

# BLOCS: Building a better life for young people, block by block

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High school graduates earn more, are more engaged in their communities and are more likely to raise kids who also graduate. But sadly, only 75 percent of students nationally, and 79 percent locally, graduate on time.

That's a problem for our entire community — and our entire community needs to be involved in finding and implementing solutions.

The support that young people need to achieve success can't rest solely on schools. It can't come only between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. In-class hours amount to only about 9 percent of our students' lives.

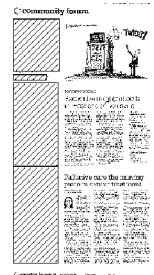
We must not underestimate the power of learning that takes place outside the classroom, recognizing that our children need quality out-of-school time (OST) programs too.

Why do OST programs matter? Studies show that youth who attend quality OST programs are 12 percent less likely to drop out of school, compared to their peers who don't participate. And quality OST programs are universally recognized as a critical tool to help students achieve and graduate on time, by contributing positively to key performance indicators, such as attendance, engagement in learning, test scores and grades.

OST programs also provide experiences like mentoring and peer-to-peer engagement activities that enable young people to develop critical life skills, such as poise, problem solving, conflict resolution and perseverance that will propel them to success in school and long after their classroom days are over.

In 2011, Louisville Metro Government, JCPD, Metro United Way and the Louisville Alliance for Youth established a community partnership — BLOCS — that works to bridge in-school and out-of-school time while demonstrating OST programming is a fundamental support in improving educational outcomes.

Today this collaborative effort continues with our partners working tirelessly to build a coordinated OST system in Louisville. This system will help steer more local students toward high quality programs, improve opportunities for youth and positively impact the social-emotional development and love of learning



among young people.

BLOCS specifically focuses on the quality, availability, access and continuous improvement of OST programs. Mindful of the important role that OST programs can play in college and career readiness, our role is to set standards for quality and motivate provider excellence. Over the past five years, we've built an intervention system that now includes 61 OST program sites around the Metro area that are committed to offering high quality programming for youth.

Last month, BLOCS — in partnership with Jefferson Community and Technical College — launched a 60 training hour Youth Development Continuing Education Units (CEU) Certificate program, open to any person who works with youth. This certificate acknowledges the unique skill sets and professionalism needed to be effective in youth development.

Finally, BLOCS is tackling the troubling statistics around summer learning loss through its Summer Learning Initiative. Research shows that most students lose more than two months in grade level equivalency in math skills over the summer months. On March 3rd, more than 100 professionals attended the BLOCS Summer Learning Summit to gain skills that will aid them in developing enriching programs to promote learning all summer long. With support from the Wallace Foundation and James Graham Brown Foundation, BLOCS is investing more than \$50,000 directly in these summer programs in 2016.

Last year, we helped nearly 30,000 youth access high-quality OST programs that in turn will help them on a path to graduation. But there is more work to do.

If you are an adult who works with young people either in your profession or as a volunteer, consider participating in a BLOCS Methods workshop or pursuing your Youth Development certification.

If you are an OST program provider consider utilizing tools like the Louisville OST Program Quality Standards, the Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes (SAYO), along with other proven methods. If you are a parent or young person searching for an OST program, go to [www.louisvilleblocs.org](http://www.louisvilleblocs.org) to search for quality programs in your area.

Recognizing that education is the foundation for a child's success in work and life, let's work together to raise the bar on quality and create a premier out-of-school time system in our community.

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