

E X E C U T I V E S U M M A R Y

Coming of Age in Boston:
Out-of-School Time Opportunities for Teens
Current Realities and Future Prospects

A Report of the Teen Study Committee of
Boston's After-School for All Partnership



About Boston's After-School for All Partnership and its Teen Study Committee

Launched in 2001, Boston's After-School for All Partnership is the largest public/private partnership devoted to children's issues in Boston's history. Leaders of 15 major philanthropic, educational, business and government institutions have committed more than \$26 million over a five-year period to strengthen and support Boston's after-school sector. The Partnership's goals are to expand, improve and sustain a wide variety of after-school activities for the children of Boston. The Teen Study Committee is a working group of the Partnership formed specifically to examine out-of-school time opportunities for the City's teens. For more information about Boston's After-School for All Partnership and its activities, visit www.afterschoolforall.org, or call 617-624-8133.

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About the Boston Foundation

The Boston Foundation, one of the nation's oldest and largest community foundations, has an endowment of more than \$630 million, and makes some \$50 million in grants every year to nonprofit organizations in Greater Boston and beyond. The Foundation is made up of 750 separate charitable funds, which have been established by donors for either the general benefit of the community or for special purposes. The Boston Foundation also serves as a civic leader, convener, and developer of special initiatives designed to build community. For more about the Boston Foundation and its grantmaking, visit www.tbf.org, or call 617-338-1700.

UNDERSTANDING BOSTON is a series of forums, educational events and research sponsored by the Boston Foundation to provide information and insight into issues affecting Boston, its neighborhoods, and the region. By working in collaboration with a wide variety of partners, the Boston Foundation provides opportunities for people to come together to explore challenges facing our constantly changing community and to develop an informed civic agenda.

Please visit www.tbf.org or www.afterschoolforall.org for the full report.

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Boston 2:00-to-6:00 After-School Initiative
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Boston 2:00-to-6:00 After-School Initiative
The Boston Foundation

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And thanks to Courtney Langell of the Boston Foundation.

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Dear Friends:

Today, Boston's young people have access to more high quality after-school and out-of-school time programs than ever before thanks to the hard work of the Boston's After-School for All Partnership and a host of committed community-based organizations.

We must all recognize that as children in after-school programs enter adolescence, their needs and interests change. Teens are at a critical turning point from childhood to adulthood and while they still seek fun, safe and educational out-of-school-time programs that are led by caring adults, they are also thinking about the future. They are looking for guidance as they deal with college, careers, academic pressures, and high school graduation requirements like the MCAS test. They are looking to build life skills and to become productive citizens.

Coming of Age in Boston: Out-of-School Time Opportunities for Teens is a valuable assessment of the city's teen programs. As Boston's adolescent population continues to grow and become more ethnically diverse, we must continue to work together to meet the changing needs of our youth. Coming of Age in Boston gives us the information we need to develop a long-term vision for teen out-of-school time programs that will help our young people prepare for the challenges of adulthood.

Sincerely,



Thomas M. Menino
Mayor of Boston

Dear Members of the Boston Community:

Boston has a long history of coming together across sectors, and mobilizing around issues of crucial importance to our city. That is exactly what happened when Boston's After-School for All Partnership was formed in 2001 in direct response to the recommendations of Mayor Menino's Boston 2:00 to 6:00 After-School Initiative. The Partnership is the largest public-private partnership dedicated to serving children in Boston's history.

We are proud to present this report, "Coming of Age in Boston," with the Barr Foundation and the Merck Family Fund. The title speaks to the challenges our young people face as they approach adulthood, but it also reflects the point at which we find ourselves in the movement to meet the after-school needs of all of Boston's students.

High-quality out-of-school time programming for teens is critical not only to the social and academic development of our young people—who today must meet higher academic standards than ever before—but also to the safety of our entire community. One of the more stunning statistics included here is that juvenile crime in Boston increases markedly when children are not in school, even peaking immediately after the school day ends. Our young people simply must have better alternatives for their free time.

In these pages, we provide a great deal of information about the current landscape of out-of-school time programs for teens—and we include some of the qualities teens themselves say they want and need in their programs. Finally, through the recommendations included in the last section, we are issuing a call to action.

We know that when there is strong public will, coupled with increased funding and a spirit of collaboration and partnership, great things can happen. Since 1998, Boston has nearly doubled the percentage of elementary and middle school children participating in after-school programs. Now we want to extend our efforts to include teens.

And so, we are inviting you, whether you are a funder, an educator, a parent, a student, a civic leader, or simply a concerned resident, to join with the City of Boston, the Boston Foundation, and the other members of Boston's After-School for All Partnership, and begin to develop the resources and the momentum we need to take on the challenge of meeting the out-of-school time needs of Boston's teens.

Sincerely,



Paul S. Grogan
President and CEO
The Boston Foundation

A Short History of Boston's Out-of-School Time Movement

For more than two decades, Boston's civic and nonprofit leadership have worked together to improve and expand out-of-school time opportunities for the city's young people. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the MOST Initiative (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time), an initiative of the Wallace-Readers Digest Funds, led by Parents United for Child Care and funded by the Boston Foundation, the City of Boston, and many others, began to assemble an extensive infrastructure for out-of-school programming. In addition, the Medical Foundation's BEST Initiative (Building Exemplary Systems of Training), was created by a diverse group of teen program providers and stakeholders as part of a national project also funded by the Wallace-Readers Digest Funds. The BEST Initiative provided youth worker training that was grounded in a positive youth development approach.

