

Metro United Way of Louisville

2014-2015 Findings



Why Afterschool? Why Quality?

Each day 11.3 million American children are without supervision at home or on the street.ⁱ Studies have shown that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in academic achievement and social emotional skills.^{ii,iv} Gains in these areas also positively influence work habits and future employability, so it's no surprise that 84% of American families support public funding for afterschool programs.ⁱⁱⁱ Both taxpayers and policymakers want safe and engaging activities for young people while parents work, but not all programs achieve these positive effects, so focusing our collective energy on improving program quality is critical.^{iv,v}

History

In an effort to improve the quality of local afterschool programs, Metro United Way (MUW) partnered with the Forum for Youth Investment's David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality to design and build a quality improvement system for afterschool programs in the Louisville region. Drawing upon the Weikart Center's evidence-based *Youth Program Quality Intervention* (YPQI), the quality improvement system is designed to: (a) build managers' continuous quality improvement skills; (b) increase the quality of instruction available in afterschool programs; (c) increase students' engagement with program content and opportunities for skill-building^{vi}; and ultimately (d) improve student outcomes related to school success.

"We knew we weren't doing certain things, but were unsure of the barriers that were keeping us from achieving certain goals. Going through the self-assessment allowed us to ask the question, "Why?" Why aren't we offering the youth more opportunities to lead? And also come up with very basic ways to make these things occur in an intentional, structured, and timely manner."

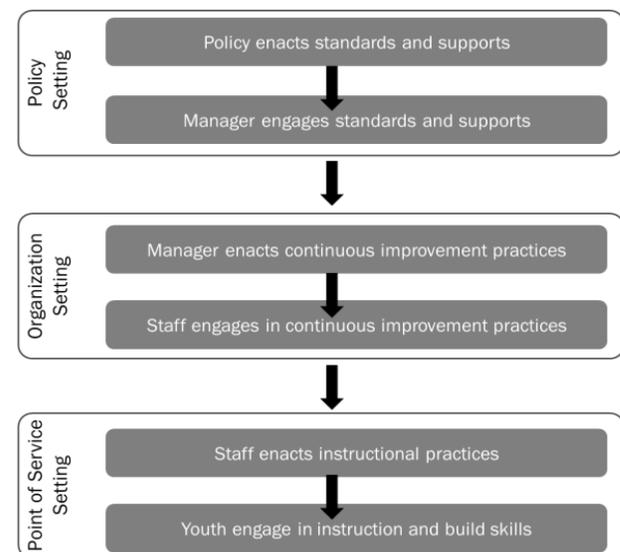
- OST site manager

Metro United Way's Quality Improvement System began with a baseline assessment of 38 sites in Fall 2014. Sites were assessed using the Youth or School-Age Program Quality Assessment (PQA). This observation-based rubric measures the presence of instructional practices that have been shown to positively impact youth development. Data collected was compiled into a report and used to determine system need and readiness for more intensive quality work.

The YPQI Approach to Quality Improvement

The YPQI approach engages out-of-school time leaders, program managers, and site-level staff in a sequence of practices that have a cascade of effects of program quality. The theory of action pictured in Figure 1 describes how communities like Louisville are improving the quality of youth programs. Leaders at MUW made a commitment to focus on the quality of afterschool programs because they recognize the importance of not just providing a safe space, but the opportunity for additional skill-building that afterschool programs provide. In implementing the YPQI, MUW leaders provided a common focus for quality at the policy level and made supports available for participating organizations, including trainings and resources. In perhaps the most important cross-level step, managers engage site-based teams of site staff in continuous improvement practices (quality assessment, improvement planning, staff training in instructional skill-building, and performance feedback on instructional practices), leading staff to enact higher-quality instructional practices in programs with youth.

Figure 1- Theory of Action



The Theory of Action produces a cascade of effects because implementation begins with a policy level decision and produces effects both across multiple levels, and from a single site manager to multiple staff and youth.

