CHAPIN HALL
CENTER FOR CHILDREN
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Palm Beach County's Prime Time Initiative: Improving the Quality of After-School Programs

JULIE SPIELBERGER
TRACEY LOCKABY

2008

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This evaluation and report would not have been possible without the guidance and information we received from many participants in and observers of Prime Time, including representatives from Prime Time, the Children's Services Council, the School District of Palm Beach County, the United Way, Palm Beach Community College, the High/Scope Foundation, Family Central, and Beacon Centers. They gave generously of their time, provided documents, answered numerous and frequent questions, arranged site visits, and facilitated our attendance at meetings and teacher trainings.

We owe special thanks to all of the Prime Time program directors, quality advisors, and community resource advocates who worked closely with us, providing access to information and helpful insights to enhance our understanding of program implementation issues. In addition to meeting with us in person during site visits, they also responded to frequent requests by telephone and e-mail for additional information throughout the past year. Finally, we are very grateful to the program directors and staff who welcomed us during site visits and found time in their busy days to answer our questions.

We also wish to acknowledge our colleagues at Chapin Hall, especially Harold Richman, for providing background information and ongoing guidance, which helped us interpret our data. We thank Shannon Guiltinan and Addy Salley for conducting a number of interviews. We also thank Addy Salley and Leifa Mayers for assisting with data analysis, and Rosemary Gill and Carolyn Winje for help in editing. Last but not least, we thank Prime Time of Palm Beach County for generously supporting the evaluation.

Recommended Citation

Spielberger, J. & Lockaby, T. (2008). *Palm Beach County's Prime Time Initiative: Improving the Quality of After-School Programs*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Figure and Tables

INTRODUCTION

This report covers the third year of Chapin Hall's process evaluation of the Prime Time Initiative of Palm Beach County, Florida, a system-building effort to strengthen the quality of after-school programs in the county. During the past two decades, the after-school field has expanded enormously, partly in response to increasing concern about developmental and achievement gaps between low-income children, especially those of ethnic minority backgrounds, and their more advantaged peers. Opportunities to participate in constructive after-school activities are still more limited in low-income communities than in more affluent communities, and questions remain about the effects of after-school programs on children's development and academic achievement. At the same time, as the field has evolved and grown, practitioners and policymakers are learning that programs are more likely to have effects when they address multiple developmental domains, are of high quality and led by professional staff, and engage children on a regular and sustained basis. Improving quality remains challenging, however, as the field is still plagued by problems of unstable funding and staffing as well as difficulty developing realistic expectations and quality standards for a diverse array of providers. Intermediary organizations such as Prime Time can be a critical resource for bringing together diverse perspectives, advocating for and developing quality standards, and linking programs with needed supports and services, including professional development for staff, to meet those standards (e.g., Halpern, Spielberger, & Robb, 2001; Johnson, Rothstein, & Gajdosik, 2004; Yohalem, Wilson-Ahlstrom, & Yu, 2005).

The Prime Time Initiative

In the context of the growing concern about the supply and quality of after-school opportunities for children and youth, about a decade ago community stakeholders in Palm Beach County formed the Palm Beach County Out-of-School Consortium. One of the outcomes of the consortium was the creation of a coordinating council to share resources and enhance existing after-school programs for elementary and high school youth. Over the course of several years, the coordinating council developed a framework for a new nonprofit intermediary called Prime Time, which officially began operation in 2001. By 2004, eight full-time staff were on board, and by 2005, the number of staff had doubled. With support from the Children's Services Council (CSC) of Palm Beach County, the Picower Foundation, and the Knight Foundation, Prime Time works with all key after-school stakeholders, including CSC, the School District of Palm Beach County, the Department of Parks and Recreation, Palm Beach Health Department, Palm Beach Community College, and various municipalities. Prime Time has also established partnerships with a grassroots coalition in Riviera Beach and with the Glades Initiative.

Prime Time is considered an important component of a growing infrastructure of community services and supports put in place to promote the healthy development, school readiness, and school success of children in Palm Beach County. The programs and systems that make up the growing infrastructure of services for families and children in Palm Beach County are intended to function collaboratively and support families and children at different stages of their development. Currently, these programs and systems are focused on serving families in four targeted geographic areas (TGAs)—the Glades, Lake Worth/Lantana, Riviera

Beach/Lake Park, and West Palm Beach—that have high levels of risk for poverty, teen pregnancy, crime, and child abuse and neglect.[1]

Prime Time focused its early work on fostering networking among providers and developing the quality of programs serving elementary and middle-school children in the TGAs. However, its overarching goal has been to create an integrated and sustainable system of standards, supports, and resources for all after-school programs in the county. It also seeks to increase community awareness of the value of after-school programs and the importance of program quality. Toward these ends, its leadership has sought to position Prime Time as a countywide intermediary, as opposed to a funder or provider of services. At the same time, in order to strengthen the system of supports for after-school programs, Prime Time's goal is to develop capacity in local institutions to provide program enhancements and staff training to programs.

Moreover, Prime Time's leadership believes that technical assistance and other program supports should be tailored to the needs of individual programs. Thus, in the 2006-2007 program year, Prime Time continued to develop, refine, and test a range of strategies to improve program quality. These strategies include a Quality Improvement System (QIS) based on program standards and assessment, on-site technical assistance delivered by quality advisors and peer coaches, staff development and networking opportunities, curricular and program enhancements, and outreach, advocacy, and marketing. To date, the QIS has been limited to programs in the TGAs that were participating in a pilot project that concluded in the fall of 2007. During the coming year, Prime Time staff plan to gradually implement the QIS more broadly in selected after-school programs across the county. All other Prime Time resources and services continue to be available to all after-school programs in the county.

A brief description of Prime Time's main strategies for achieving its goals follows:

- **Test and Implement a Quality Improvement System (QIS)**

   In January 2008, Prime Time initiated an 18-month QIS pilot project in targeted areas of Palm Beach County. The QIS is a multi-step process that begins with baseline assessments by trained outside assessors on a standardized measure of program quality called the Palm Beach County Program Quality Assessment (PBC-PQA) developed by the High/Scope Foundation. The PBC-PQA uses a 5-point rating scale to measure all aspects of program environments (i.e., physical, social, and personal), with particular focus on youth voice and engagement. The process also includes self-assessments by program staff, the development of program improvement plans based on assessment, the provision of staff training and curricular resources to implement improvements, and reassessment by outside assessors using the PBC-PQA.

   Thirty-eight after-school programs, serving more than 4,000 children and youth in the TGAs, participated in the Prime Time Quality Improvement System (QIS) Pilot Project.[2]

---

[1] For example, according to the 2003 *State of the Child in Palm Beach County*, 75 to 93 percent of children in the TGAs receive free or reduced lunch, the rate of child abuse and neglect is between 4.1 and 6.6 times the county average, and crime rates range from 14 to 93 percent above the county rate.

[2] Originally forty programs were selected for the QIS pilot, but two did not continue their participation.

These thirty-eight programs represent the variety of after-school programs in the county: Fourteen are school-based programs and twenty-four are community-based. Twenty-six of the thirty-eight are operated by community-based organizations, nine are managed by schools, and three are managed by parks and recreation departments. Half of the programs serve both elementary and middle-school children, while eleven serve elementary school students and eight serve middle-school (and in one case, high school) students. Twenty-eight of the programs also participated in a pre-QIS project the previous year to prepare them to take part in the QIS.

As described in Chapin Hall's report of November 2006, the QIS process was the culmination of more than a year's work and planning by Prime Time staff, Prime Time board members, consultants, program providers, and other community members. It also reflects an important shift in Prime Time's approach to program improvement from a quality *rating* system (QRS) to a quality *improvement* system (QIS). This decision was made 2 years ago based on the assumption that Prime Time's work would be more effective if it were a supportive rather than judgmental process.[3] Thus, programs participating in the pilot were provided a monetary incentive at the beginning of the process. This up-front funding along with the efforts to engage staff in assessing their own programs were key differences between the QIS and the QRS; additionally, in the QRS, funding was contingent on improvements on a rating scale.

- **Provide curricular resources and staff development and networking opportunities**

  Curricular resources. In addition, through its links with community organizations, Prime Time provides a large variety of curricular resources known as modules and program enhancements or overlays. The curricular resources vary in topic, format, and duration, and are offered in various developmental areas, including arts and culture, academics, health, and sports and recreation. Modules are short-term activities of six to nine sessions in duration that provide an introduction to a particular field or skill. Specific activities have included snorkeling, batik-making, world percussion, golf, Claymation, tai chi, and photography. Prime Time provides the equipment from its lending library and pays for instructors or for provider staff to be trained in delivery of the activity.

  This year, Prime Time finalized contracts with both the Center for Creative Education (CCE) and the YMCA of South Palm Beach County to provide all of the modules that previously had been provided by Prime Time. Since August 2007, CCE has been managing and providing modules in the areas of arts and culture. As of October 2007, the YMCA assumed responsibility for providing modules in the areas of health and fitness, and sports and recreation. Prime Time has had long-standing relationships with both organizations, which have the capacity to better meet the requests of a larger number of programs than Prime Time could. Both organizations also intend to build upon and expand on the current range of curricular resources for programs.

---

[3] With a quality rating system (QRS), the stakes are high in that programs receive funding depending on the results of their quality assessments or rating on a scale of 1 to 5 stars.

Overlay or enhancement programs are more intensive, longer-term components that are provided to selected after-school program sites by various community partners. These in-depth programs are integrated into the regular after-school program schedule and delivered by both the regular after-school staff and experts provided by the community organization. Currently Prime Time works with several different agencies to deliver these longer-term program enhancements in the areas of the visual and performing arts, literacy, music recording, environmental learning, academic support, and inclusion of special needs children programming, among others.

A special, 3-year community initiative, the ISH Institute residency program, emerged from a partnership between the Raymond F. Kravis Center for the Performing Arts (hereafter referred to as the Kravis Center) and Prime Time. They jointly sponsored visits from international artists from the ISH Institute in Amsterdam for a 2-week period in April 2006 and 2007 to guide forty middle-school youth from three local after-school programs in creating and performing their own production. The experience, in which youth rotate through various workshops for intensive study of a variety of art forms (street dance, break dance, hip-hop, film, and theater), again culminated in a performance by the youth at the Kravis Center in West Palm Beach. The artists will return to West Palm Beach in April 2008 for a third and final year.[4]

Staff development and networking. In collaboration with Palm Beach Community College and several consultants, Prime Time provides a range of professional development opportunities, including short, one-time workshops on a range of topics and focused trainings as well as college courses on youth development curriculum and working with children, youth, and co-workers. Program staff may apply to Prime Time for scholarships to attend classes and conferences.

The Prime Time After-school Consortium is a network of after-school and summer program providers who join together to share best practices in the after-school field, learn about new policy developments and advocacy activities, get information about a variety of program and staff resources (such as the program enhancements described above), and network with peers. The consortium is open to all individuals engaged in the after-school arena. In the fall of 2006, consortium meetings were restructured as networking events to be more responsive to provider needs and to broaden participation in the consortium. In this regard, Prime Time is also encouraging the consortium to be more independent of Prime Time in their networking activities.

---

[4] The original plan when Prime Time began working with the ISH Institute in April of 2006 was for the team of artists to come to West Palm Beach for 3 years. The Kravis Center, in partnership with Prime Time, plans to direct the residency in the future.

- **Develop partnerships with and strengthen the capacity of community organizations**

  As an intermediary organization, rather than a funder or provider of services, Prime Time seeks to institutionalize resources of assessment, professional development, and program enhancements in local organizations. Thus, Prime Time worked throughout the 2006-2007 program year to negotiate agreements with various agencies to deliver the services previously provided or facilitated by Prime Time. These included Family Central for program quality assessments, Palm Beach Community College for professional development, and, as already described above, CCE and the YMCA of South Palm Beach County for modules and program enhancements**.**

- **Increase awareness of the importance of after-school programs and support new after-school programs in TGAs through advocacy and outreach**

  Prime Time continues to be engaged in several activities to both increase awareness of the importance of after-school programs and support new after-school programs in the TGAs. In its first year, Prime Time staff worked with operating programs (funded primarily by CSC) that had already been identified by CSC, the Knight Foundation, and the Picower Foundation as needing the support and resources that Prime Time offered. During the second year, the primary strategy by which Prime Time continued to reach its goals of increasing awareness and supporting new programs was through the work of its two community resource advocates. The community resource advocates identified and began work with a variety of new programs, including programs that may not have been operational but had identified children with needs and had some staff, either paid or volunteer. This entailed meetings to introduce new programs at various stages of development to Prime Time and its resources, and to clarify Prime Time's role as an intermediary organization with resources and supports but not as a funder. The community resource advocates also regularly made presentations about Prime Time at community meetings to neighborhood groups, politicians, and various other interested individuals.

  During the past, third, year, the community resource advocates have continued their work identifying new after-school programs countywide and orienting them to the services and supports Prime Time provides. They have used as a guide in their work a list of all not-for-profit organizations and after-school programs in Palm Beach County generated by the Center for Nonprofit Excellence (whose mission is to promote quality and accountability in the nonprofit community through leadership development, education, and management services). The community resource advocates have also been asked to identify ten to twelve organizations that are operating with some stability and would have the capacity to participate in the QIS in the coming year.

  In addition, the resource advocates have continued their activities to increase the quality of and participation in after-school programs geared toward middle-school youth in the three TGAs. This special project, the Knight Middle School Enhancement Project, is expected to end in 2 years. Thus, the community resource advocates are currently stepping

up their efforts to identify new programs that are ready to receive the assistance that Prime Time can provide in anticipation of the end of the Knight Project.[5]

- **Promote Prime Time as a countywide intermediary**

  In addition to its efforts in the areas of advocacy, increasing awareness, and outreach, Prime Time has continued its efforts to streamline its organization and reestablish and reinforce its identity as an intermediary organization. A marketing consultant has been helping Prime Time try to create a consistent identity (with clarity about its function and how it is organized), primarily through a reworking of their Web site, which was launched in August of 2006. The Web site is intended to become the main portal for communication for their most important stakeholders, providers of after-school program services.

     As described below, Chapin Hall is observing each of these strategies as they develop both as individual activities and as part of an emerging *system* of supports for after-school programs serving children and youth.

A Process Evaluation of Prime Time

The primary purpose of Chapin Hall's evaluation when it began in the fall of 2004 was to document the evolution of the QIS and assess its effectiveness in improving the quality of after-school programs for elementary and middle-school students in Palm Beach County. The following three questions were identified as central to the evaluation:

1. What is the level of quality of after-school programs for elementary and middle-school students in Palm Beach County?
2. What impact does participation in the QIS have on the quality of after-school providers?
3. What is the nature of the relationship between participation in the QIS and the other services and supports Prime Time provides in the program improvement process? How are various services and supports interconnected, and how do they complement one another in improving program quality?

     These questions, particularly the last one, have continued to guide our work in the third year of the evaluation. Because several new strategies were developed in the 2005-2006 program year, including community outreach and new marketing and advocacy activities, we were also asked to continue to observe and comment on Prime Time's identity and function as an intermediary organization. In addition, much of our effort this year was focused on learning about the peer coaching process, as peer coaches have become an important aspect of the support and assistance Prime Time provides.

---

[5] The Knight Middle School Enhancement Project is a 5-year project with the goal of increasing the quality of and participation in after-school programs for middle-school youth in three targeted communities: Riviera Beach, North West Palm Beach, and the Glades. The middle-school years are challenging for many low-income youth, and it is believed that participation in after-school programs greatly reduces the chances of dropping out of school and engaging in risky behavior, while increasing academic engagement, self-esteem, and positive social behaviors. This enhancement project is being monitored by Prime Time and is not part of Chapin Hall's second-year evaluation.

Thus, although much of Prime Time's work this year has again centered on implementing the QIS with the pilot programs, it is only one of several strategies Prime Time has implemented to improve the quality of after-school programs in Palm Beach County. The long-term objective of Prime Time's work is a comprehensive quality improvement system that includes higher-education classes and programs, scholarships for staff, other professional training, on-site consultation and mentoring, curricular resources, and program assessment tools. In addition to developing the components of this system, Prime Time continues to work towards institutionalizing each of them in appropriate local organizations.

Methods

The goal of our data collection efforts in the third year was to continue observing and documenting Prime Time's implementation of the QIS in thirty-seven after-school programs serving elementary- and middle-school-age students. Specifically, our focus was (1) to continue to document the QIS implementation activities and understand how participants in the QIS pilot are experiencing the system, and (2) to again review all of the components that make up Prime Time and support the QIS process, including professional development and staff training, the provision of curricular resources, and community outreach and marketing. Our methods included interviews with a wide variety of stakeholders; observations of selected after-school programs, meetings, trainings, and other events; and review and analysis of available reports and documents.

Key Informant Interviews

Chapin Hall researchers conducted more than fifty interviews in person or by telephone with a wide range of informants this year to assess their current views of Prime Time. These interviewees included Prime Time staff and partners, after-school program directors, agency directors, peer coaches, and key community stakeholders and informants, including representatives of Palm Beach Community College and youth development professionals serving as consultants to Prime Time. The interviews were semi-structured in that certain topics were covered with all or most respondents, but other topics were tailored to the position and background of the informant. Common topics included Prime Time's identity; strengths and weaknesses of its goals, role, activities, and services; the QIS process; and communication and networking within the after-school system. Most interviews were recorded and either transcribed or summarized, and then coded and analyzed with the assistance of the Atlast.ti qualitative software.

Our data collection efforts focused on the interviews with directors of programs participating in the QIS pilot. We attempted to talk with as many providers participating in the pilot as possible to understand their perceptions of Prime Time and its resources and supports, and their experiences with the QIS. We were able to interview a total of twenty-nine (78%) directors of the thirty-seven programs participating in the pilot project this year. These program directors varied in their education and professional backgrounds in the after-school field. As a group, however, they had considerable experience working with children either as teachers or as staff in early-childhood or after-school programs, and some had extensive experience as administrators. Their educational backgrounds varied and included elementary

education, business administration, health education, social work, public administration, medicine, and recreation. In a few cases, staff had started with their programs in other positions, for example, as a secretary, police officer, youth minister, or social worker, and moved on to their positions as program directors. The directors also varied in the length of time they had been involved with Prime Time; about two-thirds had been part of a pre-QIS process during the 2004-2005 program year.

Observations of Prime Time Programs, Meetings, Training, and Other Events

We also attended selected meetings, trainings, and events facilitated by Prime Time, including peer coaches' meetings, a Knight provider meeting, and three meetings in which High/Scope presented early data findings on the QIS process to different audiences. In addition, we conducted site visits to selected after-school programs to meet staff and observe activities.

Review of Program Documents and After-School Literature

We examined all available documents pertinent to the implementation of the QIS and Prime Time's other activities. These included existing descriptions and reports of Prime Time's work, the PBC-PQA tool and related materials, meeting minutes, and professional development curricula. In addition, we had access to some information from a new database that Prime Time began developing during the year to track participation in and use of various Prime Time supports by the QIS pilot programs.

FINDINGS

Prime Time had the following broad goals during 2006-2007:

- To complete the pilot of the QIS in selected programs and develop a plan for gradually introducing the system to new programs in Palm Beach County
- To strengthen the variety and accessibility of informal training opportunities targeted to the diverse needs of part-time and full-time staff with different education and experience and facilitate the development of a formal, professional school-age pathway at Palm Beach Community College (PBCC)
- To provide curricular resources to enhance the quality of programs and develop partnerships with community organizations able to deliver these resources effectively
- To reach out to and develop relationships with community-based after-school programs not previously engaged in Prime Time activities
- To develop marketing strategies to expand awareness of the value of after-school programs and the importance of quality in those programs

As noted earlier, a central goal underlying several of Prime Time's strategies was to develop the capacity of local organizations and to position Prime Time clearly as an intermediary rather than a funder or provider of services. In the next sections of this report, we present our findings on Prime Time's accomplishments and challenges in each of these strategy areas during the 2006-2007 program year. We also discuss Prime Time's identity and progress in creating a system of supports and services for improving the quality of after-school programs in Palm Beach County.

The QIS Pilot Project

Two years ago, Prime Time's leadership made the decision to shift from a quality rating system to a quality improvement process, which would be more supportive and responsive to the individual needs of providers. Since that time, a large focus of Prime Time's work has been to carry out a pilot project to develop and test a QIS for after-school programs. This roughly 18-month process, which began in early 2006, was completed during the spring of 2007. Below we briefly review the main components of the QIS process and present findings from the past year.

The purpose of the pilot was to test a process for improving program quality and to establish a base line of quality at the beginning so that change over time could be measured. At the same time, consistent with Prime Time's new direction, it was important for participants in the pilot to view the process as one of continuous improvement rather than one of rating and accountability. The Palm Beach County Program Quality Assessment (PBC-PQA) was presented both as a tool for learning about standards of quality for after-school and youth development programs and as a guide to program improvement that communicated expectations, identified program needs, and provided benchmarks for tracking. As a learning tool, Prime Time and High/Scope maintained that it was important for program staff to do their own assessments of their programs as well as have an evaluation by external observers. Thus, the QIS pilot was designed to include both external assessments and self-assessments. In

addition, it was also decided that participants would receive an incentive of $1,500, $2,500, or $3,500 at the beginning of the pilot, depending on the size of their programs.

