Quality Time After School

WHAT INSTRUCTORS CAN DO TO ENHANCE LEARNING

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Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests and studies initiatives that increase supports, skills and opportunities of residents of low-income communities; works with policymakers to see that the lessons and evidence produced are reflected in policy; and provides training, technical assistance and learning opportunities to practitioners based on documented effective practices.

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Executive Summary

Amidst a national push to establish standards for quality after-school programs, the field is working harder than ever to articulate the ingredients of high-quality activities. This report aims to build on existing knowledge about what constitutes engaging after-school programs in which youth of all ages learn and grow. The study was designed to detail key activity characteristics linked to youth engagement and learning and to provide instructors with a road map for how to create engaging learning environments in after-school programs. Specifically, we examined three related questions:

- What conditions lead youth to want to attend the activity?

- What aspects of an after-school activity, such as the staff's behaviors and the activity's structure, lead youth to be highly engaged?

- What conditions lead youngsters to feel they have learned in an activity?

We addressed these issues by examining youth's experiences in five of Philadelphia's Beacon Centers. Beacon Centers are school-based community centers, providing a range of services to all community members and emphasizing after-school opportunities for youth. Every Beacon has two goals: First, they function as community resource centers for families and adults by offering services such as parenting groups, English as a Second Language classes and medical and mental-health referrals. Second, they seek to provide academic enrichment for youth, as well as leadership opportunities, recreational and cultural arts activities and employment training, with after-school activities serving as the cornerstone of this youth programming.

In 2002, the City of Philadelphia opened 10 Beacon Centers, and by 2004, 24 centers were strategically located in high-need neighborhoods. The centers are overseen by a managing agent, Philadelphia Safe and Sound, and every center is individually operated by a lead agency located in each neighborhood.

Research Methods

During school year 2004-05, P/PV collected three types of data at the five Beacons. We surveyed youth to collect rich data on the youngsters' perceptions of various activities—including, for example, how interested participants were in the activity, how engaged and challenged they felt, and how much they thought they learned—as well as information on the staff's interaction with the participants and their behavior in the activities. We surveyed staff to examine what types of staff, in terms of their past experiences, training and demographic profiles, are best able to execute various components of quality. Through activity observations, we also focused on adult/youth and peer relationships, instructional and presentation methods, behavior management, youth decision-making and youth input to further describe what occurred in each activity.

In total, we collected 402 youth surveys and 45 staff surveys, and we conducted 50 activity observations.[1] Additionally, to explore the issues of staff practices and activity quality more deeply, we conducted open-ended interviews with 16 instructors whom P/PV staff had identified as "strong" during our observations. Site staff also identified 22 teen participants for us to interview about what they thought made a strong instructor.

Because this study is not designed to measure program impacts, we did not directly measure how much the participants learned. Alternatively, we have concentrated on understanding what staff characteristics, instructional practices and activity components contribute to engaging educational activities from the youth's perspective.

Major Findings

Based on our quantitative analysis, the two most important things staff can do to increase engagement and learning are to effectively manage groups in ways that ensure youth feel respected by both the adults and other youth, and to positively support

the young people and their learning process. The better these tasks were done, the more deeply youth engaged and the more they felt they got out of activities.

Group management is one of the most important factors in promoting youth engagement, learning, enjoyment and regular participation. When youth of all ages rated an activity as well managed, they reported getting more out of the activity at each step in the learning process: They enjoyed the activity more, were more engaged in the day's tasks and in turn felt that they learned more than youth in less well-managed activities.

Our observations of activities revealed many successful strategies for managing groups. Four simple behavior-management techniques surfaced as particularly effective: 1) setting reasonable ground rules; 2) providing ongoing positive reinforcement through encouragement and praise; 3) being consistent and fair in reinforcing expectations; and 4) remaining firm, but not harsh, when ground rules were broken. Ultimately, good instructors provide just enough structure to help activities run well, and remain calm and consistent when presented with challenges.

Positive adult support is critical to enhancing youth learning and engagement. Youth who experienced positive adult support enjoyed their experience more, felt more engaged and perceived they learned more than those who experienced less adult support. Engagement and perceived learning for students of all age groups were similarly affected by adult support. However, students' desire to come to the activity and their level of enjoyment were affected differently by adult support, depending on the students' age. Among middle and high school youth, positive adult support increased their desire to attend an activity. This is an important result given that low after-school participation rates are a chronic problem among older youth. The level of enjoyment was most highly associated with adult support among middle school youth.

Our observations of the Philadelphia Beacons bore out the importance of both emotional and instructional support. Beacon instructors expressed emotional support for youngsters by forging trusting relationships somewhat similar to friendships or tutorships, learning about youth culture, allowing for informal socializing and taking the time to talk with individual youth when special needs arose. Effective instructional support occurred through careful one-on-one instruction; it challenged youth to move beyond their current skill levels by attempting new tasks and provided balanced feedback that included a mix of positive reinforcement and critical assessments of progress.

Our quantitative analysis did not find a direct link between peer affiliation or cooperative peer learning and participants' level of engagement or their perceived level of learning. However, we did find that the more participants reported that staff encouraged them to work together, the more youth enjoyed the activity and the more they wanted to return.

The effects of cooperative peer learning did not differ by age. However, the effects of peer affiliation did. Among elementary school children, the more participants liked their peers, the more they felt they learned. Among middle school youth, the more they liked their peers, the more they wanted to attend the activity. For high school teens, liking peers played no role in any of the four variables (engagement, learning, enjoyment and desire to attend).

Through our activity observations, we saw how Beacon instructors played three key roles in facilitating positive peer interactions. First, they modeled and set the tone for positive social interactions across the group, intervening as needed to ensure that all youth got along. Second, they brought youth together to work on projects collaboratively by placing them into pairs or small groups. Third, they placed youth in formal peer tutoring and mentoring relationships whereby youth with greater expertise were asked to guide more novice participants through a task.

The more input or voice participants felt they had in shaping an activity, the more engaged they felt and the more they liked the activity. However, in this study we did not find a correlation between participants' perceptions of having input and their perceived learning or their desire to attend an activity. Nonetheless, other studies have found that youth input appears to strengthen both engagement and enjoyment, which is important because these factors may lead to stronger participation and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for youth (Weiss et al. 2005; Herrera and Arbreton 2003; Walker and Arbreton 2004). In our study of the Beacon centers, the positive association between youth's level of enjoyment and engagement and how much input they felt they had was similar across age groups.

Youth input in the form of "youth voice and choice" was most obvious in our observations of 18 activities specifically designed for high school students. Making youth-driven activities effective at the high school level requires considerable skill on the part of instructors. Our observations revealed a common threefold pattern to successful integration of youth input. First, instructors began by setting clear expectations about the type of youth input and direction required to complete a task. Second, instructors removed themselves from the decision-making process, granting considerable responsibility to youth to craft their own unique project or solution. Third, instructors stepped back in to recognize progress and support next steps for carrying the project to completion.

About half of the interviewed staff said they encouraged youth input and made their session plans flexible enough for changes, while the other half did so only occasionally. In describing the challenges of integrating youth input, instructors noted that the time they had to teach a skill, both during the session and across the total number of sessions, limited their ability to incorporate input. Instructors who described feeling pressed to get through a certain body of material suggested that they either did not recognize or ignored opportunities for input. Additional support around how best to integrate youth input may be useful to some instructors.

Conclusion

After-school and out-of-school-time programs are extremely diverse—not only in focus, location and the types of youth they serve, but also in terms of quality. Some are engaging learning environments that teach life and social skills, athletic skills and academic skills, while others remain little more than supervised care. While all program directors, families and funders aspire for programs to be the former, it has not always been clear what staff should do to improve program quality and create effective learning environments. This study and others are beginning to make headway in identifying the key features, such as good group management and positive adult support of learning. Now funders, parents and program operators must all step up to the plate. Program staff must focus intensively on adopting high-quality instructional methods. To this end, directors must dedicate more time to supervising and coaching their staff. Most importantly, the public and funders have to recognize that quality costs money. Programs can only improve if someone pays for the extra time that quality-enhancing measures entail.

Introduction

Amidst a national push to establish standards for quality after-school programs, the field is working harder than ever to articulate the ingredients of high-quality activities (Lauer et al. 2003; Bodilly and Beckett 2005; Miller 2005; Yohalem et al. 2005). This report aims to build on existing knowledge about what constitutes engaging after-school programs in which youth of all ages learn and grow.

What is quality? One understanding of quality equates "high quality" with "effective," meaning that youth in activities successfully achieve given outcomes. If the goal of an activity is to teach dance, a high-quality dance activity teaches its participants how to dance well. Quality by this standard can be assessed only with hard outcome data, and for most policymakers and educational leaders, hard evidence of actual learning is what is important. Yet at the same time, many people say they know a high-quality activity when they see one. When they walk away from an activity thinking, "That is fantastic!" they have drawn this conclusion because they have seen highly engaged participants grappling successfully with new or challenging tasks. In these terms, the more pragmatic and common understanding of quality equates "high quality" with highly engaging.

In fact, these two ways of thinking about quality—effectiveness and engagement—are not so different. Educational research finds that engagement and learning are closely intertwined. Learning of any kind, be it math or dance, is an active process. Before youngsters can learn, they must be engaged in the activity and the learning process. This engagement "involves both behavior (e.g., persistence, effort, attention) and emotion (enthusiasm, interest, pride in success)" on the part of the youth (Eccles and Gootman 2002).

So what do we know about the features of engaging learning environments? Educational researchers know quite a lot about the features of engaging and high-quality classrooms (summarized nicely in Eccles and Gootman 2002 and Marzano 1998). But schools are mandatory and graded settings in which

children learn "hard skills" such as math, reading and science. Perhaps learning in a more voluntary, less high-stakes environment is different. After-school programs do have language arts, math and science activities, but they also teach young people visual and performing arts, recreational activities and leadership skills. Similarly, young people have different expectations for what they can do during nonschool hours, which is likely to affect how they want to learn.

For all these reasons, we wanted to take a closer look at what makes after-school or out-of-school-time (OST) activities engaging.[2] This study was designed to advance what is known about high-quality after-school activities for urban adolescents by detailing key activity characteristics linked to youth engagement and OST learning and providing instructors with a road map for how to create engaging learning environments. Specifically, we examined three related questions:

- What conditions lead youth to want to attend the activity?

- What aspects of an after-school activity, such as the staff's behaviors and the activity's structure, lead youth to be highly engaged?

- What conditions lead youngsters to feel they have learned in an activity?

We concentrated on the interactions and structures that characterize engaging educational activities from the youth's perspective. Examining Philadelphia's Beacon Initiative, we collected rich data on young people's perceptions of various activities—including, for example, how interested the participants were in the activity, how engaged and challenged they felt and how much they thought they learned—as well as information on staff's interaction with participants and their behavior in the activities. Our activity observations, which focused on adult/youth and peer relationships, instruction and presentation methods, behavior management and youth decision-making and input, were used to further describe what occurred in the activity.

Using information we obtained from staff, we also examined what types of staff, in terms of their past experiences, training and demographic profiles, are best able to execute various components of quality. Because this study was not designed to measure program impacts, we did not directly examine program effectiveness. Rather, we focused on what makes an activity an engaging learning environment, according to the participants.

The study's main findings shed light on staff practices that make youth feel more engaged in—and feel that they are learning more from—their after-school activity. The art of effective group management and various strategies instructors use to offer both instructional and emotional support to young people proved to be prominent features of strong activities, enhancing engagement and perceived learning. Providing opportunities for youth to work cooperatively with their peers enhances youth's enjoyment of their activities and makes them want to come to the activity. When youth have opportunities to have input into the activities, they tend to both enjoy the tasks more and report being more engaged in the activity.

The Philadelphia Beacons Initiative

In 2002, the City of Philadelphia launched the Children's Investment Strategy, a major initiative to increase opportunities and supports for children, youth and families throughout the city. The Philadelphia Beacon initiative is a cornerstone of this initiative, which as of 2004 encompassed 24 centers strategically located in high-need neighborhoods throughout the city. The initiative is overseen by a managing agent, Philadelphia Safe and Sound, and each center is individually operated by a lead agency located in each neighborhood.

Beacon Centers are designed as school-based community centers and safe havens, providing a range of services to all community members and emphasizing after-school opportunities for youth. Most centers operate from 3 to 8 p.m. five or six days a week and offer full-day summer programs. Every

Beacon has two goals. For youth, Beacons seek to provide academic enrichment, leadership opportunities, recreational and cultural arts activities and employment training. They also function as a community resource center for families and adults by offering services such as parenting groups, English as a Second Language classes and medical and mental-health referrals. For younger children, the centers operate a more traditional after-school program in which children typically participate in a full slate of core activities throughout the week (such as snack, homework help and creative and recreational activities). Middle- and high-school-age participants have greater flexibility to choose among a diverse menu of academic enrichment and youth development activities.

The Study

Through funding from the William Penn Foundation, Public/Private Ventures conducted a three-year evaluation of the Philadelphia Beacons Initiative. This report and an earlier one, *Getting It Right: Strategies for After-School Success* (2005), are the products of our research. Our goals were to examine the staff and program practices related to keeping youth, including older youth, engaged and learning in OST settings.

Beacon Site Selection

Since previous research has focused most heavily on programs for elementary school children, much has yet to be learned about effective ways of engaging older youth in after-school settings. To ensure we would be able to adequately address the issues involved in engaging teens, we decided to focus intensively on programs and activities serving young people in the fourth grade or higher. With this criterion, five Beacon Centers were selected for the study in early 2003. They served a mix of both younger and older youth, were demographically representative of the city's Beacons and were considered operationally sound by their second year of programming. The chosen centers included two Beacons located in high schools (Bartram and

George Washington), two in middle schools (Central East and Grover Washington) and a K–8 Beacon school (Julia de Burgos).

Data Sources

To learn more about what leads young people to be engaged in after-school activities, we collected data between Fall 2003 and Spring 2004 from multiple sources, including surveys of staff and youth, activity observations and open-ended interviews with staff and youth. In the fall, we asked the executive director at each center to identify all the activities that served primarily middle and high school students. (Older elementary school children were also present in some of the activities that served middle school students.) In the spring, we asked executive directors to identify which activities were the most educationally oriented. During both semesters, we were able to survey approximately 90 percent of youth attending the identified activities at the time of the survey. Children under 10 years old were excluded from the sample because the survey questions were not appropriate for that age group. We also requested staff surveys from the Beacon staff who led these activities. Our return rate for these was 60 percent.

Because we could not observe all of the activities we surveyed, we relied upon a mix of youth survey ratings and Beacon director referrals to select activities for observation. We observed each activity for an average of 50 minutes and typically returned for a second and sometimes third observation during the course of a semester. In total, we collected 402 youth surveys, 45 staff surveys and 50 activity observation forms.

To explore the issues of staff practices and activity quality more deeply, we then conducted open-ended interviews with 16 instructors whom P/PV staff had rated as strong during our observations. Site staff also identified 22 teen participants for us to talk to so we could explore what made a strong instructor from the teen's perspective. Appendix B provides more detail on the activities and the data collected in each.

Methods

(See Appendix A for more detail.)