From 1998-2000, the City of Boston's Office of Community Partnerships led an initiative called the Citywide Strategy for Youth Development, which created an asset-based approach to youth development, culminating in Boston's Youth Development Framework.

“Boston’s success in meeting the needs of teens in their out-of-school hours is driven by the deep desire to ensure youth reach their full potential. Boston has enthusiastically embraced the role out-of-school time programs can play to help inner city youth have access to the same activities and experiences that many suburban youth take for granted.

Boston’s After-School for All Partnership was formed to bring together the philanthropic community to identify and act in concert to address pressing issues facing our youth. The timely and important release of this report and its recommendations will build upon and extend Boston’s astonishing record of achievement as we all work together to promote ‘after-school for all’.”

**Christopher Gabrieli, Chair
Boston’s After-School for All Partnership**

In 1998, Mayor Thomas M. Menino announced the creation of the Boston 2:00-to-6:00 After-School Initiative to focus on expanding and improving after-school opportunities for Boston's youth. Following recommendations of the Initiative's Task Force, many of Boston's leading philanthropic, corporate and educational institutions joined the Mayor to create Boston's After-School for All Partnership.

Formed in 2001, the Partnership is a unique public-private coalition of 15 leading philanthropic, educational, business and government institutions, dedicated to expanding, improving and sustaining a rich variety of after-school activities for Boston's children. Recently, the Partnership was awarded a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for a program called BASE

(Building Boston's After-School Enterprise), which is working to expand access, build data systems and improve the after-school system for all young people in the city.

Introduction

Statistics tell at least part of the story, and the statistics are stunning. There are close to 45,000 teenagers in Boston (a figure that will continue to grow over the next decade), and only 20 percent of their time is spent in school. What do they do with the other 80 percent of their time? Local and national research reveals that, in a world where many families have parents who are working, significant numbers of teens spend their out-of-school time in largely unsupervised and unstructured ways. In Boston, only 22 percent of teens are engaged in out-of-school time programs that are providing fun supportive environments, and helping them to learn the academic and social skills they will need to graduate from high school and prepare for the world beyond school.

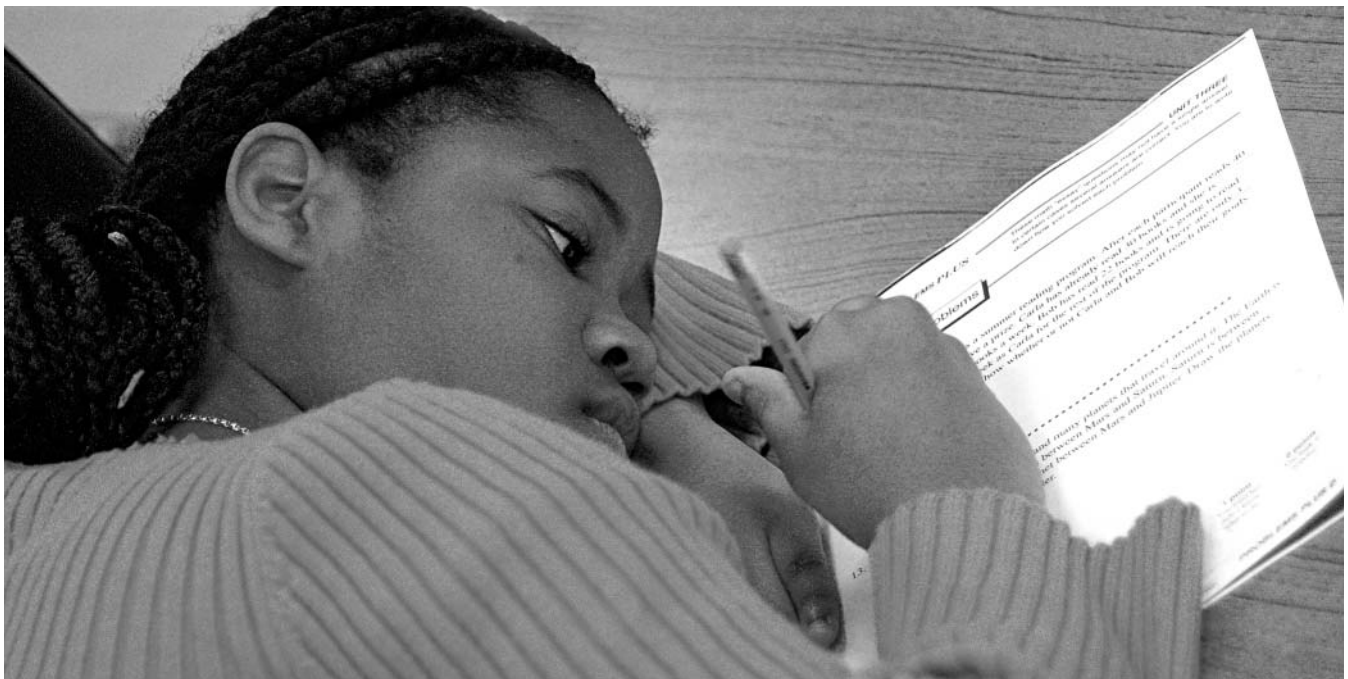
Research tells us that while the vast majority of teens choose to engage in productive activities during out-of-school hours, immediately after school, juvenile crime—including young victims and perpetrators—peaks markedly. In Boston, from October of 2002 to October of 2003, 60.9 percent of youth violent crimes

occurred from 2-10 p.m., with a 36.7 percent increase from 1-2 p.m., just as students are leaving school.