The QIS pilot process was structured into several different steps. (See Figure 1 below and additional information in Appendix A.) Following the official launch of the pilot in January 2006, outside assessors from High/Scope and Family Central conducted baseline assessments of program quality in thirty-eight programs using the PBC-PQA tool in March and early April 2006.[6] The PBC-PQA consists of four subscales: *safe environment*, *supportive environment*, *interaction*, and *engagement.* The instrument measures all aspects of program environments—physical, social, and personal—but particularly focuses on the interactional climate of the program and youth voice and engagement. The four subscales form a hierarchy in that *safe environment* can be considered a basic level of quality upon which to build the other levels (Akiva, 2005; Smith, 2007).[7]

Soon after the collection of external assessments, program directors and staff were trained to use the PBC-PQA tool and conducted their own self-assessments in April. In May, High/Scope trainers conducted sessions called program leadership training with participants in the pilot to review the results of both the external and self-assessments and to train program directors and staff in the use of the data to create program improvement plans. As reported last year, there was fairly high agreement between the external and internal program assessments. In addition, providers, by and large, felt positive about the process of collecting the data. Programs varied somewhat in their experiences, but most of the directors interviewed last year reported high satisfaction with the assessment experience. Program directors told us that their staff enjoyed being part of the process and the opportunity to observe other staff and activities at their center. For the most part, they found the tool "appropriate and easy to understand." Just a small number of providers found the self-assessment process difficult to understand and carry out. A small number of providers also reported that they felt that their external assessors did not spend enough time at their sites, did not always see the kinds of activities and interactions that were most representative of their programs, or conducted the assessments at busy times for programs, for example, during spring break or end-of-the-year activities. At the same time, assessors frequently complained about last-minute schedule changes by programs.[8]

During the summer and fall, a majority of the QIS providers completed program improvement plans. Each provider continued to work with a quality advisor and began working with Prime Time staff to implement their plans with the support of Prime Time's on-site technical assistance and coaching, informal and formal training, and use of curricular resources. In addition, a small number of programs received additional support and mentoring from five peer coaches who were hired and trained during the summer. A number of new workshops and trainings were offered in fall of 2006 to respond to some of the specific needs that were identified in the baseline assessments and incorporated into the program improvement

---

[6] One program dropped out midway through the pilot, so thirty-seven programs were involved during 2006-2007.

[7] In previous research on the High/Scope Youth PQA, a very similar instrument, most after-school and youth programs had better scores in the areas of "safe environment" and "supportive environment" than in "interaction" and "engagement." However, those that scored well in the areas of "interaction" and "engagement" were the ones that were rated highly by youth (Akiva, 2005).

[8] In response to these complaints, Prime Time planned to start the reassessment process early in 2007 to allow more time for scheduling and conducting the observations.

plans, particularly in the area of youth involvement and youth leadership. The final step in the QIS process was reassessment by Family Central assessors using the PBC-PQA in the winter and spring of 2007.[9]

Figure 1. Overview of the Prime Time After-School QIS Process[10]
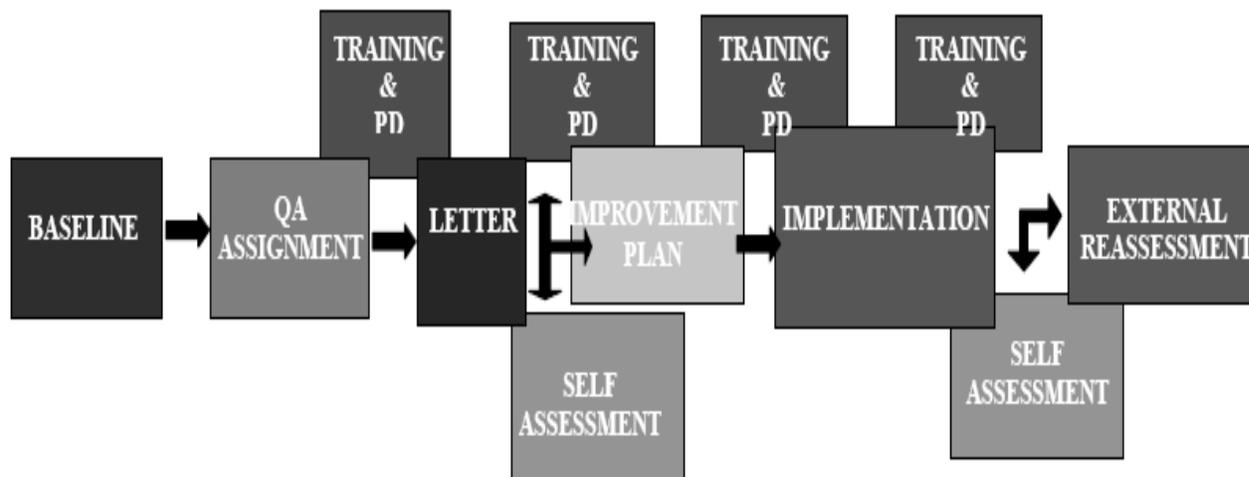
Directors' Perspectives on the QIS Process

Chapin Hall's November 2006 report presented findings from interviews with directors about the first half of the QIS pilot project, including the shift from the QRS to the QIS, the process of collecting external and internal base-line assessments, the appropriateness of the standards reflected in the PBC-PQA, and the process of creating program improvement plans based on data from the base-line assessments. There was some variability across the pilot programs in their experiences with the QIS, depending in part on the level of staff experience. However, by and large, directors were very positive about all of these aspects of the QIS. Although, as noted above, there were concerns about the timing of some of the assessments, most directors favored the "lower stakes" approach of the QIS in which funding and other resources are provided up front to foster improvement rather than tied to ratings of quality. At the same time, there was still uncertainty about the role of assessment and standards in relation to the quality improvement process. Although directors were generally in favor of the supportive approach of the QIS, they were unclear about how it would work for accountability purposes or what would motivate programs to change.

---

[9] Additional information on the PBC-PQA and findings from the early stages of the QIS pilot process are available in our previous report (Spielberger & Lockaby, 2006).
[10] Diagram developed by Prime Time (May 2007).

In this section of the report, we present findings from interviews with directors during the final year of the QIS pilot with a focus on the latter phases of the quality improvement process—the development and implementation of the program improvement plans and the reassessment process. We also discuss the directors' perspectives on the PBC-PQA instrument and quality standards and on how the QIS results will be used by providers, funders, and Prime Time. Subsequent sections of this report will discuss findings about other key activities integral to the QIS process, including professional development and training, on-site advising and peer coaching, the provision of curricular resources, and networking activities.

Development and Implementation of Program Improvement Plans

The director and one staff member from each site participated in the program leadership training, in which High/Scope and Prime Time trained them in how to interpret the results of the external base-line assessments and self-assessments and use them to develop program improvement plans. Participants began to develop their plans at the training and then continued to work on them at their sites so that other staff could be involved in the process. In addition to basing their plans on areas that the assessments indicated were weak, providers were advised to start with a small number of goals. Quality advisors also participated in some of the on-site discussions about the plans, so the final plans that were submitted to Prime Time typically were a product of suggestions made by directors, front-line staff, and quality advisors, although the last served primarily a supportive role.[11]

Implementation of the plans was expected to begin in the summer or fall of 2006. In line with their belief that the QIS process should be program-driven, Prime Time staff did not want to be too prescriptive about the process of improvement and told providers that the decision of when to start working on their goals would be up to them. Prime Time supports were to include a variety of services and resources, including on-site coaching and mentoring, modules and enhancements, professional development, and networking events. As will be discussed in a later section, the program improvement plans provide a basis for the on-site technical assistance provided by quality advisors and coaches in the current program year and topics for staff trainings. After plans were finalized, Prime Time staff reviewed them and looked for common themes across the programs. Based on that analysis as well as the assessment results, Prime Time staff identified several topic areas to address in fall workshops and training: for example, providing opportunities for children to make choices and to work cooperatively in small groups, conflict resolution, and planning and reflection.

Thirty-one (84%) of the thirty-seven pilot programs eventually submitted program improvement plans prior to their reassessments. We reviewed copies of about half of them. Based on areas in the PBC-PQA that received lower ratings, most of the plans highlighted areas in the domains of youth "interaction" and "engagement." Thus, specific items targeted for improvement in nearly all of the plans included several from these domains: namely, *youth have opportunities to set goals and make plans, to reflect on their activities, to participate in*

---

[11] At some sites, directors' comments suggest that quality advisors might have helped to foster a collaboration between the director and staff that might not have happened otherwise. There were five sites for which Prime Time records indicated a different combination of staff completed the plans or no information; in one, the plan was written by a director without input from staff; and in another, a director started the plan but staff finished it.

small groups, and *to share responsibility*. At least a third to a half of the program improvement plans we reviewed also mentioned the following from the "interaction" and "supportive environment" subscales: *staff use youth-centered approaches to reframe conflict, youth have the chance to make choices based on interests, youth have opportunities to partner with adults, activities support active engagement, staff effectively maintain clear limits by enforcing rules*, and *staff support youth with encouragement*.

When asked for their perspectives on the process of developing and then implementing their improvement plans, directors remembered the process favorably. They commented that following the program leadership training, the steps for developing the plan were clear; the process of working with staff on the plan made staff feel more invested in the plan; and the on-site support provided by the quality advisors made the task of completing the plan manageable. In interviews a year ago, most directors had been similarly positive about the process of developing the plan and in many cases said they knew before they received the results of their base-line assessments what changes were needed. However, in last year's interviews, some directors had been doubtful about if and how the plans would be implemented, whether it would result in real improvement, and the time frame for change. A director we quoted in the November 2006 report, for example, said, "We knew where we needed to go and what we need to do to improve before [we got our data, but] I just need to see how that's going to translate into a better program for us."

In contrast, a year later, most directors with whom we spoke could provide concrete examples of changes that had been made as well as how changes in quality can happen. According to one director: "It gave us the knowledge of what we needed to work on and it also helped us improve on better things for the kids. Now our field trips are better, now our schedules are better, our communication is a little better." "The person that was spearheading the QIS at my site was just awesome," said another director. "She brought in ideas, we gave ideas, we met with her and we set goals and objectives, and I think it was a great process." Below a director recalls in more detail the specific areas that her program addressed in the program improvement process:

> We were supposed to do something with reflection, because we lacked reflection time, deeply. So we came up with reflection journals, and now at the end of a field trip they'll say what they liked and disliked. We do trivia questions, "What did you like best about this?" Another one was to come up with small-group activities, but what if a child, or two or three children, don't want to do that, what's something else that they could do? So we came up with the centers and stations that are self-directed. For example, they could find all the words that started with a D or try to solve a puzzle in 10 seconds. There were three goals that we had to do.… The other one was to focus on the three C's, which were communication, consistency, and cooperation from the staff, so we're all doing the same thing. So I think those were the three we had to do.

Another theme that emerged in directors' comments about the program improvement planning and implementation was the extent to which they expressed ownership of the process. Almost without exception, every director voiced appreciation for the support and guidance Prime Time provided. As one director said, "It's good that there is a plan, and that we have Prime Time involved in the process to make sure it happens." But respondents varied in the

way they talked about who was driving the process. For some directors we interviewed, there was a sense that the director and staff were in charge of the process and responsible for the change with some guidance from Prime Time, whereas for others there was the sense that they were engaged in the process *for* Prime Time. Thus, in one of the quotes above, a director stated "We were *supposed* to do something for reflection" and then "those were the three we had to do." Some directors used the phrase "Prime Time wants us to." However, in other cases, directors talked about "we" meaning they and their staff were responsible, as in the following example: "We sit down and set objectives and then we try to meet those objectives. We will choose an area and set objectives as far as how the program is run as far as the quality and we try to meet those goals and we set deadlines."

Although some directors said they already had procedures in place for planning with staff, they felt that the structure of the QIS allowed them to be more deliberate in their observations and planning and that it would be easier to monitor progress if plans were put down in writing. In their view, it was also important to have the support of an intermediary such as Prime Time to help keep them moving forward. Moreover, there was evidence that some directors understood the planning process as one that had wider applicability than that of fulfilling the needs of the pilot. One director stated: "It made me see my strengths and weaknesses. Not only can I use it here, but I could use it with any program if I were to go someplace else. It got the buy-in from the staff to see where our programs were. I like where Prime Time is trying to go with this."

Another director described using the procedures to solve problems in other areas of the program:

> My perception of the program improvement plan is that it really works…. My staff help me make decisions as to what changes we may need to make in order to make the program run better. So they are included when I see a problem, I ask them what they think and they give me suggestions and we go from there.

Another director noted: "We're going in the right direction and doing great. I think that Prime Time wants you to use the plan as a model. And we're learning/realizing that small steps are more important. You work little by little and you gain a lot; often the bigger steps are the ones that get lost."

At the same time, it should be noted that a small number of providers with less experience, fewer resources, or who were involved in getting their program licensed, indicated that that they had struggled or were struggling with the program improvement process. In the words of one director:

> There would have been greater overall [improvement] if we were able to be more involved in it. But it has helped us to see where we are and where we're supposed to be – that's its purpose and that's how we've used it. For me, personally, the problem is time. I'm it – the program director, the admin person, the staff; and it's hard to do all of those things. You almost need a quality assurance person who makes sure things are running smoothly in terms of the trainings and things. And that's hard for one individual to do on a day-to-day basis. So for us, that's really hard. I mean it's a big part of running an organization – the quality

assurance part of it and that's something that needs to be revisited on a daily basis to make sure that everyone is doing what they're supposed to be doing. It's not anyone's fault that that particular tool doesn't work for us, it's just our situation.

This director went on to say: "It's clear what Prime Time wants to have happen, how to get there isn't as clear. For our program it hasn't been easy because of the obstacles. In a perfect scenario, I think it would be easy to achieve the goals or parameters they would like us to achieve."

As noted above, six (16%) of the pilot sites did not complete their program improvement plans. Five of them were school-based programs (three middle schools, one elementary SACC program, and one Beacon Center program); the sixth was a city parks and recreation program. These programs also were less involved in other Prime Time activities, such as networking and training events, and less likely to make use of the curricular resources than other programs. For example, on average, staff of these programs attended only one training and between one and two networking events, whereas others providers attended an average of three trainings and between three and four networking meetings.

We have limited information about why these programs were less involved, partly because we were unable to contact or schedule interviews with some of them. According to Prime Time staff, some providers generally were easier to contact and engage than others.[12] In one case, a director was badly hurt as a result of an accident, which was followed by illness in the family. In another case, a director who had been an enthusiastic participant in the early phases of the QIS pilot took a leave of absence midyear. Although she returned before the end of the program year, she did not complete the plan. In our interview last year, the director said she understood what needed to change in her program but did not have a clear vision of how that change would occur, in part, because new staff were expected to start in the fall.

In a third case, a director commented positively on the QIS process and assessment tool and relationships with Prime Time but did not reveal that the site had not completed the program improvement process. Moreover, it appeared that the priorities of this site were focused more on internal communication at the site rather than on quality improvements:

Prime Time and some other people have come and viewed what we currently offer and made recommendations towards a quality improvement plan and we have taken their observations and we tried to adjust accordingly as much as we could towards what they thought we could do. What they do I do value because it is different eyes and different ears and so forth to look at the program.

---

[12] In our experience in scheduling interviews and site visits with directors, it sometimes took several tries to get in touch with an individual and appointments often had to be rescheduled; often some issue would come up at the program and the director was no longer available when we called or stopped to visit, even though the appointment had been confirmed the day before. It also should be noted that there were changes instituted in the fall of 2006 in principals' responsibilities for after-school programs at individual schools that changed the relationships between Beacon Centers and school-operated programs or changed the kinds of programming they did. These changes, which varied from school to school, might have interfered with their work with Prime Time.

This director continued: "My main goal is to know where everyone is all the time. We run a pretty big program so I wanted to make sure that there is constant communication throughout all the hours of operation and it is the best it can be. And I think we have done that." The program had not sought support from Prime Time to meet this goal, because, the director explained, "It was mostly an internal process."

The Reassessment Process

All of the thirty-seven pilot sites were reassessed using the PBC-PQA observational tool, regardless of whether they had completed an improvement plan. These reassessments began early, in January 2007, to allow for school testing and break schedules. This early start also ensured that there would be enough time to conduct the observations, which were completed in April.[13] As with the base-line assessments, both local assessors from Family Central and external High/Scope assessors conducted the observations. Directors were not told the exact date of their reassessment visits in advance, but they were informed in a letter from Prime Time approximately when they would occur and who the assessor would be. As one of the assessors explained:

> The point is that they shouldn't have to do anything to prepare for our visit. We need a little bit of an element of surprise, because we want to capture what is natural for them. Then they receive a letter from me announcing that I'm coming, and then they get a call the day before the visit to see if there have been schedule changes, etc. Sometimes we get on site and the activities have changed so much that we are forced to do something totally different than we were planning to do.

In scheduling the reassessments, Prime Time and Family Central decided to start with the programs that seemed ready as well as a small number of programs that had not been very engaged with the QIS process and on-site technical assistance. This would allow programs with greater need of time and assistance in implementing improvements more time to work with their staff, quality advisors, and, in some cases, peer coaches before being assessed. As in the base-line assessments, programs again were encouraged to do some form of self-assessment as part of their preparation for the external reassessments.

PQA Results

A separate report prepared by High/Scope will provide details on the actual results of the reassessments and comparison with the base-line results. Briefly, on the baseline measures, the pilot programs achieved higher scores in the first two areas, "safe environment" and "supportive environment," which is consistent with other research by High/Scope.[14] On the third and fourth subscales, "interaction" and "engagement," on average, they received lower

---

[13] In addition to program observations, assessors conducted brief surveys with youth immediately following an observed activity to collect data on youth engagement. Then results of these surveys were analyzed by High/Scope researchers and compared with the PBC-PQA results to assess the relationship between youth's own reports of an activity and assessors' observations of youth engagement.

[14] Sources: Akiva (2005) and presentation by Charles Smith in meeting of Prime Time steering committee, December 6, 2005. Dr. Smith also said that other research indicates that self-assessments are generally higher than external assessments but reflect similar trends in terms of program strengths and weaknesses.

ratings; these areas also had larger distributions of scores, with differences of 1.86 and 2.69, respectively, between the lowest and highest score on a 5-point scale. Based on a preliminary report presented by High/Scope to Prime Time staff and QIS participants in May 2007 (Smith, 2007), it appears that, overall, the results of the reassessment were very positive (see Table 1). Programs made improvements in all four areas of the PBC-PQA.[15] On the first three scales—"safe environment," "supportive environment," and "interaction"—the average gains across the pilot programs were statistically significant (Smith, 2007). Although not statistically significant, there also was some progress made in the fourth area, "engagement," which is considered an area that can take longer to modify than the other areas.

Table 1. Baseline and Reassessment Ratings on PBC-PQA Form A Subscales for 37 QIS Pilot Sites[a]

PQA Subscale	Mean Rating		Mean Difference
	Baseline	Reassessment	
I. Safe Environment	4.45	4.77	.32
II. Supportive Environment	3.84	4.29	.45
III. Interaction	3.31	3.61	.30
IV. Engagement	2.60	2.85	.25
Overall program rating	3.55	3.88	

[a] The PQA rating scale ranges from 1 to 5. Actual ratings were obtained from presentation by Charles Smith to Prime Time in May 2007. The base-line ratings are just slightly different than those quoted in our November 2006 report because one program dropped out of the pilot.

The Assessment Experience

All of the directors we interviewed and who had been assessed reported that they and their staff were comfortable with the external assessor, even though, as a few acknowledged, staff—especially newer staff—were a little uncomfortable or anxious: "It was fine," recalled one director. "You know, everyone feels a bit uncomfortable." Another director said some of her staff had had unpleasant experiences with assessment in the past: "The assessment tool that they use in some places is kind of harsh, it's real strong, because we have people here who are not professional people." She added, "They pretty much know what's going on because they've been observed and had it done to them numerous times, but it still isn't the same and some of the things that they're looking for from some of our staff, they haven't been taught or they're not aware of it."

Others commented, however, "Yes, we're used to being monitored," or "We're used to people always dropping in." One director was particularly enthusiastic about one of the outside assessors: "She was really a plus and she wasn't a person that came in and everybody was 'oh no the assessor is here' and she just came in and everybody felt comfortable with her being here and I think she was in one classroom for an hour, all the teachers wanted her to come to their classroom. She was a real plus, I hope next year they send the same person."

Some directors made a point of preparing their staff and setting the assessment process

---

[15] Smith's May 2007 presentation also noted that on individual items within the scales, there was more growth in areas that were the focus of the program improvement plans.

in a "low stakes" context for them. As one director said, "I made sure that I explained to them that it was not something where they were coming to point out what we were doing wrong, but to help us see where we need to improve." Another director reported the following:

> I think [the reassessment] went great. They came out, did what they have to do. We've been prepared since August for this; we just didn't know when it would happen. But my comment to the staff was that we know what we need to do and if we start doing it all the time, its going to become natural to us, and the kids will get used to it, too. But it can't be something we do just because we have monitors coming in to observe or because I'm walking around. I tell the staff, "It has to be something you're committed to doing and that happens everyday." I ask the staff, "If you walked into a program, what would you want to see?"

At the same time, there were still some directors who indicated that managing the QIS process of both internal and external assessment was challenging, although they did not seem to feel quite as "overwhelmed by all of these processes," in the words of one informant, as they did during the collection of the base-line data. One director said the external assessment went well, but he added: "The internal [assessment] is difficult when your staff is changing and you're trying to manage your duties on site. It's challenging."

At the time of our interviews, all but a handful of programs had been reassessed. Directors were generally pleased with the results of their reassessments—as they were with the results of the first, baseline assessments. They seemed, for the most part, to take the process in stride. Most reported having made progress from the previous year on their targeted goals, and no one expressed surprise with the results. "It was very enlightening … [and] pretty much right on key," one director reported. Another stated: "It went fine. We went down in one area and up in another area, but that was expected.... I have to commend my staff; when we got assessed, I was on vacation." Two program directors commented that their program was rated more highly by the external assessor than staff had rated it themselves, noting that "we tend to be a little hard on ourselves."

Just a few directors acknowledged some disappointment with the outcomes. One told us the following:

> Evaluations were done during two different times, and I don't think the scores reflect the way the program runs. We were at a school site during one evaluation and things were a little off. Now that we have a grip on the schedule and things are different, I think the way things are being run is more representative of what we can do. But it was [consistent], and they are the things we've been working on.

In addition to this director, two other respondents felt that the assessor had not gotten a representative view of their whole program or had not spent enough time at the program to get a full picture.[16] Still, they did not dispute the evaluation their program received.

---

[16] A similar view was presented by a director who had not yet had her reassessment at the time of her interview. She said, "[The assessors] are going to be coming in tomorrow and next week, and it is just for 2 hours each day, which is kind of a small amount of time to come in and really get a feel for the program."