Quantitative Analyses. We used multivariate regression to investigate the relationships between how engaged youth felt, how much they felt they had learned in the activity, how much they enjoyed the activity and how much they wanted to come; and youth's perceptions of staff's group management skills, positive and negative adult support, the degree of peer affiliation within the activity, the extent of cooperative peer learning opportunities and youth input, as well as the participants' gender, grade level and academic competence (self-reported GPA). To investigate which types of staff were rated better by youth, we used two-level hierarchical linear model techniques (HLM, Raudenbush 1997) to correlate youth's ratings of staff with youth's gender, grade level and self-reported grades (in stage 1) and staff's age, gender, education, previous work experience and training (in stage 2).

Qualitative Analyses. Using both the youth's survey responses and observers' numerical ratings of staff practices, we identified activities youth and/or our observers perceived as better than others. The observation notes and the interviews with corresponding staff and youth (when they existed) were then used to determine whether staff in better-run activities did things differently from instructional staff members whom observers and youth rated less positively. A qualitative software package was used to further test and explicate quantitative findings, as well as to identify issues not investigated in the surveys.

Limitations. As with all studies, this research has important limitations. First, because the quantitative results are correlational, they do not prove that staff practices caused better outcomes. Second, the staff and youth who responded to our surveys and/or were interviewed could be systematically different than the typical participant or staff. Third, because the study is based in five centers in one city, the findings may not generalize to other places.

From youth, we wanted to know what drew them to an activity and what they liked and disliked about specific activities and instructional strategies. Youth also answered a series of questions designed to assess the degree to which they were engaged in the activity and how much they believed they were learning. Appendix A presents the key measures used in the report. From instructors, we sought to understand their professional backgrounds as well as the specific strategies they used to engage and challenge youth.

The blending of qualitative and quantitative research methods (see box and Appendix C for more details) produced rich results. This report advances what is known about high-quality after-school activities by detailing key activity characteristics linked to youth engagement and learning and provides instructors a road map for how to create engaging learning environments.

Youth Participant Characteristics

Table 1 on the next page shows the characteristics of the Beacon youth who completed our surveys. There was an even split between girls and boys, and youth ranged primarily between the ages of 11 and 16, with an average age of 14. The vast majority of the youth were nonwhite; half were African American, 19 percent were Latino and 23 percent labeled themselves as other (often biracial). Forty percent of youth lived with both parents.

Three quarters of participants attended the school that housed the Beacon Centers. The remainder came from another school or were older teens living in the neighborhood—this highlights the fact that some Beacons were designed to serve youth of all ages in their neighborhoods. The poverty rates at the Beacon schools ranged from 68 to 90 percent, similar to that of the host schools. Academically, participants ranged from very good students (40 percent reported they mostly got A's or B's) to poorer students (with 18 percent reporting they received C's or lower).

On average, youth reported attending the Beacons 3.6 days a week, but this mean is deceptive. Attendance was bimodal: Thirty-one percent attended one or two days a week, while 37 percent attended five or more days a week.

Staff Characteristics

The 45 surveyed instructors were predominately female (64%). Approximately half (47%) were under the age of 25. Instructors were racially and ethnically diverse: 46 percent were African American, 18 percent were white, 18 percent were Hispanic or Latino and 18 percent were another racial/ethnic group. Twenty-three percent considered the Beacon neighborhood their home, and the remainder lived

elsewhere. All of them worked part time, averaging 3.7 hours a week at the Beacons. Half of them worked three hours a week or less.[3]

Most instructors were fairly well educated and experienced in working with youth. Fifty-eight percent held a bachelor's or master's degree. Almost half (45%) were or had been previously employed as a school staff member, and an additional quarter had volunteered in schools prior to working at the Beacons. However, only two of the 45 staff we surveyed had teaching certificates. Alternatively, 71 percent had been employed by youth-serving organizations, such as a YMCA or Boys and Girls Clubs, and 36 percent had childcare experience. Almost three quarters (72%) had received training in one of the following areas in the past five years: adolescent or youth development (55%), classroom management (44%), conflict management (44%) or cooperative learning (22%). On average, the staff had worked at their Beacon Center for eight months. Thus, overall, many instructors were experienced in working with youth.

Activity Characteristics

The activities within the centers we chose to observe and in which we surveyed youth and staff were identified jointly with the directors as activities that aimed to teach their participants some skills. Of the activities we observed, a quarter focused on academic skills or enrichment, a quarter focused on athletics, 28 percent were performing and visual arts activities, 18 percent focused on career, leadership or social skills and the remaining 8 percent were designed to promote health awareness (see Appendix B). We selected activities that would provide us information on the experiences of a broad age range of students—elementary, middle school and high school levels. However, we intentionally over-sampled activities that served middle and high school students since less is known about how to best engage these older students. Roughly a third of activities served middle school youth, a third served high school youth and the remaining third served mixed-age groups, spanning elementary to high school youth.

Table 1: Characteristics of Surveyed Youth

Average age	13.9 years
8-10	3%
11-12	34%
13-14	22%
15-16	28%
17-22	13%
Male/female ratio	50/50
Race	
African American	50%
Latino	19%
White	9%
Other	23%
Lived with both parents	40%
Grades	
A's or B's	40%
B's	17%
B's and C's	25%
C's or less	18%
Reported average weekly attendance	3.6 days/week
1-2 days	31%
3-4 days	17%
5 or more days	37%

Table 2: Youth Experience in Activities
(means and standard deviations)

Outcome (1=low, 4=high)	Average
Perceived learning	3.3 (0.76) N=373
Reported level of engagement	2.9 (0.79) N=364
Level of enjoyment	3.3 (0.70) N=372
Desire to attend	3.4 (0.92) N=365

A Preview of Major Findings

This report examines four key aspects (or outcomes) of youth's experience of an after-school activity: their level of engagement, perceived learning, enjoyment and desire to attend. Appendix B details how we measured these dimensions, but in brief, survey participants agreed or disagreed (strongly or weakly) with several statements that relate to the outcomes (such as, "When I'm at this activity I'm bored," "While I am doing this activity, I think about how much I enjoy it," "I would describe this activity as very interesting," and "This activity does not hold my attention at all.") Scales or measures were constructed by averaging answers to similar statements. All the measures range from 1, meaning low (low levels of enjoyment or engagement) to 4, meaning high. We found, as Table 2 shows, that most Beacon youth enjoyed attending activities, found them engaging and felt they presented good learning opportunities.

The chapters that follow detail several major findings about which staff practices are related to these dimensions of youth's experience. However, briefly, the two most important things staff did that were most strongly associated with engagement and learning were: 1) to effectively manage their groups in ways that ensured youth felt respected by both the adults and the other youth; and 2) to positively support the youth and their learning process. The better these tasks were done, the more deeply youth engaged and the more they felt they got out of activities. Providing youth with opportunities to have input into the activity also increased engagement.

Because out-of-school-time programs are voluntary, programs must also be concerned with participants' attendance. Programs cannot impact the lives of youth who rarely show up. Thus, we examined which features have been found to be associated with participation, namely youth's desire to attend the activity and their level of enjoyment when they are there. We found that youth enjoyed and wanted to come more to activities that were effectively managed and that enabled them to learn and socialize cooperatively with their peers. Older middle- and high-school-aged youth experiencing positive adult support also expressed a greater desire to attend. Adult support increased middle school youth's enjoyment of the activities.

Our investigation into what types of staff are most successful is more speculative given the small number of staff surveyed. Overall, our analyses suggest that staff of all types can be excellent instructors. Few characteristics (past experience, training, age, education, gender, race, etc.) were strongly related to the youth's ratings of the staff's behaviors. Other more tentative correlations are discussed in the chapters that follow.

The Report's Contents

In each of the next four chapters, we describe how a leading program practice—group management (Chapter 2), adult support (Chapter 3), peer interaction (Chapter 4) or youth input (Chapter 5)—relates quantitatively to participants' levels of reported engagement, learning, enjoyment and desire to attend. We then describe some of the effective techniques instructors used to carry out the given program practice (effectively managing groups or providing support). To illuminate and also expand upon substantive quantitative analyses within each chapter, our main findings are grounded in the qualitative activity observation and interview data. At the end of each chapter we examine how staff characteristics are related to staff's ability to perform well in each area: for example, how staff education related to youth's sense of positive support. The concluding chapter takes a broad look at what program administrators and policymakers can do to support quality after-school programs.

Effective Group Management
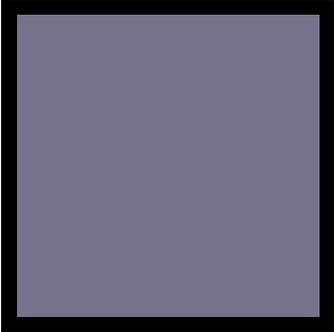
T he term "behavior management" traditionally brings to mind instructors maintaining tight control over classroom environments through strict rules and discipline. But in the minds of youth, a well-managed activity has little to do with authoritarian control. Youth look to after-school programs as places they can interact collaboratively with peers, build skills, socialize and exercise somewhat greater choice and freedom of expression than they do during the school day. Yet youth recognize that to achieve these goals, they need instructors with enough underlying control to ensure that activities progress smoothly.

From the instructor's perspective, the challenges of effective group management in after-school settings can be many. The children are mentally and physically tired after a full day of school. Instructors are called upon to adapt to a variety of changing conditions related to the daily variations in the quality of available space, and the daily fluctuations, number and mix of youth present. Program-wide systems for behavior management are not always present in after-school settings to support the individual staff, and even when they are, the frequency of new instructors often working as independent contractors (joining programs just a couple afternoons a week) means many instructors may lack experience in applying them. On the other hand, there is a seeming luxury that after-school instructors enjoy (when compared with schoolteachers)—having smaller groups as well as being able to be more flexible, creative and to certain degrees lenient in their approaches to management.[4]

This chapter examines the relationship between effective group management and youth ratings of activity quality and illustrates specific ways instructors practice good management. Our overall findings suggest that providing after-school instructors with guidance on how to effectively manage behavior is essential to high-quality after-school programming.

The Relationship Between Effective Group Management and Youth's Experiences

To capture youth's impressions of activity management, we asked participants to rate the overall organization of the activity, the instructor's control of the group and the group's behavior during the activity.[5] We examined the statistical relationships between youth's reports of their engagement and perceived learning and their perceptions of various key staff behaviors, including their assessment of the instructor's group management techniques (as well as how they rated the level of adult support and the degree to which they felt staff encouraged youth input, which we address later in this report). In this section, we discuss how youth's report of the staff's group management skills affected youth engagement, perceived learning, enjoyment and desire to attend, holding these other staff behaviors constant. We find that group management is one of the most important factors promoting youth engagement, learning, enjoyment and regular participation. When youth rated an activity as well managed, they reported getting more out of the activity at each step in the learning process—they enjoyed the activity more, were more engaged in the day's tasks and in turn felt that they learned more than youth in less well-managed activities.

Table 3 shows the relationships between the involvement outcomes (engagement, learning, enjoyment and desire to come) and the youth's ratings of their staff's group management abilities. We find that the better youth rated their staff's ability to control the group, the higher they rated their own levels of engagement, perceived learning, enjoyment and desire to come.

Other research confirms the importance of effective group management in after-school programs. A recent study of 78 after-school programs in Massachusetts (Miller 2005) found that youth appeared to be more engaged in activities that were rated by observers as being well paced and well organized. Another study of the Extended Service Schools Initiative found effective behavior management to

Table 3:
Relationships Between Group Management and Involvement Indicators

Staff Behavior	Involvement Outcomes (4-point scales: 1=low, 4=high)			
	Engagement	Perceived Learning	Enjoyment	Desire to Come
Group Management				
Good Group Management Score of 3	2.86	3.27	3.26	3.33
Good Group Management Score of 4	3.09	3.56	3.51	3.57
Difference	0.23***	0.29***	0.25***	0.24**
Standardized Coefficient	0.22	0.29	0.27	0.20
Sample Size	236	235	235	228

Note: The calculations above are derived from multivariate analyses (shown in full in Table B.1) in which the youth's outcome is modeled as a function of the youth's rating of staff's group management skills, positive and negative adult support, the degree of peer affiliation within the activity, the extent of cooperative peer learning opportunities and youth input, as well as the participants' gender, grade level and academic competence (self-reported GPA). The numbers presented under the Group Management heading are the predicted outcomes if an average sample youth scored the instructor's management skills at 3 or 4.
***$p \leq 0.01$, **$p \leq 0.05$

be a basic condition for high-quality after-school programs: Instructors need to be firm enough to control a group but flexible enough to allow youngsters to express themselves and have fun (Grossman et al. 2002). It's a matter of striking a good balance. In the rest of this chapter, we discuss how staff effectively managed their activities and explore the nuanced dimensions of management.

How Does an Instructor Manage the Group Without Overt Control? The Art of Group Management

What do after-school instructors do to effectively manage groups of young people in their activities? An analysis of our observations of the activities that youth participants rated highly in terms of both group management and engagement, combined with factors noted in the youth and instructor interviews, revealed four simple, yet essential, behavior management techniques: reasonable ground rules, ongoing positive reinforcement, consistency and fairness in reinforcing expectations, and "holding the line." There was considerable variation in how Beacon instructors approached each strategy—there appears to be no one right way to manage groups. However, the strong Beacon instructors

drew upon their expertise with youth to maintain a consistently stable learning environment without relying on harsh behavior management practices. When each of the techniques listed above was integrated successfully, youth readily recognized good group management as necessary to helping them get the most out of activities.

Setting the Ground Rules

Establishing ground rules is an important first part of any activity. Strong Beacon instructors typically set aside time on the first day of activities to discuss their expectations. In a few cases, this was a dialogue, during which youth were asked to brainstorm and agree on a collective set of ground rules. Other times instructors defined the ground rules, or the demands of individual activities were pivotal in shaping expectations. For example, in SAT prep, loud talking disturbed studious concentration; in martial arts, getting out of line meant other youth could not see and follow the instructor. For older youth, expectations were sometimes as simple as the word "respect," which encompassed everything from listening when others talked to supporting others' ideas and acting with kindness. For younger youth, rules needed to be simple as well as specific

(requiring a more specific list of "dos and don'ts" to guide the activity than may be needed by older youth). However it was done, instructors who established effective ground rules from the first day of an activity spent less time throughout the remainder of the activity dealing with disciplinary issues. Clear ground rules helped to prevent problems later on.

Once expectations were established, instructors drew on their expertise with children to practice different systems for maintaining activity flow during the course of the session. To let youth know their break time was coming to an end, a Double Dutch instructor slowly began counting down from 10, giving youth time to finish socializing and regroup. An SAT prep instructor kept youth on task by reminding them how much time they had left to complete a practice test. A drama instructor let youth who were socializing know she needed their attention by sitting down and quietly staring at them: Order swiftly resumed without the instructor having said a word.

Ongoing Positive Reinforcement

Rewards and positive reinforcement were among the most common techniques Beacon instructors used to encourage positive youth behavior. Sometimes rewards and positive reinforcement techniques were used as the backdrop for an entire activity session. For example, two instructors used stickers and other incentives to encourage good behavior with their middle school youth participants. These incentives could also be taken away in cases of disruptive behavior. However, when comparing this technique with the practice of integrating verbal positive reinforcement throughout a day's activity session to encourage participants' good behavior, incentives seemed less effective. As recognition for good practice, karate and capoeira instructors granted participants the opportunity to spar at the end of sessions. Some instructors granted special responsibilities or leadership opportunities to recognize good behavior. A Fun Science instructor selected volunteer helpers from among the youth who behaved well.

The use of rewards for behavior management and increasing motivation has been a widely discussed issue in the field of educational research. Some

researchers have found that the use of tangible rewards decreases motivation, while other researchers find external rewards to have negligible effects. However, research has consistently found that verbal reinforcement, like praise and encouragement, can increase motivation (see, for example, Cameron & Pierce 1994; Akin-Little et. al 2004).