2014-2015 Program Year in Review: Findings

Following the Fall 2014 baseline report, MUW determined a further investment in quality was warranted and a YPQI pilot was launched with 38 sites. The Youth Program Quality Assessment and School-Age Program Quality Assessment were the primary measures of instructional quality used in the project.^{vii}

In Spring 2015, sites completed a program self assessment, a process by which site personnel first observe instruction at their sites and then meet to discuss and rate the presence or absence of practices using the PQA tools. Using the site self assessment and Fall 2014 external assessment data, sites developed improvement plans and engaged in formal coaching experiences focused on improving the quality of instruction in programs.

By the end of the intervention period, 96% of managers and 100% of site-based staff who responded to a system-wide satisfaction survey stated they had developed valuable skills and gained relevant information from the YPQI process.

High Satisfaction with the Process

Site managers and staff were surveyed about their experience with the YPQI pilot. High fidelity implementation was complemented with a high degree of satisfaction with the improvement process across sites. Table 1 shows the responses.

Table 1 – Satisfaction with YPQI Process

As a result of our program's participation in the YPQI Pilot project,	To some extent or To a great extent	
	Managers (N=37)	Staff (N=27)
I gained relevant knowledge and/or developed valuable skills.	96.5%	100.0%
The quality of instruction improved at my site.	90.0%	100.0%
Youth were more engaged during program sessions.	90.0%	96.1%
Youth developed skills.	89.6%	96.1%
Overall, participation in the quality improvement system was a good use of my time and effort.	93.5%	96.1%
Overall, participation in the quality improvement system was supported by my supervisor.	93.5%	96.1%

96% of direct service staff who responded to the survey indicated they believe youth were more engaged in the program and that youth developed skills as a result of the quality improvement intervention.

100% of staff stated the quality of instruction improved at their sites as a direct result of the YPQI.

The process appeared to address an untapped need for additional support for site level staff who took it as an opportunity to develop skills to support the incorporation of youth leadership and reflection opportunities in their programs.

High satisfaction supports successful implementation of the specific elements of the quality improvement process, but it is also known to support staff retention.^{viii,ix}

"I learned what a quality program looks like. I also learned what I may view as a quality program is not viewed the same as someone else evaluating me. People sometimes see things in your program that you are not even aware of."

- OST site staff

YPQI Implementation and Results

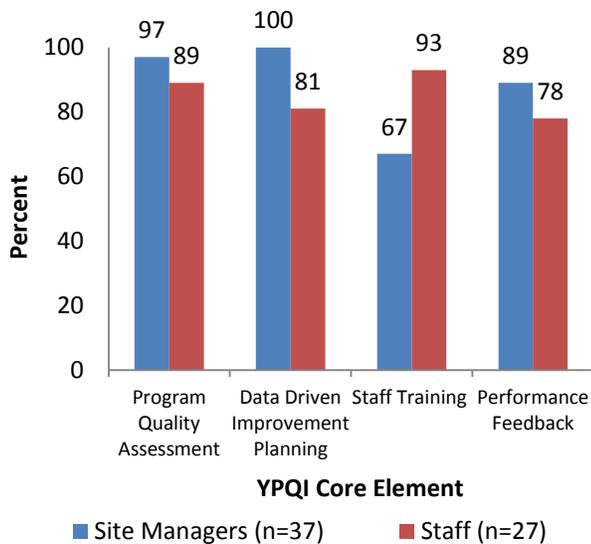
Metro United Way demonstrated a high degree of fidelity in implementing the YPQI across sites and site teams during the 2014-2015 pilot. The four core practices that constitute fidelity to the YPQI are:

- quality assessment
- data-driven improvement planning
- staff training in instructional skill-building
- performance feedback on instructional practices



Figure 2 shows site coordinator and site staff reports of participation in elements of the YPQI:

Figure 2 - Site Manager & Staff Reports of Fidelity to YPQI Core Elements



A large percentage of site staff participated in the core elements of the YPQI, which underscores both the YPQI's value as a professional development series and the low stakes nature of the model.

Most noteworthy across the pilot was 100% of sites submitted a Program Self Assessment and 100% of sites submitted a Program Improvement Plan.

Greater fidelity to the implementation of the YPQI elements has been shown to influence site coordinators' focus on quality practice. Sites that have high fidelity to the YPQI in a pilot year are 10% more likely to continue to implement those practices in subsequent years.^x



Metro United Way's decision to implement the YPQI was a critical first step in developing a wide network of quality programs able to serve children and youth with the highest degree of effectiveness. As the network grows in 2015-2016, the system will be able to establish a culture of continuous improvement and create new norms and high standards for the quality of programs for children and youth.

"The quality of the learning system fostered excitement in the individual students at our site. With the new time management policies, they also looked forward to attending a program that offered reliability and consistency."
 - OST site manager

Priorities for Improvement

Sites prioritized improvement goals around the results of their program self assessments. Managers and staff expressed strong agreement with regard to future professional development priorities. Both managers and staff asked for additional training in several instructional skills, including: how to incorporate planning and reflection into program activities, how to cultivate youth voice, and how to build a safe and welcoming community.

Staff and managers prioritized the development of the following youth social and emotional skills: initiative and self-direction; critical thinking and decision-making; and relationships and collaboration.

Site managers and direct service staff agreed the YPQI process provided valuable information that could be used for continued staff development. The top three areas identified were: applying quality standards to staff hiring and supervision; coaching staff on instructional quality; and improvement around communication with direct service staff.

"It was good to remind us that improvements are ongoing. The staff also were reminded of the importance of youth participation in the planning and delivery of the program."
 - OST site manager

Looking Forward

The success of the 2014-2015 MUW quality improvement intervention has fueled a more expansive approach to site improvement for the 2015-2016 programming year. The system will expand to 50+ sites. Additionally, there will be external assessments in the fall and spring in order to see – within the same program year – whether sites were able to make positive changes in targeted areas. Sites will also collect youth survey data using the Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes (SAYO) tool, which looks at social-emotional skills and learning for youth. Adolescents' ability to manage emotions, attention, motivation, and behavior to achieve their goals, the essence of social-emotional learning, is related to a wide range of positive outcomes^{xi,xii}. Well-developed social-emotional skills are known to support learning in both academic and career readiness skills areas^{xiii} and to promote mental health and reduce risk-taking behavior in youth^{xiv}.

This data will be incorporated into a Comprehensive Performance Report produced by the Weikart Center, following the 2015-2016 programming year. The Comprehensive Performance Report will include data collected during the 2014-2015 program year along with 2015-2016 program quality data in a performance dashboard designed for sites to be able to readily act on their data.

Metro United Way is dedicated to improving the lives of children and their communities through the active engagement of volunteers, supportive partners, and the establishment of strong programs where young people can come and develop the skills to do the same. In focusing on quality improvement across program sites in the Louisville region, MUW is helping assure continued community development in the Louisville region.



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- v Yohalem, N., & Granger, R. C. (2013). Improving the Quality and Impact of Afterschool and Summer Programs: Lessons Learned and Future Directions. In T. K. Peterson (Ed.), *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success*. Washington, D.C.: Collaborative Communications Group.
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- viii Huang, D., & Cho, J. (2010). using professional development to enhance staff retention. *Afterschool Matters*, 12, 9-16.
- ix Smith, C., Akiva, T., Sugar, S., Lo, Y. J., Frank, K. A., Peck, S. C., & Cortina, K. S. (2012). *Continuous quality improvement in afterschool settings: Impact findings from the Youth Program Quality Intervention study*. Ypsilanti, MI:
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- xi Durlak, J., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., Weissberg, R., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.
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