Some directors were already talking about next year when we interviewed them. "The assessment is over this year," one said matter-of-factly. "It went fine; we did better. We've been told that we have to start again in the fall at another base line. But we did improve." These directors, again, seemed to be taking the reassessment in stride and gearing up for next year. This perhaps reflects the beginning of an understanding that the QIS is a continuing process of quality improvement, a concept that Prime Time leadership and other stakeholders would like to take hold at all programs in the county. This view was also suggested in this director's words: "Well, right now we've set some goals and we're working toward meeting them. We've just finished with our final assessment for this year, so actually, next Saturday, we're meeting to talk about how we're going to make it better for next year." At the same time, the director understood there could be some hurdles if staff turn over: "But again, if we come back in August and two people have left—that's going to create a problem. I've dealt with that for 2 years in a row now but you just plan ahead and then make whatever changes you have to."

One exception to this generally positive view of the assessment experience was that of a program director with a city agency. Although she told us that the quality standards were clear to her and praised Prime Time staff for their efforts in preparing her staff to be assessed, she appeared to find the whole assessment process confusing. Her comments below indicate a lack of understanding about and frustration with the process as well as, perhaps, the inability of Prime Time staff to clarify the process for her staff.

Well, [Prime Time staff] have tried to explain it to them and they understand it to a certain point, but then, like I say, the monitors that come out, they're so professional, it's like you either know it or you don't. When I come in, I'm coming in doing my thing and if you're on the same level where I am … but they're really, really nice when they come out, but they're still looking for something and the only way they'll get what they're looking for is like … you can't …

Thus, the director worried about the impact on her staff when they received a low rating:

Some of the things they're looking for from some of our staff, they haven't been taught or they're not aware of it. Then when you come in, if you see this person is doing a fantastic job and you don't see it, why would you mark them down, you know. Because if you're teaching reading and you're doing an excellent job, and I'm looking for you to say one word and because you don't say that one word or respond in a certain way that I think you should respond, I shouldn't mark you down as long as you're getting your point across and the kids are enjoying what they're doing, so why mark them down. To me, it cuts their self-esteem down a little bit because I think if I do the extra training, I stay late, I set up my room, I do everything that needs to be done, here you walk in because I didn't say or do what you think I should have done, you want to mark me down.

Despite her concerns about the assessment process, this director was favorable with the feedback Prime Time staff provided afterward. Although she expected her supervisor's response to a score of, say, 2 in a particular area would be to say he wanted her "to get a 5 next time," the Prime Time staff helped her understand that was unlikely to happen quickly:

We sat around the table and we discussed [the results], and they let you know, "Well, this is why you got this," because some of the ones that we might have scored a little bit low on, we were thinking we shouldn't have and we thought we were doing great, so she kind of broke it down and she said, "Well, I can't tell you exactly what they were looking for, I can't tell you because I don't know what they were looking for because they ____ it as individuals, but I can tell you why this is like that" and she would go around and look at exactly where they were looking at, she said, "Well I can tell you why you got cut down on that, you scored so low on that and this is why."

The director went on to say that the Prime Time staff told her and her staff:

"To be honest, you're not going to get 5 when they come out again, unless you just go build a whole new building and start over, everything brand new, you're not going to get a 5." She said, "You want it to look like you're trying to improve and you're not just trying to get a high score, that what you're doing has a meaning, not just go out and say, 'we need this right here to get a five.'" [She said,] "Whatever you do, you do it … because [your] kids really need it." If I score lower here, but I see right here that I can do something else that's more meaningful to my children, then this has to stay right here for a little while. She [the Prime Time staffer] is very good, she breaks it down like that to us.

We quote this director at some length not because she represents the majority of providers participating in the pilot, but because she was persuasive about the uncertainties of the assessment process and the ambiguities in the results for her. Her experience is important because she may well represent organizations that will come into the system with less basic quality and stability and with varying levels of staff experience than the majority of those participating in the pilot project.

Additional Comments on the QIS, Standards, and Assessment

In last year's report, based on the experiences of some program directors in the early stages of the QIS, we raised a concern that for some programs, the QIS on top of other assessments and monitoring by agencies and funders might be difficult for under-resourced programs to manage. Or, there was the possibility of confusion among the requirements of different procedures and measurement systems. This year, as described above, most program directors seemed to take the process in stride and at least reported that staff had felt similarly. One factor, again, seemed to be that directors could actually see the results of the process, whereas a year ago they were less certain about where it was going.

Directors involved in the pilot also recognized the need for some means of measuring program quality and making improvements. They also stated that the quality standards were clear. Although a few directors had had questions about the meaning and scoring of some of the individual items on the PBC-PQA (e.g., what it means to provide "choices" to youth), only one or two disputed their appropriateness for their programs. One was the director of an arts program who said, "The QIS is basically for after-school programs and we are a year-round performing arts school, but it does help somewhat." When asked if the QIS should be changed to fit her program better, she said it should, but she could not envision how it might be different. She also admitted that she did not have a clear understanding of how the QIS results

will be used: "I don't have as much [understanding] as I should have. We'll have to go by what is on the program, we'll have to reschedule our program to work with their [Prime Time's] program."

Thus, for most of the program directors, there was more outward acknowledgment of and appreciation for the standards—including the view that youth should be engaged, given more choice in their activities, and play a larger role in determining program activities—than was expressed by directors a year ago. One director related the following:

> We always used to base our stuff on the NAA [National AfterSchool Association] standards, that was our measurement for quality. And that did have some to do with the interaction of teachers with kids but to me it had more to do with your classroom structures and furniture and safety codes and all these things. So we always focused on those first, especially since licensing was looking at all that too. But this has been much more, because we also have the new AYD [Advancing Youth Development] training, and because of that being about real child-centered growth—much more leadership development in children and much more input from kids, that whole thing was something we never focused on or thought about a whole lot. So I think it has been a big help because the QIS for us is based on the AYD standards.

Moreover, some directors noted that the standards in general, and the PBC-PQA in particular, were also applicable to other programs. "I think the standards are good for our program, but also good for any after-school program," one director stated. "You have the staff buying into it, and it's a good thing." Another program director said: "It made me see my strengths and weaknesses. Not only can I use it here, but I could use it with any program if I were to go someplace else." A third director reported: "Today I'm going to use the assessment tool on our other program. I don't run that program; they're just using me because I know the tool and can do it with them so they can improve their program." Her comment also illustrates how she herself has gained knowledge and skills from the QIS process that she can share with other programs.

Perceived Program Benefits

Thus, when asked for how the QIS had helped their program, many directors were able to cite examples of real changes such as better communication among staff, better activity planning and scheduling, and more involvement of youth in planning, decision-making, and problem solving. One director summed it up this way: "The process has worked well. The staff have gained a wealth of knowledge in terms of what needs to be done to ensure quality. And the kids have gained as well because they're now being assessed in terms of behavior and are getting new experiences, too." According to another director, who would continue to be part of the QIS the following year:

> So now we know what to do and we can improve on it. We start at the basics so that's kind of what the QIS standard, pilot program and Prime Time did for us. It gave us the knowledge of what we needed to work on and it also helps us improve on better things for the kids.... All around there are things that we continue to improve on and that's what we're here for. The program is existing because of the students and the parents; what we want to do is to keep improving it for them. That's what the QIS standard did for me, with the pilot program.

Another benefit was simply the impetus to make time for change. One director who was in the middle of the self-assessment process at the time of our interview said that observing the program with the PBC-PQA was encouraging her and her staff to make changes they had not had time for in the past. These comments suggest the value of the tool and the self-assessment process for learning about the important elements of program quality. Similarly, another director talked similarly about the value of the QIS, even though staff turnover can impede the program improvement process:

> I think [the QIS process] is great. I would have to stop and think what I would like to see improved about it, but just off the top of my head—I realize they give you something to do the whole year. They come in at the beginning of the year to evaluate and then they don't come back again until the end of the year. Those are the points where I assume they are going to see if you get better. And then of course you do have some staff turnover, I know the people who were here last spring are not the same. We went over and over how it looked, but when they judge you by two staff members, which could be somebody in their first year—that is a little frustrating. But I think it is good because everybody has gotten a good feel for what we are talking about when we say "reflection with children" and what are we talking about when we say "open-ended questions."

On the other hand, as reflected in some of the comments above, a shortage of staff, time, or resources can make the QIS challenging. A director quoted earlier said that although her program had improved, it had not made as much progress as she had hoped because of shortages of time and staff. As she explained, she has multiple roles in the organization: "I'm it—the program director; I'm the admin person; I'm the staff and it's hard to do all of those [quality assurance] things … It's not anyone's fault that that particular tool doesn't work for us; it's just our situation. Her experience reinforces the need for programs to have a basic level of stability before embarking on the QIS.

Finally, one director believed that an additional, practical benefit was that her program would not have to go through a reapplication process to CSC, her funder, in response to a new request for proposal:

> If we didn't do the pilot program, I do believe, in some small way, that we would not have been rolled over in the process for CSC. I have spoken with some directors of programs who were not in the pilot program and they were not rolled over into CSC; they had to reapply again. I know everyone who was in the pilot program and they were positive about [the fact that] they were not made to go through the process.

Use of the QIS Results

Last year, several directors raised questions about how CSC and other funders would use the results of the QIS in the end. Although they regarded the QIS as a supportive process, they predicted that it would have to change in the future. Some questioned what the motivation or incentive for programs to change would be. The QIS was a fine system for the moment, one director said, but once all the programs had reached the standards of quality, Prime Time would need to go back to a rating system of stars or letters (A, B, C) with another set of expectations related to these ratings. Some directors wondered what would happen if the QIS conflicted with the expectations of funders or other agency monitoring tools. Their comments led us to

suggest the need for more clarity about the role of assessment and standards, and the quality improvement process, although we also assumed that these issues would become clearer in time, as Prime Time, providers, and funders learned more about the process of program improvement and what it takes to create real change.

This year, we asked directors again if they understood how the QIS and the results of the process would be used. As illustrated in Table 2, their responses to this question varied. A few directors talked about how the results would be used by their own program, as indicated by the following: "We'll use this information to make things better for programs globally. Programs do research to inform them and I assume that this is what will happen." Others talked about how Prime Time would use the results: for example, "Prime Time uses it to see how they can help us." Or, as another director responded, "I think [Prime Time]'ll use [the results] to get funding and to show that their process works and that they are making a difference in the programs that they are supporting—that they're providing quality services to us and that is making a difference to the community and the kids." And a third group of directors discussed the way in which their funder or funders would use the results. "I do see that CSC will be watching that you do improve in areas each year. They are the funder and they are requiring it out of every single after-school program in the county now starting next August."

Some of these responses were not unlike what we heard a year ago. At the same time, there were more comments about how providers themselves would use the results than there were a year ago. There also appeared to be less anxiety about the assessment process itself even on the part of those who knew they would be reviewed by their funder or agency. Both of these differences, we think, are because of the fact that directors and, reportedly, their staff now have first-hand evidence of improvements in their program. The view of the QIS, which Prime Time staff have continued to promote, as a *process* of continuous improvement—as opposed to a final product—has also begun to penetrate the after-school community.

In the end, an important factor in how successful directors will be with the QIS depends on their capacity. As indicated by the small group of programs that struggled to stay engaged in the QIS or to make changes in their programs, a basic level of quality and stability is needed before embarking on the QIS. Providers may have good intentions and want to improve but still be overwhelmed by just running their organization, which is why it is important to have some preliminary assessment to make sure programs are ready for the QIS and frequent check-ins along the way. In addition, it will be important to continue to follow the progress of programs participating in the QIS over a longer period of time as it is likely that different circumstances, such as facility or staff changes, can slow progress or suppress previous gains.

Table 2. Themes in Program Directors' Views of the QIS

Topic	Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Program improvement process	The process is effective and really works.	"It made me see my strengths and weaknesses. Not only can I use it here, but I could use it with any program if I were to go someplace else. It got the buy-in from the staff to see where our programs were. I like where Prime Time is trying to go with this." "I think that it's incredible and we've benefited greatly from it. I love it so much I brought it back to the rest of my staff and said we need to be doing this for all of our programs. It was so helpful for us." "It gave us the knowledge of what we needed to work on and helped us improve on better things for the kids. Now our field trips are better, our schedules are better, our communication is a little better." "The person that was spearheading the QIS at my site was just awesome. She brought in ideas, we gave ideas, we met with her, and we set goals and objectives, and I think it was a great process."
	Steps in the process are clear.	"The new system, they were trying to go to this QIS program, this quality improvement program, which was beneficial to us because it helps us break down and see … where our weakness is in evaluating the top to the bottom, ways that we can improve and interact with our kids." "We sit down and set objectives and then we try to meet those objectives. We will choose an area and set objectives ... and we try to meet those goals and we set deadlines."
	Prime Time gets staff involved in program improvement.	"My perception of the program improvement plan is that it really works.… My staff help me make decisions as to what changes we may need to make in order to make the program run better. So they are included when I see a problem; I ask them what they think and they give me suggestions and we go from there."
Assessment process and assessment tool	Consistency in standards and measurement is important.	"[O]nce you start with something, stick with it and don't change it … you never know what's going on because you get started on something and the next thing you know it's been changed. A few years ago we had a different tool—that I thought was really good.… But then they tossed it out and got something new. All I am asking is that they take one tool and stick with it."
	The assessment tool is appropriate and reflects needed improvements.	"Tool is great because we can see where we are and the improvements that need to happen." "It is like a mirror ... it is like a reflection of where we need to improve, and also a reflection of where we are doing good." "Everything they asked was legit, appropriate, and it was in compliance with what we needed to do."
	Self-assessment was valuable.	"The self-assessment showed that kids are very pleased with the program…. The girls wanted to see more activities that they can get involved in like tennis and exercise classes and stuff."
	Staff felt comfortable with external assessor.	"She was really a plus … and she just came in and everybody felt comfortable with her being here … all the teachers wanted her to come to their classroom…. I hope next year they send the same person." "They came out, did what they have to do ... it can't be something we do just because we have monitors coming in to observe ... it has to be something you're committed to doing and that happens every day. I ask the staff, 'If you walked into a program, what would you want to see?'"
	Program used external assessment to improve.	"For instance, I was using large groups before; now I know that working in small groups is better. They've helped me with safety precautions…."
	Program involved the staff and children in the process.	"So we had more input from the kids, more input from the staff and that's how we got our improvements; they were included every step of the way…. This is something that's going to keep existing and probably something we're going to have to improve on; it's probably going to become part of our mission statement.... They felt like they were part of the system, not being told what to do."
	More frequent assessments would be helpful.	"[W]e would like you to come in and evaluate just that one [goal] maybe after 4 or 5 months and see if we can continue to change to a new topic [goal] that we think we need to work on … and not have it in stone for the whole year."
How QIS results will be used	So Prime Time can assess program's strengths and weaknesses and help them improve	"They [Prime Time] were just gonna use it as a guide to see where everybody was, and see how can they help improve where we're at." "Prime Time uses it to see how they can help us. Not to tear us down but to build us up, to keep the kids interested and the teachers so you can keep the teachers you have and not have high turnover."
	To establish basic quality standards	"[I]t will be used to say the basic of what we expect from an after-school program is this.... We expect you to be a safe environment, we expect you to be licensed; there are certain things we expect."
	So programs can help themselves improve	"I was able to look at our data from last year and revamp the program based on that." "We'll use this information to make things better for programs globally. Programs do research to inform them and I assume that this is what will happen."
	To help Prime Time secure funding	"I think they'll use them to get funding and to show that their process works and that they are making a difference in the programs that they are supporting—that they're providing quality services to us and that is making a difference to the community and the kids."
	To help programs secure funding	"The results will be used to improve the quality of the program and help secure funding for next year." "I do see that CSC will be watching that you do improve in areas each year. They are the funder and they are requiring it out of every single after-school program in the county now starting next August." "In the end, it will come down to additional funding opportunities and I think everyone likes money."
	To display to county assessors	"I know how we used the results; I don't know how anyone else is using the results. We just got monitored by the county…. I showed them the QIS and our scores and stuff—they said 'This is perfect.' This is what you need when you're trying to get funding. They loved that it was all lined out and I'm really happy that we had it."
	Not sure of purpose	"[T]he only discussion we've really had about this is that different programs have different funders and there are different levels and we're trying to bring everyone up to the same level." "I know for us, how we're using it is to show me the strengths and weaknesses of our program. But I don't know what specifically the QIS is for."

Agency Directors' Involvement in and Perspectives on the QIS

For real change to occur in program quality, it is helpful and often essential to have the full commitment of all levels of an organization, front-line staff, supervisors, program directors, and agency heads (e.g., Spielberger, Horton, Michels & Halpern 2005). Thus, in interviews we asked program directors these questions about the knowledge and involvement of their agency directors in the QIS process: How much did they understand about the process? How supportive were they?

More than half of our sample of program directors had little to say about the role of their agency directors. We had a sense from them that agency heads were aware of their involvement in the QIS and generally supportive but not well informed. Eleven directors, or a little more than a third of our sample, did talk positively about the support of their agency directors in the QIS process. In these cases, the level of involvement of agency heads varied. Most were described as supportive, and about half were described as both supportive and informed.[17] Another director reported that: "Our president and founder knows what Prime Time does. He knows that they used to give us a lot of money so he's very supportive. He knows less about our involvement with Prime Time and our participation, but there are people in between the president and myself who are more aware of what's going on."

In a few cases, agency directors had participated in a Prime Time training or met with a peer coach. A particularly engaged agency director, according to one program director, has "been very supportive. Initially we both attended all the trainings and then spoke with our staff about what the quality and assessment piece is. We've had numerous conversations about how to improve and what needs to be done. We've spent a lot of time trying to make sure that we both know what we need to do." Another director also reported, "My supervisor has gone to several [of Prime Time's trainings] because that's part of her job description; I've been to a few in the past year too as well as the site coordinator."

In a few other cases, agency directors were supportive but rather distant from the process; for example, one director described the agency head as "very supportive, yes, but not very involved." Another stated that her agency director "is aware of the QIS process and what is going on and why it is good to have it. She had a meeting about a year ago with one of the coaches who came over to talk to her. She is supportive of the process though not directly involved in the QIS process." Only one director really conveyed what seemed to be a lack of support from her superiors:

> They're aware of it. They're not involved in it in any way. Or are involved only to the extent that we're pursuing licensing. They're not really supportive either. We're in two different locations and we just have basic communication. No one (except for me) is really interested. They are interested in the overall crime prevention.

---

[17] How much an agency director is involved, or how much communication a program director might have with the head of an agency to reliably report on that involvement, might depend on the agency's size. For example, program directors at larger agencies such as a parks program or Middle School program might not know if the head of their agency was involved, for example, in the development of the QIS.

Some program directors appeared to be more proactive than others in terms of making sure that their agency leader was informed. One director told us her agency director "knows every step that we've taken. I'm program and she's fiscal. While I have made sure she has all the information and she knows how to access different things if she were going to deal with it, she hasn't really been involved." Another program director reported:

> My director was involved and my city manager was involved and that's been one of my goals this whole time, to make sure they understood, to keep meeting with them individually and then finding ways to attach things like budgets into it so we could get supplies for the rooms or set up the rooms or get reflection journals if that's what's needed to fulfill requirements.

Two directors also noted that agency directors are supportive because they can see the results in their programs. "[My director] has 'joined forces' with Prime Time," one said. "She can see the value in having them. She's also easily accessible and can see the results we're getting from working with Prime Time." Another stated: "I relay the information from Prime Time to her. I make sure she gets a copy of all the assessments. She's been great because she knows it will help the program."

We also interviewed four agency directors, who confirmed much of what we learned from program directors. These four agency directors were positive in their perceptions of the QIS, explaining that it provides the needed structure for programs to look at the services they're providing and how they work with kids. As one director noted, "They start to become more reflective and be able to think about how they can do things better."

Another agency director spoke favorably about the QIS process because, in her view, "receiving all the data and then making plans based on that is exactly what should be done." However, she did not know whether programs are actually working toward the goals they established in the planning process. Another director noted that she/he was discouraged from attending the early trainings about the QIS process because of restrictions on the number of people who could attend the trainings and the priority given to front-line staff to ensure that the training would "get directly to the line staff." This director understood these goals but thought that agency directors should have been welcome to participate in the trainings.

Finally, these four agency directors wanted to be kept informed regarding the overall progress of the QIS, but especially about their programs' assessment results. Two talked specifically about having been intensely engaged by Prime Time during the 2 years prior to this one, and then hearing little about Prime Time or the QIS process. Most of the working committees that formed around the QIS stopped meeting when the QIS began operating and the Out-of-School Consortium no longer had a steering committee, and while this was understandable to them, they felt as if they no longer knew what was going on. They advised that Prime Time, in the words of one informant, "have a commitment about keeping people involved at the higher level in order for middle management [i.e., directors] to do [the QIS] successfully." Thus, these directors also believe that to provide sufficient support to program directors implementing program improvement plans and for them to be successful with the QIS, it will be important to engage agency directors as well as front-line staff.

Quality Advising and Coaching

The assistance provided by quality advisors and peer coaches to program directors and program staff continues to be a very important component of all of the supports Prime Time provides to the after-school program community. As the value of these two supports has become more and more apparent, the attention and effort that Prime Time devotes to them has increased. Early in the 2005-2006 program year, Prime Time restructured the on-site technical assistance component of the QIS, reducing the number of quality advisors from four to two. Two quality advisors became community resource advocates, and the two remaining quality advisors continued to provide support to programs in the pilot. During 2006-2007, one quality advisor moved to a different position within Prime Time, and Prime Time hired two new quality advisors, for a total of three. The programs were then redistributed among the quality advisors, with each quality advisor assigned to twelve or thirteen programs.

Also during the 2006-2007 program year, Prime Time identified, hired, and trained five peer coaches to work with eight programs (three coaches worked with two programs each and two coaches worked with one program each). These programs had all requested support in specific areas via their quality advisors and, thus, were judged by Prime Time to be in need of more support and guidance than the quality advisors could provide. A great deal was learned and accomplished from the quality advising and peer coaching processes this year, and as the advisors, coaches, programs, and Prime Time continue to learn more, these vital one-on-one supports will only improve.