All of the instructors we observed recognized strong performance and good behavior through individual and group praise. For example, one instructor exclaimed to his group:

> Instructor: *OK, you guys are all working, that's great!*
>
> One boy (sarcastically): *That's a shock to you?*
>
> Instructor: *Yeah, that's a shock, 'cause usually you guys are talking. Oh, this is great. I can relax today.*

The middle schoolers in the instructor's group seemed to appreciate his humor and frankness.

The Fun Science instructor took a more straightforward approach. At the end of the activity, he asked the group, "How many tried [today's activity] and felt like they got most of it?" When a majority of youth raised their hands, he then told them to keep their hands up and pat themselves on the back for doing a great job.

Consistency and Fairness When Rules are Broken

When ground rules are broken, discipline may be required. Good judgment, compassion, fairness and the willingness to forgive and forget are effective instructors' guiding principles for discipline. Good instructors know how to address individual behaviors and hold youth accountable without demeaning them, holding grudges or overreacting.

Some instructors adopted creative approaches for responding to infractions by tapping into age-appropriate aspects of youth culture. One instructor asked a disruptive youth to sit at a table on the far side of the room that he humorously dubbed the "Chamber of Despair"—the title was particularly

apt given that the boys in the activity were keenly interested in games like Dungeons and Dragons. When the boy rejoined the group, the instructor readily resumed normal instruction, giving the boy as much positive reinforcement and support as the others. He effectively made the point to the youth and his peers that poor behavior was unacceptable but that he still trusted and cared about the youth. The best group managers disciplined youngsters, then seemingly forgave and forgot by simply moving on with instruction.

Discretion was critical in group settings. To maintain expectations, instructors needed to address individual disruptions, but they needed to do it so as not to demean youth. A martial arts instructor pulled a single disruptive youth to the side, quietly addressed his behavior on an individual level, but also redressed the entire group when there were numerous disruptions. In both cases, he returned to instruction using the same respectful tone he had used prior to the disruptions. A health instructor used a similar method, firmly and calmly addressing major disturbances, like a participant turning on the classroom computer and another youth getting up out of his seat during the presentation. When the instructor later called for volunteers, these youth were among those she selected.

Fairness also means responding to misbehavior in a way that reflects the seriousness of the infraction. In young people's eyes, small problems deserved light punishments. Many of the strong instructors we observed chose to ignore small infractions such as calling out answers or talking to other youth when they were expected to be quiet. A college readiness instructor ignored nonverbal communication between two participants who were smiling and mouthing words at each other—ultimately they were not disrupting the group and they were engaged in the activity.

Not all instructors we observed were skilled in the art of behavior management, and some were put to the test more regularly by youth. In two activities we observed, relationships between instructors and youth seemed to have deteriorated, perhaps beyond repair. When instructors responded to youth infractions with equal disrespect, youth seemed to only show a greater lack of respect toward the instructors.

In one observation, the instructor's battle of wills with a few participants led the whole group to detach from the activity and pay no attention to the session.

Holding the Line

Instructors sometimes faced tough situations. A youth in a dance activity became upset when she was told she could not be the first dancer in line for an upcoming performance. When the instructor explained to her that she would be second, the girl walked away and sat by herself behind an auditorium staircase. The instructor permitted the girl's self-selected quiet time, but when the girl returned to the group 20 minutes later the instructor asked her to take a seat for the remainder of the activity. Although the instructor's firmness clearly displeased the girl, it likely helped the instructor maintain fairness and integrity in the eyes of the group.

How Group Management Strategies Differ by Participants' Age

The statistical relationship of good behavioral management to engagement and perceived learning did not differ by participants' age, though what constituted good management changed as the participants matured. The observational data showed that in well-managed elementary school activities, instructors maintained order by having much more structure. Behavioral expectations were simple and concrete. Staff of well-managed middle school activities allowed more socializing to occur and ignored small infractions of rules but regularly reined in youth who were off task or noisy. To adult observers, middle school activities often felt less controlled because there was a greater level of socializing present than in activities for younger youth. In high school activities, staff tended to stress respectful interactions and let the teens have more control over the flow of the activity.

How Staff Characteristics Related to Their Group Management

Effective group management is clearly important in creating an engaging learning environment. As program directors make hiring and staff development decisions, what type of individual is able to manage groups of youth well? To address this question, we examined the relationship between youth's

perceptions of instructors' group management skills and basic staff characteristics that program directors could easily use to select staff, namely:

- College education;

- Previous work experience with children;

- Previous training;

- Age; and

- Similarity of staff's racial and ethnic backgrounds to participants' backgrounds.

All of these characteristics have been noted in other research as predictive of staff performance. Several qualitative studies have found that staff who are similar to the participants in both age and culture have been seen to relate better to youth (Walker and Grossman 2000). Much of the childcare literature finds a strong relationship between education and performance. Another question we explore is what type of work experience is best suited to staff working in a school-based after-school program: school experience or experience in youth-serving organizations? Finally, we consider how training affects the key interactional qualities we found to be critical.

Unfortunately, we can only examine these issues in a very preliminary manner. Staff surveys were distributed at the end of sessions. Only three quarters of instructors for whom we have youth data filled out their staff surveys. When we tried to track these instructors down, many were no longer associated with programs and either could not be located or declined to fill out the survey. As a result, the number of staff for whom we have both staff surveys and youth surveys (and thus could be included in the analysis) is small (approximately 30). Because we may be systematically missing the data on instructors with shorter-term retention within programs, our staff findings here, and in other chapters, should be considered highly preliminary. The relationships we found could reflect the peculiarities of our programs rather than a general trend.

To examine these questions, we statistically related the ratings the students gave the staff to staff characteristics, adjusting for the rater's (the student's) gender, grade level and academic competence (his or her self-reported GPA).[6] In Table 4 we present the results. When we consider which staff were

Table 4: Relationships Between Staff Characteristics and Youth's Assessments of the Staff's Group Management Ability

Staff Characteristic	Change in youth's assessment of the staff's group management skills (1=low, 4=high)
Staff-Youth Ratio	-0.66
Female	0.06
Younger than 25	-0.05
School Work Experience	0.07
Youth Organization Experience	0.05
Childcare Work Experience	-0.16
Same Race/Ethnicity as Participant	0.10
Youth Development Training	-0.13
Group Management Training	-0.26
Training in Cooperative Learning	0.25
College Educated	0.18
Number of Youth and Staff	250/32

Note: These are selected coefficients from an HLM analysis of the youth's assessment of the staff's group management ability in which students are embedded in activities. At the first stage, the 250 students' ratings were regressed against their gender, grade level and self-reported GPA. At the second stage, the activity level intercept was modeled as a function of the 32 staff's characteristics. The full set of coefficients is shown in Table B.2.

rated by the youth as having the best group management, we found no solid evidence to suggest that any of the considered adult characteristics were strongly related to better group management. None of the results were statistically different from zero. However, given the small number of activities and students, this is not surprising. Staff of all types—men, women; young, old; those with different work experiences—all appear to be able to learn to manage groups well.

The results, however, may suggest areas for further investigation. Somewhat surprisingly, having more staff per youth lowers the youth's ratings of

staff's management skills. In this small sample, the staff characteristics that seemed to be most strongly correlated with youth's rating of the their group management had to do with the type of training the staff member needed or received. Staff who received group management training were less well rated than those who had not received this training. Perhaps the training did not adequately improve the skills of those who were particularly weak in this area. On the other hand, staff receiving training in cooperative peer learning appeared to be rated better than other staff. We do not know if stronger staff received training in cooperative learning or if training in cooperative learning helped the staff manage their groups. Staff who had a college education also seemed to be rated by students as being better at group management, and staff who had worked as child care providers tended to be rated lower than those without this prior work experience. Perhaps these staff did not adjust their management style to working with the older students. However, the reader is cautioned again that none of these associations are statistically significant in our sample.

Summary

In recent years, much attention in the youth development field (including P/PV's research) has been spent understanding and promoting practices that encourage positive adult-youth relationships and youth leadership. However, this chapter reminds us that the creation of a physically and psychologically safe place is the bedrock upon which youth can optimally develop. Statistically, our findings show that when youth rate an activity as well managed, they enjoy and are more engaged in the activity and, in turn, feel they learn more than youth in less well-managed activities. While some educational research suggests that with strong curricula and well-planned units, youth will be so well engaged that behavior is rarely a concern (Marzano 2000), our findings are a reminder that youth indeed need and benefit from instructors who can successfully maintain order and fairness.

From the youth's point of view, it appears that good instructors provide just enough structure (given their age and needs) to help activities run well, and remain calm, consistent and fair when presented with challenges. Through our observations, we saw strong instructors striking a balance between being clear and firm in maintaining order, and offering sufficient positive reinforcement to recognize good work, keep youth on task and encourage respectful peer relationships. An instructor's expertise in effective group management techniques seems essential to the creation of a high-quality, engaging learning environment.

However, more research in this area is needed. Our measures of both the staff's management ability and the youth outcome are reported by the students themselves. It could be that the most engaged youth who also learn the most are the ones who rate the staff as more in control. The association may be driven in part by those students' general liking of the activity rather than the instructors' behaviors.

The Difference
Supportive Relationships Make
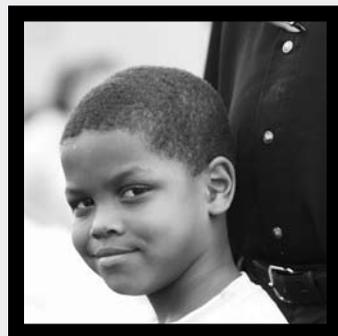
Supportive adult relationships are critical to youth development. Positive relationships with instructors contribute to young people's cognitive and social development throughout adolescence and generate a sense of belonging that is a foundation of child well-being (Connell and Wellborn 1991; Wentzel 1998). At the same time, good relationships between instructors and youth play a key role in learning by creating hospitable learning environments. A meta-analysis of more than 100 studies found that teachers who shared high-quality relationships with youth had 31 percent fewer discipline problems than those teachers lacking high-quality relationships (Marzano 2003). Thus, positive instructor-youth relationships appear to be a key element of the type of effective behavior management discussed in the last chapter.

Effective adult support often goes beyond being a friend or social support. In this study, we found adult support to include two main concepts: the emotional support that occurs within these staff-youth relations, as well as the instructional support that is necessary for skill development. Good instructors are pros at both.

The Relationship of Adult Support and Youth Involvement

To capture youth's impressions of staff's support, we asked participants to rate the activity's staff members on five positive support behaviors (pays attention to me, understands me, makes me feel part of the group, etc.) and four negative behaviors (bothers me, puts students down, etc.). From their answers we constructed a positive support scale and a negative interaction scale. In this section, we discuss how these scales related quantitatively to students' reported levels of engagement, perceived learning, enjoyment and desire to come, holding the other key staff behaviors we were investigating constant (such as group management skills, encouraging youth input and cooperative peer learning).[7] This analysis enables us to isolate the effect of adult support from these other behaviors.

Table 5 shows the relationships between the involvement indicators (engagement, learning, enjoyment and desire to come) and youth reports of both positive support and negative staff interaction. We found that youth who felt positively supported by their instructors were more engaged in activities and felt they learned more than youth who felt less supported. A one-unit increase in a student's rating of an instructor's level of positive support is associated with a 0.28 increase in his or her reported level of engagement and a 0.49 increase in how much he or she believes he or she has learned in the activity. Not surprisingly, when staff interact with youth in a negative manner, they enjoy the activity less. There seems to be a slight positive association with engagement (they concentrate, feel challenged and use their talents), perhaps to avoid possible ridicule. However, they did not report learning more. Research by Smith and Smoll (1979) on sports and by Grossman and Rhodes (2002) on mentoring found that negative interactions, such as the ones we investigated, dramatically decreased the probability that the youth would continue the activity.

While not shown here, we also examined whether these relationships differed by age group (elementary, middle and high school). Unlike effective group management, which has the same effects on all students, positive adult support affected youth of different ages differently. Among middle and high school youth, positive adult support increased their desire to attend an activity. This is an important result given that low after-school participation rates are a chronic problem among older youth.[8] The level of enjoyment was most highly associated with support for the middle school youth. More positive relationships with staff were not associated with higher levels of reported enjoyment for the elementary and the high school youth. Their basic enjoyment (but not engagement) of the activity was independent of staff support. The peculiar importance of staff to middle school-aged adolescents is likely related to their developmental stage—a feature of which is the desire to be more independent from their parents while still valuing adult guidance.

Table 5:

Relationships Between Adult Support and Involvement Indicators

Staff Behavior	Involvement Outcomes (4-point scales: 1=low, 4=high)			
	Engagement	Perceived Learning	Enjoyment	Desire to Come
Positive Adult Support				
Adult Support Score of 3	2.81	3.14	3.22	3.37
Adult Support Score of 4	3.09	3.63	3.47	3.41
Difference	0.28***	0.49***	0.25***	0.04
Standardized Coefficient	0.25	0.45	0.25	0.03
Negative Adult Support				
Negative Interaction Score of 1	2.84	3.30	3.40	3.33
Negative Interaction Score of 2	2.96	3.36	3.25	3.43
Difference	0.12*	0.06	−0.15***	0.10
Standardized Coefficient	0.12	0.06	−0.17	0.09
Sample Size	236	235	235	228

Note: These are selected coefficients from a multivariate analysis (shown in full in Table B.1) in which
the youth's outcome is modeled as a function of the youth's rating of staff's group management
skills, positive and negative adult support, the degree of peer affiliation within the activity, the
extent of cooperative peer learning opportunities and youth input, as well as the participants' gen-
der, grade level and academic competence (self-reported GPA). All data are from youth surveys.
***$p \leq 0.01$, *$p \leq 0.10$

We also examined how adult support affected the stages of learning.[9] We found that youth who experienced positive adult support got more out of activities at each step in the learning process. In particular, we found that if two youth equally enjoyed an activity, the one who felt more positively supported by staff was more engaged. Similarly, between two equally engaged youth, the one who felt the most adult support felt he or she learned the most. Effective group management and positive adult support are the only two practices we examined that had this type of compounding effect.

Our qualitative investigation, described below, discovered that positive adult support in an out-of-school time setting consisted of two distinct components: emotional support and instructional support. This research also uncovered an interesting relationship between the two types of support and youth's overall sense of support.

How Do Instructors Play Supportive Roles?

Our investigation of our qualitative data showed two important yet distinct components of positive adult support in after-school programs: one is emotional, the other is instructional. Emotional support involves the warmth, care and encouragement that give youth the security to take on new challenges and grow (Rhodes 2004). Instructional support means helping youth gain new knowledge and meet

challenges through clear, supportive and individualized teaching strategies. This distinction in the type of adult support is widely reported in the social support field. Within that field, "instrumental" support is used in lieu of the term "instructional" support; the two terms have very similar meanings.

We found that in after-school learning environments, effective adult support typically constitutes a blended effort on the part of instructors to give youth the necessary balance of information, guidance and emotional care to foster strong skill development. Yet our observations of the Philadelphia Beacons also revealed a complex relationship between emotional and instructional support. When instructional support was strong in activities rated high on adult support by the youth, we did not always observe staff providing emotional support. In these cases where overt emotionally supportive behavior was absent, it seems that the time and effort the instructor put into teaching was perceived by the youth as another form of caring. Below we discuss the two forms of support in more detail.