The statistics, however, tell only part of the story. In focus groups, teens themselves have expressed frustration about the lack of engaging free time activities and opportunities available to them. Teens say that out-of-school time activities need to be interesting to them and have staff they can relate to and respect. Teens say, in effect, “If a program is good enough, we’ll come.”

At the same time, the need for high-quality programming is greater than ever because students now are required to pass the rigorous new MCAS test before graduating from high school, making academic preparedness a high priority for students who want to go on to college. In addition, many providers of out-of-school time programs express interest in developing better and more programs for teens.

The compelling statistics, the expressed interest from teens for more engaging out-of-school time options,



and the desire on the part of providers to rise to the challenge present the community of Boston with a window of opportunity. The bad news is that this window is opening at a time of severe financial restraints—when programs are facing deep cuts in their budgets and are not receiving additional resources to launch new programming.

The good news is that Boston has a highly impressive track record of creating innovative approaches to seemingly intractable problems—and it has unique assets and resources, including a dynamic and innovative nonprofit sector and a business community willing to roll up its sleeves and help. Boston also has strong and diverse neighborhoods with groups of residents that know how to mobilize around issues of importance to everyone.

In addition, many of the approaches and systems that are crucial to meeting the needs of Boston's teens are already in place. Boston has been a national leader in improving and expanding after-school programming for younger children. The city has widely embraced an asset-based approach to youth development that builds on young people's personal and social skills and is achieving positive results. And in 2001, spurred by the leadership of Mayor Thomas M. Menino, Boston's After-School for All Partnership was formed. The Partnership, a public-private coalition of 15 leading philanthropic, education, business and government institutions, has been instrumental in significantly advancing the field.

A parent survey conducted by the Partnership in June 2003 revealed that Boston has nearly doubled the number of children involved in after-school programming in just five years. And, thanks to public education campaigns, more than eight in ten parents believe that after-school programming is critical to their children's academic and social success.

In response to this tremendous window of opportunity—and the challenge of making a difference in the lives of Boston's teens—the members of the Partnership formed a Teen Study Committee to better understand the current array of out-of-school time opportunities for teens in Boston and the growing demand for more and better programs. The Committee and the Boston Foundation commissioned Technical

A Case Study: Boston's Environmental Teen Youth Development Programs

The Barr Foundation and the Merck Family Fund commissioned additional research focusing on environmental youth development programming for teens.

These programs predominately focus on leadership training and stewardship, and provide promising and interesting models for the entire field. See page 15 for a summary of this research.

Development Corporation (TDC), to conduct research into this issue.

The results of this research build a compelling case for turning the city's attention to meeting the needs of teens during their out-of-school hours, providing them not only with something to do with their free time, but with the support they need to graduate from high school and launch themselves into constructive adult lives.

Boston has a long and rich history of partnerships that have stretched across sectors and moved the city forward at key moments in its history. The time is now to engage this community's stakeholders in building a strategic, thoughtful and extensive array of out-of-school time options for our city's teens.

A Demographic Snapshot of Boston's Teens

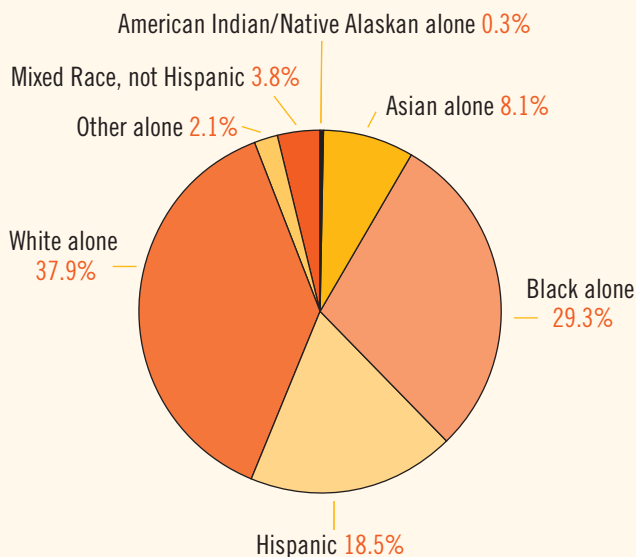
Boston's Teen Population

The teen population in Boston is large, ethnically diverse, and growing. A scan of the 2000 Census and Boston Redevelopment Authority data reveals close to 45,000 young people between the ages of 13-19 in the City of Boston (not including some 12,000 college students). The overall growth in the teen population from 2000–2010 is expected to be 9.2 percent.