The Quality Advising Experience

Comments from directors about their relationships with their quality advisors were again, without exception, positive. Their comments also reflected the recent changes in staffing and the redistribution of programs among staff, in that several mentioned having new quality advisors, and a couple were not sure who their quality advisors were. Directors praised the quality advisors for their willingness to listen, accessibility, availability, flexibility, responsiveness, creativity, and resourcefulness. One director put it this way:

> I have a new one now and she is very good. Both of them, the one I had before and the one I have now, are very accessible. When I need them, I can call or e-mail them and I always get a response right back. They offer any kind of support, anything I need I can get it from them, whether it's modules I need or some other type of assistance – like if I want them to come out and evaluate me or the program – at a drop of a dime they would do those things for me.

Several directors stated that the quality advisors will do whatever is necessary to get the programs the help they need, in whatever form required. One director said that her quality advisor came to her site and provided training tailored to their specific needs on several occasions:

> She did all the training herself, and the only thing she asked for was different suggestions. She said: "You know what they really, really need. I'm not going to tell you that I need you to do this and I need you to do that…. I do not deal with these children every single day….

Give me suggestions of what you want me to do the trainings on…. Give me a couple of days to get my thoughts together, and we're going to work it out and we're going to do it," and that's what happened.

Another said: "Our quality advisor has been great, coming out and providing trainings specifically to our staff. So they've really bent over backwards trying to provide whatever assistance they can for us." Among the group of providers who were working with new quality advisors, two directors in particular were especially pleased with how the transition was handled. One said:

Well, we just met. In that time, she's made a point to come out and talk with the staff. She's brought resources, and has made sure we have the information on the advance training. So while I've only seen her twice, she has made sure that she has been active in learning our needs. I do feel that if I have a request, I can call or e-mail her and she would follow through. I think that's important.

The other director stated:

My quality advisor changed recently, and what I really liked about the whole process is that when she was leaving she came to talk to me and told me that she was going to be getting a smaller caseload. I really thought that was quite professional of her to come and tell me, rather than just disappearing – it made me really happy to see this happen.

The quality advising process has evolved over the course of the last 2 years both in terms of the manner by which support is provided to programs and, in some instances, the nature of the support. Now that advisors have been working with programs for 2 years, they are beginning to provide less hands-on support, presumably as programs become comfortable with less direct support. Also, as professional development is tailored to both programs' needs (i.e., as stated by the goals in their program improvement plans) and the state of (and advances in) the field of after-school programming, and other factors, it makes sense that changes would occur with respect to the support provided by quality advisors. For example, as one program director explained:

Anytime we have a question, they answer it, and if they can't, they find out how they can and then get back to us right away. The Web site has been very helpful. Sometimes we don't even have to call, we can just look on the Web site. Before it was very hands-on, you know, holding our hand, and now it's like here's where you can go to get the information. It seems to work better.

One program director discussed how the level of interaction has changed over time. She described her first advisor as "very involved, providing the support that was needed (e.g., funding, frequent visits)." Now that she has transitioned to her third quality advisor, she has been having less interaction with her advisor than she has ever had before, which is a concern for her. However, she continues to be satisfied with the support she does receive: "She came and we met and talked about the QIS – she was so willing to answer any of my questions about the assessment. She was very encouraging because of how we had improved. Whenever I see

her we talk a bit. We have a great relationship and she's always very encouraging when I see her, it's just not that often."

The changes this director is experiencing in her relationship with her quality advisor are likely due to multiple factors. These include not only the individual interactional style of the quality advisors but also a general shift in Prime Time's views of the manner in which assistance is provided and of the nature of the assistance to be given. There also may be different levels of need or expectation on the part of directors about on-site technical assistance, with some believing that it would not (or should not) change in intensity or frequency over time. Thus, Prime Time may want to pay particular attention to the expectations of providers in light of their view of the appropriate roles and responsibilities of the quality advisors and peer coaches in the upcoming year and communicate clearly about their roles and responsibilities.

The Peer Coaching Experience

The peer coaching component, designed to support the work of the quality advisors, was implemented in the fall of 2006. Planning for this component began the previous year in collaboration with a group of providers funded by CSC who had received coaching services through CSC. Prime Time staff and directors of these programs met to collectively define their shared vision for core competencies for coaches across the county. One result of their meetings was a document drafted in February of 2007, which described Prime Time's approach to coaching as "peer mentoring" for the purpose of assisting after-school program staff in improving their performance.[18]

Subsequently, at the beginning of the 2006-2007 program year, Prime Time hired and trained five experienced after-school professionals to serve as peer coaches for eight (omission?). At this time, many decisions about the structure of the coaching process and how it would work were made. It was decided, for example, that coaches would be paired with programs by matching their areas of expertise to programs needing their particular skills, rather than to a set number of programs, as the quality advisors are. It was also decided that geographic proximity of the peer coaches to programs would be considered, as possible, in the matching process. However, Prime Time staff was initially unsure about the most effective way to recruit peer coaches, as well as what their qualifications should be. Although the process remains somewhat unclear, Prime Time staff believe that overall they made appropriate choices in the selection of coaches who were hired this year. In addition, they feel that they know much more about the issues involved in recruiting and training coaches. With one exception, all of the peer coaches were directors themselves of other programs; the fifth one was an experienced front-line staff member. As described below, all experienced challenges in working with programs, and most also made considerable progress.

Our data collection on the topic of peer coaching included a range of informants. Along with interviews with Prime Time staff involved in setting up the peer coaching process, we interviewed six of the eight program directors working with a peer coach and five peer coaches about their experiences. In an effort to learn how participation in the process had impacted programs and staff from an agency perspective, we also talked with agency directors of the

---

[18] This document, which specifies core competencies, continues to be revised by Prime Time.

programs that were receiving assistance from peer coaches as well as agency directors of the programs where the peer coaches were employed.

Four of the five coaches felt that they were able to both establish rapport with their assigned program directors and, to varying degrees, make progress toward the goals outlined in their program improvement plans. One coach felt that there was no connection with the program director from the beginning, and consequently, the relationship never developed, nor was progress made. In the program director's view, the coach did not offer the kind of assistance she expected to get. She told us: "We used to have a peer coach, but we decided that she was no longer needed. What happened is that she was more of a resource person."

This program director's supervisor, the agency director, had a similar point of view: "When Prime Time asked my opinion of the coaching process, I told them that what I saw was not peer coaching…. Peer coaches should come into the classroom and watch staff interact with the children and then give us feedback, or do a role play, for example." After discussions with the agency director and Prime Time staff, it was decided that it would be best to assign a different coach to the program. Another coach also reported struggling for a long time to convince the program director that the coach was not trying "to come in and change her program. I was just trying to enhance what she was doing and make things better for her and her staff. And I think once she got a grasp on that we had a lot of resources through Prime Time to help enhance what she was doing."

In the case of two other program directors, it became virtually impossible for them to focus on their program goals with their peer coaches because other important program matters demanded their attention. For both of these programs, the primary issue was the facility in which each of their programs was housed or temporarily housed. Both of the directors were, in fact, very pleased with their peer coaches but found it difficult to make changes in programming in the context of severe facility constraints. One director eventually decided to discontinue working with her coach. She justified her decision in the following way:

> I felt like it would be a waste of time to continue. I was meeting with her during times when I should have been doing other things, when the end result was going to be the same. The purpose of our relationship was to get us where we needed to become licensed, and licensing is not a possibility in this location – based on what we learned from the Health Department and just based on the fact that we don't have any of the basic things in place that we need. To be licensed in this facility, with the square footage we have, we'd be serving three to five kids and for the cost to do that, it's not worth it. You might as well refer those kids someplace else and shut down – that's if we were seeking the licensing. But for an after-school tutorial program, licensing isn't required and we can still provide service to the community. Hopefully, Prime Time will remain in place to help us ensure the quality of our services and to help us with the licensing if and when it's possible.

The other director, who was running a school-based program, continued to work with her peer coach but has struggled with circumstances related to her facility. Her peer coach described the challenges for this program as follows:

All the stuff for the children is in boxes because they don't know where they're going to be. They don't have art supplies or books. What happened was that 3 years ago, she had a building. It was completely wiped out by the hurricane and she had to start over from scratch. So when she worked with her previous quality advisor, she had her own building. Everything was okay and her goals were set. When I started working with her last year, she was going from building to building and hadn't been making any progress.

Previously this program director had been operating out of a school cafeteria. She told us:

They moved us from the cafeteria to another building. Now we're in this building. And now, they want to move us to another two rooms. I'm not feeling too good for someone to come and see and evaluate my program. I receive help from my coach, but I need a space. I need more help. After the 14th of February, I'll hopefully be in a new space permanently. And then we can concentrate on goals again!

Peer coaches, agency directors, and program directors working with peer coaches also talked about the positive experiences they have had with the peer coaching process, which, in some cases, benefits the coach as well as the program receiving the coach's services. It is worth noting that in all cases, the agency directors with whom we spoke both approved of their staff serving as peer coaches and having their staff work with a peer coach. The agency director of a program who had a staff member working as a coach talked about the change she had noticed in this individual as a result of serving as a coach. In her view, the individual has "grown tremendously professionally, seemingly as a direct result of participation in the QIS process and being a peer coach." Another coach expressed a similar view about her experience:

Well, it has only been a benefit to me in my personal and professional growth. I've had opportunities to train; I think I'm the better for it. It allowed me to add to my skills and resources, as well as model what I'm trying to teach to my staff so they can teach our children and their families. It has afforded me opportunities to speak about excellence and quality in a number of arenas.

Coaches also talked about the fact that a program's success at meeting its goals depends on the level of the director and staff's commitment to reaching their goals:

The program director is so excited and focused on her goals. She has an extensive system of supports through the church, and now the housing authority. The housing authority has said that they will take care of all the changes that the Health Department has requested be made to their program.

Another peer coach describes the success she experienced with one of the programs she coached:

They are so open and I can go in there anytime. I always call and say that I am coming, but I feel that I can just walk in there anytime. I have access to wherever I want to go. I can come into whatever class that I want to. I can come in there early and sit and talk with all the staff. It is really an open environment. At first their agency director was like, well, I don't know if

I want you talking to – you know. But she has really backed off, and things have been going really well there.

Although the coach admits to not knowing exactly *what* brought about the change, she did say that "the agency director empowered the program director and staff and now they know what they're doing and they can do it." The turnover in staff has ceased as of October of this year, and the coach says there "is no more conflict." She suspects these changes are due to a combination of new staff being hired as well as her efforts to convince staff to work harder at pooling their assets and working together, rather than competing with each other.

Most of the six program directors interviewed who worked with peer coaches were satisfied with their experiences and talked about the benefits they had received from their coaches. One director had to leave her program for an extended period, and her peer coach essentially kept her program afloat while she was gone. The peer coach and director serve the same community and work very closely together in general: "If either of us finds something good out there, we try to share it." One exciting project, created in an effort "to do something about the violence in the community," developed as a result of one of the coaching relationships. The peer coach and program director came up with the idea of a march. They met only once to discuss their ideas without the children and then scheduled a second evening meeting that they would attend. The plan, as explained by the director, was to

> come up with a marketing packet and a script so the kids can call and get an appointment and sit in the face of whoever this person is – if we can get these people – Pepsi, etc., to buy into supporting the march with their presence and dollars. The money would be pooled and Prime Time would administer it. So when kids want to do things, they would draw down on these monies that all kids in the county would draw down on. We will begin with the march and then strategically identify areas of the county in need and then clean up the county one block at a time. I was able to share a bit of this at a meeting recently, and it just so happened that the new mayor was there and he's interested.

As noted earlier, there were two other directors who, although happy with their peer coaching experiences, were limited in the progress they could make toward the goals in their plans because of limitations in their physical facility—factors unrelated to the coaching relationship. Two other programs also expressed satisfaction with the relationship and the assistance provided but felt they lacked the time needed to devote to their goals. One director explained:

> We basically had our coach come in and do workshops with the staff and that is probably it. One of our goals was to get our kids' council going and we were going to have the kids from our coach's center come over and meet each other. It hasn't happened yet because we are so busy. So that is basically the only relationship. We probably could have availed ourselves more but it has just been really busy. We were short staffed for a little while, and now everybody is in place and it is easier.

Finally, the only other question that was raised by two informants was a concern of some agency directors about the appropriateness of taking program directors away from their own programs to advise another program. In one case, an agency director said she was quite

pleased with her own program's coaching experience but was admittedly skeptical of a peer coaching model that "pulls people away from their programs to work with other programs." This comment, although it may not represent a majority view, suggests a lack of clarity about the value of the coaching relationship.

Challenges of the Peer Coaching Process

Several of the challenges that those participating in the peer coaching process have experienced have already been mentioned, such as ongoing program demands eclipsing the program directors' and coaches' abilities to focus on goals; being unable to establish rapport between the program director and coach; and having the legitimacy of program directors leaving their own programs to go work with others as coaches questioned. Another issue peer coaches talked about was whether they were adequately prepared to coach other programs. One peer coach said that she believed she was well trained but that "there was quite a bit of time between our initial training and the beginning of our coaching relationships. We were trained in August and we got started in November. And it really was my fear—I hate to attend trainings and then not use the information right away." Another said that she felt she would have been totally prepared if she had had the small-groups training before beginning to coach her program. One peer coach expressed frustration at having worked for several months with a program director only to learn that she was planning to resign. Finally, one peer coach said she did feel prepared for coaching because she "let the program set the tone and just went with the flow," pointing out that "this is a new area for all of us."

All coaches spoke highly of the training they received from High/Scope. One coach said that she thought the training could be revised, because coaches and program directors have now been working together for quite some time. At the end of November 2007, returning coaches participated in a "refresher" training at Prime Time. In addition, three prospective peer coaches are being interviewed by Prime Time staff currently, and a training for new coaches is scheduled for early January 2008.

Peer coaches also discussed some of the improvements they thought could be made to the peer coaching process. Two coaches mentioned that there should be indications of a sufficient level of commitment from programs requesting the assistance of a peer coach. One coach put it this way:

> I think that what should be changed is how we go about approaching the people who need help. I think that if I'm a director of a program, and you come to my site and you want to work with my program director, if everyone doesn't buy into what you're doing, then they really don't know what you're doing…. If you really don't want this help, then don't waste time. There's somebody out there who really needs and wants the help. The selection process needs to take this into account.

Another coach took this viewpoint one step further and suggested that programs requesting peer coaches should have already taken some concrete steps on their own toward reaching goals that would ostensibly indicate their level of commitment to meeting their program goals via the coaching process. Finally, one peer coach said that she and some of her colleagues were unsure about if or how to terminate a relationship that was not going well:

As coaches, we thought we were assigned to this program and we have to stick it out for 3 months or however long, where if you know it is not going to work out, I think we should feel free to say this. Maybe the quality advisor could step in at this point…. We thought, "Okay, these are our programs and we're with them through thick and thin."

The Concept and Role of a Peer Coach

Much is still unclear about how the peer coaching process will be shaped by Prime Time, the current peer coaches and program directors, as well as new peer coaches and new program directors who become engaged in next year's QIS. At the time of our data collection, it seemed that many program directors were not aware of the coaches or sure what the difference was between a quality advisor and a peer coach. Thus, when interviewers shared a brief description of how the coaching process is currently working and asked program directors to express their interest in such an arrangement, most indicated only vague interest. The current peer coaches and the directors being coached, on the other hand, indicated that they understood both the differences between coaches and advisors, as conceptualized by Prime Time, and the purpose of the peer coaching process.

Program directors who were not interested in having a coach usually gave one of two reasons for their lack of interest: (1) They felt that they already had a strong sense of what needed to be done to improve the quality of their program and did not want anyone or anything to add to their workload; (2) they thought their program was doing well and that the support they were currently receiving from their quality advisors, their assessors, and all of the other supports offered via Prime Time, was sufficient. Directors who did express interest usually said it was because they wanted "to learn as much as possible," but they were not specific about particular needs that they thought would be addressed by having a coach. This suggests that the concept of a coach—as distinguished from a quality advisor—may still be vague for most directors.

According to the literature, coaching can take several different forms. Robbins (1991) describes two general approaches, "expert" coaching and "peer" coaching. In her view, the expert form of coaching is one in which the coach has more expertise or experience with the topic in question and serves as a consultant to help the individual being coached learn or refine particular skills. She contrasts this approach with "peer" coaching, which she views as "a confidential process through which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practices; expand, refine, and build new skills; share ideas; teach one another; conduct research; or solve problems in the workplace (Robbins 1991, p. 1)."

Another variation in coaching approaches involves where coaches come from. Prime Time staff selected seasoned after-school professionals from other programs in Palm Beach County—many of them program directors themselves—to work with directors of other programs with less experience. This approach seems to be consistent with Robbins' "expert" model, although we have observed elements of Robbins' "peer" model in Prime Time's approach as well. Recently, Prime Time staff have considered another approach to selecting their peer coaches, which is to foster coaching relationships between individuals from the same program ("on-site" peer coaching).

34

There are presumably advantages and disadvantages of both models. For example, it can be helpful to be coached or mentored by someone who is very familiar with and understands the challenges and opportunities in the program context. It also can be important for program staff to recognize that they can be resources for one another. But it may also be helpful to have fresh eyes on a program from someone who is less involved in the day-to-day operations or who has other experience to apply to solving a problem at the site. The evidence presented above suggests that some of the challenges coaches experienced this year were in communication, clarifying expectations, and working within unstable or under-resourced physical environments.

Such challenges could occur with either model, or a combination of these models. Prime Time will most likely want to continue to refine their current model, and also explore the use of an "on-site" peer coaching model, which might take the form of after-school program staff working collaboratively, as described by Robbins, to improve performance. With either model, or variations on these approaches, it is clear from directors' comments that they will need more information about the role and value of a coach before they will become engaged in a coaching relationship. In addition, it is possible that some of the challenges in the coaching relationship could be addressed through additional specialized training for directors and other professionals serving as coaches.

Importantly, Prime Time's approach to peer coaching in its first year of implementation seems to have both incorporated and, in large part, succeeded in facilitating the overall purposes of peer coaching as outlined by Robbins (1991, p. 16) and tailored somewhat by us to fit Prime Time's needs:

- To reduce isolation among providers
- To build collaborative norms to enable providers to exchange ideas and assistance
- To create a forum for addressing problems related to program delivery
- To share successful practices
- To transfer skills and knowledge gained via training to the program environment
- To promote the provider as researcher
- To encourage reflective practice

As the peer coaching model evolves across Palm Beach County among other providers of services to children and specifically among providers involved with Prime Time, it seems clear that all will want to make sure that, regardless of the approach taken, peer coaching efforts share the collaborative goals of refining, expanding, and enhancing the knowledge of after-school providers.

Table 3. Themes in Prime Time Coaches' Perspectives on the Peer Coaching Program

Topics	Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Peer coaching program	Didn't effectively explain to peer coaches what their role should be	"I think they really want it, but I'm saying if the providers have the quality advisors at Prime Time, who's to say they need us?... But if we are an extension of the quality advisors, they're not out here on the ground on a daily basis and we are, then they get answers to a lot of questions a lot faster."
	Coaches didn't know that they had the freedom to make adjustments, abandon particular program if it wasn't working out	"I think as coaches we thought we were assigned to this program and we have to stick it out for 3 months or however long, where if you know it is not going to work you should feel free to say I don't think this is going to work." "I guess I tried because I was new at it, and I didn't know any better than to speak up and say hey, this isn't working."
	Good measurement tool	"This program to me is just awesome. I wish, truly, honestly, I've been in the field for 15 years, that this kind of thing could be mandated for every program working with kids, because this is such a great tool to measure your program by and to make sure that programs are maintaining the quality that they're being funded for."
	Builds networks and camaraderie within after-school community	"I don't ever go anywhere where people don't know me and Prime Time. If I needed help and I called upon [the director] to help, she would help. That's the type of camaraderie that you're helping to build in after-school programming. It makes you feel good when people know about your program."
	Selection process wasn't optimal	"If you really don't want this help, then don't waste time. There's somebody out there who really needs and wants the help. The selection process needs to take this into account."
	Coaches don't have opportunity to establish goals with program director	"I think the coaches should probably visit the site first, before the goals are established. The goals are established with the quality advisor and then the coach meets with the program director and begins work on the goals, as the model works now, but I think this should probably change."
	Program is effective	"Something changes every day in this field, and if you've got a coach, you're able to see more clearly what you need and what you're doing."
Program context and expectations	Program director had unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of coach	"So for her I had to say I am not a rescuer for you. You know what you have to do and you have to do it…. I am giving you hints or I am giving you options."
		"Can I use your director's credential?" [A director who did not have one asked to use the coach's credential.]
	Program director didn't want to participate in peer coaching	"They acted like they wanted her [another coach] there, and then when she went, they acted like they didn't want to talk with her and like 'what are you doing here?'" "A lot of programs got involved for the wrong reasons though. They thought that if they were working with a coach, they could secure their funding if [they] show that [they] got help from the coaches." "A lot of directors out there are in DENIAL. They don't think they need help—they think their program is totally excellent. I tell anybody, if you've got a program and you meet your numbers every day and you're doing what you think you should be doing—you still need help because everybody doesn't know everything."
	Openness, willingness to accept help	"[The staff at that school-based program] are so open and I can go in there anytime…. I can come into whatever class I want to." "I thought maybe they would want to discontinue being coached after they'd participated in different trainings, accomplished their goals, etc., but they seem to want to continue...They are still open and receptive to being helped, and they're not ashamed to say 'I don't know.'"
	Skilled director	"Yeah, he is great. He is a program coordinator at [a community-based program]…. He would make a great coach."
	Staff turnover	"Their staff was always turning over … but now they have had their staff like I said since October, and they all seem to be a cohesive group." "I think she [another coach] gets frustrated sometimes because she had a site and she started working with them, but then she found out that the director was thinking of leaving and she has left. So it is like how much effort can you put into something like that?"
	Program wasn't taking right steps to get license/funding	"Yeah, my main goal with [a community site] was to get them licensed … they never got the letter from the principal and never got to use that site. So CSC pulled the funding because they never said to CSC, well, we are working on it and we didn't get the site." "The space was so small, and they didn't have adequate parking ... there were termites, etc., and it was determined that it would be easier to demolish the building...This is why Officer Patterson has decided that she no longer wants a peer coach—she cannot get licensed in the facility she's currently in." "Her program was pulled out—something with her narrative piece—it was incomplete. She didn't flush out a lot of detailed information that should have been included."