Emotional Support

Opportunities for instructors to build emotionally supportive relationships with youth in after-school settings differ from opportunities afforded teachers during the school day. While schoolteachers often have more time on their side for relationship development—seeing students over longer, more regular periods—after-school instructors benefit from less formal and more intimate environments provided by smaller group sizes.

Beacon instructors expressed emotional support for youngsters by forging trusting relationships somewhat similar to friendships or tutorships, learning about youth culture, and taking the time to support individual youth when special needs occurred.

A desire to build mutual respect and rapport guided many instructors in their interactions with youth. Most adopted a "friend" or "big sister/ brother" role. A girls' self-esteem-and-relaxation-activity instructor described how she began getting to know the girls in the first activity session:

> *In my initial introduction to them, I tell some personal information about me, things I enjoy doing, tell a joke, try to show my personality. I try to build a "big sister" type relationship, show that I care, and then they will come back. Then when the teacher part of me comes out, they know they can trust me on both levels.*

In our interviews, a third of instructors mentioned the value of **learning about youth culture** as a way to connect with youth. A job-readiness instructor described how she learned about teen culture so she could integrate it into her weekly discussions with youth:

> *I try to keep myself up to date with their kind of stuff.… Once a week, I will listen to the radio and watch MTV and BET and find out what's happening.*

Another instructor shared a keen interest in video games and game cards with his participants, frequently referencing them during discussions:

> Boy: *Yo, James! Just so you know, this is how I draw in bubbly-words.*
>
> Instructor looks at the boy's poster and says: *Oh, yeah, that looks like a thing from* Fooly-Cooly World (a Japanese anime series).

Other instructors described the importance of simply making **time to talk** with youth and engage in friendly banter during sessions. Some instructors chose to adopt an "open door, open heart" policy, allowing time after the session for participants to ask questions or just have (as some described), a "heart to heart."

Such efforts on the part of instructors to connect appealed to youth. Two high school teens explained:

> *A good instructor appeals to our interests, music, exploring our talents. We look up to older people who share the same views as us and try to connect with them.*

> *[They] can give you insight on some-*
> *thing that you were not aware of, what*
> *they learned from age. They offer an*
> *understanding from a broader perspective*
> *than just their opinion.*

The importance of **informal socializing** in fostering a positive relationship between adults and youth has been found in other studies (McClanahan 1998; Herrera et al. 2000; Herrera et al. 2002; Jarrett et al. 2005; Hall et al. 2004). The need to interject "fun" was particularly important in activities that focused on academics, and several Beacon instructors showed skill in engaging youth, as seen in an SAT prep course.

> *We joke—it's a small class, and I try to*
> *keep it light. I do not want it to be set up*
> *like a class. I think they get more out of*
> *it if it's different…. I do not stand up*
> *in front of them. You see me sitting with*
> *them. As long as they are not scream-*
> *ing out, I do not make them raise their*
> *hands…. I do not give homework.*

Instructional Support

Somewhat surprisingly, our analyses revealed that youth seemed to interpret instructional support as a sign that adults care about them and want to help them achieve their goals. This important finding was particularly apparent in several activities, including martial arts, college readiness and drill team, where the instructors set high expectations for skill development but provided relatively little direct emotional support. By leading rigorous and repetitious practice sessions, instructors gave youth the tools to live up to their expectations, and while instructor-youth interactions were not negative, there was a clear emphasis on skill development over relationship development. We found that youth in these activities reported high levels of adult support in the surveys. Thus, it appears that adult instructors can provide effective support to youth participants through responsive instruction, in which the instructor identifies and satisfies the specific needs of the group, and the individual within that group, to ensure their full understanding of the material.

Instructional support is the basis for youth learning and the way instructors make sure that youth have the inherent knowledge needed for genuine skill development. It occurs in a variety of ways—providing one-on-one instruction, challenging youth to move beyond their current skill levels, and providing balanced feedback that includes positive reinforcement and critical assessments of progress.

Individualized Instruction

In essence, instructional support means making sure each participant "gets it." Often this requires careful individual support. The small size of groups (averaging 9 participants across the 50 activities we observed) often afforded by after-school settings allows staff to use individual instruction fairly frequently.

The Beacon instructors we interviewed recognized the important role individualized instruction plays in supporting participant learning. Through our observations, we saw the different ways they offered individual instruction. A multimedia instructor moved from one youth to another, giving welcome advice on their computer-based art projects. Both martial arts instructors would use warm-up exercises as a time to walk around and offer verbal pointers or physically adjust youth's stances to ensure their skill development. A co-instructor in another activity spent most of her time helping a new participant get up to speed on a class project.

In a visual arts activity, the instructor circulated around the room, helping youth design posters for a school event—for this exercise, his feedback was very direct.

> *The instructor says to Caroline,*
> *"Remember, don't put the letters too close*
> *together because they'll squish up." Then*
> *he moves over to the table where John's*
> *also drafting letters on his poster. He*
> *says, "Okay, every now and then, take a*
> *big step back and see if all the letters are*
> *lined up right." The instructor watches*
> *John step back and then make some*
> *adjustments to his text.*

With just six youth in attendance, the art instructor was able to spend the activity session shifting from one youth to the next, critiquing and monitoring their work.

Challenging and Supporting Youth to Adopt New Skills

Youth talked about their appreciation of challenging opportunities. One youth noted that his SAT preparation instructor "never gives you the answer—she makes you think about it for yourself." Another youth described how his instructor challenged him by offering a reward for strong performance:

> *If I get really good, he said he'd take us to the park with him, and when he drums I can drum with him.*

Our observations revealed the use of a variety of techniques like these to challenge youth. The main way instructors challenge youth to gain new skills is by assessing their current abilities and facilitating their advancement with increasingly difficult or new steps. A youth explained,

> *A good instructor, they figure out what you don't understand and spend as much time as you need to figure it out. A bad instructor says they already went over that and won't help you.*

In interviews, 11 out of 16 instructors described accurately assessing youth's skill levels as critical to activity quality and youth engagement. This assessment ranged from informal observations of the youth's performance to formal quizzes at the beginning and end of the activity to gauge the level of participant learning on the topic. The instructors would often use these assessments to provide feedback, as well as to guide next steps. One instructor described how this occurred in his martial arts activity:

> *If the group is getting things a lot quicker than normal, everyone is flowing the same way, I may give them a little more. I do this when I see that they are getting it quicker than I expected.*

Instructors also commonly set a level of expectations for youth performance through professional demonstration of a skill or art. For example, a Double Dutch instructor jumped right alongside youth to demonstrate new moves. An art instructor brought in his professional portfolio of work for youth to look through at their leisure during the activity so they could gain insight into the life and work of a professional artist and see the final product of applying good techniques.

Instructors would often challenge youth using a number of different strategies unique to the activity or project. For example, some activities were naturally competitive, particularly those with an athletic focus, like basketball and Double Dutch. Other activities were focused on a goal or an end project or performance, which instructors then used to help youth practice and build on current skills. Activities like these may also be challenging because of the creativity required and deadlines that accompany each project. Some instructors challenged youth by teaching new concepts in each session. In martial arts, youth learned new moves in each class while continuing to practice and master the old ones. We also observed some degree of youth self-challenge, whereby youth focused on their own accuracy and accomplishment of a given skill or task.

Balanced Feedback

Youth value honest, critical feedback. A Beacon teen described it as the quality of a good instructor:

> *If you are performing and you are lacking [not doing well], they tell you.*

This youth preferred an instructor's frankness to strictly positive reinforcement.

However, for instructors, figuring out ways to convey useful criticism without alienating youth required care. As one karate instructor noted,

> *When I was growing up martial arts was very strict.… In the beginning, I was more disciplined, thinking this would help the student out. But that didn't work. I noticed that most [of the youth] would get discouraged, were not coming back and complaining that it was too tough. I didn't want them to not come back, so I had to change this.*

Our observations and interviews reveal that the feedback youth responded to best was balanced in that it paired ongoing encouragement with clear instructions on how to do better. In this way it simultaneously challenged and motivated youth to acquire new skills. Other research confirms the essential role of feedback in learning (Marzano 2000; Bransford et. al. 1999; Creemers 1994; Kearns 1988; Smith et al. 1979).

Beacon instructors took different approaches to providing balanced feedback. A martial arts instructor encouraged a participant's punching practice by telling the boy after a strong punch, "I felt the difference in that one," and testing him after a poor one with the question, "Come on, is that how you punch?" A visual arts instructor combined regular positive reinforcement, such as, "Keep working on

it; I think you got it down," "You really impressed me today," and "Oh, man, that's comin' out sweet," with frank critiques of participants' work. He coached one on his drawing with, "That looks good. That bird looks too friendly, though, for a winged creature of destruction." Being able to combine critical feedback with specific directions for how youth might improve their performance required both patience and perseverance on the part of instructors.

While critical feedback was often provided on an individual basis, other times it was directed to an entire group of youth participating in a project together. In a cultural dance activity during which youth were preparing for a stage performance, the instructor provided positive reinforcement to youth throughout the session: "Good job" and "You got it." She

Table 6: Relationships Between Staff Characteristics and Adult Support

Staff Characteristic	Change in the Youth Score of Positive Adult Support Rating	Change in the Youth Score of Negative Adult Interaction Rating
Staff-Youth Ratio	0.17	-0.03
Female	0.23	-0.01
Younger than 25	0.03	0.11
School Work Experience	0.14	0.10
Youth Organization Experience	-0.07	-0.16
Childcare Work Experience	-0.25*	0.36**
Same Race/Ethnicity as Participant	-0.07	-0.13
Youth Development Training	-0.15	-0.03
Group Management Training	-0.08	0.07
Training in Cooperative Learning	-0.02	0.01
College Educated	-0.15	0.08
Sample Size Youth/Staff	257/32	257/32

Note: These are selected coefficients from an HLM analysis of the youth's assessment of the staff's positive and negative interactions in which students are embedded in activities. At the first stage, the 257 students' ratings were regressed on gender, grade level and GPA. At the second stage, activity level intercepts were modeled as a function of the characteristics of the 32 staff. The full set of coefficients is shown in Table B.2.

**p≤0.05, *p≤0.10

then continually challenged youth by firmly saying, "Keep working at it," and at one point stopping the practice to ask youth to perform a dance step again because she felt they could do it better.

How Staff Characteristics Related to Adult Support

Given the importance of adult support, we examine which types of staff in our sample offered the kind of adult support youth preferred. Similar to the analysis discussed at the end of the previous chapter, we statistically analyzed how youth's perceptions of staff support varied by staff characteristics, controlling for the youth's gender, grade and academic competence (GPA).[10] Table 6 presents the results. Again, the model does a poor job at explaining adult support; most of the factors we considered (staff-youth ratio, gender, age, education, racial match, prior work experience and training) were not statistically related to youth's perception of adult support. Thus, it appears that staff of almost all backgrounds can effectively provide positive adult support.

The one factor that appears to be negatively related to positive adult support in our sample was a staff's previous childcare work experience. Youth rated these staff more likely to interact with them negatively and, while not statistically significant, less likely to give positive support. This finding may be unique to our particular sample of staff (our sample size is very small). It may also be reflective of the fact that, at the time of our study, Beacon programs were taking advantage of a federally subsidized program to hire welfare-to-work candidates as program aides, and these aides' past work experiences often included childcare. These staff may have needed more training in how to interact with older youth. However, given our small sample, this finding warrants more careful examination.

Summary

We are not the first to point out the importance of positive adult support in the lives of youth. Indeed, it directly supports both engagement and learning in after-school settings. But this report's description of *how* instructors go about providing this support is relatively new. We find that programs can achieve their goals better if they have staff who are skilled at

providing positive support. Youth will be both more engaged and learn more—and for middle school and high school youth, they will want to attend more—if they feel supported by the staff.

Second, we find that youth feel supported not only and not entirely through the presence of emotionally supportive adults. Our qualitative data showed that some staff who provided strong instructional support with relatively little emotional support were just as highly rated on positive support as staff who mainly provided emotional support within an after-school environment. We found this was especially true in activities that both focused intensively on a particular skill and in which youth made a choice to participate. Halpern (2005) also found a similar result in a teen program in Chicago. Additional research exploring the interplay between instructional and emotional support would be beneficial.

Peer Interactions

Youth often say the main reason they come to activities is because their friends are there. But what role do peers really have in the learning process? Do strong peer ties enhance a participant's engagement in the activity? Or do they just get the participants to show up more often?

One of the benefits after-school activities can provide participants is an opportunity to interact with peers and improve their social skills. This is, of course, a quite important outcome in and of itself. However, in this study we did not examine what conditions led youth to have better social interactions. Rather, this study examines whether the type of interaction allowed in the activity promotes the individual's engagement, learning, enjoyment and desire to attend.

We investigated these issues both quantitatively and qualitatively to find that while providing youth with opportunities for positive peer interactions greatly enhances their enjoyment of and desire to attend an activity, their capacity to increase engagement and learning is less definitive. Given the difficulty many programs have attracting and holding on to participants, especially older youth, understanding what makes youth want to come to voluntary learning activities is an important programmatic and policy issue.

Relationship of Peer Affiliation and Cooperative Learning to Youth Involvement

As in the other chapters, we begin by discussing the statistical relationships we observed between the youth involvement indicators and the staff or activity characteristics we are considering. For this chapter, we considered two main dimensions of peer interactions: the first, whether participants felt "peer affiliation," meaning whether they liked the others in the activity and got to know them well; the second, whether instructors encouraged cooperative learning by urging participants to help each other and work together.[11] Staff have direct impact in encouraging youth to work together (or not); they may also be able to foster a general sense of familiarity and liking

among the group. As described in the earlier chapters, we statistically modeled youth's report of their level of engagement, perceived learning, enjoyment and desire to come to our six key staff or activity characteristics (such as group management, positive adult support, etc.), as well as the participant's grade level, gender and academic competence.

Table 7 shows that our quantitative analysis did not find a direct link between either peer affiliation or cooperative peer learning with participants' level of engagement or their perceived level of learning. Yet, as one would expect, we find that the more participants reported that staff encouraged them to work together, the more youth enjoyed the activity and the more they wanted to return. The association of cooperative peer learning and the desire to come to the activity all the time is especially strong.

When we examined these relationships separately by age group (not shown in the table), we found that the relationships between peer affiliation and the involvement indicators differed by age. For elementary school children, the more they liked their classmates, the more they felt they learned. The more middle school students liked their fellow participants, the more they wanted to come to the activity; however engagement and learning were not affected. This middle school finding fits with the importance of peer acceptance at this age. However, for high school teens, liking one's peers played no role in any of the four variables. Perhaps this is true because high school students are more driven by their own desires to acquire particular skills.

The effects of cooperative peer learning did not differ by age. For all age groups, cooperative learning opportunities similarly increased youth's enjoyment in and desire to come to the activity.

The next section presents what we learned about enhancing peer interactions from our qualitative data. As before, we examined activities that youth had rated highly on either cooperative peer learning or peer affiliation, and we reviewed staff and youth in-depth interviews we conducted to gain insight into what staff can do to enhance peer interactions.