Race and Ethnicity

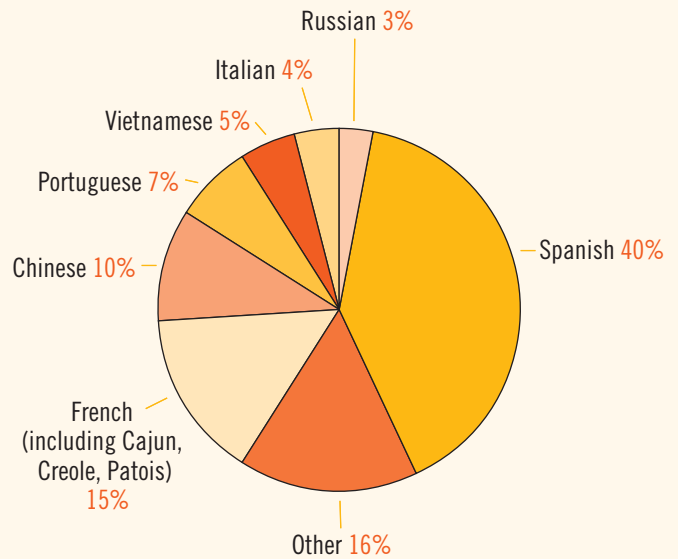
While this population reflects national trends as far as gender, with 51 percent being girls and 49 percent boys, it is far more ethnically diverse than many other cities. About 38 percent of teens are White, 29 percent Black, 18 percent Hispanic and 8 percent Asian. (The high percentage of White teens in these figures is skewed by the 12,000 college students who live in the Allston/Brighton and Fenway/Kenmore areas, and contribute to the total figures.)

Boston Teens by Race



Source: Census 2000

Language Spoken at Home Other than English



Source: Census 2000

Language

A number of students face linguistic barriers in school and in out-of-school programs. Of the 31 percent of Boston residents who speak a language other than English at home, the largest group, 40 percent, speaks Spanish.

School Enrollment

Historically, Boston Public School enrollment has risen over the past decade but will plateau at 2003 levels through 2006 before dropping yearly until 2010. Boston high-school drop-out rates have declined slightly since 1999-2000. In the 1999-2000 school year, the drop-out rates for ninth graders and twelfth graders were 9.7 percent and 8.4 percent respectively; in 2000-2001 the dropout rates for ninth graders and twelfth graders were 8.5 percent and 8.2 percent respectively.

Key Findings

What Teens Want and Need

To better understand the desires and needs of Boston's teens, TDC conducted focus groups with disengaged teens, surveyed current providers of out-of-school time programs, and reviewed national literature and recent local research. Among the local studies TDC consulted was *After-School Programs in Boston: What Young People Think and Want*, prepared and conducted in the summer of 2001 by Innovation by Design and the Center for Teen Empowerment. That study, which reached some 300 young people in after-school programming through 20 focus groups, provided a strong foundation for TDC's research. Another study TDC used was the 2001 *Boston Youth Survey* of 2,599 teens conducted by the City of Boston and Boston Centers for Youth & Families, although it focused solely on teens in summer school, and thus was not representative of all Boston teens.

Choices and Options

Through its research, TDC discovered that teens have a great deal of independence regarding their out-of-school time and confront a much wider selection of options from which to choose than younger children. Most teens are not required by their parents to attend programs and instead spend their time hanging out with friends, playing sports, doing homework, working, or caring for siblings or other relatives.

Paralleling national trends, close to half of all teens spend their out-of-school time in unstructured and unsupervised ways—and most spend at least *some* of that time by themselves. The results of the 2001 Boston Youth Survey reveal that 20 percent of teens indicated that they most frequently work at a job after school, while only 10.4 percent attend a school or community-based out-of-school time program more frequently than other activities.

Pressure and Responsibility

A combination of responsibilities weighs on all teens as they decide how to spend their out-of-school time. Boston Public School students interested in higher education must achieve certain grades and pass the MCAS to graduate from high school. Those who do not plan to attend college must pass the MCAS, and then prepare to find a job. Some teens also are required to contribute to family income by working after school while numerous others are interested in earning discretionary income and seeking employment opportunities. Many must care for siblings or other relatives in need.

Fun, Learning Opportunities, Accessibility, and Supportive Relationships

Just as teens face different pressures and responsibilities than younger children, they also want different things from out-of-school time programs—an important consideration when planning new programming, since they also have the independence to choose how to spend their free time.

Fundamentally, teens want programming that is fun, provides learning opportunities and skills development, is accessible, and builds supportive relationships with caring adults and their peers. When asked in focus groups why they don't attend after-school programs, the most common answer was "nothing interests me."

■ Fun

For teens in TDC's focus group, a "fun" program was one with friends and "cool" staff. Teens wanted programs to offer activities they were particularly interested in ("chilling" and "movies"). A number of teens said they wanted to "Learn something challenging." For a program to be "fun" or "cool" it often requires the endorsement of friends.

According to providers, many teens will not come to a program unless it is deemed acceptable by their friends—a scenario that is especially true for girls, who often travel with friends to programs. A factor that makes a program “uncool” is sharing a space with younger children.

■ Skills Development and Leadership Opportunities

In TDC’s focus groups, most teens, regardless of their family or school situation, wanted to learn skills that will help them in the future. They also were especially attracted to programs with leadership opportunities, and those who were not currently engaged in out-of-school time programs requested help with math, reading and job readiness. The opportunity to earn money and build job skills were also primary incentives for teens.

■ Accessible Programs

Easy accessibility was described by providers and teens as a highly important requirement. Programs located in teens’ own neighborhoods or those that provide transportation (especially in the evening and during the winter season), and are open on a drop-in basis, at least a few days a week, were cited as particularly appealing. In TDC’s focus group, when asked how they would tell funders to invest their money, teens responded that they would most like a neighborhood community center that had all of the things that were important to them in one central location. Teens expressed a strong interest in having “teen only” community centers.