Table 3 (cont.). Themes in Prime Time Coaches' Perspectives on the Peer Coaching Program

Topics	Theme	Illustrative Quotes
On-site goals and issues addressed	Resolve conflicts between staff members	"They [staff at a school-based program] were having issues—that staff was having issues getting along. There was conflict and I don't know what I said but the executive director backed off …she empowered them and now they know what they are doing and they can do it. She doesn't have to stand over them."
	Get program licensed	"But now we have started the process of getting the new site licensed at the new school…. So we will see."
	Get funding for program	"The funding—I helped them with the forms that CSC made available online. I was able to make the forms interactive for them."
	Teach classroom management, leadership styles, conflict resolution	"The instructors wanted to know how they could better get kids to come in and do what they say … and we all participated in the training ('Bring Yourself to Work') together. I wanted to show them that we could do this together. What we did once the training was over, I did follow-up work with them."
Training and preparation	Good information was provided	"Most of the things in there was good information. I think that we could tweak that now that some of us have been in the trenches, but on the whole it was good."
	Coach felt adequately prepared	"I think they had a good idea of what your strengths were to go into a program … whatever happened it worked."
	Too much time between training and start of peer coaching	"We were trained in August and we got started in November. And it really was my fear—I hate to attend trainings and then not use the information right away."
	Specific training course was missing	"Had I had the small-groups training before working with [the director], I would have been totally prepared."
	Specific training course was effective	"Now I can walk in a room and problem-solve very quickly since I had that small-groups training."
Overall coaching experience	Coach's expectations weren't met	"And I think Katie was frustrated with her program because all she wound up giving them was ideas for programming or things to do, where I think she thought her involvement would be a little different."
	Communication with program director was difficult	"But every time she wanted to speak to me for awhile she would call here saying I don't have her phone number, she is not returning my calls, but meanwhile my report would be like I called her and I left a message and she hasn't returned my calls." "Exactly, I don't know [why the director wasn't responding to the coaching relationship]." "I e-mailed the number to he r... and I never got a thank-you e-mail, or even a response message saying she received the e-mail." "[The director] would not return my calls or e-mails.... To date, she's not registered for one class.... I felt like maybe I was putting too much pressure on her to stay on schedule.... As it turns out, she was not ready when the funding became available. And I felt like a failure, yes."
	Lack of connection with program director	"I would go over, I would call, and [the director] really didn't want to interact with me. She didn't want me to talk with her staff either." "She never once said to me ... I appreciate your help, I'm done being coached. If she had said something like this ... I could have comfortably moved on and been reassigned." "I was trying to get her staff signed up for the ... training ... but she just didn't have time to hear about it." "I asked her to call me when she was ready for me to help ... but she never called."
	Coaching process created opportunities for and enhanced skills of coach	"Well, it has only been a benefit to me in my personal and professional growth…. It allowed me … to add to my skills and resources, as well as model what I'm trying to teach to others to my staff, so they can teach our children and their families. It has afforded me opportunities to speak and talk about excellence and quality in a number of arenas." "[The director] and I have been working on a project for about 6 months now. What we want to do is something about the violence in our community. We will begin with the march and then strategically identify areas of the county in need and then clean up the county one block at a time.... It's clear that people have taken notice of what we've said and how we've said it and want to be a part of what we've begun." "But since then, other agencies have gotten my name and asked for my help, and I spend a lot of time on the phone helping them with the steps to take to become licensed and they eat it up."
	Coach had feeling of efficacy	"Yes, I honestly do (feel he was able to help as a coach). "They're actually using a lot of what they learned in the training in their daily work now—and they're really seeing the difference.... Her staff is a young staff, and they began to see themselves doing better for the kids—this is for me. They were there every day on time and engaged." "A lot of them now are taking college courses. Getting professional development for themselves."

Professional Development

The opportunities for staff education, training, and development provided by or facilitated by Prime Time are a distinct set of supports. Although they can be considered a system unto themselves, they also complement and can be integrated with other services and supports, such as Prime Time's networking events, the QIS, and curricular resources. Indeed, in a sense, all of the Prime Time strategies are working toward the goal of professional development, which is expected to influence long-term outcomes of improved program quality and youth development.[19] For example, the QIS seeks to increase providers' knowledge of what quality is as well as assess program quality and track progress toward higher quality over time. The modules and program enhancement not only provide enriching activities to children and youth but also are a model for program staff of what kinds of activities are appropriate and how to present them in a way that engages participants.

The after-school field is characterized by a variety of staffing patterns. Programs typically have a mix of part-time and full-time staff with a range of educational backgrounds and professional experience. Thus, to best meet the diverse professional development needs of providers in Palm Beach County, Prime Time's leadership believes that the professional development system should be flexible and include both informal community-based training, credentials, and certificates and formal higher education degree programs. According to a Prime Time staff member:

> At this point we are trying to make sure that providers have a variety of training opportunities to choose from. For those who may not be interested in taking credit bearing courses, we offer workshops at Prime Time (directly geared toward quality indicators in the [PBC-PQA] tool and where folks seemed to score lowest on assessments) and through the college (such as the 40-hour [school-age] certificate, which includes the Advancing Youth Development course). For those who are and will be interested in the future in pursuing a degree that is directly related to the field, Prime Time, in partnership with PBCC, will be working to develop the education track that will result in an A.A. degree, and in the future articulate into a B.A.

At the same time, Prime Time is still struggling to understand what the "right" combination of informal training and formal education opportunities is to accommodate the needs of a diverse provider community.

Opportunities for Professional Development

Informal Training

During 2006-2007, Prime Time expanded the range of professional development offerings for providers. According to Prime Time staff and Prime Time's Web site, a wide variety of workshops and short-term courses were conducted by Prime Time staff and outside facilitators engaged by Prime Time. These trainings included basic information to improve program operations, such as the steps for becoming a state-licensed program and principles of financial

---

[19] Recent evaluations of out-of-school time professional development initiatives suggest that along with improving the quality of youth experiences in programs, professional development could help to address the problem of staff turnover and stabilize the youth development work force (Harvard Family Research Project, 2004, 2006).

management. Trainings also included ways to improve the social and emotional climate of programs and improve relationships among staff and between staff and youth, and ways to increase youth engagement in programs. To address one of the concerns expressed by providers in the western part of the county last year, nearly all of the youth-oriented workshops were offered at least once at a site in the Glades TGA as well as at sites in the eastern part of the county.

That youth engagement was a particular focus of a number of trainings was the direct result of the initial PBC-PQA assessments conducted the previous year, which identified youth engagement as a particular area in need of improvement. Thus, Prime Time staff along with independent consultants and trainers from High/Scope provided workshops such as "Planning and Reflection," a workshop on ways to support youth in planning, implementing, and assessing their own activities, and "Choices within Choices," a workshop on providing youth both choice and challenge in their activities. These and other related trainings—"Youth Participation in Action," "Effective Use of Small Groups," "Avoiding Conflict through Youth Participation," and "Developing and Sustaining a Youth Advisory Council"—were purposely developed to connect to particular QIS indicators that the initial PBC-PQA ratings and program improvement plans had identified as areas in which many programs needed improvement. Another potential outcome of these trainings, therefore, would be to help reinforce for providers the links between course content, the QIS, and the coaching activities that Prime Time leadership intended

That many of these trainings were targeted to areas identified by the PBC-PQA and program improvement plans could be considered a limitation of the informal trainings provided by Prime Time. That is, it geared them narrowly to providers participating in the QIS pilot rather than broadly to all providers in the county. Indeed, some program descriptions indicated that QIS participants would have priority in participating in training. Thus, providers not involved in the pilot may have more difficulty applying concepts learned in training to their programs. On the other hand, Prime Time's long-term goal of a countywide quality improvement initiative must be kept in mind. In time, the QIS will become more available to other providers as well.

One issue that Prime Time and its outside consultants faced both in developing and scheduling workshops was the limited time that providers have available. Analysis of records provided by Prime Time indicate that twenty (54%) of the thirty-seven QIS providers participated in at least one training workshop provided or facilitated by Prime Time during the second year of the QIS pilot. A Prime Time staff member reported that, "in looking at the attendance sheets, it seems that we have had more providers outside of the QIS pilot attending our trainings than those who are in it." It is noteworthy that providers outside the QIS pilot are aware of and taking advantage of Prime Time's staff development offerings. At the same time, the fact that participation by QIS participants is lower than Prime Time considers desirable raises a question of whether there is a "threshold effect" in that programs involved in the QIS cannot take on an additional activity such as training.

An outside consultant who assisted in developing and delivering some of the youth-oriented trainings had generally positive comments about the quality of the training focused on

increasing youth engagement and youth voice in program activities. For example, as a result of training in how to set up youth advisory councils, according to the consultant, "providers are really stepping up and getting councils going." At the same time, this consultant believes that Prime Time staff are still learning how to structure informal training opportunities to be most effective. The consultant questioned whether Prime Time, as an intermediary whose role is to "promote best practices and really institutionalize best practices, fully understands what it takes to help programs reach those places of quality components, or really improved practices." In any training, it is important to provide information but also to provide structure and incentives so providers can apply the information successfully.

In the case of "Developing and Sustaining a Youth Advisory Council," originally the consultant and Prime Time sought to develop a multi-part training of four sessions, with separate sessions on how to start and structure the councils, and how youth and adults can collaborate in running them. Because of conflicts in scheduling and uncertainties about whether providers could attend all four sessions, the material was presented in two sessions to make it more feasible for providers to attend. As it turned out, despite some skepticism about the impact of the shorter training periods, according to the consultant, Prime Time staff were "surprised with how much work the directors and staff did between the sessions." The consultant, on the other hand, had more confidence that providers could show the kind of progress they did, as long as the content of the training was structured so that they really could apply it. Again, the perspective of this consultant is that, without underestimating the difficulty of involving after-school staff in professional development activities, Prime Time is still learning how to design, structure, and schedule informal training experiences to be most effective.

Formal Training

During 2006-2007, Prime Time also continued to work with Palm Beach Community College to establish a formal career pathway consisting of a fully articulated course of study leading to credit-bearing certificates, credentials, and degrees. Plans for this pathway include beginning with the Advancing Youth Development (AYD) curriculum developed by the Academy for Educational Development, which fulfills part of the training required by the state. The AYD course consists of a 3-day (20 hours) introduction to the youth development approach and its implications for practices of youth workers. Other courses currently are provided in the areas of program management and school-age program certification, but the selection of options for school-age (versus early childhood) professionals remains limited at the time of this report. It also should be noted that Palm Beach Community College also offers a Training of Trainers course with a 20-hour curriculum that meets part of the 40 hours required for the director's credential. This course was a response to a suggestion that emerged from a series of planning meetings on professional development held in February 2006 in which one concern was which organization or organizations would be responsible for school-age training, and whether relevant courses should reside in PBCC or be contracted through Prime Time. At that time, it also was suggested that PBCC offer an adult learning or "training of trainers" class to build a pool of potential trainers.

The career pathway was not established by the end of the 2006-2007 program year, and course offerings remained limited. As one informant explained, "the problem across the state is

that there's not yet adequate demand for school-age [training and credentials]." Yet, progress was made in the effort to develop a professional pathway for school-age staff during the past year. In January 2007, PBCC hired a Post Secondary Adult Vocational (PSAV) Coordinator dedicated to school-age training issues at the college. He reviewed the core competencies for school-age staff, met regularly with Prime Time staff to discuss community needs, and visited programs and talked with staff. He also met with High/Scope trainers to learn more about their resources and how they could work together to strengthen professional development and training.

Just as with the informal training provided by Prime Time, as one informant from PBCC explained, "the QIS is going to drive the training offered by PBCC." There also will be incentives to encourage providers to enroll in classes and work toward a credential or degree. One incentive will be a requirement by the Children's Services Council that directors of the child care and school-age programs it funds earn the state Director's Credential (part of which can be fulfilled by obtaining the Florida school-age credential). Other PBCC activities include working with other school-age professionals to develop core competencies for the school-age providers and a college credit certificate, which will convert non-credit courses to credit-bearing courses, which later can be applied to an associate's (A.A. or A.S.) degree. With regard to the long-term success of this effort, there appear to be several issues. One issue will be designing the course requirements for the school-age track. Another will be convincing the college's administrators that there is a need for a school-age credential and obtaining their approval. And a third issue will be convincing providers that it will be beneficial to them. As one participant in the effort explained:

> The population of the workers is so diverse. Some of them already have degrees. Some are working on degrees. Some don't want to go to college. Some are certified teachers. I have so many different levels of workers—what am I going to require them to do? My goal would be the 40-hour entry-level training—not having a problem populating this training. The Florida school-age certificate—if we can get people to move to this step, that would be huge.

This individual was optimistic about developing the structures for the professional pathway at the college and eventually obtaining the approval of the administration. This process is expected to be facilitated by a recently established Business Partnership Council that will give preliminary approval to the program:

> [The] Business Partnership Council will be a mix of different types of providers as well as Prime Time staff, and the college will host and facilitate [it], but it's more for the college to have a group of individuals from the community and the population to advise us. The college has all this bureaucracy. To get courses changed, added, deleted, you have to go before the curriculum committee and get their approval for absolutely everything. If you have the Business Partnership Council's approval, the process goes a lot smoother.

With regard to obtaining the "buy-in" from providers, this individual believed that both monetary incentives—for example, a stipend or increase in salary—would be needed as well as the encouragement of funders and agencies:

We have a lot of pieces in the works; it's just a matter of putting them all together. It's not a problem for us to build it; the problem is the motivation and what will drive the providers to take it. If there's nothing in the licensing that requires it, then why are they going to take it? So we're looking for that external force to drive it as well. QIS will drive it. CSC will drive it. We've talked with the school district, because they are the largest provider of youth workers, so if they don't participate, our numbers wouldn't be as significant.… We've had a lot of conversations with them as well as Prime Time.… We're [also] going to need some type of incentives. Whether it be a stipend-type when they hit certain levels.… Early childhood uses some educational incentives along with the Wages (cap ok?) program, and they're doing very well. What we've learned from other states is that you're not going to survive without incentives.

Scholarships

Finally, Prime Time continued to offer scholarships for staff of school-age programs for the 120-hour school-age certification program offered at Palm Beach Community College, which is a minimum requirement in the state of Florida for child-care providers serving school-age children ages 5 and up. Prime Time also provides funding for staff to attend other professional development courses, workshops, and state and national conferences. Our documentation on applications for and receipt of scholarships by providers in Palm Beach County during the 2006-2007 program year is limited to the period between December 2006 and April 2007. Records for that period indicate that there were a total of 129 applications; 93 (72%) were listed as approved, while the others were listed as cancelled, denied, or pending at the end of the report period. A total of 76 individuals requested scholarships to attend conferences or courses at PBCC, with an average of one or two requests per person (range: one to five). As might be expected, l35 (27%) requests were from 32 individuals for conference attendance; the rest were for courses at PBCC. Fourteen of these individuals received scholarships to attend the National AfterSchool Association (NAA) Conference. The remainder received scholarships to attend local or state conferences.

More than half of the requests (60%) for scholarships were from staff of programs participating in the QIS pilot; however, it is important to note that the requests for this time period represent only eight of the thirty-seven QIS sites. We do not know why more QIS sites did not take advantage of the scholarship opportunities, although there may be several reasons. For example, some providers may already have completed the course work for which the scholarships could be applied. Others may think they do not have the time to take courses. We would expect that more QIS participants would be aware of and take advantage of scholarship opportunities because of their increased contact with Prime Time. Then again, it is notable that other providers in the county are also aware of and taking advantage of the scholarships. This is another area in which it will be important to track growth in awareness of Prime Time's resources and supports over time.

Directors' Views of Professional Development Opportunities

QIS directors interviewed in the third year continued to recognize the value of staff development. In our interviews, we asked them for their perspectives on a variety of topics related to professional development. These topics included the availability, range, and quality

of training, the extent to which they or their staff had participated, benefits of training, recommendations for improving training, and general observations of the barriers and aids to engaging staff in training. Their perspectives varied, depending on their experience in the field and the extent of their participation in training, although overall they remained positive about Prime Time's offerings in the area of professional development.

Variety and Quality of Training

More often than not, directors appreciated the range of topics covered in the informal trainings provided by Prime Time staff and consultants. One director reported:

> They provide all different resources for us. When we go to the meetings, they bring in speakers, letting us know what is available, and also find out what our needs are, and we give them a suggestion, and they will bring someone in to talk about what we are interested in. We have been very satisfied. They have a variety of training topics.

Another director stated: "There's definitely a variety of trainings. I'd like to see CPR and first aid become more available to us … rather than going to an outside agency such as the fire or police department for that training." A third director stressed both the range of training options and the need to be selective about which ones to attend: "There are a lot of different topics to choose from, but I try to get into the ones related to my goals. High/Scope came to do our assessment and showed us the areas we need to focus on more, so we try to go to the trainings that will help us in those areas."

On the other hand, some directors expressed the desire for a greater variety of training opportunities. For example, one director noted, "We did anything we had to learn about what we were unsure of and needed for our QIS standards, but Prime Time hasn't had anything in the last 2 months that my staff are either interested in going to or that is required." Another informant stated that there are not sufficient opportunities for training because Prime Time does not provide the training for the 40-hour credential:

> That's normally through the college, [but] I wish there was more training for that [like] AYD. Prime Time can give you scholarships for that training, but that's really up to the college. Otherwise they're really right on target for the other trainings. They are created based on what's needed for the QIS standard.

Directors had no complaints regarding the quality of the informal training provided by Prime Time.   For instance, the director quoted below had some difficulty accessing available trainings but thought the quality of the trainings staff had been able to attend had been high:

> We have been very satisfied with the trainings. They've been done very professionally. They're easy to understand and follow. The only problem we've had for the ones that aren't in house is arranging schedules in order to attend. That's a big problem, especially during the summer. Most of the good ones are during the summer, and we're in summer camp so we can't get out. I think if they could offer the same trainings at various times, [it] would be the best way to accommodate the greatest number of people.

Accessibility, Scheduling, and Location of Training

As noted previously, an ongoing issue for a majority of directors we interviewed has been making time for training, particularly for staff, although they varied both in their reported participation in training and their views on how easy it was for them or their staff to take advantage of these opportunities. One director said: "Both my staff and I have participated in many of the trainings, and we have been very satisfied so far with them. I can't go to all of them, but the trainings I feel will benefit my program, I always make sure I attend." Another director noted that it is sometimes easier for her to attend trainings than for her staff:

> Some trainings, I go and bring the information back, because my teachers are Palm Beach County teachers, so they may or not be available during the middle of the day. So I go and other staff in administration also attend different trainings and bring information back. And then we have staff meetings and workshop to present what we have learned to our staff. It works out just fine, because when I go to the training, I'm in the frame of mind that I need to bring back all the information, so I collect all the materials and notes that are needed to train my staff. They always have the train the trainer.

> Another director also reported that as a full-time staff person, it is easier to attend trainings than it is for part-time staff. However, even if she brings back the information to her staff, the knowledge and enthusiasm for learning are not as great as they would be if staff attended themselves. She explained:

> I can usually go when the trainings are scheduled now, because I am full-time, but it wasn't even an issue when I was part-time because they were always scheduled in the mornings and I had to go to college. I see that as an issue. You know, you need the staff to be in on new ideas and sometimes to be motivated by someone from the outside, so it is not always too good for only the director to go and bring back the ideas. I think it would be good for them to see things from another point of view, another perspective.

> In addition to the issue of when trainings are scheduled, another concern mentioned in Chapin Hall's last report about Prime Time was where they were held. We noted last year that directors who work in programs in the western area of the county sometimes complained about having to travel a long way to attend most of the classes and trainings that are offered for school-age professionals (Spielberger & Lockaby, 2006). Prime Time staff paid attention to this complaint and, as described earlier, tried to offer the same trainings in the western part of the county that were given in the eastern part.

> Only a few directors directly spoke about the location of the trainings, which might be one indication that Prime Time's efforts to conduct more trainings in the Glades have paid off. For example, a director who had some concerns about the availability of training and staff time to attend training last year told us the following this year:

> Prime Time has done so much for our staff. First of all, they have been out to give workshops directly to our staff, even out here in the Glades, they've provided all kinds of in-service training, they provide funding for attending conferences, they come out and do the QIS with us, so they come out and they explain it and help us to self-evaluate and give us special funding to purchase things we might need to bring up the quality of the program. So they

44

have done a lot on that that I think has caused the staff to become much more professional.

On the other hand, this director disapproved of the way trainings were sometimes scheduled in the Glades, on short notice, making it difficult for some providers in the western part of the county to arrange to attend, even when the trainings were in their community. It was believed that if the trainings were scheduled more in advance or with more regularity, attendance would be higher. "The only thing I would prefer is that they would really make it a top priority to schedule them in advance for the Glades," the director stated.

One other point that emerged in interviews with a few of the QIS directors was a desire for Prime Time to offer more trainings directly. This was not based so much in a feeling that there were inadequate opportunities for training. Rather, it seemed to be based in a sense of familiarity and comfort with Prime Time. Thus, a director quoted above mentioned that she would prefer to receive CPR and first aid training at the Prime Time office rather than at an outside agency such as the fire department. When asked why, she responded, "Well, there is a sense of belonging when it's down at their office." Another director who preferred that classes currently offered only at PBCC be available directly through Prime Time noted that it would both make them more convenient and increase their frequency. But a third reason was that "we're familiar with the people and the surroundings [at Prime Time]."

Incentives for Training

Another factor influencing staff participation in informal and formal training is the availability of scholarships for staff to attend classes and conferences. There was little directors could criticize about this resource, which made it possible for programs without agency resources to provide training for staff they might not have been able to provide otherwise. For one provider, this was the most important resource Prime Time could offer:

> The last thing, which I think is the biggest thing, is their professional development program where they will pay for tuition to take educational classes to enhance your own professional development and/or go to a conference that is relevant for your programming. A lot of programs like mine don't have a big budget to do these kinds of things, but it is very good for helping to support your staff and enhancing what you can offer them.