Table 7: Relationships Between Peer Interactions and Involvement Indicators

Staff Behavior	Outcomes (4-point scales: 1=low, 4=high)			
	Engagement	Perceived Learning	Enjoyment	Desire to Come
Cooperative Peer Learning				
Cooperative Learning Score of 3	2.86	3.29	3.25	3.18
Cooperative Learning Score of 4	2.98	3.38	3.39	3.61
Difference	0.12	0.09	0.14**	0.43***
Standardized Coefficients	0.10	0.08	0.14	0.32
Peer Affiliation				
Peer Affiliation Score of 3	2.91	3.33	3.31	3.38
Peer Affiliation Score of 4	2.92	3.38	3.31	3.49
Difference	0.00	0.05	0.00	0.11
Standardized Coefficients	0.00	0.05	0.00	0.08
Sample Size	236	235	235	228

Note: These are selected coefficients from a multivariate analysis (shown in full in Table B.1) in which the youth's outcome is modeled as a function of the youth's rating of staff's group management skills, positive and negative adult support, the degree of peer affiliation within the activity, the extent of cooperative peer learning opportunities and youth input, as well as the participants' gender, grade level and academic competence (self-reported GPA).
***p≤0.01, **p≤0.05

How Can Instructors Help Build Positive Peer Relationships?

Youth are often initially attracted to after-school programs because they present opportunities to interact with peers. In our interviews, almost a third of youth identified socializing and having fun with peers as a part of quality instruction, a third said they made new friends in the activities and others said they valued the time they were able to spend in activities with preexisting friends.

Beacon instructors played three key roles in facilitating positive peer interactions. First, they modeled and set the tone for positive social interactions across the group, intervening as needed to ensure that all youth got along. Second, they brought youth together to work on projects collaboratively by placing them in pairs or small groups. Third, they placed youth in formal peer tutoring and mentoring relationships in which youth with greater expertise were asked to guide more novice participants through a task.

Strong Instructors Model Positive Social Interactions
Good instructors establish an inclusive sense of community within activities that extends to every member of the group. Our observers often noticed that the better instructors treated individual youth in activities, the better youth treated one another. In this way, instructors appeared to serve as leading role models, setting a strong level of expectation for how all members of the group interacted and got along.

Three of the most important things instructors did in promoting positive peer interactions were to establish and maintain basic expectations or ground rules (as described in Chapter 2), welcome new youth to the group and continually reengage drifters or loners and swiftly and artfully intervene when peer interactions turned negative.

Since Beacon Centers are modeled as community centers within schools and often draw participants from their surrounding neighborhoods and adjacent schools, youth who join individual activities often do not know one another at first. Designing opportunities for youth to get acquainted—even if it is as simple as leading a round of introductions at the start of an activity session—paves the way for positive social interactions throughout the course of the activity. In a youth council activity attended by four new participants, the instructor changed the start of his session by announcing that the full group would first do an icebreaker. He asked participants to write down their name, neighborhood, favorite role model, favorite singer and place they'd most like to be and to draw a picture of a symbol they believed best represented them. After giving the group a few minutes to write, the instructor solicited volunteers to share why they chose their personal symbols. The icebreaker took about 15 minutes and helped forge a sense of community that could prove important to the youth council's success with and enjoyment of group projects that followed.

In other role modeling examples: An instructor who encouraged applause after a participant's performance seemed to set in motion a sense of camaraderie that modeled for youth how to respect and support one another; another instructor noticed that a youth arriving late to the activity decided to sit at a desk far removed from the rest of the group, and swiftly encouraged the young man to "join the circle of friends." Respectfully engaging what can sometimes be self-selecting outsiders appears a cornerstone of establishing a positive sense of community among youth.

The youth interviewed in our sample confirmed that peers sometimes have a negative influence on learning opportunities when they act in ways that belittle other participants. In such circumstances, instructors need to intervene in appropriate ways to manage group dynamics. In this respect, effective behavioral management skills are critical when using cooperative peer learning techniques.

Adult monitoring took several forms at the Beacons, including establishing ground rules about respecting peers and separating youth when their interactions became disruptive to the rest of the group or

stopped the flow of the activity. In an SAT prep session, football players who teased each other good-naturedly with the instructor's knowledge received firm discouragement when they began making fun of a newcomer. Another instructor reacted to problems between youth by regularly incorporating teamwork activities in response to fighting. For example, she asked youth to hold each other's hands and then figure out a way to disentangle themselves to form a big circle. Her justification was simple: "They have to learn to be a team." During middle adolescence, when youth are trying to establish both their autonomy from and affiliation with peers, opportunities to interact with peers while instructors are available to model positive social relationships may be particularly valuable.

Instructors Create Opportunities for Informal Peer Group Work

Simply placing youth into pairs and small or large groups to work together encouraged positive peer cooperation on tasks and typically allowed for modest amounts of socializing. For example, during a girls' relaxation and self-esteem activity, the instructor explained that a number of participants shared pre-established friendships and attended because their peers were there. The instructor was able to capitalize on their friendships by making group projects a regular part of the activity and encouraging both project-focused and social conversation. Similarly, in an SAT prep activity, the members of the school's football team (who were required to attend) sat together, asked each other questions, worked out problems together and joked around. In each case youth's interest in socializing increased their interest in attending, strengthened their overall enjoyment and reinforced their participation in learning-based activities.

For other youth, group activities provided opportunities to socialize around a common interest and promoted a sense of belonging. This may be especially important for teens who feel alienated from their peers during the school day. One youth reflected on his peer relationships in school versus those he experienced in a Beacon hip-hop activity:

> When I said I was an outcast, I meant
> an outcast! [When] I interact with people
> in hip-hop, I'm more comfortable. I can
> be in character. It's easy for me to get
> along with them here.

Another youth who said he made many new friends at his Beacon center described the entire program as a peer-friendly environment:

> It's good because it's like a place where everyone lays aside their differences and it doesn't matter, we're all just there for fun.

Sometimes peer groupings were very informal. In a teen hip-hop session, where youth took turns presenting their own raps to the group, peer-to-peer feedback was integral to the activity but often took subtle forms. After one youth recited his rap, others coolly affirmed his efforts with nods of approval and comments like "yeah" and "mm." One youth from the activity described his appreciation for this type of informal performance opportunity and critique:

> It's cool, 'cause you get to see people expose their talents, what they can do. And they put it out there in the open.

Four Beacon activities, including open gym time and drop-in programs during lunchtimes, were so loosely structured that youth were free to socialize casually with peers throughout sessions. Yet, in these cases as well, having caring adults on hand to both model and monitor social interactions appeared to be an important factor in helping youth feel comfortable and supported at centers.

Instructors Encourage Peer Tutoring and Mentoring Relationships

Although our quantitative analysis did not find a positive link between a typical type of cooperative peer learning activities and engagement or learning, our observations suggest that, when skillfully done, peer-to-peer teaching may heighten engagement and learning. For example, a karate instructor used peer teaching to dramatically increase the number of youth engaged in the class—raising participation levels from just a third of youth engaged at the beginning of the activity to three quarters by the end. The instructor accomplished this by first asking the most experienced participants to lead the warm-up exercises and demonstrate their "kadas"—a simulated fight combining a variety of moves. He then invited several other youth to practice their kadas in front of the group. He went on to divide the group into thirds, again asking more accomplished youth to guide the small groups. The impact on engagement was dramatic, and all the

strategy required was flexibility and willingness on the part of the instructor to adapt his day's plans to a style that might better engage participants.

Peer teaching is designed to benefit both the tutor and the learner. In another example, a multimedia instructor asked one of his more experienced participants to teach a newcomer how to create his own computer slide show—an activity the tutor had completed already. The instructor got them started and walked away. However, in a few minutes, he noticed the tutor experiencing trouble remembering the early steps, so he intervened with a few key reminders. Once the two boys created a first slide together, the instructor suggested that the newcomer take over the computer mouse so that he could make the next slide. This opportunity showed learning on two fronts: The new youth learned how to create his own slide show with the help of an experienced peer, and the peer tutor refreshed his memory of the task and practiced important aspects of effective teaching. Here, again, an instructor's occasional intervention is critical in ensuring that peer tutoring is productive.

How Staff Characteristics Were Related to Youth-Rated Peer Interactions

As described in the earlier three chapters, we quantitatively examined which types of staff were rated better by their participants. When we considered which type of staff was best able to incorporate cooperative learning into their activities and foster feelings of peer affiliation among the participants, we found that none of the characteristics we examined (education, age, experience, training) relates very strongly to either being able to foster a cooperative peer learning environment or peer affiliation, according to the participants (see Table 8 on the next page). The only factor that is somewhat related was whether the staff had prior work experience in the childcare industry. Those staff with childcare experience were seen by the youth as being less likely to provide them opportunities to work together. As mentioned before, this finding could be unique to our sample, or it could reflect a more directive style taken by childcare workers who interact with younger children. Researchers and program operators should give this observation additional thought and examination.

Table 8: Relationships Between Staff Characteristics and Peer Interactions

Staff Characteristic	Degree of Cooperative Peer Learning	Peer Affiliation
Staff-Youth Ratio	-0.05	-0.11
Female	0.08	0.13
Younger than 25	0.07	-0.21
School Work Experience	-0.01	0.04
Youth Organization Experience	0.08	-0.06
Childcare Work Experience	-0.26*	-0.14
Same Race/Ethnicity as Participant	-0.11	0.05
Youth Development Training	-0.15	0.00
Group Management Training	-0.03	-0.07
Training in Cooperative Learning	0.12	0.04
College Educated	-0.02	-0.03
Sample Size Youth/Staff	257/32	249/32

Note: These are selected coefficients from an HLM analysis of the youth's assessment of the staff's ability to foster cooperative learning opportunities in which students are embedded in activities. At the first stage, the 257 students' ratings were regressed against their gender, grade level and self-reported GPA. At the second stage, the activity level intercept was modeled as a function of the 32 staff's characteristics. The full set of coefficients is shown in Table B.2.
*$p \leq 0.10$

Summary

Helping youth interact more productively and relate better to peers is a worthy goal for after-school programs. Youth often cite the presence of friends as a motivating reason for participating in such programs. In this chapter, we show that the participants in this study enjoyed the activities and wanted to come more often when staff provided them with opportunities to work together and help each other. This was true for participants of all ages—elementary school, middle school and high school. Youth enjoy activities where they are guided by staff to work and learn together in a positive, cooperative manner. Youth enjoyed both small and large group activities, but we observed that staff must carefully monitor peer interactions to ensure that participants remain respectful of one another and on task.

When we controlled for the other key staff behaviors, we did not observe an additional positive relationship between youths' attitude toward their peers and our key outcomes—engagement, enjoyment, perceived learning and the desire to attend. Given that it is difficult to make people like each other, this may be good news for staff. What is important is that instructors provide youth with opportunities to work with at least a subset of youth in the activity. However, this finding regarding peer affiliation does not hold for elementary school children. They feel they learn more when the integrated peer group gets along well.

Youth Input

Youth input is recognized as a fundamental principle of youth development. Developmental experts suggest that as youth grow older, increasing the levels of their voice and choice at home, in school and in after-school environments can provide important experiences leading into successful adulthood and positive participation in community life (Kirshner et al. 2002). A mix of environment types appears best. In a qualitative study of four strong youth programs, Larson et al. (2005) found that, depending on the activity and its goals (the development of leadership or organizational skills versus the development of a particular skill), a different balance of adult and youth control was needed. Thus, while most after-school advocates agree that youth input is desirable (at least in some activities), instructors do not always facilitate it well. Some instructors worry that giving youth too much input risks changing the activity plan, slowing down activity progress and producing a less effective, less engaging session (Larson et al. 2005).

In Philadelphia Beacons activities, youth input occurred in many shapes and forms, spanning a continuum of activities with relatively limited to high amounts of input. On the lower end of the continuum, participants were invited by instructors to choose between two possible projects or given creative license for how to carry out a specific task. On the high end of the continuum, youth were invited to select and carry out a large group project under the guidance of a skilled instructor. Overall, we observed that the amount of youth input often depends on participants' age and that integrating youth input effectively requires considerable skill and know-how on the part of instructors.

The Relationship of Youth Input to Youth Involvement

To gauge the degree of youth input occurring in the activity, we created a scale by asking participants in our surveys six questions about whether instructors let them help plan activities and set rules.[12] As described in the other chapters, using that scale, we statistically examined how perceived youth input

related to our four outcomes—reported levels of engagement, perceived learning, enjoyment and desire to come. As shown in Table 9, we found that the more input participants felt they had, the more engaged they felt and the more they liked the activity. However, there was no correlation between participants' perceptions of having input and their perceived learning or their desire to come to an activity. Nonetheless, the capacity of youth input to strengthen both engagement and enjoyment is important because other educational studies have found that these factors lead to stronger participation and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for youth (Weiss et al. 2005; Herrera and Arbreton 2003; Walker and Arbreton 2004).

We also found that the association between youth's level of enjoyment and engagement and how much input they felt they had was similar across age groups. From our observations, we saw that the way staff provided participants input often looks quite different by age. However, we were not relating particular behaviors (such as letting the youth set the rules or letting youth choose the activity for the day) to engagement or enjoyment, but rather we were relating a youth's sense of input to the outcomes. Providing youth of all ages appropriate ways to feel that they are shaping their after-school experience increases the level of their enjoyment and engagement.

How Can Instructors Elicit Positive Youth Input?

Eleven of the 18 youth we interviewed said instructors sought their input, ranging from asking their opinion about an activity to allowing them to run a session. As a high school teen explained, youth valued this input: "I wouldn't like it if I didn't have a voice."

About half of Beacon instructors said they encouraged youth input and made their session plans flexible enough for changes. The other half said they only occasionally incorporated participants' ideas. In describing the challenges of integrating youth input, instructors noted that the time they had to teach a skill, both during the session and across

Table 9: Relationships Between Youth Input and Involvement Indicators

Staff Behavior	Outcomes (4-point scales: 1=low, 4=high)			
	Engagement	Perceived Learning	Enjoyment	Desire to Come
Youth Input				
Youth Input Score of 3	2.94	3.34	3.33	3.39
Youth Input Score of 4	3.05	3.37	3.42	3.43
Difference	0.11*	0.03	0.09*	0.04
Standardized Coefficients	0.11	0.03	0.10	0.03
Sample Size	236	235	235	228

Note: These are selected coefficients from a multivariate analysis (shown in full in Table A.1) in which the youth's outcome is modeled as a function of the youth's rating of staff's group management skills, positive and negative adult support, the degree of peer affiliation within the activity, the extent of cooperative peer learning opportunities and youth input, as well as the participants' gender, grade level and academic competence (self-reported GPA).
*$p \leq 0.10$

the total number of sessions, limited their ability to incorporate input. Instructors who described feeling pressed to get through a certain body of material suggested that they either did not recognize opportunities for input, or ignored them. On one occasion, we observed how an instructor's desire to meet her own high standards for a performance squelched an opportunity for creative input from youth. When the instructor was approached by two youth who were making up new steps for a performance, she observed their contributions and then concluded, "Nope, doesn't go together"—so they all went back to the regular routine. The example highlights how some instructors may need additional skill to effectively foster youth input in ways that complement the overall goals of their activity.

Youth Input in Teen Activities

Youth input in the form of "youth voice and choice" was most obvious in our observations of 18 activities specifically designed for high-school-aged teens. Making youth-driven activities effective at the high school level requires considerable skill on the part of instructors. In activities where teens were given increased voice and choice, the instructor played the role of a careful guide, stepping in only when needed to ask an important question, share useful information or guide a decision.

Instructors occasionally handed almost complete decision-making control over to older teens. In an anti-smoking teen activity, in which youth were paid to gather information about the dangers of tobacco and create group presentations to educate other teens, all decisions about planning the presentations required a consensus. When trying to decide on the best approach for their presentation, youth listened with respect to their peers before making a final decision. At the request of the instructor, each teen was also expected to lead one of the group's presentations at another school. Such a high level of youth input required skill and flexibility on the part of the instructor to integrate input as it arose. He explained his overall strategy for incorporating youth input:

> *I lay out the day in the beginning (of the session), and if they bring up something, even though I may not be prepared to talk about it, I try to do it. They change the conversation all the time! I might be talking about cancer, and they'll change to talk about the number who smoke or something. I say, "It's your meeting." I don't want them to think I run it. It's their program, not ours.*

Similarly, during a dance activity that included teens and younger participants, the instructor split the entire class into two groups and assigned each to choreograph a dance. After giving youth a few ideas to get them started, she stressed that youth were in charge. Older youth stepped in to serve as informal leaders, helping to design the dance. Then each group performed for the other, and the instructor completed the exercise by integrating the two dances into one and inviting the whole group to perform the dance in unison.

Both examples above suggest that successfully integrating teen input may be a threefold process, whereby:

1. Instructors begin by setting clear expectations about the type of youth input and direction required to complete a task.

2. Instructors remove themselves from the decision-making process, placing considerable responsibility upon youth to craft their own unique project or solution.

3. Then, instructors step back in to recognize progress and support next steps for carrying the project to completion.

In these ways, soliciting teen input involves recognizing teens' abilities, granting them the responsibility to perform well and remaining—like a good backseat driver—available to step in as needed.

Youth Input Among Middle School Youth

Our observations suggest that youth input is incorporated in more subtle ways for middle school activities, where frequent opportunities to make decisions within set projects arose but where there was less youth leadership and choice in directing overall projects. Activity sessions for middle school youth also tended to have greater structure, and instructors provided regular feedback to keep activities on track. For example, to carry out what was to be the creation of a group game-card set, a visual arts instructor encouraged middle school participants to brainstorm as a group about good game characters—a variety of warriors, dragons and beasts came to mind. He then assigned each participant to create an individual character or make landscapes that would serve as a backdrop or stage for the characters. As youth began drawing, the instructor

remained available to offer suggestions and answer questions—sometimes being highly prescriptive in his responses. When a girl asked, "What color are mountains?" the instructor responded, "brown." Participants appeared comfortable with this level of hands-on instruction.

Similarly, the instructor of a drama activity for middle school youth struck a balance between granting youth considerable creative freedom within a project and careful guidance to ensure steady progress. During a session in which youth were asked to create and act out their own stage characters, the instructor offered regular support. When one participant failed to fully convey her character because she spoke in her own voice, the instructor suggested she could develop her character further by thinking about "how the character changes" and asked, "How would you feel and talk as that character?"

We did not observe the level of relatively independent youth input in the design of activities for middle school youth that we saw among older teens. This may well have been the result of younger participants' seeming demand for relatively high levels of structured guidance and instructors' complementary sense of the types of activity formats that work best with this age group. Yet at the same time, highly skilled instructors may be better able to incorporate greater youth input into the design of their sessions by gradually increasing the opportunities for youth input among middle schoolers.

Youth Input in Mixed-Age Activities

Fifteen of the 50 activities we observed were designed for mixed groups of both elementary and middle school participants. In these settings, opportunities for older participants to serve as leaders for younger participants were often plentiful. In a martial arts activity, three older youth were given time to practice their moves and then asked by the instructor to serve on a team of judges, critiquing the moves of others in their groups. After each younger participant performed his or her kada, the trio gave them a score, often with additional feedback from the instructor. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, this type of positive peer interaction may lead to increased engagement on the part of both older and younger participants.

Table 10: **Relationships Between Staff Characteristics and Youth's Rating on Input**

Staff Characteristic	Change in Youth's Input Rating
Staff-Youth Ratio	1.14**
Female	0.09
Younger than 25	0.23
School Work Experience	-0.08
Youth Organization Experience	-0.20
Childcare Work Experience	0.07
Same Race/Ethnicity as Participant	-0.15
Group Management Training	0.07
Youth Development Training	0.06
Training in Cooperative Learning	-0.28
College Educated	-0.09
Sample Size Youth/Staff	256/31

Note: These are selected coefficients from an HLM analysis of the youth's assessment of the staff's ability to foster cooperative learning opportunities in which students are embedded in activities. At the first stage, the 256 students' ratings were regressed against their gender, grade level and self-reported GPA. At the second stage, the activity level intercept was modeled as a function of the 31 staff's characteristics. The full set of coefficients is shown in Table A.2.
**$p \leq 0.05$

How Staff Characteristics Related to Youth's Sense of Input

Which staff seem better able to provide these opportunities? What types of staff characteristics are related to youth's perceived sense of input? To start to shed light on these questions, we statistically analyzed how youth's reports on input related to staff characteristics (gender, age, education, work experience and training). As we have found with most of the other staff behaviors, none of the characteristics we examined were related very strongly to being able to foster an environment in which youth can have input, according to the participants (Table 10). Thus, again, it appears that staff of many types of backgrounds can provide appreciated opportunities for input.

While most staff characteristics did not affect the amount of input the participants felt they had, the staff-youth ratio did have a large effect (the standardized coefficient was 1.22). The greater the staff-youth ratio, the more youth felt the staff let them have input into the activity.

Summary

Incorporating youth input is one way in which instructors can create a more enjoyable and engaging activity for youth of all ages. We know both intuitively and statistically that youth who enjoy an activity come to it more often and that youth who are more engaged in an activity's tasks learn more. The challenge for instructors is to find ways to effectively elicit youth input while simultaneously maintaining the instructional quality of the activity. The instructors who were most successful at incorporating youth input were those who identified junctures where youth could make a choice without dramatically compromising the fundamental learning tasks. For example, youth in creative arts activities could choose the subject to write about or draw, for no matter what the subject of their creativity was, the underlying steps and processes were the same.

Instructional strategies for incorporating youth input varied across middle and high school age groups. Some activities for older teens were almost entirely youth-driven, in that teens were called on to decide on a given project and see it through from beginning to end. To ensure success in these cases, instructors often adapted the strategy of beginning with a clear set of expectations to get the task started, then removing themselves to allow youth to carry out a set of decisions, and finally stepping back in as needed to inform progress around next steps. Across activities for middle school youth, instructors tended to grant frequent opportunities for youth to make decisions within a set project but little leadership and choice in directing overall projects. In activities for mixed-age groups, older

Although we did not observe activities exclusively for elementary school children, youth development theory suggests that frequently being heard may be a good way to let the younger participants feel as if they are shaping the activity (see, for example, Mitra 2006).

youth were frequently given formal or informal opportunities to serve as group leaders, informing decision-making on behalf of their groups. Such opportunities within mixed-age settings may be especially desirable, because in addition to creating opportunities for peer cooperation, they grant younger youth the chance to observe teens modeling decision-making and to thus learn about how youth input can be negotiated.

Care needs to be taken by instructors when incorporating youth input so that tasks stay productive. When control of an activity is turned over to the youth, staff must walk the fine line of letting youth make decisions, while guiding and helping the group accomplish overall goals. "Leading from behind" seems to capture this art of letting youth take the lead in deciding how to carry out tasks while maintaining a constant vision for the final outcome and guiding youth all along the way. The right balance, as Larson et al. (2005) suggest, depends critically on the goal of the activity. Activities that are meant to teach leadership or organizational skills need to provide more opportunities for youth to have input than other types of skill-based activities, such as karate.

Summary and Conclusions
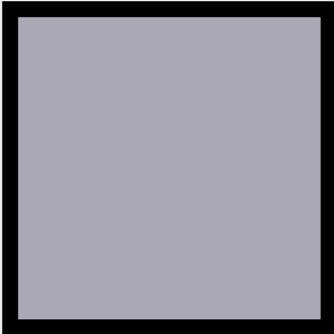
U nderstanding what makes an after-school program high quality is critical to a wide audience of practitioners, policymakers, funders, families and, ultimately, youth.

Quality OST programs not only occupy and deeply engage youth; they teach them skills. Youth bring to their activities temperaments and interests that have much to do with how engaged they will be and how much they will learn. But what things can activity leaders and programs do to further capture young people's imaginations and help them get as much as possible out of their experiences?

We designed this study to answer three main questions:

- What conditions lead young people to enjoy and want to attend activities?

- What aspects of an after-school activity, such as the staff's behaviors and the activity's structure, lead youth to be more highly engaged?

- What conditions lead youngsters to feel they are learning in an activity?

Summary of Findings

Table 11 summarizes our quantitative findings from the previous chapters. We standardize the correlations to allow us to compare the strength of the relationships across each key variable.[13] The larger the value, the stronger the correlation is between the table's variables.

Staff matter. Our most basic finding was that what staff did affected youth's engagement and, especially, how much they felt they learned. Yes, a strong learning activity must have a set of lessons and exercises or tasks that can meet youth at their current skill levels and help them advance. However, a strong curriculum is not enough; strong staff enable youth to get the most out of their after-school time. Instructors create the environment in which youth are actively engaged in the learning process. The study found that the two

most important staff practices we considered were age-appropriate behavioral management techniques and positive support from adults. In other words, how well programs create high-quality learning environments is linked to staff's ability to promote supportive interactions among all youth and between staff and youth.

The more youth felt encouraged and supported by staff, the more youth felt they learned. Over the past 15 years, much of the research in the youth development field, including P/PV's work, has stressed the importance of adult-youth relationships. This line of research has examined how important it is for youth to feel connected to staff, both because connected youth participated in programs longer and because outcomes appear to be larger for youth that are more connected to staff. The current study reaffirms the importance of adult-youth relationships. Indeed, the strongest relationship we found was between how positively supported the youth felt and how much they felt they learned (0.45).[14]

Supportive instructors cared about and were skilled at helping youth to learn. They provided doable challenges, encouraging youth to try hard, praising successes along the way and providing instruction and corrective feedback to foster improvement. General emotional support from instructors (i.e., caring about the youth) was valued, but good instruction and constructive feedback was also important. In fact, instructors who provided high levels of responsive instruction could convey to participants the same level of "caring" as instructors who provided more emotional support, acknowledging participant's moods or daily problems.

Youth felt they learned more in activities where staff's control over the group was better. While reinforcing the importance of adult-youth relationships, our study also highlights that high-quality OST staff need to expand beyond simple relationship-building skills if they are to create engaging learning environments. The second strongest finding concerned how well youth felt staff controlled

Table 11: Summary of Relationships Between Staff Practices and Youth Involvement Indicators
(Standardized Coefficients)

Youth Ratings of:	Engagement	Perceived Learning	Enjoyment	Desire to Come
Group Management Skills	0.22***	0.29***	0.27***	0.20**
Positive Adult Support	0.25***	0.45***	0.25***	0.03
Negative Adult Interactions	0.12*	0.06	-0.17***	0.09
Cooperative Peer Learning	0.10	0.08	0.14**	0.32***
Peer Affiliation	0.00	0.05	0.00	0.08
Youth Input	0.11*	0.03	0.10*	0.03

Note: These are selected coefficients from a multivariate analysis (shown in full in Table B.1) in which the youth's outcome is modeled as a function of the youth's rating of staff's group management skills, positive and negative adult support, the degree of peer affiliation within the activity, the extent of cooperative peer learning opportunities and youth input, as well as the participants' gender, grade level and academic competence (self-reported GPA). All data are from youth surveys.
***p≤0.01, **p≤0.05, *p≤0.10

the group and how much youth felt they learned (0.29). Our qualitative investigations found that effective instructors managed their activities so that groups were "in control" without making activities feel restrictive.

We also learned that what constitutes good behavioral management in non-school hours looks and feels different from the standard well-run classroom. From the youth's point of view, good instructors had control of the group but (in most activities) allowed for more informal socializing than commonly occurs in a classroom.

Feeling supported, and that the staff could manage the group, were equally important to the youth's level of enjoyment. After-school programs must pay more attention than do schools to creating environments that youth enjoy and want to be a part of, because even elementary school children can persuade their parents to exit or change programs. Our analyses indicated that several staff behaviors influence participants' enjoyment of activities. As one would expect, when youth felt positively supported, they enjoyed the activities more. However, how well youth felt the staff managed their group was just as important as positive support. To a lesser but still significant degree, youth enjoyed activities where staff

allowed and encouraged peers to work cooperatively and offer input into the activity.

Staff-youth interactions were only weakly associated with youth's desire to attend. How much youth wanted to attend activities was weakly correlated with the support that staff provided the youth. Instead, what was related to youth's desire to attend was being able to interact with their peers in an environment (i.e., higher levels of cooperative peer learning) where they felt the staff had control (i.e., better group management).

Limitations of Study

This study is one of the few to date that have examined—both quantitatively and qualitatively—factors associated with higher-quality after-school activities. Yet there are several limitations to the study that should be kept in mind. First, because the quantitative results are correlational, they do not prove that staff practices caused better outcomes. Second, we do not always have objective measures of what staff did and how they performed throughout the 8 to 10 weeks of an activity—we simply rely upon the triangulation of youth, staff and observer accounts. We also do not have objective measures of youth outcomes, such as youth grades or skill

tests. We know how engaged they felt, how much they enjoyed the activity, how much they thought they learned and how much they wanted to attend the activity. While enjoyment and engagement are opinions and must be asked of the participant, learning could have been measured through pre- and post-tests. Motivation literature has clearly documented that perceived learning is not the same as actual learning. It is an imperfect reflection on it. Research that ties staff behavior and characteristics to more objective outcome measures still needs to be done.

A fourth major limitation of the study is that the staff and youth who responded to our surveys and/ or were interviewed could be systematically different than the typical participant or staff. We have information only for those youth who remained in activities and did not drop out through the first half of the session, and staff who returned their surveys. Because the individuals for whom we are missing data are likely to be systematically different than those we surveyed and interviewed, our findings are best generalized to similarly participating youth and staff. Lastly, this is a relatively small and localized study. Here, we studied five reasonably well-run programs in Philadelphia. We also chose to examine particular types of activities, namely those that served middle and high school students and/or those that were educationally oriented. For these reasons, readers will benefit from placing our findings in the context of other major after-school studies. However, most of our findings were in line with the largest earlier study of 78 after-school programs in Massachusetts (Miller 2005). Diverging results have been carefully noted.

Conclusions

Given that staff practices appear to be related to how much youth feel they learn in their after-school activities, what should programs do? In an ideal world, after-school program directors could staff activities with masterful instructors who connect with the youth, make learning fun and skillfully help youth grow. But, unfortunately, such wizards are rarely plentiful enough in a field that offers primarily part-time work.

Given real-world limitations, how should a program director proceed? Trying to hire strong staff is currently the most common solution. Unfortunately our research was not able to provide much guidance on this front. Almost none of the simple screening tools—such as a college education or the type of past work experience—were strongly related to how youth rated staff. Directors should continue to use their good judgment to assess the complex set of characteristics that create strong instructors. However, more research needs to be done to assess whether there are simple screening tools that can be used to more easily identify skilled staff.

Training is another option. Understanding how to encourage and promote quality on a daily basis is essential. To ensure staff quality, the field needs to move well beyond providing one-time training opportunities and focus more on ongoing staff feedback.[15] For program directors, supporting quality from within means integrating regular instructor supervision, staff learning opportunities, staff-to-staff mentoring and program assessment into daily practice. Staff meetings can be used to get advice from peers, learn more about effective instructional strategies and brainstorm solutions to new challenges. Given the often sizable number of part-time and independent contractors who work in programs, coordinated times for staff development and training can prove difficult, but the extra effort is worthwhile.

Finally, there are comprehensive program assessment tools being developed by organizations like High Scope and the Search Institute that can be used by program staff to periodically assess and reflect upon program effectiveness and areas for improvement. These techniques and many others, when applied regularly, can be used to promote and sustain quality.

Yet, quality is chronically undercut by a shortage of both funding and staff time to carry out the types of activities listed above in an intentional and consistent way. Quality will only increase if program funders and policymakers do their part to ensure that daily supervision and time for weekly professional development activities are integrated into program budgets and expected goals.

After-school and out-of-school-time programs are extremely diverse—not only in focus, location and the types of youth they serve, but also in terms of quality. Some are engaging learning environments that teach life and social skills, athletic skills and academic skills, while others remain little more than supervised care. While all program directors, families and funders aspire for their programs to be the former, it has not always been clear what staff should do to improve program quality and foster effective learning environments. This study and others are beginning to make headway at identifying the key features. Now, funders, parents and program operators must all step up to the plate.

Program staff must focus intensively on adopting high-quality instructional methods. To this end, instructors must be willing and available to engage regularly as a program team and buy into best practices for program monitoring and professional development. Directors must dedicate more time to supervising and coaching their staff. Most importantly, the public and funders must recognize the true costs of quality programming. Programs can only improve if someone pays for the extra time that quality-enhancing measures like these entail.

Endnotes

1 For the youth, this was 90 percent of youth attending the identified activities at the time of the survey. For staff, the response rate was 60 percent.

2 The terms "after school" and "OST" are used synonymously throughout this report.

3 In these programs, the only full-time staff were typically the executive director, an assistant director and a program coordinator, who did not lead individualized activities beyond more generalized whole-group gatherings such as homework help and tutoring.

4 The average size of the groups we observed was approximately nine participants to every one instructor.

5 We asked youth to rate their activity based on the degree to which the activity was well organized, youth were well behaved in the class, youth followed the rules and the instructor was in control of what was supposed to happen during the activity.

6 We used a random-intercept HLM analysis of the youth's assessment of the staff's group management ability in which students are embedded in activities. At the first stage, the students' gender, grade level and GPA were entered as independent variables. At the second stage, the remaining variance is correlated to staff characteristics. There were 257 youth reports across 32 activities (with 32 corresponding staff). Given the specification, there were 21 degrees of freedom for the coefficients related to staff characteristics and 221 degrees of freedom for the student-based coefficients (not shown in the text but included in the appendix). The random intercept's covariance estimate is 0.08, while the residual covariance estimate is 0.48.

7 See the note to Table 5 and Appendix B for details of the specification.

8 Walker and Arbreton (2004) similarly found a strong relationship between participation and positive adult support, whereby positive adult support over time strengthens participation.

9 This was a path analysis in which staff characteristics were modeled as affecting enjoyment, then enjoyment affected engagement and engagement affected how much youth felt they learned.

10 As before, we conducted random-intercept HLM analyses of the youth's assessment of the staff's positive or negative support in which students are embedded in activities. At the first stage, the students' gender, grade level and GPA were entered as independent variables to adjust the ratings by systematic youth factors. At the second stage, the remaining variance is correlated to staff characteristics. There were 257 youth reports across 32 activities (with 32 corresponding staff). Given the specification, there were 21 degrees of freedom for the coefficients related to staff characteristics and 221 degrees of freedom for the student-based coefficients (not shown in the text but included in the appendix). These models perform much less well than did the model of group management. In the positive support model, the random intercept's covariance estimate is 0.001, while the residual covariance estimate is 0.44. In the negative support model, the random intercept's covariance estimate is 0.01, while the residual covariance estimate is 0.47.

11 Students were asked three questions about the degree to which they liked each other (such as, "students like being with each other in this activity," "students in this activity get to know each other really well"). The answers to these three items were averaged to gauge peer affiliation. Five items asked about whether the staff encouraged students to help each other and work together in the activity (i.e., "Staff encourage all students to participate" and "Staff let students work together.") These were averaged to gauge peer cooperation.

12 Students were asked to agree or disagree, mildly or strongly, with statements such as "Staff let youth help plan what we do," "Staff ask for suggestions about how or what we do," and "Staff let you do things in a way you think is right for you." The answers to these items were averaged to form the youth input scale. See Appendix B for details.

13 The entries are standardized coefficients.

14 A standard deviation increase in how supportive youth felt the staff were increased how much they perceived they learned by 45 percent of a standard deviation.

15 Research has found that one-time training is often ineffective (e.g., DuBois et al. 2002) and its effects fade quickly (Blau, 1997; Phillips et al. 2000; Clarke-Stewart et al. 2002). However some research has found that serious upfront training can have lasting positive effects (Herrera, 2000; Smith et al. 1979).

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Appendices
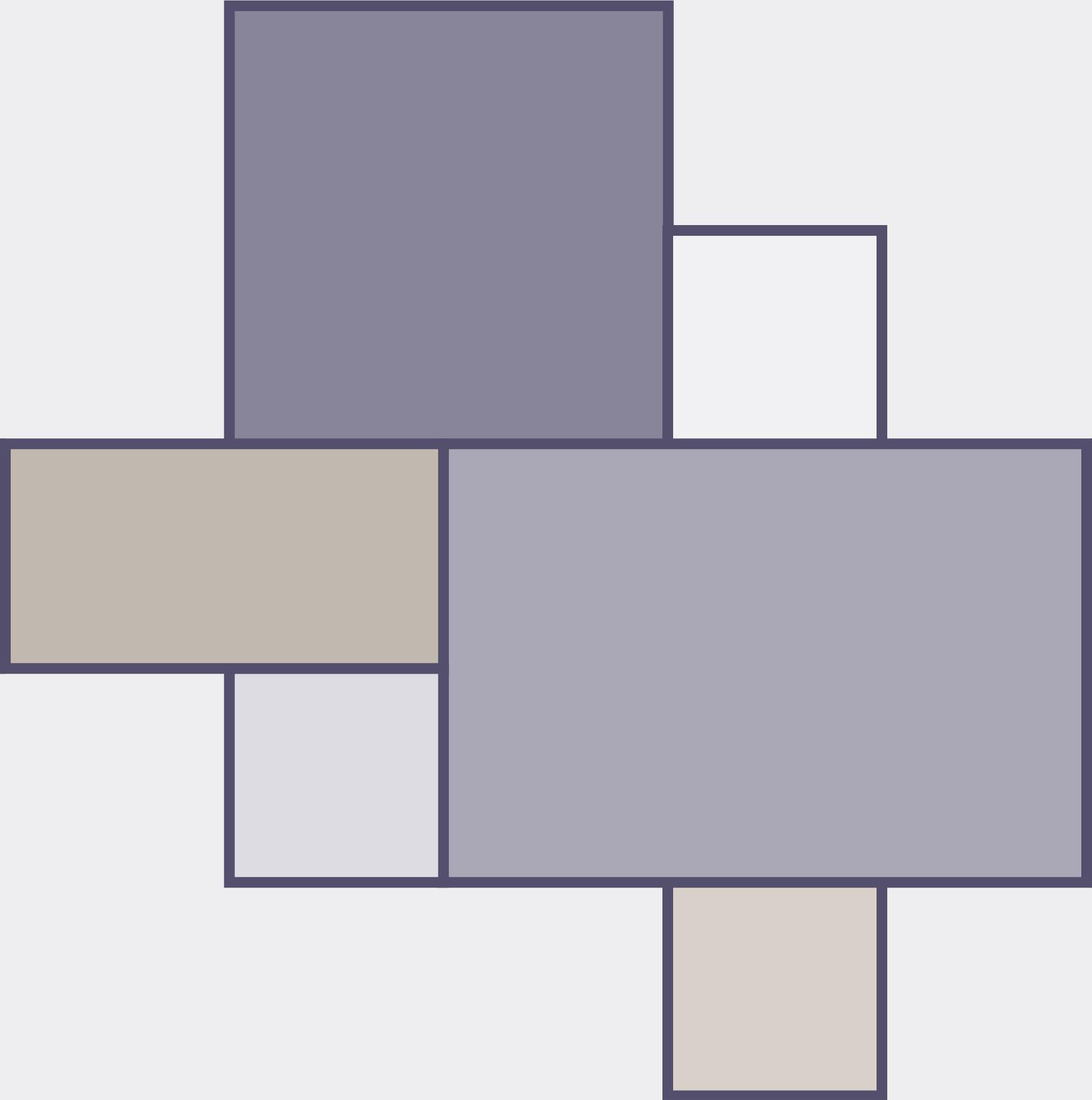
Appendix A:
Methodological Overview

Quantitative Analyses

Using the survey responses of participants, we constructed measures (see Appendix B) of how engaged youth felt, how much they felt they had learned in the activity, how much they enjoyed the activity and how much they wanted to come. We also constructed scales of youth's perceptions of staff's ability to manage the group, provide support and encouragement, encourage peer cooperation and provide opportunities for youth input. Youth also reported on the degree to which participants liked each other. We then statistically modeled our four outcomes (engagement, perceived learning, desire to attend and enjoyment) as a function of youth's rating of staff's group management skills, positive and negative adult support, the degree of peer affiliation within the activity, the extent of cooperative peer learning opportunities and youth input, as well as the participants' gender, grade level and academic competence (self-reported GPA).

To investigate which types of staff were rated better by youth (such as better educated staff or staff with different work experience), we also analyzed the youth's rating of the staff using a two-level hierarchical linear model framework (HLM, Raudenbush 1997). At the first stage, we modeled youth's ratings of staff abilities (on group management, adult support, cooperative peer learning and youth input) as a function of participants' gender, grade level and academic ability (self-reported grades) to adjust for systematic report bias. At the second stage, we modeled the remaining variation as a function of staff characteristics (age, gender, education, previous work experience and training).

Qualitative Analyses

We used interviews and observations to examine how instructors apply effective practices in after-school settings. For each activity for which we had youth survey data, we printed out the average ratings youth gave the instructors on group management, adult support, peer affiliation, cooperative peer learning and youth input. In addition to taking detailed notes while observing activities, researchers numerically rated the quality of activities along similar dimensions as those in the surveys. Using the survey and observation ratings, we were able to identify which activities youth and/or our observers perceived as better than others. The observation notes and the interviews with corresponding staff and youth (when they existed) were then analyzed to determine whether staff in better-run activities did things differently from instructional staff members whom observers and youth rated less positively. A qualitative software package was used to systematically identify and correlate themes across the qualitative data sources. We used the qualitative analysis to both test and explicate findings from the quantitative analysis (such as relationship between group management and engagement or youth input and engagement) and to identify new themes. For example, the interview and observation data provide a richer description of adult support than we were able to capture in the youth survey.

Limitations

As with all studies, this research has important limitations. First, the analyses of youth outcomes (engagement, learning, enjoyment and desire to come) were based on concurrent youth reports. Youth who really liked a staff member may have reported that they were very engaged and learning and that the staff member was good in all dimensions of running the activity. Thus, the correlations between practices and outcomes could be too strong. Second, our youth interview data may reflect a disproportionate number of positive accounts; we interviewed participants in the middle of semesters, missing youth who may have dropped out early. Third, the 60 percent of the staff who returned their surveys are likely to be systematically different than the other staff. Thus, our analysis of how staff characteristics affect ratings could be specific to long-term, more dedicated staff. Fourth, the sets of activities for which we have observations, staff interviews and youth interviews do not completely overlap. Thus, we sometimes have to rely solely on the youth or an observer or the staff themselves to identify a practice as strong. Lastly, the youth we interviewed in depth were selected by staff. They were probably the youth with whom the staff had closer contact or relationships and/or those who attended most often. Thus, we may have been talking with a group that was not representative of the Beacon student population as a whole.

Appendix B:
Quantitative Analysis

Measures of Involvement and Staff Practices

In the youth surveys we asked participants to agree or disagree with many different statements and questions about the activity (such as, "When I'm at this activity I'm bored," "While I am doing this activity, I think about how much I enjoy it," "This activity helps me get better at things," "I learn new things in this activity," "How hard do you concentrate while you are here?" and "This activity does not hold my attention at all"), as well as what they thought about the staff's ability to run the activity. We have averaged responses to similar statements to form measures (or scales) for these dimensions, ranging from 1 meaning low (low levels of enjoyment or engagement) to 4 meaning high. Below are the items used for each scale and the degree to which the answers on these items were correlated with each other (Cronbach's alpha).

Perceived Learning (alpha=0.87)

- This activity helps me get better at things.
- I learn new things in this activity.
- The things we do in this activity get me to try my best.
- I've gotten better over time at this activity.
- I learn a lot in this activity.

Engagement (alpha=0.62)

- How much do you use your talents and skills?
- Is this activity challenging?
- How hard do you concentrate while you are here?

Enjoyment (alpha=0.86)

- When I'm at this activity I'm bored.
- While I am doing this activity, I think about how much I enjoy it.
- I really enjoy this activity.
- I would describe this activity as very interesting.
- This activity does not hold my attention at all.
- I enjoy doing this activity very much.
- This activity is fun.

Desire to Participate (alpha=0.86)

- I try to come to this activity all the time.

Positive Adult Support (alpha=0.86)

- Staff say nice things to me when I do something good or try hard.
- Staff pay attention to me.
- Staff understand me.
- Staff make me feel part of the group.
- Staff care about me.

Negative Adult Support (alpha=0.78)

- Staff bother me.
- Staff put students down.
- Staff make fun of what students say or do in ways I don't like.
- I don't like the staff in this activity.

Group Management (alpha=0.68)

- This activity is well-organized.
- Kids are pretty well behaved in this class.
- Kids follow the rules in this class.
- The leader is in control of what is supposed to happen in this activity.

Cooperative Peer Learning (alpha=0.74)

- Staff encourage youth to help each other.
- Staff encourage all youth to participate.
- Staff let youth work together.

Peer Affiliation (alpha=0.67)

- Youth in this activity are very interested in getting to know each other.
- Youth like being with each other in this activity.
- There are groups of youth who don't get along in this activity.
- Youth like being with each other in this activity.
- Youth in this activity get to know each other really well.

Youth Input (alpha=0.80)

- Staff let youth help plan what we do.

- Staff ask for suggestions about how or what we do.

- Staff let us help decide what the rules are in this activity.

- Staff let you do things in a way you think is right for you.

- Staff let youth help decide how we do things.

- Staff let youth help decide how long we do things.

The Statistical Models

To analyze the relationships between youth involvement and various staff and activity characteristics, we regressed one of the four involvement scales (youth's engagement, perceived learning, enjoyment and desire to come to the activity) on the youth's assessments of the staff's control of the group (our group management scale), ratings of positive and negative adult support, ratings of the group's peer affiliation, cooperative peer learning opportunities and youth input, as well as the students' gender, grade level and GPA. We take account of the clustered nature of data (namely students are clustered in activities) by using a simple random intercept model (i.e. including an activity-specific random effect).

(1)
$$Y_{ij} = \sum_k \alpha_k X_{ijk} + \sum_s \beta_s Z_{sij} + \upsilon_j + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

Where:

Y_{ij}	=	the involvement score of student i in activity j
X_{ijk}	=	the k student level covariates for student i from activity j
Z_{sij}	=	the rating of student i in activity j of staff practice s
υ_j , ε_{ij}	=	an activity-level and student-level random error respectively, assumed to be independently and identically distributed

Table B.1 presents the estimated coefficients. The unparenthesized numbers show the change in an outcome measure (say, reported levels of engagement) induced by a one-point change in the youth's rating of the skills group management abilities (say, from 3 to 4 where 1=low and 4=high). For example, the first entry shows that a one point

higher rating on group management ability, holding all else constant, is associated with a 0.23 point higher rating in the youth's level of engagement. Because we do not know whether a one-point change in the group management scale is a big or small change, we also report standardized coefficients, another way that is commonly used by researchers to describe relationships, in the row below. A standardized coefficient is how much of a standard deviation would the outcome shift if the factor we are examining increased by one standard deviation.[1] Standardized changes of 0.2 or less are generally viewed as small; those between 0.3 and 0.5 are considered to be medium, and those 0.5 and over are consider to be large (Cohen, 1988).[2] Using the Cohen benchmarks, the standardized coefficients indicate, for example, that holding everything else equal, improvements in the youth's perception of group management has a small to medium-sized effect on engagement, perceived learning, enjoyment and their desire to come to the activity. The standardized coefficients range from 0.20 to 0.29.

To determine what types of staff are rated better in certain ways, we statistically related the ratings the students gave the staff to staff characteristics, adjusting for the rater's (the student's) gender, grade level and academic competence (his or her self-reported GPA). In particular, we conducted hierarchical linear modeling analysis on the youth's assessment of the staff's behavior. At the first stage, the students' gender, grade level and GPA were entered as independent variables. At the second stage, the remaining variance is correlated to staff characteristics. *Table B.2 presents the results of these analyses.*

(2)
$$Z_{ijt} = \beta_t + \sum_k \delta_k X_{ijk} + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

Where:

Z_{ijt}	=	the rating of student i in activity j given to staff t
$\sum_k X_{ijk}$	=	the kth student-level characteristic X for student i in activity j
ε_{ij}	=	a student-level random error

(3) $\beta_t = \beta_0 + \sum_m \gamma_m Q_{tm} + \mu_t$

Where:

Q_{tm} = staff t's measure on characteristics m

μ_t = a staff-level random error

Table B.3 is quite similar to B.1 except that age interactions are included in the model.

(4) $Y_{ij} = \sum_k \alpha_k X_{ijk} + \sum_s \beta_s Z_{sij} + \sum_s \gamma_s Z_{sij} * ES + \sum_s \lambda_s Z_{sij} * MS + \upsilon_j + \varepsilon_{ij}$

Where:

X_{ijk} = the k student level covariates for student i from activity j

Z_{sij} = the rating of student i in activity j of staff practice s

ES = a dummy variable equal to one if the student is in elementary school

MS = a dummy variable equal to one if the student is in middle school

$\upsilon_j , \varepsilon_{ij}$ = an activity level and student-level random error respectively, assumed to be independently and identically distributed

Table B.1
Relationships Between Staff Practices and Involvement Indicators

(The first coefficient in a cell is the unstandardized coefficient. The coefficient in italics is the standardized beta.)

Activity Features	Involvement Indicators			
	Engagement	Perceived Learning	Enjoyment	Desire to Come
Youth Female	-0.04	-0.03	-0.13*	0.06
	-0.03	*-0.02*	*-0.09*	*0.03*
Grade Level	-0.01	-0.03**	-0.03*	0.03
	-0.03	*-0.11*	*-0.12*	*0.09*
GPA	0.08***	0.02	0.03*	0.06
	0.14	*0.04*	*0.06*	*0.09*
Positive Adult Support	0.28***	0.49***	0.25***	0.04
	0.25	*0.45*	*0.25*	*0.03*
Negative Adult Interaction	0.12*	0.06	-0.15***	0.10
	0.12	*0.06*	*-0.17*	*0.09*
Good Behavioral Management	0.23***	0.29***	0.25***	0.24**
	0.22	*0.29*	*0.27*	*0.20*
Youth Input	0.11*	0.03	0.09*	0.04
	0.11	*0.03*	*0.10*	*0.03*
Cooperative Peer Learning Environment	0.12	0.09	0.14**	0.43***
	0.10	*0.08*	*0.14*	*0.32*
Peer Affiliation	0.00	0.05	0.00	0.11
	0.00	*0.05*	*0.00*	*0.08*
Sample Size	236	235	235	228

Note: These are the coefficients from a multivariate analysis where the youth's outcomes are modeled as a function of the youth's rating of staff's group management skills, positive and negative adult support, the degree of peer affiliation within the activity, the extent of cooperative peer learning opportunities and youth input, as well as the participants' gender, grade level and academic competence (self-reported GPA). All data are from youth surveys. The clustered nature of the sample (by activity) is accounted for in the estimation of the covariance matrix.

***$p \leq 0.01$, **$p \leq 0.05$, *$p \leq 0.10$

Table B.2
Relationships Between Staff Practices and Staff Characteristics

(Unstandardized regression coefficients; standardized coefficients in italics; and p-values in parentheses.)

Staff Characteristics	Practice Quality					
	Positive Support	Negative Interactions	Group Management	Youth Input	Cooperative Peer Learning	Peer Affiliation
Youth Female	0.16 *0.11* (0.09)	0.03 *0.02* (0.76)	-0.02 *-0.02* (0.82)	0.08 *0.05* (0.42)	0.13 *0.09* (0.18)	-0.05 *-0.04* (0.59)
Grade Level	0.03 *0.12* (0.15)	-0.06 *-0.21* (0.01)	0.04 *0.15* (0.13)	0.05 *0.18* (0.07)	0.05 *0.19* (0.03)	0.07 *0.29* (0.00)
GPA	0.01 *0.01* (0.85)	-0.12 *-0.22* (0.00)	0.02 *0.04* (0.52)	0.03 *0.05* (0.35)	0.00 *0.01* (0.92)	0.04 *0.07* (0.19)
Staff-Youth Ratio	0.17 *0.04* (0.63)	-0.03 *-0.01* (0.93)	-0.66 *-0.15* (0.21)	1.14 *0.25* (0.02)	-0.05 *-0.01* (0.90)	-0.11 *-0.03* (0.83)
Female	0.23 *0.16* (0.11)	-0.01 *-0.01* (0.94)	0.06 *0.04* (0.77)	0.09 *0.06* (0.66)	0.08 *0.06* (0.63)	0.13 *0.09* (0.57)
Younger than 25	0.03 *0.02* (0.83)	0.11 *0.07* (0.45)	-0.05 *-0.03* (0.79)	0.23 *0.15* (0.21)	0.07 *0.05* (0.61)	-0.21 *-0.15* (0.30)
School Work Experience	0.14 *0.10* (0.26)	0.10 *0.06* (0.49)	0.07 *0.05* (0.70)	-0.08 *-0.05* (0.66)	-0.01 *-0.01* (0.92)	0.04 *0.03* (0.85)
Youth Organization Experience	-0.07 *-0.04* (0.61)	-0.16 *-0.09* (0.36)	0.05 *0.03* (0.82)	-0.20 *-0.11* (0.35)	0.08 *0.05* (0.62)	-0.06 *-0.04* (0.80)
Childcare Work Experience	-0.25 *-0.17* (0.06)	0.36 *0.22* (0.03)	-0.16 *-0.10* (0.42)	0.07 *0.04* (0.73)	-0.26 *-0.18* (0.09)	-0.14 *-0.10* (0.52)
Same Race/Ethnicity as Participant	-0.07 *-0.05* (0.43)	-0.13 *-0.08* (0.19)	0.10 *0.06* (0.35)	-0.15 *-0.10* (0.14)	-0.11 *-0.08* (0.28)	0.05 *0.03* (0.57)
Youth Development Training	-0.15 *-0.11* (0.18)	-0.03 *-0.02* (0.82)	-0.13 *-0.09* (0.44)	0.06 *0.04* (0.73)	-0.15 *-0.11* (0.23)	0.00 *0.00* (1.00)
Group Management Training	-0.08 *-0.05* (0.55)	0.07 *0.04* (0.69)	-0.26 *-0.16* (0.24)	0.07 *0.04* (0.75)	-0.03 *-0.02* (0.87)	-0.07 *-0.05* (0.79)
Training in Cooperative Learning	-0.02 *-0.01* (0.92)	0.01 *0.00* (0.97)	0.25 *0.13* (0.38)	-0.28 *-0.14* (0.33)	0.12 *0.07* (0.59)	0.04 *0.02* (0.91)
College Educated	-0.15 *-0.10* (0.28)	0.08 *0.05* (0.63)	0.18 *0.11* (0.36)	-0.09 *-0.06* (0.65)	-0.02 *-0.01* (0.91)	-0.03 *-0.02* (0.91)
Sample Size Intra Class Correlation	257/32 .01	257/32 .07	250/32 .15	256/31 .14	257/32 .04	249/32 .33

Note: These are the coefficients from an HLM analysis of the youth's assessment of the staff's behavior in which students are embedded in activities. At the first stage, the students' ratings were regressed against their gender, grade level and self-reported GPA. At the second stage, the activity level intercept was modeled as a function of the 32 staff's characteristics.

Table B.3
Relationships Between Staff Practices and Involvement Indicators by Age of Youth

(Unstandardized regression coefficients.)

Activity Features	Outcomes			
	Engagement	Perceived Learning	Enjoyment	Desire to Come
Elementary School (ES)	1.10	-0.24	0.51	3.76***
Middle School (MS)	0.23	0.04	-0.02	0.97
Youth Female	0.00	0.00	-0.10*	0.16
GPA	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.06
Positive Adult Support	0.33**	0.45***	0.14	0.33*
ES Positive Adult Suport	-0.40	-0.18	-0.19	-0.89**
MS Positive Adult Support	0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.04
Negative Adult Interaction	0.15	0.11	0.01	0.30*
ES Negative Adult Interaction	0.07	0.04	-0.15	-0.45*
MS Negative Adult Interaction	0.17	0.07	0.36**	-0.17
Good Behavioral Management	0.19*	0.34***	0.35***	0.27*
ES Good Behavioral Management	-0.05	-0.03	-0.06	-0.22
MS Good Behavioral Management	-0.04	-0.14	-0.22**	-0.12
Youth Input	0.09	0.05	0.05	0.10
ES Youth Input	0.07	0.02	0.10	-0.21
MS Youth Input	0.06	-0.13	-0.19	-0.02
Cooperative Peer Learning Environment	0.18	0.02	0.15	0.20
ES Cooperative Peer Learning Environment	0.17	0.10	-0.00	0.43
MS Cooperative Peer Learning Environment	0.07	0.05	0.14	0.01
Peer Affiliation	-0.02	0.03	0.02	0.22**
ES Peer Affiliation	-0.09	0.26**	0.16	-0.04
MS Peer Affiliation	-0.31	0.10	-0.15	0.04
Sample Size	287	286	286	278

Note: These are the coefficients from a multivariate analysis. All data are from youth surveys. The clustered nature of the sample (by activity) accounted for in the estimation of the covariance matrix.

***p≤0.01,**p≤0.05,*p≤0.10

Appendix C: Activities

Table C.1: Philadelphia Beacon Activities Included in this Study

	Academics		Arts		Athletics	Personal Interest		
Activity	Academic Enrichment	Academic Skills	Performing Arts	Visual Arts	Physical Skills	Career Development	Health Knowledge	Social & Leadership Skills
	Central East Inner City Games*[1]	Grover Washington Fun Science *[1]	Grover Washington Drama* [1]	Grover Washington Multimedia[1]±■	Bartram Basketball*[1]	Grover Washington Job Readiness *[1]±■	Grover Washington Bringing Star* [1]±■	Grover Washington Travel Club ■
	Central East After School All Stars *[1]	George Washington SAT Prep *[1]±■	George Washington Hip-Hop Education *[1]±■	George Washington Visual Arts[1]±	Julia de Burgos Capoeira* [1]±■	Julia de Burgos Cosmetology [1]	George Washington G.E.M.S. *[1]±	Central East T.A.T.U. *[1]±■
	George Washington After School [1]	Grover Washington College Readiness ■	Bartram Drama *[1]±■	Central East Arts and Crafts*	Julia de Burgos Karate *[1]±■	Julia de Burgos Modeling and Dancing*		George Washington Beacon Center Drop-In *[1]±■
	Bartram After School*	Julia de Burgos Fun Science evening session *[1]±■	Julia de Burgos Bomba y Plena *[1]■		Bartram Double Dutch *[1]±■			Bartram Girls' Club*
	Grover Washington After School*	Julia de Burgos Fun Science after-school session*	Central East Dance*		Central East Drill Team* ■			George Washington Youth Council*±
		George Washington Computer Lab*	George Washington Dance Class*		George Washington Martial Arts [1]±			Grover Washington Youth Council*
			Julia de Burgos Latin Dance*		Central East Karate*			Bartram Youth Council*
			Grover Washington Dance*		Central East Cheerleading*			Grover Washington Junior Youth Council*
					Julia de Burgos Basketball*			Central East Youth Development*

* Participant survey and/or instructor survey received

[1] Activity observed, typically twice

± Activity instructor interviewed

■ Activity participants interviewed

Table C.2: Philadelphia Beacon Activities Included in this Study, by Age Group

Age	Academic Enrichment	Academic Skills	Performing Arts	Visual Arts	Physical Skills	Career Development	Health Knowledge	Social & Leadership Skills
	Academics		**Arts**		**Athletics**	**Career Development**	**Personal Interest**	
Middle School	George Washington After School	Grover Washington Fun Science *[1]	Grover Washington Drama*	Grover Washington Multimedia±■ Grover Washington Visual Arts±			Grover Washington Bringing Star*±■	Grover Washington Travel Club■
High School	Central East Inner City Games* Central East After School All Stars*	George Washington SAT Prep*±■ Grover Washington College Readiness■	George Washington Hip-Hop Education*±■ Bartram Drama*±■		Bartram Basketball*	Grover Washington Job Readiness *±■	George Washington G.E.M.S.±	George Washington Beacon Center Drop-In*±■ Central East T.A.T.U.*±■
Mixed Ages	George Washington After School (elementary and middle school)[1]	Julia de Burgos Fun Science evening session (elementary and middle school)*±■	Julia de Burgos Bomba y Plena (elementary, middle and high school)*■		Julia de Burgos Capoeira (elementary and middle school)*±■ Julia de Burgos Karate (elementary and middle school)*±■ Bartram Double Dutch (elementary and middle school)*±■ Central East Drill Team (middle and high school)*■ George Washington Martial Arts (elementary, middle and high school) ±	Julia de Burgos Cosmetology (elementary, middle, high school and adult)		

* Participant survey and/or instructor survey received

± Activity instructor interviewed

■ Activity participants interviewed

Appendices Endnotes

1   The units of standardized coefficients are standard deviations rather than the arbitrary units of a scale. A standard deviation indicates how tightly individuals' outcomes cluster around the measure's mean, or average. For a normally distributed variable, 34 percent of the sample's values fall between the mean and one standard deviation above the mean. In this sample of youth, the standard deviation of the group management scale was 0.75. Now suppose that a one standard deviation increase in a student's rating of a staff member's group management skills were associated with a 0.17 increase in the reported level of engagement from say 2.90 to 3.17. If the standard deviation of the engagement scale were 0.05 (implying that 34 percent of the students rated their instructors' ability between 2.90 and 2.95), then the change in engagement of 0.17 would be more impressive than if the standard deviation on engagement were 1.0. In the latter case, the student whose instructor is rated one standard deviation (or 0.75) higher than other students' instructors would be more highly engaged in their activity, but they would not be more engaged than many others.

2   Cohen, J. (1988) *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.