■ Supportive Relationships

Perhaps most important to teens was the opportunity to build supportive relationships with caring adults. Teens want staff they can relate to and who make a program fun, engage them in relevant and challenging activities, and provide guidance. Teens also indicated that strong and well-trained staff are an essential ingredient in successful programming.

Key Elements of Effective Programs

The tools are available to envision a set of effective out-of-school time opportunities for teens. Positive youth development principles frame effective out-of-school time program practices for all young people, but also recognize that teens are developmentally different from younger children.

In addition to the key practices that make any effective out-of-school time program successful, listening to the voices of Boston’s teens has helped to identify the additional elements of effective programs specifically for teens:

- Teens themselves should be invited to play an increasingly active role in designing and running programs;
- Programs should be run by experienced, dynamic youth workers and adults in leadership positions;
- There should be opportunities for fun, but also for academic and life skills development; and
- Teens should have a ‘space of their own,’ separate from younger children.

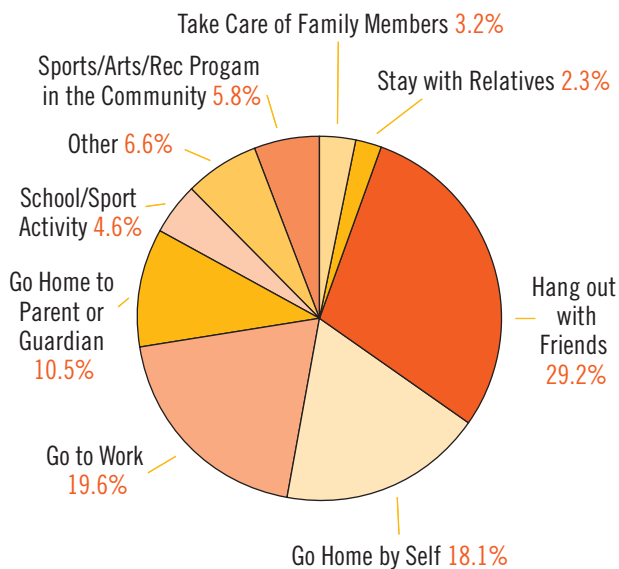
Is Boston Ready to Respond?

The Current Landscape

Cause for Concern

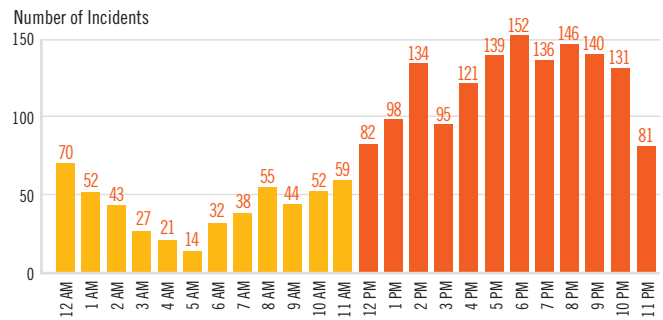
Community-based out-of-school time programs compete with numerous forces for teens' attention and time—from jobs and homework to family responsibilities to hanging out with friends (see pie chart this page). While many teens are spending their free time in constructive ways, local and national research reveals that significant numbers of teens frequently are unsupervised when they are out of school, too often a recipe for trouble. Fewer programs are available for teens than for their younger counterparts at a time when the teen population is growing at a rapid pace. Those programs that are available often are not engaging teens or meeting their needs.

Most Frequent After-School Activities



Source: Report of the 2001 Boston Youth Survey

Youth Violent Crime by Hour 10/1/2002 to 10/1/2003



Source: Boston Police Department Office of Research and Evaluation

Juvenile Crime

Research indicates that juvenile crime peaks immediately after school (see bar chart). From October of 2002 to October of 2003, 60.9 percent of youth violent crime in Boston occurred from 2-10 p.m., with a 36.7 percent increase from 1 to 2 p.m., just as young people are leaving school for the day.

Positive Alternatives

Community-based out-of-school time programs represent a promising alternative to unstructured time for teens. For the purpose of this report, these programs are defined as those run by nonprofit or public organizations in community or school-based sites that provide services to teens in the out-of-school time hours—not including school sponsored after-school clubs and sports opportunities.

How Many Teens Are Served by Existing Programs?

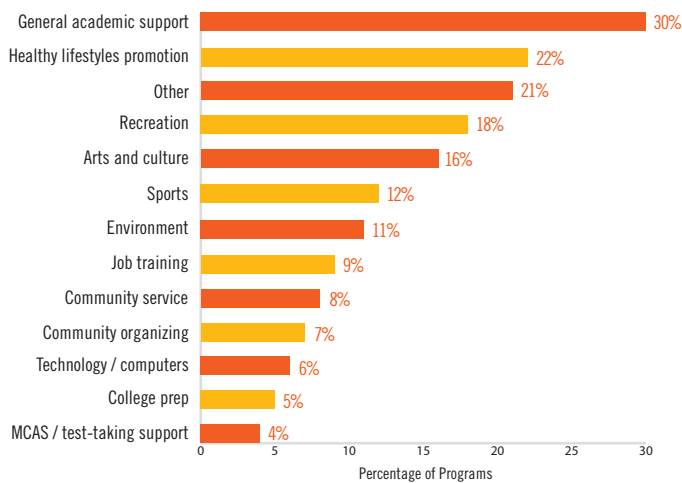
The 179 providers that responded to TDC's survey take a variety of approaches to out-of-school time programs and serve between 5,600 and 9,900 teens on a weekly basis. Based on these figures, up to 22 percent of Boston's teens participate in the responding community-based programs on a weekly basis.

What is the Focus of These Programs?

The field presents a wide variety of offerings (see bar chart this page). The largest group of providers, 30 percent, identified themselves as general academic support programs. Another 22 percent of programs offer healthy lifestyles promotion, including substance abuse prevention, life skills and mental health programs. Boston also has a cultural sector that is engaging teens in numerous activities.

Of the 21 percent of respondents that self-selected the “Other” category, many identified themselves as providing youth leadership, education, or career development programs. A separate survey was also conducted on the burgeoning field of programs for teens with an environmental focus, which represent 11 percent of out-of-school time programs. (See page 15 for an analysis of these exciting programs.)

OST Program Focus



Where Are the Programs Located?

Every neighborhood of Boston has programs that serve teens, although some, such as Roxbury and the South End, have more than others, like the Fenway / Kenmore and Charlestown neighborhoods. Given the growth projections for the teen population over the next several years, all neighborhoods will continue to face an increasing demand, especially since accessibility is one of the requirements teens have for their out-of-school time programming.

What Approaches Do the Programs Take?

A hands-on approach, with an experiential, activities-based style, is the most popular style of programming at 57 percent, with peer leadership programs running a close second at 49 percent. Academically focused programs tend to use a tutoring or instructional approach with teens. About one-third of the programs charge a fee for participation and a similar number pay participants a stipend.

Who Are the Teens Being Served?

The demographic profile of participating teens is different than the demographic profile of the general teen population of Boston. Relatively more males than females and more Black teens than White teens take part in the available programs.

What is the Perceived Value of These Programs?

In focus groups with providers, an effective practice for improving retention in out-of-school programs for teens is to require participants to clear a hurdle or make a sacrifice to gain entrance. Many programs require teens to apply or try out for the program, during which expectations are set and both providers and teens can determine whether the program is a good match. Also, the perception that teens have “been accepted” into a program increases the value of it both for teens and parents, even if most applicants who apply are accepted. Charging a fee is also beneficial for some programs, as is providing teens with stipends to encourage their participation.

Facing the Challenges

With the continued growth of the teen population in Boston, there will only be increased need and demand for out-of-school time opportunities for teens. Yet present programming faces a series of formidable challenges.

The Lack of a Central Hub

Geographically, Boston is separated into 16 neighborhoods, but culturally, many neighborhoods can be divided street by street. Teens who live in neighborhoods with gangs feel unsafe crossing some of those streets to attend programs. Also, some programs are perceived by teens as being designed for a particular ethnic group, to the exclusion of others. These factors make it difficult for many programs to work together—especially since there is no central hub or resource specifically designed to connect programs with each other or with public schools.

Retaining Staff and Teens

While teens clearly emphasize the critical importance of building strong relationships between teens and staff, providers voice apprehension about staff turnover. Providers expressed that teen attrition is in part a symptom of not having enough qualified staff. Teens want responsible and nurturing adults who spend time with them and relate to them. They seek individualized attention and want adults who can help them grow both intellectually and emotionally.

Loss of Teen Jobs

Recent job cuts for teens are destabilizing the situation even further. City programs have been hit hard. In the spring of 2003, the Boston Youth Fund for teen summer jobs was cut by almost 50 percent, from \$6 million to \$3.3 million. With state and federal governments backing away from their traditional support of teen summer employment programs—and the difficult

economic climate limiting teen employment even further—the demand for programs for teens is growing.

Perceived Disconnect Between Providers and Funders

Providers of out-of-school time programs also voice an underlying concern that their vision for teen programs may be different from funders' visions. Providers highlighted evaluation metrics and funding cycles as areas where there is a “disconnect” between their programs and expectations of funders. They also feel that funders are more focused on quantity than quality—and that they make an artificial distinction between operating support and funds for specific programs. Providers feel pressure to continually recast their programs in a new light to receive funding.

Expanding and Enhancing Programs

Sixty-one percent of the programs that responded to the survey indicated that they had plans to expand their programs in order to meet the growing needs of teens—in aggregate, programs estimated creating 3,450 to 6,550 new slots. At the same time, providers were concerned that their plan to expand was coming at a time of deep cuts in their budgets. Twenty-one percent of providers were unsure about expanding soon, but indicated that they may expand in the future. Most providers see the need for a concerted citywide effort to expand and improve the sector as a whole. They also talk about bringing in more qualified staff and asking funders and other agencies to help develop connections between programs and raise awareness of current offerings.

A CASE STUDY

Environmental Youth Development Programs

Many of Boston’s environmental organizations have developed highly successful programs that powerfully link stewardship of natural areas with environmental education and youth development. The Barr Foundation and the Merck Family Fund joined the Partnership’s Teen Study Committee, and commissioned additional research about this sector. Twenty environmental programs responded to the survey.

A Hands-On Approach

Boston’s environmental teen programs focus on leadership training and stewardship through a dynamic, hands-on, service learning approach. These programs tend to be smaller than other out-of-school time offerings. In fact, almost half of environmental programs serve 10 or fewer teens per week. The small and intensive nature of these programs helps to build close, one-on-one relationships with teens. They teach teens to care about the environment and empower them to make a difference through physical maintenance, community leadership, activism, and educational opportunities.

Although these programs are only present in seven of Boston’s neighborhoods, they serve teens from all of Boston’s neighborhoods. Annually they serve more than 600 teens—and the demographics of their participants generally reflect the demographic characteristics of Boston’s teen population as a whole, although they tend to serve fewer White teens.

Recognizing Teens’ Efforts Through Stipends

Boston environmental providers are far more likely (67 percent) to offer stipends than other teen providers (at 35 percent), and are less likely to require a fee. Their reasons for doing so are to recognize the efforts of teens, level the playing field for teens who need to earn money, teach teens that social justice work has value, and convey the meaning and expectations of employment.



Powerfully Demonstrating Effective Practices

Environmental programs for teens strategically align with the qualities teens say they want and need. They are fun and place-based, and empower teens by teaching organizing skills and offering opportunities for teen leadership and input. They also recognize the critical role that adult-teen relationships play in the programs, and tend to have lower staff-to-teen ratios, recognizing that both teens and the environment require long-term commitments. Finally, these groups engage in “systems thinking,” by networking and collaborating with each other and with teens, other community stakeholders, schools, higher education institutions, and other nonprofits. In short, environmental programs provide exciting models for the sector as a whole to study and to emulate.

Recommendations

This report comes at a critical time in the history of Boston’s out-of-school time movement. Inspired by a widely-expressed need on the part of educators, providers, funders and others to reach a greater understanding of the demand for teen out-of-school opportunities, the report paints a clear picture of the current and potential landscape of offerings. It was spurred by the knowledge that young people generally are “aging out” of existing after-school programs after the age of 12 while the teen population is growing in Boston, and will continue to grow. Finally, there is more academic pressure on Boston’s teens today—perhaps more than at any other time in history—as students face the new requirement of passing the MCAS test in order to graduate. All of this is coming at a time of cuts in public funding for teen programming, especially drastic cuts in teen summer jobs. Resources are tightening rather than expanding.

The following recommendations are a call to action. They embrace the progress that has been made to date, and advocate for incorporating the needs and ideas of teens—and the programs that serve them—into an overall vision that will help Boston’s young people to reach their full potential, and become fully contributing and engaged participants in this city’s workforce and community. They are informed by existing and fresh research, spurred by the many providers who are dedicated to serving our young people, and grounded in the voices of Boston’s teens themselves.

Cultivate Increased Demand Among Teens

One of the first steps toward strengthening out-of-school time programs for teens will be to cultivate increased demand among teens themselves, by learning even more about their needs and interests, and encouraging their active participation in every step of the process of developing specific activities, and designing effective programs.

A great deal is already known about the qualities of successful programs—from inviting teens to help design and run programs to the need for well-trained

dynamic staff teens can relate to and admire, to the desire on the part of teens both for fun and help in improving their academic work, learning basic life-skills, and having a space of their own.

Once the demand has been established, there will be a strong foundation for developing a sophisticated marketing plan to reach out to teens and parents. Messages and communications tools should be informed by a deep understanding and appreciation of the diverse and unique needs and interests of teens. And any strategic communications and marketing plan should include both an overarching awareness campaign, stressing the general benefits of out-of-school time activities, as well as messages that are tailored for specific providers. According to feedback from teens and providers, individualized hands-on outreach by a caring adult—and especially a peer—is a uniquely successful recruitment tool.

Expand the Number and Range of Opportunities for Teens

In light of economic and budgetary hardships currently facing Boston, it is urgent that new and innovative strategies be pursued to expand and enhance out-of-school time opportunities for teens. Unlike students in elementary and middle schools whose parents usually choose their after-school programs, teens themselves are the consumers of out-of-school time opportunities. They already face a number of choices when it comes to deciding how to spend their free time, and any effort to expand and enhance programming should be grounded in knowledge about—and respect for—the wide variety of interests and needs teens have.

As the sector works to expand offerings for teens in the out-of-school hours, efforts should be made to identify model programs and approaches in Boston and elsewhere that can be expanded and brought to scale without compromising quality. The small and intensive nature of some programs may make it inappropriate to grow these efforts much beyond

current levels, but some other program approaches may more readily lend themselves to being scaled up.

The city should encourage and build upon the existing multi-sector partnerships that already are creatively approaching these challenges, and special attention should be paid to engaging those sectors that have not yet participated, emphasizing the many ways in which their participation can make a meaningful difference both to teens and to the quality of their own experiences.

More can and should be done to foster new creative partnerships, further engaging the business community (future employers of many of Boston's teens), local colleges and universities, and city resources. Businesses can provide more internships and career days, local universities can provide tutors and volunteers, and existing city resources can be leveraged—especially Community Centers, parks, libraries, and other public spaces. Boston's numerous cultural institutions already offer young people opportunities to create and participate in arts and cultural learning experiences, and this sector should be encouraged to do even more. Only by coming together, in partnership, can Boston rise to the challenge of improving and expanding the landscape of out-of-school time programming to meet the diverse needs of all of the City's teens.

Build the Sector's Capacity

It is crucial to build the capacity of the out-of-school time sector to support the growing need for out-of-school time programs for Boston's teens. Following are a number of steps that should be taken in order to strengthen the entire sector's capacity to support expanded and improved teen out-of-school time programming.

Develop a Long-Term Vision for Teen Out-of-School Time Programs

A unifying and cohesive vision for teen programming should be created—one that recognizes the unique and various needs of teens. Ideally this vision should define what 'success' will look like, and inspire teens, providers, parents, schools, businesses and participants from many other sectors to help realize this vision.

Elements of the vision might include:

- A commonly-accepted definition of the important elements of quality out-of-school time programming, with recognition of the need for broad and diverse program offerings to appeal to the differing needs and interests of Boston's teens;
- Specific, even measurable, goals for the range and number of teens engaged in out-of-school time programs; and
- A definition of the outcomes that Boston hopes to achieve for its teens through these opportunities.

Create Citywide Standards for All Teen Programs

Standards should be created for all teen programs. They should detail the characteristics of successful programming, while empowering providers to design their own unique and varied programs. These standards should offer inspiration, guidance, and quality control for teen service agencies. Teens and providers should offer input, and funders should provide insights into the ways in which these standards could dovetail with their grantmaking priorities, and help them to assess quality and success in programming. Environmental Youth Development Programs described on page 15 as well as programs in the arts and a range of other areas provide some promising models for other providers to study.

Improve the Infrastructure Supporting Teen Providers

Feedback from providers and other key community groups highlighted the need to enhance the teen out-of-school time infrastructure, and build the capacity of providers so that they can offer quality programs run by skilled staff. Many elements of this infrastructure already are in place or emerging—what is needed is a systemic approach to coordinating services, information and resources. The infrastructure should be nimble and flexible to support the varying and evolving needs of sector providers.



Facilitate Communication, Coordination and Networking

The entire sector will benefit tremendously from the creation of a central hub for out-of-school time programs for teens, giving teen providers the opportunity to engage in dialogue with each other, share best practices, combine recruitment efforts, and develop strategic partnerships with each other and with other stakeholders.

Support a Clearinghouse of Information

A clearinghouse for teen out-of-school time options will help to direct, monitor, and document the growth of the sector, as well as support marketing efforts.

Develop Professional Training Grounded in Youth Development Principles

Teens, providers, and out-of-school time experts all agree that the most critical factor in a teen’s decision to participate and remain in a program is the quality of

the staff—and so support and training for staff is a high priority, and should be tied to citywide standards. This effort should build on the work of Achieve Boston, a resource that aims to create an infrastructure to support access to high-quality training and professional development for youth workers in Boston. Due to the increasing ethnic diversity of Boston’s teen population, training should include cultural sensitivity, and teach providers to work with different populations with different abilities.

Identify and Expand Financial Resources

In this era of cutbacks, it will be important to advocate for sustainable financing for providers of teen programs by identifying and accessing sources of public and private support and funding streams, such as multi-year grants, which recognize the time-intensive nature of youth development.

Conclusion

More than any other city in the nation, Boston always has been—and remains—a national, even international, center of innovation. It has a remarkably dynamic business sector, diverse and lively neighborhoods, dozens of colleges and universities, world-renowned teaching hospitals, a uniquely vibrant cultural sector, and numerous other assets that can be applied to solving problems and embracing fresh opportunities. As such, Boston is uniquely equipped to respond to the call to action this report makes and take on the challenge of meeting the needs of the city's teens.

An investment in young people—especially those on the verge of becoming contributing adults—is an investment in the future of our city. Recent studies have shown that Boston is starting to lose too many of its young adults to other cities that are more affordable, and seem to offer more opportunities. In the midst of this climate, this loss of human capital, investing in Boston's young people is not only the right thing to do—it's the smart thing to do. Today's teens are tomorrow's workers, voters, politicians, community leaders and heads of families. If they have lived and been educated and nurtured here, they already have a deep investment in the community.

This report is a blueprint for continuing to build an array of out-of-school time opportunities for teens that are as innovative and strong as so many of Boston's other achievements. It comes at a crucial moment in the development of the sector—a window of opportunity during which an investment of time, attention and resources can make a critical difference in the lives of thousands of Boston's teens—and as a result, to Boston's future. This city's teen population is large, diverse, growing, and facing increasing pressure to earn money, perform academically, and prepare for the demands of adulthood.

Boston has a long history of creating model programs for other cities to follow. In the area of out-of-school time programs for teens, this city can learn from promising city-wide efforts in other metropolitan areas across the country—from Kansas City's standards-setting process to data collection efforts in Springfield, Massachusetts, to Chicago's strong and effective partnership model. In addition, New York City and Chicago have experimented with extended hours of programming for teens on nights and weekends. Boston can benefit from the strengths and experiences of these efforts and others, and then go on to create new models from which other cities can learn.

This call to action on behalf of Boston teens goes out not only to teens, parents and providers, but also to this city's policymakers, funders, entire nonprofit community, civic leaders, businesses, colleges, universities, trade schools and cultural organizations—to all those who have a stake in the future of this city. The city's unique assets and ongoing commitment to innovation provide a strong foundation as we approach this unprecedented moment of challenge and of opportunity.

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Methodology

This report synthesizes existing knowledge, and presents the results of new research conducted by Technical Development Corporation (TDC) about the landscape for teen out-of-school time programming. In addition to reviewing the literature and interviewing local and national experts, TDC conducted both demographic research and a survey of community-based teen out-of-school time programs, and facilitated focus groups with providers and teens. The Barr Foundation and the Merck Family Fund commissioned additional research to focus on environmental youth development programming, which is reflected in the case study on page 15.