Another director noted that the availability of scholarships also made it easier to fulfill licensing requirements for professional development, even though staff who received training did not always remain at the program. For example, one director stated:

> We've received scholarships from Prime Time to pay for staff members to take courses. Unfortunately, those members are no longer with us, but that happens in this field—there's a lot of turnover. But at least it satisfied the requirements with the health department, and you know, the health department isn't understanding if you have staff who don't meet their educational requirements. If staff are here for a short time and they take courses—well, at least we've received aid in ensuring that we are within the mandates of the health department during that time [that they were there].

Although directors we interviewed appreciated the availability of scholarships for staff, the percentage of QIS sites using scholarships during 2006-2007 appears to have been low.

One reason may be that the scholarships are limited in what they can be used for. One director told us:

> Prime Time is helpful. One of our staff members qualified for a scholarship, and it was great because it was during a year that funds were difficult [to obtain]. It's helpful to have a place where staff can go and get funds provided. The one thing though is that there are some restrictions on the course that can be taken and paid for with a scholarship. We have some staff who would like to take courses in math, English, or other General Ed courses but they can't always because they can't afford it. It would be great if Prime Time could provide some scholarships or funds for people to take those classes, too.

In addition, another director who had not made much use of the scholarship opportunities explained:

> A lot of my staff are returning staff, so I haven't had to touch on the scholarship avenue, but I did get a scholarship this year for one of my staff to go to NAA [National Afterschool Association Conference], so we do use them if I need them for a resource or I need them so my staff can get their 40 hours. I will try Prime Time first to see if they can get that scholarship, first, before I see if we have the resources and money here. Sometimes we don't. I haven't had to do that because most of my staff have been here for 2 to 3 years and they already have their requirements. And the others have already gone to school or have their A.A. and don't need the certain things that Prime Time pays for. They pay for scholarships that go into the after-school field—well, some of my employees already have those credits. So I wouldn't go for something they already have; it's not a benefit for Prime Time or for me. I don't want to waste money. So that's why I haven't used the scholarship thing, because I haven't gotten any new employees. Once I get new employees, I would probably go that way.

Building a Professional Development System

As described in this section, during the 2006-2007 program year, , Prime Time increased the variety of professional development staff trainings available to after-school front-line staff and program directors in Palm Beach County. Informal trainings were offered in both the eastern and western parts of the county and ranged from the basics of licensing to financial management to engaging youth. In particular, Prime Time tried to link informal staff development to the QIS process by providing trainings to address areas of need specified in the program improvement plans. In addition, in accord with Prime Time's goal of building capacity in local institutions, Palm Beach Community College assumed more responsibility for developing and managing the professional development system. To assess these supports and the partnership between Prime Time and Palm Beach Community College, Prime Time staff also began compiling and tracking information about and from front-line staff as well as directors about how staff are using scholarships for course work, half-day trainings, conferences, and other professional development opportunities.

From the perspective of most of the directors in the QIS pilot, progress was made in improving the availability and flexibility of training. However, providers naturally would like to see a wider variety of trainings, more frequent trainings, more locations for training, and more advance scheduling. Although only mentioned by two directors, another suggestion was

to broaden the kinds of courses for which scholarships could be applied. With regard to Prime Time's goal to strengthen connections between training and the QIS, it was clear that most providers who had taken part in training recognized the link to their program's improvement plan.

Overall, Prime Time staff reported that trainings were well attended. However, there was some surprise, and perhaps disappointment, about the level of participation among the QIS providers. Although it is significant that providers outside the QIS pilot are aware of and are taking advantage of Prime Time's staff development offerings, the lower-than-expected participation of QIS providers raises the question of whether there is a "threshold effect," in that programs involved in the QIS cannot take on an additional activity such as training.

Finally, in addition to gathering information on providers' use of and experiences with professional development opportunities facilitated by Prime Time, we also asked them to talk about more general barriers to staff development. The barriers they discussed were similar to those we have noted in previous reports, particularly staff turnover, lack of time, and lack of financial incentives. Several directors observed that as much as they appreciated the informal training opportunities and scholarships available to front-line staff, often the staff who use these resources do not remain in their positions long enough to see the benefits of their training, These barriers, which are not unique to Prime Time's efforts to develop a flexible and comprehensive professional development system, will be discussed in the final chapter of this report.

Program Enhancements

Prime Time's program enhancements, which include short-term instructional modules and more intensive overlay programs, remained one of the most popular of all the countywide supports Prime Time provides. At the same time, the structure of this area of support saw important changes this year. As mentioned previously, Prime Time recently finalized contracts with both the Center for Creative Education (CCE) and the YMCA of South Palm Beach County to provide many of the modules that previously had been provided by Prime Time. CCE has been managing and providing modules in the areas of arts and culture, in partnership with Prime Time, since August 2007. (The current plan is for the two organizations to partner for another year, and then full responsibility will shift to CCE.) Prime Time continued to administer modules in other areas, including health and nutrition, sports and recreation, academics, and career explorations, although the YMCA assumed responsibility for providing the sports and recreation modules in October 2007. In an arrangement similar to the one with CCE, Prime Time plans to work in partnership with the YMCA for a year and then shift sole responsibility to the YMCA for the sports and recreation modules. Prime Time has had long-standing relationships with both CCE and the YMCA, which have the capacity to better meet the requests of a larger number of programs than Prime Time can and, in addition, build upon and expand the current range of curricular resources for programs. Meanwhile, Prime Time will continue to provide the equipment from their lending library and to pay for instructors to be trained in delivery of the activities in the areas of health and nutrition, career explorations, and academics.

Table 4 provides rough estimates of module use. It indicates that thirty-two (86%) of the thirty-seven QIS pilot sites used modules during a 2-year period between fall of 2005 and summer of 2007. The most popular modules were in the areas of sports and recreation, dance and movement, and the visual arts. On average, the QIS programs used at least four or five different modules during the 2-year period, although total module use per program was higher because many programs used the same module more than once.

Table 4. Use of Modules by QIS Pilot Programs Fall 2005-Spring 2007[a]

Module Type (Most Frequently Mentioned Examples)	Frequency	Estimated # Module Types	Estimated # All Modules
Sports and recreation (e.g., soccer, basketball, flag football)	90	144 Mean = 3.9 across 37 programs; 4.5 across 32 programs	235 Mean = 6.4 across 37 programs; 7.3 across 32 programs
Dance, movement, and music (e.g., step by step, travel-world percussion)	50		
Visual arts (e.g., silk painting, clay, and digital storytelling)	30		
Media, communication, and technology (e.g., positive PSA (sp out?))	18		
Health and social development (etiquette, cooking and gardening, and Nurse Power)	18		
Others not categorized	29		

[a] Source: Prime Time. Table may underestimate actual module use, because information came from more than one source, and Prime Time's database to track use of supports by the pilot programs was still being developed at the time of data collection. Many programs used the same module repeatedly, and not all repeated use may be captured in these numbers. Five QIS programs used no modules. Chapin Hall, not Prime Time, was also responsible for categorizing the modules by type.

On the whole, both the program directors and agency directors we interviewed said they were very pleased with the modules as well as with the changes they have noticed in recent months, with respect to the modules. Of the twenty-nine program directors we interviewed, twenty-one spoke about their experiences with the modules, and sixteen of them had only positive things to say. Several program directors noted that the module offerings in the areas of arts and culture had increased in both number and variety with the shift to CCE.

One program director described a module called "Fashion Club," in which the children made purses and wallets: "They loved it that they used the sewing machine—they know how to use it—boys *and* girls. So they bring in the sewing machines—eight of them (clear?) for each of our kids because they want a 1:4 or 1:3 ratio." This director went on to say that her program had also used a program enhancement called "Earth Force," an environmental education curriculum provided by the Pine Jog Environmental Education Center. She described "Earth Force" as an experience where kids get "back to nature and learn about recycling and what the environment is all about." Another program director, whose program is located in a rural area in the western part of the county, expressed excitement about the shift to CCE:

> This year, they have started a whole new way—it is underneath the Center for Creative Education. It is part of this program where they have been doing it for years, but they're usually connected to people who are connected to a school, but now it is available to us and these are highly qualified professionals, and we go through them. So now we are lined up for six or seven modules for the summer. I forget how many hours she said but like 30 hours or something. We are delighted! This is going to save us a fortune, and we are going to have many more choices for our kids.

In addition, a third program director shared three more positive aspects that he had experienced. He noted that the shift seemed to have "freed Prime Time staff up to go back to doing quality programming stuff. They were really getting bogged down with the scheduling of the modules." He also noted how the process has become more "streamlined." "With the process now, they've got it more centralized through an agency; when you fax over or call in your request, [a staff member] will call back in a matter of minutes or at most a day, and they'll connect you with the instructor who will be doing the module and they'll introduce themselves." Finally, he said his program was getting more of their requests for modules fulfilled than they had before:

> It was limited out here [rural Palm Beach County] at first. You could barely get anything out here. No one wanted to work out here. But [Prime Time staff] worked around and they got people who live in our area now and they work in this area, and other artists who work on the coast don't mind making the drive. It's because Prime Time took it back to the drawing board and made things work out here.

A small number of providers reported mixed experiences with the modules. Although they had many positive things to say about these resources, four program directors and two agency directors also mentioned problems getting modules for their programs. Some said that there are modules they would like to have during the school year, but they are only able to get them during the summer. Programs who mentioned this limitation were located in Riviera

Beach, Pahokee, and Belle Glade. One director suggested that the reason that modules are easier to get in the summer is that:

> Many module teachers are located in West Palm Beach and do not wish to travel all the way out here for only an hour-long session during the school year. In the summer, they can book us for more than an hour (3 hours or more) and then go to another program and catch them; whereas in an after-school situation, they wouldn't have time to do that.

One program director noted that although CCE can offer many more instructors than Prime Time was able to, they are sometimes still unable to honor all the requests for modules simply because the demand for them is so high. She speculated that the increased demand may be partially the result of Prime Time's efforts to make sure that more after-school programs in the county are aware of their existence, mission, and available resources. This director says that she and her staff have just learned to plan a little farther ahead:

> Like maybe 4 to 6 months ahead. My staff is getting better at that. This was the only hurdle we came up against—my staff and I signed up for a bunch of modules and then we couldn't get them all—we only got three. That's one thing the gentleman at CCE told me—he will give us at least three of the five or six we've requested so we'll at least have something. He said he'd always try to get us all that we've requested, but we will always get something.

Another agency director noted that although she has seen mostly positive changes with the shift in responsibility for the arts and culture modules, it has meant some new restrictions on the availability of the modules:

> Well, I think there's been some confusion because some of the modules moved over to the Center for Creative Education, and I thought that that was all the modules, and then we were also told that we only had *x* numbers of hours per year to use. There was a limit. There definitely is, and we begged them for more hours and I think we might have gotten some more. But because of this, I don't think we were requesting as many of the Prime Time modules, because we thought they'd all moved to CCE. But the reality is that Prime Time is still administering some of the modules that we could have been requesting all along.

To clarify this issue, a Prime Time staff member explained to us that it has been up to CCE how many enhancements each program receives, but "there is no official limit to the number of enhancements that programs can request or receive." Thus, it appears that only in the event of too many requests for particular modules is there a need to set limits. In this case, Prime Time and CCE consider how many requests they have received from which programs andassess the needs among the requesting programs and communities.

Six program directors and one agency director commented specifically on the quality of the module instruction. Program directors spoke favorably of the module instructors' abilities to teach age-appropriately, knowledgeably, and professionally. One director, who has been operating in the after-school program community since Prime Time formed as an organization, said that while she has considered the modules to be good in the past, she had been less impressed with the individual instructors. She was pleased to learn that CCE and Prime Time were now working together to provide some of the modules and enhancements. She reported: "We've had instructors come from CCE to work with the middle-school kids before and I love

them. The instructors were really into it. I think that was the only thing that Prime Time needed to improve!" Two other directors talked about how the instructors were knowledgeable, good with children, and professional. One described the instructors from CCE as "total professionals!"

> They have been run through the school board; these are professional artists and professional dance teachers. It's not just like some little guy who is 20 years old and just decided to apply to Prime Time to teach soccer or something, but is not really good with kids; he knows how to play soccer, but not how to teach. So then you'd be out there trying to help him. Now you don't have to do anything, because these are people who have been doing it for years and they know what they are doing. They are great.

Another simply said: "I've used about five modules this year, and they all have been great instructors. They are very knowledgeable about what they are doing, and they are good with children."

Thirteen program directors talked specifically about the staff's role during module instruction. Primarily, directors said that at least one staff member was present during module instruction to serve as general support to the instructor and to address discipline issues as needed. Others said that staff are present to learn, so that they can teach the module in the future if needed. One director said that although the staff's primary role is to provide support, she does encourage them to get more involved: "They usually just stand in the corner—they are mainly college students—and watch what's going on, but I really want them to get more involved so they know what's going on and can teach the module themselves if the instructor is unable to come out one day." In addition to these functions provided by the staff, one director said that a staff member is present during module instruction to ensure the safety of the children and to observe what the children are "getting out of it."

Related to these issues, a Prime Time staff member recently told us that both CCE and the YMCA would be developing and including train-the-trainer components with each of the modules—both short and long-term enhancements; thus, the modules and enhancements will more formally serve as professional development opportunities in the future. The way that CCE in particular has begun this process is by choosing ten module curriculums that they believe lend themselves to a train-the-trainer format. They will go forward with this plan in the next year. Similarly, the YMCA chose a plan for training trainers that will involve working with different cohorts of kids to facilitate leagues of after-school programs competing with each other.

As mentioned earlier, an exciting overlay, or more intense, longer-term enhancement program provided to selected after-school programs through an application process, is the community initiative involving international artists from the ISH Institute in Amsterdam. Jointly sponsored by the Kravis Center and Prime Time, the ISH Institute residency program was first held in April 2006; it took place again in April 2007, and will be repeated in April 2008. ISH Institute artists visit for a 2-week period to guide forty middle-school youth from three local after-school programs in creating and performing their own production. The month before the ISH visit, local artists spend 2 hours a week with the chosen students to get them ready to work with the international artists. Each year the experience, in which youth rotate

through various workshops for intensive study of a variety of art forms (street dance, break dance, hip-hop, film, and theater), culminates in a performance by the youth at the Kravis Center in West Palm Beach. In the coming year, prior to the April 2008 ISH visit, youth will receive more intensive preparation from local artists (3 days a week for 2 hours for a 4-week period).[20] Again, consistent with Prime Time's goal of developing capacity in local organizations, the education department at the Kravis Center will take primary responsibility for a future permanent local residency.

Thus, with respect to the modules and program enhancements, Prime Time has been able to make considerable progress toward meeting its goal of strengthening the capacity of local organizations to provide curricular resources to after-school programs in Palm Beach County. Prime Time has been able to serve more organizations in the community than in previous years by establishing partnerships with CCE and the YMCA, and by continuing their partnerships with the various contracted organizations in the county to provide the overlay or enhancement programs. Prime Time has also taken important steps toward ensuring that children will have access to more in-depth learning over a longer period of time—another one of its goals—by partnering with such organizations as the Kravis Center, CCE, and the YMCA. Finally, again with an eye toward institutionalizing the enhancement programs in several local organizations in the community, Prime Time expects that for now, the YMCA and CCE will function separately, without trying to coordinate or make consistent the terms and procedures they use to administer the enhancements. This may mean some frustration for providers requesting resources from different organizations until they learn the policies and procedures of different resource organizations. However, with respect to empowering CCE and the YMCA to deliver these resources and helping to ensure that the services are sustainable, it seems reasonable to Prime Time that the organizations should function independently.

---

[20] This opportunity benefits the local artists as well as the youth. It gives the the local artists an opportunity to practice their professional and rapport-building skills with the youth.

Community Outreach and Networking

Prime Time again devoted a great deal of time and effort to its outreach, advocacy, and networking activities during the past year. Based on information collected in focus groups and from other communication with providers during the 2005-2006 program year, Prime Time staff decided to restructure the After-School Consortium meetings in order to better meet the needs of providers. In addition, Prime Time continues to recognize that advocacy and outreach are important components of a total effort to increase the quality of program delivery across Palm Beach County. Finally, the outreach, advocacy, and networking activities have continued this year with the assistance and guidance of a marketing consultant who has continued to develop and shape Prime Time's role as an intermediary organization in the after-school program community across the county.

The After-School Consortium

As described in Chapin Hall's November 2006 report, Prime Time facilitated a process last year that led to the restructuring of the consortium meetings into what are now called networking events. The monthly networking events continue to include a variety of activities such as seminars and workshops with experts in the field, open networking time, and special events. By most accounts, the restructuring of the meetings was a success. Of the twenty-nine program directors we interviewed, eighteen program directors talked about their perceptions of the networking meetings this year. Fourteen (78%) of the eighteen, as well as one agency director, had only positive things to say. The agency director was especially pleased with the new format:

> You know the out-of-school consortium meetings, I think have been dynamite this past year. I think the different venues have been wonderful. I'm not sure everybody understood why they were going to the different places, but it was just go. And when I had given this feedback already to Prime Time, one thing I think we missed was really being able to visit with each other and share what was going on. You know, the real networking part. Exposing people to a lot of different places throughout the county is very important. And having fun I think is really important. I think that's a gift to give people. So, you know, I think that's good. That fits into the big picture. I don't think that connection is made.

The fourteen program directors expressed satisfaction with going to different locations throughout the county, getting exposed to the different speakers who present at the meetings, meeting and networking with colleagues who are doing similar things in the community, and having the option to send staff to special events. One director simply said that "going to facilities to see what they are like and can provide is better than people coming in to the office and talking to us about them." Another director shared how she formed a partnership with someone as a result of a networking meeting:

> The networking meetings allow us to communicate with the other professionals to find out what they are doing. We can get some ideas from them and also share our ideas. These events provide an opportunity for us to partner with others. For example, I had an event that I invited some of the other programs. One of the ladies asked me if next time, she could partner with me—so now I have a better relationship as a result.

One director talked about how pleased she was with the structure and efficiency of the meetings:

> They set the agenda pretty well. They usually tell us what the agenda is, and then they'll have a speaker. They'll tell us what's coming up next, if there's anything new coming up—like a new scholarship. We end talking about where the next meeting will be. It's pretty short; usually they don't last longer than 2 hours. They make it a big event every time. The different locations help too. The first one was at the Norton—well, no one knew where the Norton was. The next one was at the Kravis Center. So the locations are in different areas of West Palm and it lets you get out there and see the new stuff you wouldn't see otherwise. I think it really works.

Four of the program directors had mixed comments about the new meeting format. One was not aware of the networking meetings. Another, although otherwise very complimentary of the meetings, indicated that she preferred the old format because they involved more training:

> Training, for me, is more important, and with the change it's become more of a social thing. And maybe, subconsciously, that's why I haven't gone. If I have to put something here on hold, and I'm already behind, I am more inclined to go if there is training involved or something beneficial and not just social. Before there was always a speaker or something on the latest modules or highlights of what a program is doing. There were possible partnering opportunities with some of the other programs. But that's gone now. I've only gone to one since the change, and the times that I do go to sign up it's been full. I never had a problem getting in before, but that's fine.

Among mixed responses from some other directors, there was a general feeling of just not being able to attend all the meetings that after-school providers are expected to attend. One said that because the meetings are held during the day while she teaches, and the school district will not allow her to leave the students, she is not able to attend the meetings. She felt that she was "missing out" by not being able to attend the meetings.

Community Outreach and Advocacy

The two community resource advocates coordinate aspects of Prime Time's activities related to outreach and advocacy. Because Chapin Hall's process evaluation has been focused on the QIS pilot project and resources directly connected to that process, we have collected limited information about its work that has been focused on other programs in Palm Beach County. We briefly discuss this work here, however, because it is an important part of Prime Time's overall ambition to build a countywide quality improvement system that will be available to all programs in the county.

First, the community resource advocates have continued the efforts they began last year to identify other after-school programs in the county and orient them to Prime Time's services and supports. They have used as a guide for their work a list of all not-for-profit organizations and after-school programs in Palm Beach County generated by the Early Learning Coalition.

Part of this work has been in response to a request to identify ten to twelve organizations that would be appropriate for rolling into the QIS in the coming year.

Similar to the lesson learned from the QIS process that programs with more basic quality and stability can make better use of Prime Time's supports, the community resource advocates also believe they need to look for "ready" programs. "We're doing this differently than last year," one advocate explained. "Last year we brought in programs that were totally not ready. We're not looking for perfect programs, but we're also not looking at programs that are totally not ready—they need to have a few aspects solidly in place (the basics)." Moreover, as the community resource advocates plan for the future, they are expanding their outreach activities beyond the TGAs. In describing his recent work, a community resource advocate said that he has been visiting a large number of programs in the southern parts of Palm Beach County, beyond the Lake Worth/Lantana TGA. "My goal is to see if they're running after-school programs, and if so, to learn what their needs are with respect to the services Prime Time provides," he explained. "I made eighty-seven site visits from April to June, 2007."

As the advocates meet with providers around the county, they are both orienting them to the services and resources Prime Time and its partners provide and increasing their awareness of other after-school initiatives at the state and national level. They are involved in two national initiatives currently. One is the Campaign for Proficiency, an initiative of the Advocacy Institute in Boston, for which one of the advocates has been certified as a trainer. One of the advocates explained that the Campaign for Proficiency "is a campaign to educate, empower, and inform parents and kids and others in our communities that if we want our young people to be proficient, we have to be proficient as adults. We have to be a guide for them. We have to think positive and make healthy choices in our lives."

The other is Afterschool for All: Project 2010, which was started by the national Afterschool Alliance organization, which has a number of state affiliates. This initiative seeks to bring a wide range of individuals and organizations, including public officials, police chiefs, businesses, parents, religious leaders, and educators, together to advocate for access to quality, affordable after-school programs. The community resource advocates and other Prime Time staff, including Prime Time's marketing consultant, have "identified new towns and areas who have become very excited about Project 2010." They have also met with local businesses, to garner support for the initiative in Palm Beach County. One community resource advocate reported:

I've also gotten the opportunity to do more advocacy with businesses. We have identified two businesses that are interested in promoting Project 2010 and after-school programs. There is soon to be a 3-month relationship where they will use our name, Project 2010, and send information out and let people know about how to become a part of Project 2010.

Finally, the community resource advocate staff has become involved with the city governments in Riviera Beach and West Palm Beach to help establish youth empowerment centers in five violence-prone neighborhoods. Prime Time's staff and consultants are providing technical support to help get the centers up and running. This work is still taking shape, and the community resource advocates expect these programs to take time to establish.

One observer (who is this?)stated: "The municipalities have been slow-moving." This was confirmed and explained by one of the advocates:

> We were all in agreement that we really need to take our time with these centers. The centers need the time to do what they need to do and not rush anything. They have intentions and they know what they need to do, but in order to make their plans successful, they need more time. There is good representation from the youth. Prime Time will have an MOU [memorandum of agreement] with them, and we will continue to provide them with technical assistance and support and any other community information that they need. We are still in the loop with them.

From our interviews with program and agency directors participating in the QIS pilot, there is a general sense that both awareness of the importance of quality and knowledge of the elements of quality have grown a lot during the past 3 years. Program directors often commented on Prime Time's increased visibility among after-school providers and its role as an advocate for quality, partly through the networking events. For example, one director told us: "Prime Time is reaching out to communities. Prime Time spends *a lot* of time and money going out and educating the community about the importance of after-school programs." However, many directors in the QIS pilot did not know the range of the activities of the advocates or fully understand the purpose of some activities.

Indeed, with respect to advocacy, the few directors who did discuss the topic expressed differing views on Prime Time's role as an advocate. One agency director thought that Prime Time—as an intermediary—should focus on connecting programs to the resources they need to improve their quality and questioned "how community advocacy or after-school advocacy fits into an intermediary organization." In contrast, a program director clearly appreciated Prime Time's advocacy efforts, which she saw as appropriate to their function and as benefiting both her program and the broader after-school community:

> They [Prime Time] really give us the support and have the vision for what after-school is really about. They are the ones that do things that we have never really heard of like Lights on After-School, and all those things are coming because they are so much more aware of the things we should know about.

Again, as noted, we have collected little information from or about programs outside the QIS pilot and do not know about the impact of the work of the community resource advocates on other programs. However, it will be important in the future to track their work more closely to see how it affects not only community awareness of Prime Time over time but also how it changes support for improving the quality of after-school programming throughout the county. Moreover, it will be valuable to learn more about providers' perspectives on Prime Time's advocacy work and observe changes in those perspectives over time as well.

Prime Time's Identity and Development

Throughout Prime Time's efforts to improve the quality of after-school programs in Palm Beach County by developing a comprehensive system of supports and services that can be tailored to the individual needs of providers, an underlying goal has been to clarify what it means to be an intermediary. As a relatively new and still growing organization, Prime Time's leadership and staff have struggled to clearly define its role and responsibilities within a network of heterogeneous providers, other intermediaries, and funders. Prime Time has also worked hard to define the distinction and relationship between quality improvement and the monitoring and assessment of quality, as well as Prime Time's role in facilitating or mediating access to resources as opposed to directly funding them. With a long-term ambition of developing a countywide system for program improvement and professional development, Prime Time's leadership also recognizes that to establish quality standards, these standards must be understood and accepted throughout the county and not just by a select group of programs.

Initially, when Prime Time began, its activities involved a limited set of programs funded by CSC, and a dominant focus was the development of standards and a quality rating or quality improvement system. During the past 2 years, as Prime Time has sought to broaden its mission and its activities, its leadership has emphasized the building of a flexible and sustainable system centered on the QIS, which will gradually improve staff qualifications and program quality throughout the county. In the course of this work, we find that Prime Time's identity as an intermediary, although still evolving, is becoming clearer. However, we also find that Prime Time's role as an intermediary naturally entails some ongoing ambiguity and a need for flexibility in roles and responsibilities over time as the system changes.

In our report of November 2006, we concluded that there was growing understanding of and support for Prime Time's goals and strategies. In addition, the view of Prime Time as primarily a *funder* of services was being replaced with a view of Prime Time as a support and advocate for providers as well as a source of ideas and concrete resources, including new curricula and financial help for staff development. Along with the new QIS, it was hoped that all of these resources would, in time, result in better-quality programs for children and youth.

This view continues today, as reflected in interviews during the past year. When we asked program and agency directors for their perceptions of Prime Time's role in the after-school community, they most often mentioned the support provided to program staff and directors and the program improvements brought about by access to resources, staff training, and on-site technical assistance. Many directors highlighted Prime Time's commitment to and consistent focus on staff development and program quality, as well as its positive yet fair and professional approach to improving quality. Most of all, many providers simply felt well supported in a way they had not been in the past: "I feel like I am not alone, because they always support me. There is a lot of networking there and a lot of support. I no longer feel lonely." Another director stated:

> They are one of the main groups that are doing the advocacy for us, working along with the colleges to get us courses, to get us training, and to work with Children's Services Council, so

they are really a big force to work with as far as after-school programming in our region. But at the same time, the thing I like the best about them is the sense of major support.… They are the only ones that really seem to get [after-school]. If they weren't there, I don't think I would be able to stand it.

Another positive aspect of Prime Time's approach, which a few directors specifically commented on, was the *continuity* of support. One director told us:

They have strengthened my program in assisting the things I need to reach. They have several people doing follow-up to make sure things are going okay—they make sure that you get the help and support you need. I don't like it when people tell you what you need to do and then never check back with you; Prime Time doesn't do that.

A similar view was expressed by another director:

You have a lot of organizations that come out, start you off, and sort of leave you hanging and don't come back and don't follow up on what's going on, but not them, they come out and they just stay with us and they're just like one of the family. We know first names. And when we don't get back to them, they get back to us, 'Oh we need this plan in because this grant it goes in at such and such time, and you guys need to get on the ball.' And we're doing so many things and we forget, but they just make us remember and it's great.

These perceptions of Prime Time as a source of not only material resources but also social and emotional support are consistent with many of the views expressed by program directors in the previous year. In addition, this year some of the directors also talked about becoming more autonomous or self-sufficient in their work. There was a sense of confidence and authority in at least some of the directors that was not evident in our interviews the year before. One director explained:

I think their goal is to try to get every facility to really be self-sufficient and run these type programs for themselves. They came in and they gave great training, 'cause that was a push of theirs. And the staff at these facilities have really picked up the mantle and started implementing some of these programs on their own. I think their ultimate goal is to give you a boost and for you to become self-sufficient.

Although this is still a subtle shift and not characteristic of all programs, it is consistent with Prime Time's own goals to empower providers and make them advocates and resources for themselves and one another. In interviews 2 years ago, providers commented on increased collaboration between them and Prime Time and the fact that they were being listened to more than in the past. Comments this past year suggest that relationships between providers and Prime Time have grown beyond this, in that "being listened to" and collaborating in planning and implementing changes are no longer so novel. Thus, we have the sense that some programs, at least, feel more self-sufficient and empowered in addition to feeling more supported.

Progress and Concerns

Program directors and other informants viewed Prime Time's organizational growth and increased activities during the previous year as primarily a continuation of their prior work. For example, one director commented, "I don't think the goals have really changed but the activity has increased," and another said, "They're building, but they are building on the things they said they would."

In addition, for the most part our informants were positive about the increases in staff and resources. They sensed that Prime Time's work was more focused and better organized: "At the beginning there was not really a specific focus on what they were doing," a program director stated. "But now I think they are more organized and more goal-oriented." According to another director, "The informal training feels a lot more organized this year than it has been." One director reported: "Things have improved tremendously. They have additional staff, and that has contributed to Prime Time's ability to spend more individual time with the various programs." Similarly, another said: "Prime Time is taking on a more 'team' approach. You have a specific person you can contact about things, and this makes [it] easier to get what you need."

Furthermore, providers are beginning to see tangible evidence of changes in the quality of their programs as a result of their work with Prime Time. "They challenged me to excel, and I appreciated that," a director told us. Another director commented, "They are definitely key in improving all of the after-school programs that are out there in the county." One other director summed up the accomplishments of the past year as follows: "There have been many changes through the QIS. The QIS has brought more quality to the after-school programs in Palm Beach County, and that is one of the bigger improvements I have seen."

A few informants also commented on the progress Prime Time has made in expanding the community of after-school providers, fostering networking, and developing quality standards applicable to a diverse group of providers. In this regard, two directors noted continuing improvements in relationships with the school district.
"Initially there was some bias against the school district and after-school programming," one informant reported. "That has radically changed; it is a very positive relationship [with] a lot of sharing and partnering and respect." A program director described the impact of Prime Time's resources on a school district after-school program:

> I got familiar with Prime Time when I was working with the Beacon Center. I started going to a lot of the trainings [and] a lot of the modules were set through Prime Time.… So when I came into the schools and it was proposed to us to work with Prime Time through the Safe Schools program, I [was] familiar with them already.… Then the new system, this QIS program, [helps] us develop a better program for our after-school program, whether it's the academic component, staff development, [or] the different programs that we're offering. It's definitely beneficial for us financially, [and] it has been supportive when it comes to improving our program, evaluating the top to the bottom, ways that we can improve and interact with our kids. So it's been definitely a great experience.

Along with organizational growth, there can be challenges, for example, in staffing or communication. When asked directly if they had any concerns, a majority of our informants voiced no reservations about Prime Time's direction or work. Only five of the twenty-nine program directors, as well as two agency directors and one consultant, expressed concerns about some aspect of Prime Time or offered suggestions for improvement. Their individual concerns varied, although an underlying theme was that there have been some communication lapses and challenges in meeting the needs of a diverse network of providers. For example, one informant suggested that the increased growth made it difficult to keep up with all of Prime Time's activities: "As they expand, they compartmentalize a little, and I lose track of who is in charge of what [even though] they tell us." Another complained that "sometimes Prime Time spreads itself too thin." A third noted that after being assigned to a new quality advisor, there was less interaction with the advisor: "I like the interaction with them, so personally I would like *more* interaction on a monthly basis with my QA and I don't really have that."

In addition, a director described two instances in which poor planning and communication made it difficult to accommodate the particular needs of her program. In one instance, the program received a last-minute call from Prime Time offering a free field trip for middle-school students; however, there was no funding for elementary school students, and staff wanted both groups to attend at the same time. In another instance, youth from her school-based program were invited to perform for a networking event, but the event was held during the day when the children would be in school and at a location some distance from the school. Although the director and staff decided it would be a good experience and made arrangements for them to attend, the youth only had a chance to perform and were unable to see the other performances. Although the director described it as "a lovely event," she concluded: "It really was just for the providers. It could have been for the kids too, but it was totally about the providers."

The only other theme underlying a few of the comments from this small group of informants was a question about whether Prime Time represented all participants in the after-school system. Three individuals raised questions about whether the views and needs of youth and parents were being adequately addressed in Prime Time's work.[21] In addition to the comment of the director just cited, another informant noted with regard to the QIS that consumers were not involved in developing the standards that are being assessed in the PBC-PQA tool:

> I think we're getting a lot of information, but I think there are pieces that are missing. I don't think we all agree on what we're striving for. There is so much room for growth in including the consumer voice in all aspects of the initiative.

Two or three informants voiced confusion or questioned Prime Time's ties with CSC. One, a program director, noted that "a lot of their board members come from their funders, and they don't really have any outside influence outside of their funders." An agency director

---

[21] One might add that this concern was voiced even in light of the fact that much attention during the past year in the QIS and in staff training, has been paid to the area of youth engagement, giving youth choices, responsibility, and leadership opportunities

wondered whether the two organizations could maintain distinct roles when it came to implementing the QIS more broadly:

> Prime Time has worked very hard the last 3 years to make sure they're separate from CSC, but the way the QIS will now be used with CSC agencies goes back to a rating system concept rather than an improvement system concept.

This individual went on to say that Prime Time is still struggling to figure out what being an intermediary really means and "how to convey that to the after-school community. We all get confused around that. I don't think it's totally clear within the staff, and I don't think it's clear with providers. [Being an intermediary] is a hard concept." Another agency director similarly commented:

> I see Prime Time as being the baby of CSC. I'm hoping that what Prime Time says is true, that they're becoming an intermediary. I see Prime Time staff listen and I believe things are different now, but I know that the perception is still different in the community. Everything takes time. We keep jumping from model to model, but we don't give the models time to work. Change takes time.

Despite the concerns of these individuals, there appears to be less confusion and worry about the relationship between Prime Time and CSC than there was a year ago. Other than those mentioned above, no other program or agency directors expressed reservations about this relationship in relation to motivation to participate in the QIS or how the results of the QIS would be used. Although CSC was often mentioned in interviews with directors, they seem to make a distinction between the two organizations and see Prime Time as being neutral and unbiased in its approach to quality improvement. Thus, we conclude that the program directors we interviewed are feeling both supported by and satisfied with Prime Time's direction. However, it may be that agency directors who have less direct contact with Prime Time have less information and therefore more concerns about Prime Time's role in the after-school community.

Other Concerns

Finally, as they did the year before, some directors expressed concerns about larger issues that are endemic to the after-school field—issues of staff shortages and turnover, and inadequate facilities. For example, one director believed that her program's assessment would be lower because of its poor facilities, even though the program was doing well otherwise:

> When CSC or somebody comes out and says we're going to do evaluations, everything is right here at [a rating of] 5, but our furniture, we might be like a 3. It's not falling down, it's not going to hurt anybody, but … we don't have all that new furniture [like the programs on the coast, over in West Palm Beach] because most of our money is going into renovating the building, keeping the maintenance up on the building and that kind of stuff, but when it does get to the point we need to get new furniture, we will.

Another program director who had not yet had her final assessment when we interviewed her worried about how it would be affected by recent staff shortages: "We've had

to make adjustments to what we do on a regular basis because of the staffing shortage." Another director talked about his ability to participate in staff training and other Prime Time activities: "This year has been difficult. Last year we had a director, which freed me up a bit. This year we no longer have a director, so I haven't been able to get out and do much of what I used to do over the years." A third director similarly commented:, "Unfortunately, I haven't been as active recently because I've been here without much free time to go to events.... It's almost a global thing—do more with less." Although these staff and facility concerns cannot be resolved by Prime Time alone, they impact the ability of providers to fully participate in the QIS or take advantage of the staff development and curricular resources provided through Prime Time to students in the classroom.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This is the third report of a process evaluation of Prime Time by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, covering the 2006-2007 program year. Prime Time's goals during the past year included completing the pilot of the QIS, while continuing to increase the capacity and responsibility of local organizations to provide curriculum and other program enhancements to after-school programs. In addition, they continued to work on establishing ongoing professional development, increasing outreach to new programs, and developing community awareness of the importance of after-school programs for children and youth and quality standards. In the evaluation, we focused on the continuing development of the QIS, but we also observed the implementation of Prime Time's other strategies to develop a comprehensive, countywide system of supports and resources for out-of-school-time programs.

Prime Time is a broad and multifaceted intermediary that has undergone several leadership changes and fairly rapid organizational growth in a short period of time. Although Prime Time is still evolving, its role and responsibilities as an intermediary are becoming increasingly clear to its leadership and staff, the provider community, other intermediaries, and funders. Interviews with a range of program directors participating in the QIS pilot indicate that Prime Time continues to be a highly regarded and trusted resource among this group of providers. In addition, there appears to be growing awareness among other after-school providers in the county about Prime Time's work, the resources it facilitates, and the importance of quality in programming.

When program directors in the QIS pilot talked about the strengths of Prime Time, they most often mentioned teamwork and support, along with opportunities for networking, program enhancements, and training. They perceive Prime Time's activities to be closely aligned with its goals and right on track to meet both their individual needs and those of the broader after-school community in Palm Beach County. They were appreciative of Prime Time's efforts during the past year to further refine its professional development offerings to meet providers' shared learning needs and connect training to program improvement plans. They also recognized the effort to provide more trainings in the western part of the county. Providers were also pleased with the increased variety of modules and other curricular resources and the quality of module instruction. Perhaps most important, directors appreciated the tools and ideas they have received from participating in the QIS pilot to improve the quality of their programs. These program directors continued to embrace the shift in focus from quality rating to quality improvement. They also reflected a growing sense of self-sufficiency and empowerment in their quality improvement efforts.

The QIS pilot concluded successfully with thirty-seven of forty original programs participating in the final reassessment, and thirty-one programs completing all phases of the QIS, including program improvement plans. Although some providers were more engaged than others, the QIS pilot process encouraged the participation of a diverse group of providers. Prime Time responded to concerns and suggestions raised by directors last year in terms of difficulties managing the baseline assessments and concerns about how the QIS results would be used by Prime Time and funders. Prime Time reinforced its role as an intermediary and

facilitator of quality improvements when it established the assessment process in a different organization, Family Central.[22]

Directors understood the value of both internal and external assessment and by the end of the pilot were comfortable with the PBC-PQA instrument. This tool proved to be both a useful measure of quality and a tool for bringing about that quality. Although collecting the baseline assessments was a complicated task, the process of collecting the follow-up assessments began earlier in the year and ran more smoothly. Responding to the concerns of providers, Prime Time devoted more time to the reassessment process. The on-site technical assistance provided by the quality advisors and, for some programs, the peer coaches was an important factor in the success of the pilot. There appeared to be an increased level of comfort with the process among program directors and their staff. Program directors also reported less concern about how the assessment data would be used by Prime Time and funders than they reported the previous year.

The success of the pilot can be attributed both to Prime Time's work as well as the providers' new understanding of the QIS process. Because providers were able to see examples of real change in their programs, they were able to reflect on the process of change. Whereas some directors expressed uncertainty and some ambivalence about the QIS in the first year, all participants in the pilot who were interviewed expressed more satisfaction and understanding of the process this year. At the time of our interviews, some directors remained uneasy about the outcome of the pilot and how the QIS results would factor into funding decisions, although they seemed to recognize that these concerns were matters to discuss with their funder rather than Prime Time. Some directors also worried about some of the goals in their program improvements that seemed out of reach because of obstacles such as deteriorating facilities and staff turnover that, in their view, Prime Time's resources cannot impact.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Ongoing Challenges for Prime Time</h2>

In our report of November 2006, we identified several challenges facing Prime Time and other intermediary organizations engaged in system building in the after-school field. Although these are long-term challenges, we believe, as discussed in the following, that Prime Time's work is also helping to address these issues in Palm Beach County.

Responding to Diverse Needs

Prime Time is developing a system to engage and support a very diverse network of programs, including school-run child-care programs, public parks and recreation programs, and a variety

---

[22] In collecting the baseline assessments, Prime Time staff tried to keep itself separate from the process to emphasize that its role is one of support rather than assessment. However, it became necessary for a Prime Time staff member to be involved in the assessment process to oversee both the training of the assessors and the logistics of conducting the assessments to make sure communication and relationships among the programs, the assessors, and Prime Time remained positive. In the new QIS, Family Central staff will have primary responsibility for building relationships with providers to explain and facilitate the QIS process. Providers will also be more proactive in arranging for their assessments directly with Family Central, while Prime Time will still assist programs in preparing for their assessment visits and interpreting the scores afterwards.

of community-based programs (some of which are provided in school settings), which are operated by small, faith-based and immigrant organizations and larger, well-established agencies such as Boys & Girls Clubs and the YMCA. These programs have different goals, organizational structures, resources, licensing requirements, funding, and levels of quality. During the 2006-2007 program year, one way Prime Time attempted to better meet the needs of this diverse provider community was by expanding the locations of training, making these trainings more widely available, increasing resources for individual, on-site technical assistance by quality advisors and peer coaches, and developing trainings directed at identified needs in program improvement plans.[23] In addition, the community resource advocates intensified their efforts to reach out to new programs to learn more about availability, types, and needs of programs in different areas of the county and how Prime Time can best support them.

Communicating, Building, and Maintaining Relationships

With Prime Time's growth and the expansion of the number and variety of programs it touches, communication has become more challenging. Through the quality advising system and the redesigned networking meetings, Prime Time also devoted more attention to making sure that people remain connected and informed this year. Although building relationships, communicating, and collaborating with diverse constituencies are difficult, Prime Time's efforts were largely successful. Only a few of the directors we interviewed complained about a lack of information or communication. The new networking events suggest that these may be more responsive to the varied needs of providers and offer more opportunity for real communication and networking.[24] The varied locations of these events throughout the county also broadens providers' knowledge of the larger community of after-school programs as well as the resources available to programs.

In addition, Prime Time has taken a measured approach in its effort to institutionalize resources in local organizations and increase their capacity to meet the needs of the provider community. As we have noted previously, in working with community partners it is important to clearly establish roles and responsibilities and maintain frequent communication and oversight to ensure that high-quality services are provided.

As new programs are brought into the QIS and learn about other services provided by Prime Time, these communication structures will become increasingly important to make sure providers are fully informed about the QIS process and how to access professional development and curricular resources. In addition, interviews with a small number of program and agency directors suggest a need to broaden Prime Time's constituency. Along with expanding the range of after-school providers involved with Prime Time, it means finding ways to inform and involve youth and families in quality improvement efforts as well as to inform and engage agency directors and other leaders.

---

[23] As noted earlier, Prime Time responded to the needs of staff in the western part of the county by offering more workshops and classes at more convenient locations and times for them. PBCC is also exploring the possibility of offering some of its credit-bearing classes at other, community-based sites.

[24] These are also a valuable venue for Prime Time leadership and staff to report on their activities and learn firsthand about the interests and concerns of providers.

Clarifying the Role of Assessment, Standards, and the QIS

At the conclusion of the pilot, there was widespread support for the QIS, the quality standards it represents, and the shift from a system of quality ratings and accountability to a system of quality improvement and support. There was, moreover, much less concern than there had been the previous year about how the assessment data would be used by funders. Last year, some providers were uneasy about the distinction between support and assessment in the QIS and uncertain about how their final ratings would be interpreted and used by CSC and other funders. One year later, although providers still wonder how their progress will be viewed by their funders, they have much greater understanding of, and apparent trust in, the improvement process. This suggests that however their progress is viewed by funders, providers are learning what they need to do to better their programs based on agreed-upon standards of quality. They also seem to sense they are a part of a community of programs working toward the same goals.

However, clarifying the role of assessment, standards, and the QIS is likely to be an ongoing issue as new programs are brought into the QIS. It has taken time for programs who have participated in the development of the QIS, from its early days as a QRS until now. Across the field, there are still questions about what quality looks like, the process of change, how best to measure change, and how to hold providers accountable for change. Thus, it will be important to continue to track changes in perceptions of the assessment process as the QIS evolves.

Training and Retaining Staff

Developing staff qualifications and retaining qualified staff are ongoing challenges in the after-school field, and the effects of these challenges on Prime Time's work are similar to those in other system-building initiatives. The lack of financial incentives for training (e.g., increased compensation and/or job responsibilities), staff shortages, and family or school responsibilities can make it difficult for both directors and front-line staff to make time for training. Many providers are convinced that Prime Time is not able to help with this very important problem that they face. [25]

Indeed, one question we raised in the previous year was the impact of staff turnover on participation in the QIS. The fact that a large majority of the programs in the pilot completed all phases of the process suggests that staff turnover, to the extent it occurred, did not impact the process significantly. At the same time, most of the programs in the pilot were stable programs with some history, which might have made it easier for them to manage staffing problems with Prime Time's support. As new, perhaps less stable programs become engaged with Prime Time, it will be important to observe how staffing and other issues (e.g., facility problems) impact their ability to use and benefit from Prime Time's resources. [26]

---

[25] One director, on the other hand, told us that her quality advisor helped her "a great deal" with finding and hiring the "right" staff, and working at the administrative end to help ensure that the new staff would stay

[26] In discussing staff issues in our interviews with directors, some seemed to accept the inevitability of staff turnover and commented that providers need to develop strategies for retaining staff and for making transitions smoother when staff do leave. Other directors, perhaps those with fewer resources, were genuinely struggling with this issue and seemed to have fewer resources to deal with it.

In its efforts to provide on-site technical assistance and to make training and curricular resources more available in other parts of the county, Prime Time is starting to tackle some of the barriers to staff development and retention. There is now a full-time staff person at PBCC dedicated to the professional development of the school-age work force. However, there are still unresolved questions about the right mix of informal training, continuing education, and credit-bearing course work to meet the needs of the diverse provider community and about how these different opportunities can be integrated into a comprehensive professional development system.

Increasing incentives for staff to participate in training is complicated. Although generally Prime Time's trainings were well attended, staff reported some disappointment in the levels of attendance by some of the QIS providers compared with other, non-QIS providers. It is important that providers outside the QIS pilot were aware of and taking advantage of Prime Time's staff development offerings. However, the fact that participation by QIS participants is lower than Prime Time considers desirable raises a question of whether a "threshold effect" exists in that programs involved in the QIS cannot take on an additional activity such as training. Or, given limited time, do providers make choices about which activities to engage in? Another question is how much support staff and directors receive for professional development within their own agencies. Do agency and program directors view and treat their staff as professionals and encourage them to participate in training? These are questions to explore in the context of Prime Time's future work.

Conclusion

Prime Time's QIS pilot and related professional development strategies have yielded a number of important lessons about the process of program improvement. Quality improvement is a long-term process. It takes time to collect the baseline data needed to develop a program improvement plan. It can take time to form useful relationships with quality advisors and other on-site technical assistance providers and obtain the resources needed to implement the plan. The culture and expectations of agencies, whether it is the school district, a well-established community-based organization, or a small, faith-based organization, affect the process of change. It requires initiative, time, and energy on the part of staff who may feel overwhelmed just managing the day-to-day operations of a program to find time to reflect on their work and implement new practices. Fully implementing program improvements—especially in the important areas of youth engagement and relationships between staff and youth—can take a long time.

As we noted in our November 2006 report, the barriers to professional development, such as staff turnover and time and financial constraints—including lack of compensation for continuing education—are endemic to most out-of-school system-building initiatives (e.g., Halpern, 2005(add to references); Halpern, Spielberger, & Robb, 2001). However, this does not mean that they cannot be lessened. In building a flexible professional development system, it will be helpful to continue to track participation in training in relation to staff turnover to learn more about the barriers and facilitators to staff development for Palm Beach County providers. Toward this end, the management information system being developed by Prime Time will be useful for gathering a variety of information about providers in the county, the

level of their participation in the range of supports for out-of-school time programs, and quality measures.

Throughout the QIS pilot, Prime Time pushed the view that improvement starts wherever programs currently are and will proceed at different rates depending on baseline quality and the specific areas that need to be modified. It promoted self-assessment, which was not a part of the pre-QIS process, as an important means for staff to learn about quality and to feel more ownership over the process. As noted above, there was a growing sense of confidence and authority among the directors in the QIS pilot that was not present in our interviews the year before. Although not true of all programs, this sense is consistent with Prime Time's own goals to empower providers and make them more self-sufficient. At the same time, there still are and will continue to be programs that need more help than others on their way to self-sufficiency. Thus, providing support to diverse after-school programs requires a delicate balance regarding when to intervene and when not to. Prime Time learned that programs with some level of stability in terms of physical space, funding, and personnel were better equipped to make use of and learn from the QIS and other resources. Thus, Prime Time is being intentional (word choice?) in how QIS is rolled out to a new group of programs as well as in how new programs are engaged by the community resource advocates.

Finally, it is important to keep learning about the process of quality improvement. Now that the QIS pilot has been completed, Prime Time has asked Chapin Hall to continue to observe and document its activities as it prepares to launch the QIS more broadly. Plans for the 2007-2008 program year include working with three primary groups of providers:

- After-school programs funded by the Children's Services Council (CSC), which are required to participate in the QIS as part of their funding and most of which participated in the pilot and are familiar with the QIS
- Middle-school programs, both community-based and school-based, including a few that are new to the system, and several that have already been participating in the QIS
- School-aged Child Care (SACC) programs, operated by the school district, which have not participated in the QIS previously

Although the QIS process will be very similar to the pilot, Prime Time expects participating providers to be more self-sufficient and take more initiative in the QIS than they did in the pilot. For example, providers will now be responsible for contacting Family Central and making their own arrangements to be assessed. Thus, an important question is how proactive providers will be in obtaining the resources they need, whether it is professional development, program enhancements, or a visit from a quality advisor or coach. Other important questions about the roll-out of the QIS include the following:

- Are there differences among programs, based on program auspices or previous experiences with quality improvement?
- What is the level of participation and buy-in from staff at different levels—from front-line staff working directly with children, to program directors, to agency leaders?
- What is the relationship between providers' quality improvements in the QIS and the specific supports provided by Prime Time, including peer coaching, professional

development, curricular enhancements, and other activities? What particular kinds of resources are most helpful for which programs?

- Is the external coaching process implemented last year the appropriate model for Prime Time and providers in Palm Beach County? What are the different roles played by quality advisors and external coaches, and do providers understand the difference? What factors make for successful coaching relationships, and what are some of the barriers?

In addition, Prime Time will continue its work on other strategies to implement its overarching goal of developing a comprehensive system of standards and supports to strengthen the quality of after-school programs throughout the county. In addition to enhancing opportunities for professional development for staff, Prime Time also aims to continue to support other local institutions such as PBCC, the Center for Creative Education, and the YMCA and strengthen their capacity to provide needed resources to after-school programs. Important questions about these strategies include the following:

- What are the incentives for *training*? How easy is it for program staff to make time for training? Are there differences in participation levels in training as a function of use of other Prime Time resources? Is there a threshold effect? What is the impact of formal training on programs participating in the QIS versus programs not participating in the QIS?
- What are the needs and issues facing directors who are not and have not been part of the QIS pilot? How is Prime Time bringing them into the system? What kinds of supports do they need before engaging in the QIS?
- How well are Prime Time's partner organizations working with providers? How easy is it for programs to obtain the resources they need from Prime Time, Family Central, PBCC, the Center for Creative Education, the YMCA, and other organizations providing enhancements?
- Do providers continue to hold largely positive views of these organizations, as suggested by our research to date, or do they encounter more challenges when they have to take more initiative to obtain resources?

In summary, in the coming year Chapin Hall will pay close attention to the transition from the pilot phase to the actual implementation of the QIS across Palm Beach County. We will continue to examine the kinds of quality issues providers grapple with, which Prime Time resources seem to have been particularly effective in leading to change, and what other resources might be needed. We also hope to continue to explore providers' perspectives on assessment, and whether the QIS approach rather than a rating system continues to be understood and preferred by providers, as well as effective in improving quality. In addition, we hope to better understand variations among the experiences of different providers, depending on their baseline level of quality and needs, previous experience with the QIS, program type and structure, staff background, and community context.

APPENDIX A

Description of Prime Time's QIS Process

Quality Improvement System
2007/2008 Rollout Plan[27]

Baseline Assessment
Quality Advisor Assignment
Letter of Recommendation for Improvement
Training
Self Assessment
Program Improvement Plan
Implementation
Reassessment
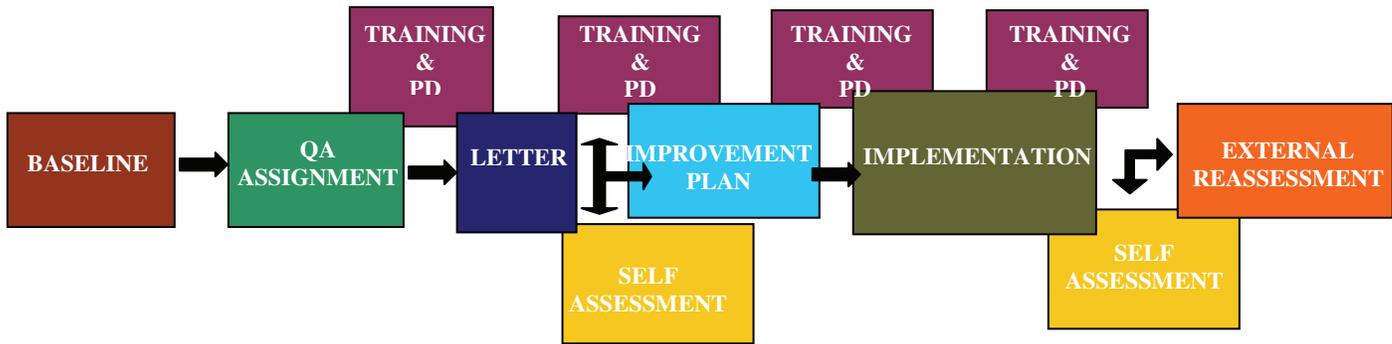
Baseline Assessment

Once programs have signed a contract with CSC, they will have to contact Family Central to make arrangements for their baseline assessments. Family Central will collect baseline data from every CSC funded afterschool program beginning the first week of September 2007. They will contact each provider to confirm their assessment and ask them to provide their program schedule. Family Central assessments and interviews will run through the end of February 2008 and are on a first come first served basis. Once baseline data collection is completed for a program, Family Central will send providers their scores and provide Prime Time with a copy of the report.

Quality Advisor Assignment

Providers will be assigned to a Quality Advisor (QA) as the assessments are received by Prime Time from Family Central. The QA will be responsible for reviewing the report and making initial contact with the assigned site. The QA will meet with the Prime Time management team to review and obtain suggestions for recommendations. Once the Letter of Recommendation is drafted, the QA will contact the provider to discuss the recommendations and review the report.

Letter of Recommendation for Improvement

Providers are responsible for following though and obtaining the "Letter of Recommendation for Improvement" from their Prime Time Quality Advisor. Once providers have obtained the letter, it is their responsibility to submit it to CSC within six months of the awarded contract. This letter will provide a summary of the baseline report and areas for improvement. In addition, the letter will also include the following recommendations:

- upcoming trainings to attend
- enhancement opportunities that support improvement areas
- development of an improvement plan

---

27 Source: Prime Time, 2007

- participation in a self assessment process with program staff

Training and Professional Development

QA will recommend that any program engaging in the self-assessment process attend a Bringing Yourself To Work (BYTW) training prior to entering into the self-assessment process. Through the Professional Development department Prime Time will provide supports, in the form of different trainings, to help program staff improve the overall quality of programming that they are offering to their youth. Training offered at Prime Time will directly address items and indicators on the PBC-PQA and will help participants understand how to apply what they have learned into practice. Prime Time will also work with Palm Beach Community College to develop and deliver credit and non-credit courses and certificate programs that are relevant to the afterschool field. The overall purpose or rationale behind this is to enhance the skills and knowledge of the afterschool professional.

Enhancements

For the coming year, through our partnerships with enhancement agencies, afterschool professionals will have the opportunity to attend train the trainer workshops to gain hands on experience that will help enhance their professional skills. The partnership organizations will provide afterschool professionals with the basic skills/curriculum that can be implemented into their programs. In additions, technical assistance to afterschool professionals will be available through the partner agencies. Enhancements will have less emphasis on experts hands-on and more afterschool professional hands-on.

Self Assessment

QAs will work with assigned providers to conduct self-assessment within their programs and facilitate scoring and discussion. Self-assessment data is designed primarily for internal uses by the program staff. *Although this is a process that Prime Time strongly recommends, it is up to the program to engage Prime Time staff and seek support in this process once trained.*

Program Improvement Plan (PIP)

Providers will use baseline data and Prime Time recommendations to develop a Program Improvement Plan. Plans should list a minimum of three and a maximum of five goals and include: a timeline, steps toward reaching the goals, corresponding PBC-PQA item, measure of success and desired support. *Although this is a process that Prime Time strongly recommends, it is up to the program to engage Prime Time staff and seek support in this process.*

Implementation

Providers will carry out plans to improve quality through various support mechanisms. Providers will follow plans and further engage Quality Advisors for support. Providers may also request the assistance of a peer coach to help accomplish specific goals in the PIP.

External Reassessment

Re-assessments are conducted annually. Family Central will conduct re-assessment of each program at approximately the same time that their baseline took place the year prior and follow the same procedure.

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide for QIS Program Directors

Year 3 Interview Guide for
QIS Program Directors

Note to interviewer: If the respondent mentions quality at any point during the interview (e.g., often mentioned related to Prime Time's goals and/or the program improvement process), please probe to determine each Director's definition of quality.
_____

Note to interviewer: Ask the following two questions only if we've not interviewed this Director previously. If we have interviewed the Director before, please refer to the interview transcript and/or the matrix of information we've put together to get oriented to the Director's "story" before the interview.

1. What is your background (i.e., where is most of your professional experience?)?

2. How long have you been the Program Director at your current program? Have you had previous experience as a program director?

    _____

3. What is the focus of your program? *(probe if necessary to determine primary target population served, needs or goals of children and families, i.e., specific needs of this program's children and families)*

4. How do you view Prime Time? What do you think Prime Time's role is in the after-school community? How do you think others view Prime Time? What do you see as Prime Time's goals? *(Note to interviewer: if respondent naturally answers these questions, you don't need to ask them – just use your judgment here. We're trying to get at how Program Directors and others are thinking of Prime Time these days, i.e., as funders, providers, monitors?*

5. Have you seen changes in Prime Time's goals or activities over time? What changes have you seen? What do you think of them?

6. What activities do you associate with Prime Time? *(Note to interviewer: We want to see what activities seem to stand out for respondents, e.g., modules, professional development, and/or the QIS pilot?)* Which of these activities have you participated in?

7. How do you feel about the work that Prime Time is doing currently? What impact has Prime Time had on your program and staff so far? Do you have any concerns about Prime Time's work?

    _____

Note to interviewer: The next several questions ask about different aspects of Prime Time: (1) modules/program enhancements; (2) professional development; and (3) the quality improvement process. If respondent talks about these above, you may not have to ask each of these questions.

8. *(Note to interviewer: Try to recall how the respondent responded to item 4 above and ask this question accordingly…)* Have you accessed any of Prime Time's modules or program enhancements? If so, were you pleased with the process and the quality of the module instruction (*the process=timeliness of response from Prime Time after request, overall quality of the module, children's reactions, etc.)*? What is the role of program staff when outside instructors come? (*Use as probe if necessary: is this an opportunity for staff development or a time for staff to do other things?*)

9. Have you or your staff participated in professional development or trainings conducted or sponsored by Prime Time? *If yes*, how often? How satisfied were you with them? *If no,* or infrequently, why don't you/your staff participate?
(*Note to interviewer: Please probe for their perceptions of the quality of instruction, the accessibility of trainings, and the availability of trainings*)?

   Do you feel that there are a variety of training topics to choose from? Is there anything you would like that you know is not available (*Probe: What are your training needs?*)?

   Is staff turnover a concern for you? Do you have any (other) concerns regarding staff? Has any of the support Prime Time offers been helpful with this (these) issue(s) for your organization?

   How do you think Prime Time can best assist Program Directors with staff development and retention?
   _____

10. What is your perception of the program improvement process (i.e., what the process is and what Prime Time wants to have happen with the program improvement plan, etc.)? How have you and your staff been involved in the process?

11. What were some of the goals that you included in your plan? Did you access any of the supports that Prime Time offers to help you meet these goals? *If no*, why not? *If yes*, how satisfied were you with the supports you received?

12. How did the assessment process go for your program this year, both the self-assessment and the assessment done by an external observer?

   a. Do you think the assessment tool is appropriate and useful for your program? Are the standards clear?
   b. Were you and your staff comfortable with the external assessor? Why or why not?

13. What is your relationship with your Quality Advisor? *(Probes: What are some of the areas in which you've received support from your QA? Have you been satisfied with the support you've received from your QA? If not, why?)*

   If this Director does NOT currently have a peer coach, ask the following:

14. Are you aware that some Program Directors are working with peer coaches (assigned to them by Prime Time)? *If not*, just let them know that some programs are working with

program directors who, through an application and training process implemented by Prime Time, have become peer coaches. *If so*, what is your sense of how this process works? Are you interested in working with a peer coach? If so, why?

_____

15. Do you participate in the Networking Events? Are these meetings useful; if so, in what way? If not, why?

16. Do you feel like you are kept informed of the activities and supports Prime Time offers (e.g., trainings, meetings, technical assistance)? Have you used Prime Time's Web site? Do you find it useful? If so, why? If not, why not? (*Probe for preferred modes of communication if relevant*).

_____

17. Based on your overall experience with the QIS thus far, do you think the process has worked to improve the quality of <u>your</u> program? Do you think the system should be changed in some way? Do you think participation in the process changed your program? If so, how? (*Probes: the pilot process has involved internal and external program quality assessment based on agreed-upon standards and the creation of a program improvement plan [with goals] based on assessment results…have these aspects been effective at improving program quality in your opinion?*)

Do you feel like you have a good understanding of how the QIS results will be used? (*Probes: by Prime Time, your agency, other funders…*)

Has the Director of your agency been involved in and/or supportive of your participation in the QIS process? Please explain.

18. How do you think Prime Time is doing in its efforts to respond to the needs of both your program specifically and the needs of the diverse after-school provider community more generally? (*Probe for suggestions for improvement [if relevant] in terms of the QIS in general, professional development, modules/program enhancements, community outreach, communication, anything else...*)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Akiva, T. (2005). Turning training into results: The new youth program quality assessment. *High/Scope Resource*, Fall/Winter 2005, 21-24.

Benson, P. L., & Pittman, K. J. (Eds.) (2001). *Trends in Youth Development*. Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Center for Nonprofit Excellence (2007). www.nonprofit-excellencepbc.org

Children's Services Council (2005). *State of the Child in Palm Beach County: School-Age Children.* West Palm Beach, FL: Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County.

Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. (Eds.) (2002). *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

(Add Halpern, 2005, from p. 74?)

Halpern, R., Spielberger, J., & Robb, S. (2001). *Evaluation of the MOST Initiative: Final Report and Summary of Findings.* Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children.

Hansen, D. M., Larson, R. W., & Dworkin, J. B. (2003). What adolescents learn in organized youth activities: A survey of self-reported developmental experiences. *Journal of Research and Adolescence, 13*(1), 25-56.

Harvard Family Research Project (2004). Promoting quality through professional development: A framework for evaluation. *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Evaluation, 8*, 1-12.

Harvard Family Research Project (2005-06). Professional development. *The Evaluation Exchange*, *9*(4), 1-23.

Johnson, E., Rothstein, F., & Gajdosik, J. (2004). Professional development for youth workers. *New Directions for Youth Development, 104*, 51-64.

Larson, R. W. (2000). Toward a psychology of positive youth development. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 170-183.

Larson, R. W., Hansen, D. M., & Moneta, G. (2006). Differing profiles of developmental experiences across types of organized youth activities. *Developmental Psychology, 42(5)*, 849-863.

National League of Cities (2006). www.nlc.org

Larson, R. W., Hansen, D., & Walker, K. (2005). Everybody's gotta give: Adolescents' development of initiative within a youth program. In J. Mahoney, R. W. Larson, & J. Eccles (Eds.), *Organized Activities as Contexts of Development: Extracurricular Activities, After-school and Community Programs.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Larson, R. W., Jarrett, R., Hansen, D., Pearce, N., Sullivan, P., Walker, K., Watkins, N., & Wood, D. (in press). Youth programs as contexts of positive development. In A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *International Handbook of Positive Psychology in Practice: From Research to Application*. New York, NY: Wiley.

National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) (2006). *Making the Case: A Fact Sheet on Children and Youth in Out-of-school Time*. Wellesley, MA: NIOST, Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College.

Robbins, P. (1991). *How to Plan and Implement a Peer Coaching Program.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Spielberger, J., & Lockaby, T. (2006). *The Prime Time Initiative of Palm Beach County, Florida: QIS Development Process Evaluation: Year 2 Report.* Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children.

Spielberger, J., Horton, C., Michels, L., & Halpern, R. (2005). *New on the shelf: Teens in the Library--Findings from the Evaluation of Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development.* Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children.

Wynn, M. J., & Kromrey, J. (1999). Paired peer placement with peer coaching in early field experiences: Results of a four-year study. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 26*(1), 21-38.

Yohalem, N., Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., & Yu, D. (2005). *Youth Program Quality Assessment and Improvement: Celebrating Progress and Surfacing Challenges. A Meeting Report.* Washington, DC: The Form for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc.