Shared Youth, Shared Strategies:

What City Agencies, Schools and Community Partners Can Do Together to Improve Cambridge Middle School Youth Participation in Quality Out-of-School Time Programs

A Strategic Plan of

The Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth

June 2009

Co-Chairs:

Sam Seidel, Vice Mayor, Cambridge City Council

Nancy Tauber, Cambridge School Committee

Prepared by:

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Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth

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About the Aspire Institute at Wheelock College

Founded in 2007, the Aspire Institute seeks to strengthen the capacity of communities to improve the lives of children and families, through effective college-community collaboration. Specifically, the Aspire Institute mobilizes the resources of Wheelock College to support strategic planning, program quality improvement and research and evaluation, in the areas of education, health and wellness and family, child and youth services.

Aspire Institute's Director, **Jake Murray,** served as a co-facilitator of Commission meetings, coordinator of data collection and research, and principal author of the ***Shared Youth, Shared Strategies*** plan. Mr. Murray has worked with the City of Cambridge, Department of Human Service Programs and the Agenda for Children previously to develop and implement new initiatives.

Clarification of Terms and Intent

Out-of-School Time Programs

For the purpose of this strategic plan, the term Out-*of-School Time (OST) Programs* refers to both formal after school ***and*** summer programs. The Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth recognizes the critical role that both after school and summer activities play in promoting the healthy development and academic success of youth. They offer the same opportunity to impact the lives of youth – the hours youth spend over the summer are equivalent to the hours they spend after school over the full school year. Focusing on one over another, thus short-changes our youth.

Therefore, it is the full intent of the Blue Ribbon Commission that the citywide strategic goal, core objectives, desired outcomes and system-level strategies outlined in the ***Shared Youth, Shared Strategies*** plan apply both to Cambridge after school and summer programs. It is only through the combined efforts of both settings that this plan will succeed in significantly improving the social and learning experiences for middle school youth, both inside and outside of school.

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Executive Summary

Each school day, over 1,300 Cambridge middle school youth leave schools in the early afternoon. These same youth end school in late June, not returning to classrooms until September. What they do every day after school and over the summer months may have dramatic, lasting impacts on their school and life success. Mounting research suggests that middle school youth who engage in quality out-of-school-time (OST) activities perform better academically, demonstrate greater social and emotional competency, engage less in risk behaviors, and engage more in sports and exercise in comparison to youth who do not participate in OST activities. In very real terms, OST activities greatly enhance the well-being of middle school youth, offering a range of experiences that can foster both their present and future life success. Therefore, **it is of great concern that only one-third of Cambridge middle school youth regularly participate in OST programs and activities.**

To address this concern, the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth—comprised of school department staff, human service providers, elected officials and families—completed a strategic planning process over the winter and spring of 2009. This process began with a comprehensive environmental scan to develop a full picture of Cambridge middle school youth—e.g. demographic characteristics, unique learning and developmental challenges, and available city resources. The results of this scan are summarized in the Key Findings section of this report. Based on these findings, the Commission developed the ***Shared Youth, Shared Strategies*** plan that seeks to unite city agencies, schools and community partners to greatly enhance OST opportunities for middle school youth and families across the city.

A Citywide Goal

The ***Shared Youth, Shared Strategies*** plan begins with and build from a single citywide strategic goal:

To ensure broad participation of Cambridge middle school youth in quality out-of-school-time experiences that fosters both their present and future learning and life success.

Core Objectives

To achieve this goal, the plan calls on city agencies, schools and community partners to collaborate to pursue the following core objectives:

1. **To increase enrollment** of middle school youth in out-of-school time programs
2. **To enhance the quality** of out-of school time programs
3. **To foster youth connection to community** by bringing together youth and caring adults from across neighborhoods, schools, cultural/ethnic backgrounds and professional communities

Desired Outcomes

Success in meeting this strategic goal and core objectives will be measured through the city's **progress in reaching the following outcomes among Cambridge middle school youth within the next three years:**

- Increased enrollment rates in after school and summer programs
- Positive social-emotional development
- Increased academic engagement and skills
- Improved physical health and reduced risk behavior
- Improved youth connections to peers and community adults
- Increased future orientation and goals

The Commission has identified key indicators of progress toward these outcomes and suggested steps for monitoring these indicators in the full strategic plan.

System-Level Strategies

To pursue this plan's citywide strategic goal and core objectives and, ultimately, to achieve the desired outcomes, the ***Shared Youth, Shared Strategies*** plan outlines several potential system-level strategies. These strategies represent concrete action steps the community—city agencies, schools, community-based organizations and families—could undertake to significantly change the out-of-school-time experiences of Cambridge middle school youth. Moreover, these strategies are " system-level" because they are designed to change policies and practice across agencies, programs, neighborhoods and youth, rather than benefit individual youth, families or programs.

The potential strategies outlined in this plan target improvement in three system-level areas:

1. **Community Awareness and Outreach**—Strategies to improve information about OST programs for youth, families, and schools

2. **Service Delivery and Coordination** –Strategies to track enrollment, target services, and improve access across programs, schools and neighborhoods

3. **Quality Improvement**—Strategies to support OST programs in offering rich, developmentally appropriate and challenging learning and social experiences

Next Steps

This plan represents an important start. The real work lies ahead, as Commission members and others who are critical to this work move this effort from plan to action over the next several months and years. Among others, key next steps will include:

1. Seeking adoption of the plan's strategic goal by City Council, School Committee, Cambridge Kids' Council, key city agencies , as well as school and OST program leaders

2. Appointing a cross-system task-force –comprised of Commission members, key organizational leaders and staff, and youth—to further develop and implement system-level strategies over the next three years (June 2009 to June 2012)

3. Developing and submitting grant proposals to key funders in support of plan implementation

Shared Youth, Shared Strategies: Strategic Plan A

Citywide Strategic Goal: *To ensure broad participation of middle school youth in qual experiences that fosters both their present and future learning and l*

Core Objectives	Systems-Level Strategies	Systems Change
To Increase Enrollment	**Community Awareness & Outreach** Strategies to improve information about OST programs for youth, families, and schools	Improved communication systems & products Improved data collection, analysis & reporting Ease of access to programs/activities
To Enhance Quality	**Service Delivery, Coordination & Capacity** Strategies to track enrollment, target services, and improve access across programs, schools and neighborhoods	Greater collaboration between schools, city agencies, community organizations, higher education institutions & businesses Knowledgeable, skilled & committed staff Increase in age/ developmentally appropriate program design and activities
To Foster Youth Connection to Community	**Quality Improvement** Strategies to support OST programs in offering rich, developmentally appropriate and challenging learning and social experiences	Greater focus on /support for informal learning Greater focus on/support for health/wellness

Introduction

Each school day, over 1,300 Cambridge middle school youth leave schools in the early afternoon. These same youth end school in late June, not returning to classrooms until September. What they do every day after school and over the summer months may have dramatic, lasting impacts on their school and life success. Mounting research suggests that middle school youth who engage in quality out-of-school-time (OST) activities perform better academically, demonstrate greater social and emotional competency, engage less in risk behaviors, and engage more in sports and exercise in comparison to youth who do not participate in OST activities. In very real terms, OST activities greatly enhance the well-being of middle school youth, offering a range of experiences that can foster both their present and future life success. Therefore, **it is of great concern that only one-third of Cambridge middle school youth regularly participate in OST programs and activities.**

What can communities do to change patterns of middle school youth behavior?

How can communities work across schools, neighborhoods and organizations to ensure that middle school youth are safe, healthy, intellectually engaged and challenged to think about their futures both in and outside of school?

These are the core questions a committed group of Cambridge school department staff, human service providers, elected officials and parents, who served on the Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth, addressed this past winter and spring. The data-driven and creative solutions they came up with to answer these questions are presented in the ***Shared Youth, Shared Strategies*** plan that follows. This plan begins and builds from a single citywide strategic goal:

To ensure broad participation of Cambridge middle school youth in quality out-of-school-time experiences that fosters both their present and future learning and life success.

In support of this goal, this plan proposes core objectives and a series of system-level strategies to be implemented within the next six months to two years (June 2009 through June 2011). Taken together, this goal and these objectives and strategies will unite city agencies, schools and community partners to greatly enhance OST opportunities for middle school youth and families across the city.

The Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Youth Services

In May of 2008, the Cambridge City Council and the School Committee held their annual joint session. Focused on youth services, the joint meeting generated a significant amount of interest, particularly in the need for increased participation in and better coordination of youth programs. In response, Mayor Denise Simmons launched a Blue Ribbon Commission in July 2008 to study and report on the City's out of school time services. The Mayor appointed Vice Mayor, Sam Seidel, and School Committee Member, Nancy Tauber as Co-Chairs and a small number of key school and agency leaders to serve on the Commission.

Middle School Youth Focus

Over the summer and fall, the Co-chairs convened several meetings to gain a better understanding of the existing efforts and identify pressing out of school time needs within Cambridge. From these meetings, commission members identified low middle school youth engagement in out of school time activities as a community-wide challenge. While several efforts have been undertaken over the past few years to address this age group—including the school department review of the current K-8 school structure and middle school education programs, development of three new programs for middle school students (funded by the DOE 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant) and piloting of the RAYSE middle school youth summer initiative—resulted in a bump in OST enrollment , there are still large numbers of middle school youth not currently engaged in OST programs.

Commission-in- Action

To address this challenge, the Commission decided to undertake a comprehensive strategic planning process to understand and address the factors contributing to low middle school engagement in OST activities. To move this process forward, the Commission was renamed the Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth and executed the following steps:

1. Expanding the commission to include a broad representation of school and out of school time leaders and elected officials that are concerned with and/or most directly working with middle school youth in the city

2. Requesting and receiving funding from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation to conduct a citywide strategic planning project

3. Contracting with the Aspire Institute at Wheelock College to serve as a strategic planning consultant.

Over the winter and spring of 2009, the Commission completed a strategic planning process – described in the next section. As a result of this process, the Commission developed the strategic goal, core objectives and strategies outlined in this report. This plan represents an important start. The real work lies ahead, as Commission members and others who are critical to this work move this effort from plan to action over the next several months and years.

Strategic Planning Process

In the winter of 2009, the Commission launched a strategic planning process to research and develop a plan for increasing Cambridge middle school youth participation OST programs and improving the quality of these programs. To coordinate this process, the Co-Chairs formed a sub-committee of the full Commission to serve as a Planning Team. This team consisted of the Co-Chairs, Agenda for Children Out-of School-Time Initiative Director, Susan Richards, Cambridge School-After School Partnership Director, Khari Milner, and consultant and Aspire Institute Director, Jake Murray.

Work-Plan

The Planning Team developed a strategic planning work-plan (see process diagram on page 15), which the Commission completed over a series of six meetings, held from February through June 2009. This work-plan included the following stages:

Stage 1: Framing the Work

To guide the planning process going forward, commission members identified two types of key questions:

Information Questions – *What do we need to know to inform our strategic plan?*

- Who are Cambridge middle school youth? What do we know about their academic performance, social-emotional development and physical health?
- How many middle school youth participate in out-of-school-time programs? What are the reasons they do or do not participate? What are the patterns of participation?
- What out-of-school-time resources exist for middle school youth in Cambridge? How many programs specifically serve middle school youth? What types of professional supports exist for these programs?

Action Questions –*How should we use this plan to guide action?*

- How can we respond on a city-wide (or systems) level— across schools, city agencies, community programs, and families— to increase the *participation* of middle school youth in OST programs?
- How can we improve information about resources?
- How can we improve the *quality* of OST programs serving middle school youth?

Stage 2: Environmental Scan

To answer the key information questions, the Commission, in collaboration with the Aspire Institute, conducted an environmental scan which included the following components:

- Review of available data on middle school youth, including academic and health indicators, school and OST enrollment data, and existing youth and family surveys results
- Review of current research on middle school youth and OST programs
- A resource map of existing OST programs and activities serving middle school youth in Cambridge
- A Middle School Learning Forum with Wheelock College faculty members, which included presentations on youth development, family engagement, health and wellness, literacy and math and science.

The key findings resulting from these environmental scan activities are presented in the next section of this report.

Stage 3: Goal and Strategy Mapping

Based on both the Key Findings and the Key Action Questions, the Commission engaged in goal and strategy development activities. Specific activities including the following:

- **Goal and Objective Setting.** From review of key findings and Commission meetings notes, the Planning Team developed a citywide strategic goal and core objectives that captured the overall purpose of the planning effort. This goal and these objectives were presented to the full Commission for review, refinement and approval.

- **Strategy Mapping.** Commission members were asked to develop aligned strategies for achieving the citywide goal and core objectives. The Planning Team organized suggested strategies and then asked Commission members to prioritize among them, considering which strategies were essential for meeting the strategic goal and, of these strategies, which should be implemented in the short-term (next six-months to a year) or mid-term (within one to two years).

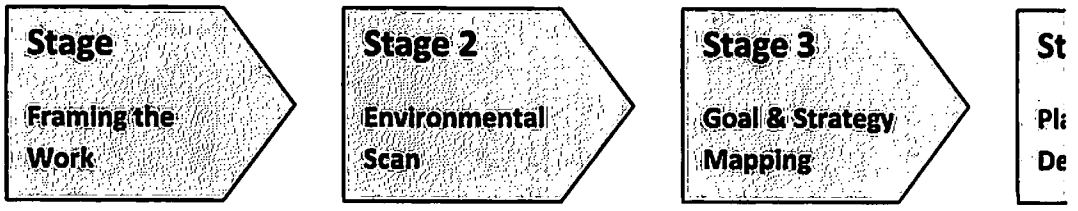
- **Strategy Work-Planning.** Commission members reviewed the prioritized strategies and developed initial work-plans to guide further development and implementation of these strategies.

Stage 4: Plan Development and Dissemination

The Planning Team documented and organized the Commission's strategic planning work through the development of this plan. Over the summer and fall of 2009, the Co-Chairs will share this plan with the Cambridge community through the following activities:

- Presentation of the plan to the Cambridge City Council, School Committee, and Kids' Council (A preliminary strategic report was presented to the Annual Joint Session of the City Council, the School Committee and the Kids' Council in May 2009)
- Presentation of the plan to CPSD leadership, principals, staff and school-site councils
- Convening a youth forum to share ideas, gather feedback and enlist support of Cambridge middle school youth
- Presentation of the plan to OST program leaders and staff
- Broad dissemination of the plan to the community in collaboration with the CPSD Office of Public Information and Communications and other City agencies to develop and implement marketing and communication strategies

Strategic Planning Work-Plan



Time-frame /Meetings	February 1 meeting (Feb 12)	March 2 meetings (March 5 & 26)	April & May 2 meetings (April 16 & May 7)	June 1 Mee (Junc
Actions	**Establish/clarify:** • Committee charge • Planning goals • Review current data • Communication & Work-plan	**Review:** • Cambridge services & resources • Relevant research • Other models	**Goal & strategy mapping by identifying:** • Goals & objectives • Key strategies • Organizational roles & responsibilities • Strategy work-plans	**Revie prelir plan** • De
Aspire **Deliverables**	• Prepare data report	• Coordinate faculty experts • Conduct/present data reports	• Capture mapping process in preliminary strategic planning framework	▪ D
Commission **Deliverables**	• Oversee ongoing communication	• Prepare & present overview of current services	• Distribute preliminary plan for feedback from key stakeholders	▪ P d a

Key Findings

Over a series of three meeting held in February, March and April of 2009, the Blue Ribbon Commission completed an environmental scan. This scan was designed to answer the following key questions:

- Who are Cambridge middle school youth? What do we know about their academic performance, social-emotional development and physical health?
- How many middle school youth participate in out-of-school-time programs? What are the reasons they do or do not participate? What are the patterns of participation?
- What out-of-school-time resources exist for middle school youth in Cambridge? How many programs specifically serve middle school youth? What types of professional supports exist for these programs?

With support from the Aspire Institute, the Commission reviewed available academic, health and program enrollment data as well as current research on middle school youth and out-of-school time programs. The key findings from this review were as follows:

Key Finding # 1: In comparison to nearby communities, the Cambridge middle school youth population is relatively modest in size, but spread across more schools

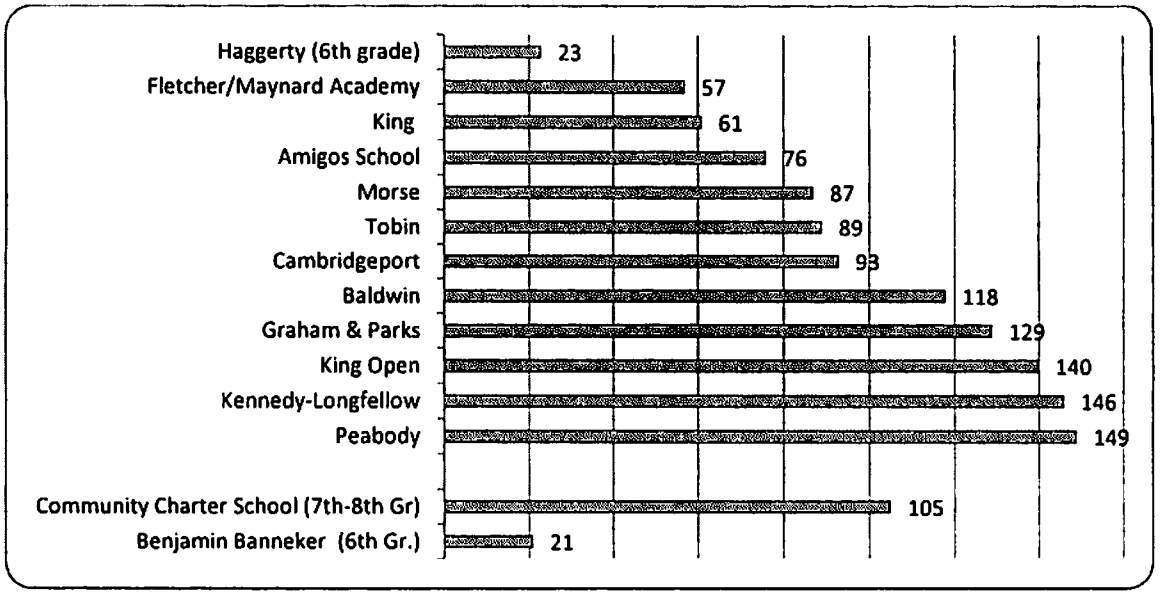
There are approximately 1,350 middle school youth (grades 6, 7 and 8) in Cambridge, of which 1, 168 (85%) are enrolled in the Cambridge Public School District (CPSD). Middle school youth are evenly distributed across grades six, seven and eight, averaging 390 students per grade.

In comparison to surrounding districts, the CPSD middle school population is relatively small in size. For example, the public school districts of Brookline, Newton, Everett, and Quincy have higher number of students enrolled in middle school grades –see chart below. Thus, relative to the scale of other communities, Cambridge would appear to have a 'reachable' middle school population, and that schools and OST programs could plan and deliver an adequate level of services.

The challenge of engaging Cambridge middle school youth, however, is less an issue of size than of distribution. Because of Cambridge's K-8 elementary school structure, middle school students are spread across 12 public schools and two charter schools. The number of middle school students in these school ranges from 21 to 150 – see graph on next page.

Cambridge Middle School Enrollment by School

(Includes Grades 6-8, unless noted otherwise)



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

In comparison, similar districts serve middle school students across between two and eight school – see chart below. **Expanding and improving OST options for Cambridge middle school youth, thus, will require new and creative efforts to coordinate services across multiple schools and OST providers.**

Comparison of middle School enrollment and number of schools:

Cambridge and nearby communities

Public School District	Middle School Population (SY2009 Grades 6-8)	Number of schools w/ middle school students
Cambridge	**1,168**	**12+**
Brookline	1,240	8
Somerville	949	7
Newton	2,467	4
Everett	1,200	5
Quincy	1,907	5
Medford	1,011	2

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Key Finding #2: Middle school youth are in a critical developmental stage, engaged in defining both a present *and* future self identity

Middle school youth are in the midst of great personal transformation. They are sailing fast into –and through—an 'identity storm,' in which they are forming ideas of both who they are in the present and who they would like to be in the future. Their present identity is heavily shaped by how they feel their peers and the adults in their lives view them. [1] Are they considered "good students" or one of the "smart kids"? Are they good athletes? Are they physically attractive? Which of any of these traits make them feel accepted by peers or adults?

Because of this heightened focus on perceptions, they often interpret interactions with peers and adults through a highly sensitive lens. For example, a middle school student might misinterpret a teacher's reminder that she has an assignment due as a sign that that teacher does not like them or think they are a good student. Adults working with middle school youth must be attuned to this frequent over-emphasis on perception, helping youth interpret their interactions with others in tempered and constructive ways.

Also critical to shaping positive self images among middle school youth is providing social, physical and academic experiences that both challenge them and allow them develop a sense of personal mastery or skill.[2] For example, youth might write, direct and perform their own play, develop and publish an online magazine, or organize their own environmental campaign. Thus, another important task of adults is to create multiple opportunities, both in an outside of school for youth to challenge themselves and experience success in various domains.

Middle school youth also define their present self in terms of their level of independence from parents and adults. They value highly making their own decisions about what activities they engage in and who they spend time with. At the same time, research suggests that middle school youth benefit from a 'facilitated autonomy' – in which adults provide youth with ample opportunities to make decisions within a framework that defines (with youth input) which choices and activities are safe, appropriate and challenging. [3] In this way, **adults can help middle school youth identify, negotiate and then exercise appropriate levels of autonomy.**

At the same time, middle school youth are beginning to develop a stronger sense of their future self –of what is possible for them and who will they become. Will they go to college? What will they do for

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[1] See: Cooper, C., García-Coll, C., Bartko, W., & Chatman D. & C. (2005) Editor's Introduction. *Developmental Pathways Through Middle Childhood: Rethinking Contexts and Diversity as Resources.* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; Eccles, J., Midgley, C., Wigfield, A., Buchanan, C., Reuman, D., & Flanagan, C. (1993). "Development During Adolescence: The Impact of Stage-Environment Fit on Young Adolescents' Experiences in Schools and in Families." *American Psychologist*, 48, 90–101; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development.(2000). *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century.* New York: Carnegie Corporation.

[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid

work? Will they travel? See the world? How middle school youth answer these questions can, in fact, be a key factor shaping future outcomes. A growing body of research shows that adults who were successful in college and later in their professional fields developed strong interests and firm ideas about their life as adults during their middle school years.[4] Thus, **encouraging appropriate future goals among middle school youth and helping them understand the pathways to these goals is another critical role adults can play.**

Because of their smaller staff-student ratios, flexibility over program design and activities and ability to hire a wide range of caring and skilled staff from various educational and professional backgrounds, OST programs offer multiple opportunities to foster positive youth-adult relationships. However, for this reason, it is **essential that staff in OST programs are well-versed in youth development stages, and then capable of translating this understanding into practice. For many staff, this may require specialized training and supervision.**

Key Finding # 3: Cambridge middle school youth would benefit from extended learning opportunities after school and during the summer

Review of available data on the academic performance of Cambridge middle school youth paints a mixed picture. In the aggregate, Cambridge students perform below the state MCAS averages in English/Language Arts, Math and Science for students in grades six, seven and eight. There are also MCAS performance gaps between different Cambridge racial/ethnic, income and disability student subgroups.

Further review, however, shows that most Cambridge subgroups outperformed their same sub-group counterparts in the state in the 2008 MCAS. In addition, the CPSD aggregate MCAS performance is lower than the state aggregate performance in part due to the high number of students with special needs in the Cambridge public schools. Whereas in Cambridge the percentage of students tested who are special needs ranged between 27% and 32% across the middle grades, statewide, the number of student tested with special needs ranged between 18%-19% for the middle grades. (See Appendix 3: Cambridge Middle School Youth: Summary Data Report for a review of MCAS results).

In sum, while in several instances Cambridge middle school students are out-performing their counterparts in the state— especially within certain sub-groups—**all CPSD middle school youth would benefit from extended learning activities after school and over the summer that enhance interest, knowledge and skills in the areas of math, science and literacy.** In particular, schools and OST

[4] Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development.(2000). *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century.* New York: Carnegie Corporation; Walker, K., E. & Arbreton, A. (2001). *Working Together to Build Beacon Centers in San Francisco: Evaluation Findings from 1998–2000.*Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures

programs should seek ways to provide coordinated supports to underperforming students and students with specials needs.

Research suggests that high quality OST programs can significantly increase the time youth spend engaged in learning activities, foster greater motivation to learn and improve academic content knowledge and skills. [5] An often overlooked or missed opportunity to foster academic success is the summer time. In fact, **emerging research suggests that the accumulated summer experiences of youth and the quality of these experiences may account for a significant portion of the 'achievement gap' between different youth subgroups.** More specifically, children and youth who do not consistently engage in summer activities that offer a range of both academic and non-academic learning experiences are more likely than children and youth who do consistently engage in these activities to experience both summer 'learning loss' and lower learning rates over the school year.[6]

A key characteristic of OST programs that are successful in enhancing youth academic performance is that:

> They combine the qualities of typical youth development programs—building self-confidence, sense of mastery, sense of belonging, self-discipline, sense of responsibility to self and others—with high quality curricula that increase engagement in learning and specific skills in reading, math and other subjects.
>
> (Miller, The Learning Season, p. 11) [7]

Moreover, OST programs provide multiple opportunities to embed learning in non-academic activities, engage in extended, project-based learning and apply learning to real-life context.[8] For example, youth might engage in a robotics competition, develop a youth-run business or non-profit or conduct a community-wide needs assessment on health issues. Such experiences bring academic content and skills to life and can powerfully augment school-based learning.

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[5] See: Grossman, J., Price, M. L., Fellerath V, Jucovy, L., Kotloff, L., Raley, R. & and Walker, K. (2002) *Multiple Choices After-School: Findings from the Extended-Service Schools Initiative*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures; Eccles J. & Gootman, J. (Eds.) (2002) *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, National Academy Press, Washington, DC; Miller, B.M. (2003). *Critical Hours: After-School Programs and Educational Success.* Brookline, MA: Miller Midzik Research Associates for the Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

[6] Miller, B.M. (2007). The Learning Season: The untapped power of summer to advance student achievement. Quincy, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

[7] Ibid

[8] Russell & Reisner, 2006. *Supporting Social and Cognitive Growth Among Disadvantaged Middle-Grades Students in TASC After-School Projects. Journal of Youth Development:* **Vol. 1, No. 2;** Broh, B.A. (2002). Linking extracurricular programming to academic achievement: Who benefits and why? *Sociology of Education* (Vol. 75, pp. 69-91); Viadero, D. (2002). Study finds inequity in students' school days. *Education Week,* 6.

Key Finding # 4: While many middle school youth report high levels of physical activity, segments of youth are not consistently engaged in sports or exercise programs

Cambridge schools and OST programs provides a range of sports and exercise programs for middle school youth and a high number of youth report they are physically active. Review of existing programs and data on physical activity suggests the following:

- All CPSD K-8 schools offer intramural middle school basketball and volleyball and to middle school students[9]
- There are 29 school and community-based sports and exercise programs serving middle school age youth[10]
- All 37 full-care after school programs and 41 summer programs offer physical recreation activities[11]
- 70% of middle school students reported participated in rigorous physical activity at least 3 times per week[12]
- Almost two-thirds of middle school students (65%) report participation in some form of after school sports or exercise[13]

However, **despite the high level of services and reported physical activity, there remain clear health challenges.** Health assessments of CPSD students report the following:

- 61% of fourth through eighth grade students did not pass the district's physical fitness test
- One-fifth (20%) of Cambridge children (K-8) are overweight—a rate that exceeds both the state (14%) and national (18%) rates [14]
- Nearly another one-fifth of Cambridge children (18%) are at risk of being overweight[15]
- Middle school girls are less likely than middle schools boys to report participating in either rigorous exercise (62% of girls vs. 77% of boys) or moderate exercise (30% of girls vs. 41% of boys)[16]
- There is no coordinated system for tracking youth participation in sports and exercise programs

Thus, **Cambridge schools, OST programs and health agencies should explore ways to improve physical activity levels and healthy eating habits among middle school youth, especially middle school girls.**

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[9] Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth. (2009). Cambridge After-School & Summer Activities for Middle School Youth: Preliminary Resource Data. Reported presented in April 2009.
[10] Ibid
[11] Ibid
[12] Cambridge Prevention Coalition (2007). Cambridge Middle Grades Health Survey: 2007.
[13] Ibid
[14] Cambridge Public Health Department (2007) Public Health Assessment; Center for Disease Control (2006)
[15] Ibid
[16] Cambridge Prevention Coalition (2007). Cambridge Middle Grades Health Survey: 2007.

Key Finding # 5: Participation of Cambridge middle school youth in OST has increased in recent years, but there is room for further improvement, especially among older youth (seventh and eighth graders)

On average, one-third of Cambridge middle school students participate in OST programs during the school year (400 per year). This number has improved in recent years, especially among eighth-grade students, whose enrollment in OST programs increased significantly this past year, jumping from a three-year average participation rate of 25% (from SY2006 to SY2008) to 32% (in SY2009). This development is largely attributed to the expansion of one middle-school focused after school program (the Department of Human Service Program's (DHSP) Gately-Peabody Middle School Partnership) and the launch of two new programs (the East End House/Kennedy-Longfellow Middle School Partnership and the DHSP Frisoli Middle School Partnership).

Of immediate concern, however, is the remaining large number (approximately two-thirds) of middle school youth who are not consistently participating in OST programs (i.e. attending an after school programs for three or more days per week or a summer program for at least four weeks). In a survey conducted by the CPSD in 2008,[17] over half of middle school students (56%) reported that they "hang out, have nowhere to go after school." The percentage of students reporting this increased with age/grade – whereas 41% of sixth graders reported they "hang out", 53% of seventh graders and 67% of eighth graders reported this to be the case. These findings appear to coincide with increased levels of reported risk behaviors (delinquent behavior, substance abuse and sexual activity) among older youth, especially eighth graders, as captured in the Cambridge Middle School Health Survey (2007) – see graph on next page .

Review of both national research and local data from surveys and focus groups suggests the following reasons for low OST enrollment among middle school youth:

- A majority of youth report they are simply not interested or motivated to join OST programs, especially programs who also serve younger age children. They would rather "do their own thing." [18]
- Youth have to take care of a younger family member – 42% of Cambridge middle school youth reported this to be the case[19]
- Families do not strongly encourage ("push") or require middle school youth to attend programs , because they perceive participation in OST activities as " their youth's decision" or they do not want to engage in power struggles with youth [20]

[17] Cambridge School-After School Partnership. (2008). Middle School Youth Survey. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Public School Department

[18] Duffett, A., & Johnson, J. (2004). All Work and No Play: Listening to what kids and parents really want from out-of-school time. Washington, DC: Public Agenda.

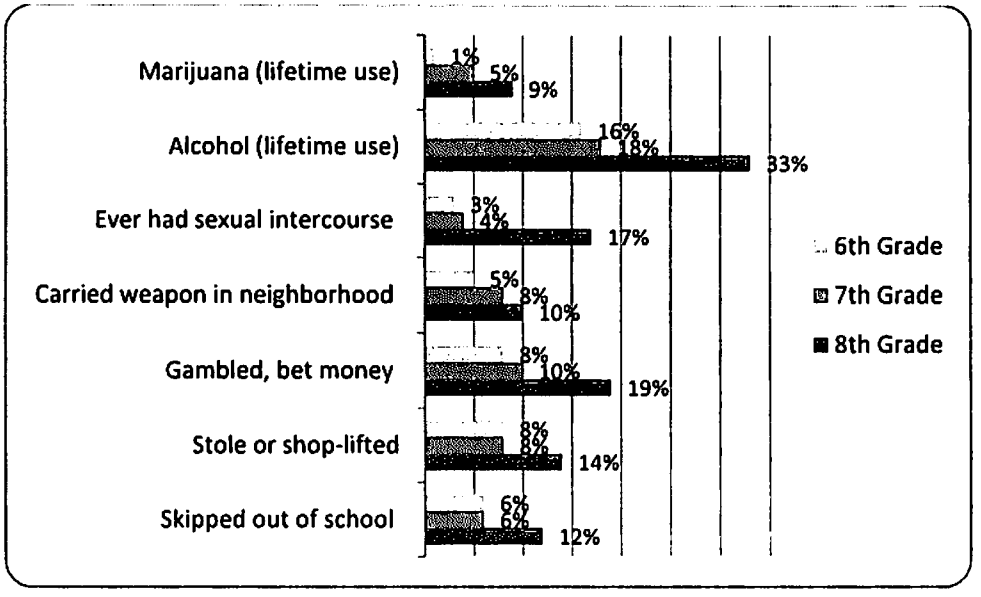
[19] Cambridge School-After School Partnership. (2008). Middle School Youth Survey. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Public School Department

- Lack of information among families about programs[21]

To develop a full understanding of OST participation from year-to-year and across schools, programs, neighborhoods and youth sub-groups, **the city will need to improve enrollment data and tracking systems across programs**. In particular, more information is needed about the level of middle school youth participation in summer activities.

Eight Graders at Risk:

Comparison of risk behaviors reported by Cambridge middle school youth by grade



Source: Cambridge Middle Grade Student Survey: 2007

Key Finding # 6: Middle School OST options and experiences vary considerably across schools and neighborhoods

While many middle school youth and their families choose not to participate in OST programs, this decision is also influenced by several factors related to where students go to school. These factors include the following:

- ***Types of OST programs available at or nearby schools***. Schools with after-school programs specifically focused on middle school youth (e.g. Peabody, King Open and Kennedy-Longfellow) have higher numbers of students participating in OST programs than, schools with no specialized middle school programs (e.g. Cambridgeport, Morse, etc).

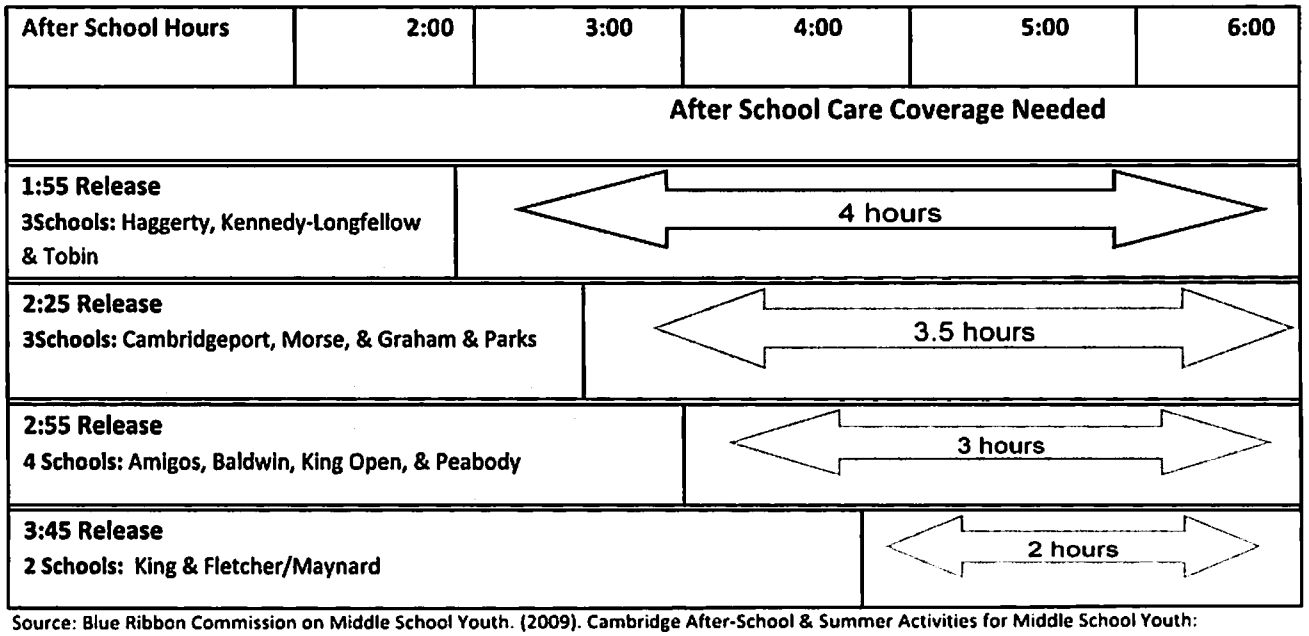
[20] Duffett, A., & Johnson, J. (2004). All Work and No Play: Listening to what kids and parents really want from out-of-school time. Washington, DC: Public Agenda.
[21] Cambridge Department of Human Service Programs. (2007) Youth Division Youth Center Focus Groups.

- ***Middle school enrollment by school.*** Schools with high concentrations of middle schools students are better positioned to show need, advocate for resources, enlist partners and develop programs of adequate size than schools with small numbers of students.

- ***Limited mobility.*** Middle school youth are less likely to travel from schools to community-based OST programs or programs at other schools. Parents are also hesitant to allow youth to travel across the city to programs after school. As a result, middle school youth tend to stay within or near their school or home neighborhoods after school, with limited exposure and access to programs, youth and adults from other areas of the city.

- ***School release times / late bus.*** Middle school after school options and needs are shaped by the length of the school day. Whereas some students end school before 2:00PM, other finishes close to 4:00PM –see chart below. In addition, student after school hours are shaped by when the late bus arrives at each school, which ranges from 3:45 to 5:00PM. As a result, the after school care needs of students can range from 1 to 4 hours. Families are often challenged to find programs that can accommodate these various schedules, offer affordable options for limited time and then to get students to programs if they are not located at or near schools.

CPSD School Release Times & After School Coverage Needs

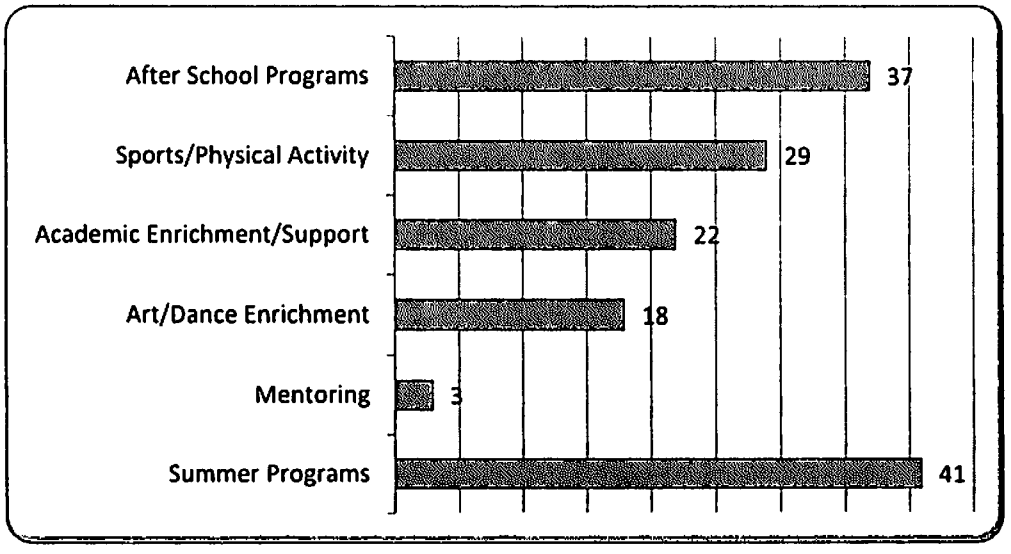


Source: Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth. (2009). Cambridge After-School & Summer Activities for Middle School Youth: Preliminary Resource Data

Key Finding # 7: There is currently less need for more OST resources than a need for improved coordination of existing resources

Cambridge offers a rich array of OST programs for middle school students. A resource mapping study conducted for the Commission identified 60 separate organizations offering approximately 150 OST programs and activities for middle school age youth. Among these programs, 37 provide full-time after school care (5 days per week from 2-6PM), and 69 offer enrichment activities in academic content areas, sports/exercise or arts/music. Of these full-time programs, 19 offer a summer program. In addition, there are 20 summer-only programs—see chart below.

Cambridge OST programs by program type/focus



Source: Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth. (2009). Cambridge After-School & Summer Activities for Middle School Youth: Preliminary Resource Data

However, further review of existing programs shows that only 12 of 150 program focus specifically on middle school students (Gr. 6-8). Moreover, while the majority of full care programs (29 of 37 or 79%) serve 15 or more sixth-grade students, **there is a considerable drop in the number of programs serving a sizable number of seventh and eighth-grade students**. Consider the following:

- Only 6 of 37 full care after-school programs have 15 or more seventh and eighth-grade students[22]
- Only 5 of 37 full care after-school programs have 10 or more eighth-grade students[23]

[22] Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth. (2009). Cambridge After-School and Summer Activities for Middle School Youth: Preliminary Resource Data. Reported presented April 2009.
[23] Ibid

Thus, while many OST programs are open to middle school youth, only a few serve significant number of middle school youth, especially older youth. In fact, three programs (the DHSP Gately-Peabody Middle School Partnership, the DHSP Frisoli Middle School Partnership, and the East End House/Kennedy-Longfellow Middle School Partnership) account for 45% of all CPSD middle school youth enrolled in OST programs. These programs specifically outreach to and design program activities for middle school youth, **strongly suggesting that other Cambridge OST programs should also consider focusing on a targeted developmental age group, rather than a broader K-8 or grades 4-8 range.** In particular, programs in which there are small numbers of middle school youth enrolled or are under-enrolled, in general, should consider specializing in one developmental area.

Key Finding # 8: There are limited quality improvement and professional development activities specifically designed for OST programs serving middle school youth

There are several promising quality improvement and professional development efforts currently underway in support of Cambridge OST programs, such as the Agenda for Children's Integrated Self Assessment and Support (ISAS)process, the CPSD's School-After School Partnership's Quality Partnership Grant initiative and Middle School Partnership cross-program team, and training provided through the DHSP Inclusion Initiative. Among these activities, however, few are specifically targeted to OST programs working with middle school youth.

As we have reviewed, the developmental and academic needs of middle school youth are challenging and unique, and thus require staff with different knowledge and skills than staff in K-5 OST programs. Cambridge families lend support to this argument. In family surveys conducted by the DHSP from 2006 to 2008, parents of middle school youth were consistently less likely than parents of elementary age children to report that OST staff knew their children's "personality, strengths, interest and needs." Thus, OST programs working with middle school youth would benefit from specialized professional development. This professional development should include quality guidelines and training in the followings areas:

- Middle school youth development and related high quality program design and practices
- High quality academic enrichment and support
- Inclusion of children with special needs
- Developing physical activities/sports options that engage a range of middle school youth
- Working with and supporting middle school families

Citywide Strategic Goal, Core Objectives & Desired Outcomes

Citywide Strategic Goal

In response to the Key Findings, the Commission proposes the City of Cambridge and community partners adopt the following citywide strategic goal:

To ensure broad participation of middle school youth in quality out-of-school-time experiences that fosters both their present and future learning and life success.

Core Objectives

To achieve this goal, the Commission calls for collaboration among city agencies, schools and community partners to pursue the following core objectives:

1. **To increase enrollment** of middle school youth in out-of-school time programs

2. **To enhance the quality** of out-of school time programs by ensuring:
   - Age/developmentally appropriate practice
   - Challenging informal learning experiences
   - Opportunities to explore creative interests and professional careers
   - Trained and connected staff

3. **To foster youth connection to community** by using out-of school-time activities to:
   - Bring together youth from across neighborhoods, schools and cultural/ethnic backgrounds
   - Cultivate relationships between youth and community adults from a range of professional fields, community settings and cultural institutions
   - Facilitate smoother transitions from middle school grades to high school

Desired Outcomes

Success in meeting this strategic goal and these core objectives will be measured through the city's **progress in reaching desired outcomes among Cambridge middle school youth within the next three years**. These desired outcomes and the key indicators for measuring progress towards these outcomes are as follows:

- **Increased enrollment rates in after school and summer programs**
  - Key Indicator: increase from 33% to 45% of middle school youth enrollment in OST programs (Source: CPSD – School-After School Partnership: Annual OST enrollment Data)

- **Positive social-emotional growth**
  - Key Indicator: increased number of middle school parents reporting that OST staff know their child's strengths, personality and interests
    (Source: DHSP Family OST Survey)
  - Key Indicator: increased number of parents of middle school parents reporting that their child is learning how to get along with other youth (Source: DHSP Family OST Survey)
  - Key Indicator: reduced number of youth with school-related disciplinary actions
    (Source: CPSD)

- **Increased academic engagement and skill**
  - Key Indicator: increased availability and participation in OST math, science and literacy activities
    (Source: Agenda For Children & CPSD – School-After School Partnership)
  - Key Indicator: Improved academic performance
    (Source: CPSD: MCAS results for grades 6, 7, 8)

- **Improved physical health and reduced risk behavior**
  - Key Indicator: increased participation rates in OST sports and exercise programs
    (Source: CPSD Athletic Department and DHSP Recreation and Youth Divisions)
  - Key Indicator: improved percentage of students passing the CPSD Fitness Test
    (Source: CPSD Athletic Department)
  - Key Indicator: reduced reported risk behaviors (e.g. substance abuse, sexual activity etc)
    (Source: Cambridge Prevention Coalition: Middle School Grades Health Survey)

- **Improved youth connections to peers and community adults**
  - Key Indicator: increased number of adult volunteers and community partners working with OST programs
    (Source: DHSP, Agenda For Children and CPSD – School-After School Partnership)
  - Key Indicator: increased number of OST programs that draw youth from multiple schools, neighborhoods and backgrounds
    (Source: CPSD – School-After School Partnership: Annual OST enrollment Data)
  - Key Indicator: increased number of youth participating in community service activities
    (Source: DHSP, Agenda For Children and CPSD—School-After School Partnership)

- **Increased future orientation and goals**
  - Key Indicator: increase in the number of youth reporting plans to go college, identifying career aspirations and participating in college and career awareness activities (Source: Middle School Partnership Network and CPSD--School-After School Partnership

In the following section, the Commission identifies a process for monitoring progress towards these outcomes and key indicators through the establishment of a middle school **OST Quality and Professional Development Team** (see page 28).

System-Level Strategies

To pursue this plan's citywide strategic goal and objectives and ultimately to achieve desired outcomes, the Commission proposes the implementation of several system-level strategies.

These strategies are the heart of this strategic plan. They represent the concrete and innovative work the community—city agencies, schools, community-based organizations and families—can undertake to significantly change the out-of-school-time experiences of Cambridge middle school youth. **In a very direct way, the success of this plan relies on successful execution of these strategies.**

Why Systems-Level?

To foster broad social change in support of middle school youth and families, the Commission focused on **systems-level strategies** that affect policies and practice across the city, rather than those that benefit individual youth, families or programs. More specifically, the Commission identified strategies that meet the following criteria:

- They unite multiple community partners around a shared goal
- They foster –and require—ongoing collaboration across these community partners in order to be implemented
- Once implemented, they will lead to intermediate systems changes (e.g. the way information about OST programs are shared across schools) that are key to achieving desired outcomes (e.g. increased OST enrollment rates)
- They benefit youth, families and staff from across schools, neighborhoods and organizations, rather than individual youth, families or programs

Focus Areas and Time-Line

The Commission has developed potential strategies to the address improvement in three system-level focus areas:

1. **Community Awareness and Outreach** – Strategies to improve information about OST programs for youth, families, and schools

2. **Service Delivery, Coordination and Capacity** – Strategies to track enrollment, target services, and improve access across programs, schools and neighborhoods

3. **Quality Improvement**—Strategies to support OST programs in offering rich, developmentally appropriate and challenging learning and social experiences

In addition, system-level strategies are grouped into the following implementation time-line categories:

- **Short-Term Strategies**—Potential strategies the city could implement within the next year or by June 2010. These strategies build from—or are aligned with—pre-existing efforts and would not require significant new resources. In many instances, these strategies can be achieved through the re-organization of current resources and services. Thus, implementing these strategies within a shorter time is feasible.

- **Mid-Term Strategies**—Potential strategies the city could implement within two-three years or by June 2012. These strategies may require significant planning and coordination across organizations and some may require moderate to significant additional resources for implementation.

Community Awareness & Outreach Strategies

(Improving information about OST programs for youth, families, and schools)

Potential Short-Term Strategies (December 2009 –June 2010)

1. **Develop a social marketing initiative to attract a broad range of middle school youth to OST programs**

2. **Launch a public awareness campaign to inform middle school families, schools and community providers about both the benefits and availability of OST programs**

Potential Mid-Term Strategies (June 2010 – June 2012)

3. **Develop a formal OST placement process across schools**

Service Delivery, Coordination & Capacity Strategies

(Tracking enrollment, targeting services, and improving access across programs, schools and neighborhoods)

Potential Short-Term Strategies (December 2009 –June 2010)

1. **Create a citywide data system to track middle school youth OST program participation**

2. **Assist programs to serve specific developmental age groups – *e.g. K-5 or Gr 6-8 versus a K-8 span.***

Potential Mid-Term Strategies (June 2010 – June 2012)

3. **Develop a network of middle school OST programs, with shared enrollment, access and scheduling to promote greater participation, mobility and diversity of experience**

4. **Develop a new middle school after-school program in neighborhoods/schools where there is an identified need**

Quality Improvement Strategies

(Supporting OST programs to offer rich, developmentally appropriate and challenging learning and social experiences)

Potential Short-Term Strategies (December 2009 –June 2010)

1. **Identify quality guidelines for middle school OST programs**

2. **Develop a middle school OST quality and professional development team to promote best practices**

3. **Enhance the quality of academic enrichment and support in middle school OST programs by strengthening CPSD -OST collaboration**

Potential Mid-Term Strategies (June 2010 – June 2012)

4. **Promote greater middle school youth participation in sports and exercise, with a focus on girls**
5. **Develop a college and career access initiative**

Next Steps

To move from plan to action, the Commission recommends the following steps:

1. The Commission Co-Chairs will present the strategic plan to the City Council, School Committee, and the Cambridge Kids' Council and seek adoption by these groups of the plan's citywide strategic goal: ***To ensure broad participation of Cambridge middle school youth in quality out-of-school-time experiences that foster both their present and future learning and life success.***

2. Commission Planning Team members will present the strategic plan to school leaders and principals, school-site councils and school staff (e.g. middle school teacher clusters and family liaisons)

3. The Co-Chairs will submit the strategic plan to CPSD leaders to inform both the overall CPSD strategic planning process and the K-8 review process

4. Commission Planning Team members will present the plan to OST leaders and staff

5. The city will appoint a cross-system task-force –comprised of Commission members, key organizational leaders and staff, and youth—to further develop and implement system-level strategies over the next three years (June 2009 to June 2012) and monitor progress towards desired outcomes.

6. The Commission Planning Team will develop and submit a proposal in support of strategy planning and implementation to the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and other funders

7. The appointed Task-Force will convene a youth forum to provide feedback on the strategic plan and assist with further development of strategies.

8. The appointed Task Force will outreach to other partners who work with middle school partners and are not presently on the commission – e.g. SPED Pac, City Sprouts, City Step, Sports leagues, etc.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Potential System-Level Strategies – Implementation Time-line

Systems-Area	July-Oct	Nov-Feb	Mar-June 2010	July-Oct	Nov-Feb	Mar-June 2011	July-Oct
Community Awareness	Social Marketing to Youth						
	Public Campaign to Families/Community						
				OST Placement			
Service Delivery, Coordination & Capacity	OST Enrollment Tracking System			New middle school AS program in high need area			
	Developmental age focused programs			Network with cross-program enrollment, access, schedu			
Quality Improvement	Quality Guidelines			Promoting sports/exercise among MS girls			
	Quality & PD Team			College/career access initiative			
	CPSD-OST Content Collaboration						

Appendix 2: Potential System-Level Strategies – Initial Work-Plans

Community Awareness & Outreach Strategies

(Improving information about OST programs for youth, families, and schools)

Strategy	Next Steps	Responsible Entity	Time-Frame
Develop a social marketing initiative to attract a broad range of middle school youth to OST programs	• Establish communications team that includes key agencies, initiatives & youth • Research: conduct youth focus groups & review other models (e.g. PASA) • Integrate with existing efforts • Develop/disseminate messages through existing channels	Task-Force w/ CPSD Public Information DHSP Youth Division Cambridge Prevention Coalition CPHD	Present --June 2010
Launch a public awareness campaign to inform middle school families, schools and community providers about both the benefits and availability of OST programs	• Engage communications team (see above) • Research: conduct focus groups with parents & school staff & review other models • Integrate with existing efforts • Develop messages, info and online resources and disseminate through existing channels	Task-Force w/ CPSD Public Information DHSP Youth Division Cambridge Prevention Coalition Camb-Somerville Rsrce Gde CPHD	Present --June 2010
Develop a formal OST placement process across schools	• Review other case-management programs to establish best program model & job descriptions • Conduct staff audit to identify potential, existing resources • Review 8th grade portfolios to consider an OST learning requirement	Task-Force w/ CPSD DHSP	June 2010-June 2012

Service Delivery, Coordination & Capacity Strategies

(Tracking enrollment, targeting services, and improving access across programs, schools and n

Strategy	Next Steps	Responsible Entity	Time-Frame
Create a citywide data system to track middle school youth OST program participation	• Coordination with new City/CPSD data-management system to develop OST data tracking capacity • Outreach/orientation to OST providers about new system • Time-line for collection & reporting	Task-Force w/ CPSD MIS DHSP	Present --June 2
Assist programs to serve specific developmental age groups *(e.g. K-5 or Gr 6-8)*	• Conduct review of enrollment patterns across city & CBO programs • Develop description/guideline of developmental appropriate programs (see below Quality strategy) • Align staff training to developmental age groups (see Quality strategy)	Task-Force w/ DHSP AFC Leaders Grp MSPN	Present --June 2
Develop a network of middle school OST programs, with shared enrollment, access and scheduling to promote greater participation, mobility and diversity of experience	• Form planning team among pilot network of programs & schools • Review PASA & other network models • Coordinate enrollment systems • Coordinate transportation	Task-Force w/ CPSD DHSP EEH MSPN	June 2010-June 2
Develop a new middle school after-school program in neighborhoods/schools where there is an identified need	• Assess need by school & neighborhood • Review available, close OST resources • Establish program planning team as needed	DHSP CPSD	June 2010-June 2

Quality Improvement Strategies

(Supporting OST programs to offer rich, developmentally appropriate and challenging learning and

Strategy	Next Steps	Responsible Entity	Time-Frame
Identify quality guidelines for middle school OST programs	• Form guidelines team • Review existing guidelines • Adopt/adapt from these guidelines to propose city guidelines	Task-Force w/ MSPN AFC	Present --June 2
Develop a middle school OST quality and professional development team to promote best practices	• Appoint team leader/chair • Build from MSPN to add all MS focused programs • Develop schedule • Outline goals, strategies and action steps	Task-Force w/ MSPN	Present --June 2
Enhance the quality of academic enrichment and support in middle school OST programs by strengthening CPSD -OST content collaboration	• Identify team and team chair(s) • Develop meeting schedule in sync with OST MS quality team (see above strategy) • Identify content goals, strategies and action steps	Task-Force w/ CPSD MSPN	Present --June 2
Promote greater middle school youth participation in sports and exercise, with a focus on girls	• Track sports/exercise participation across middle schools • Identify needs by subgroups & factors influencing participation • Form planning team to develop new outreach & sports/exercise activities as needed	CPSD CPHD DHSP	June 2010-June 2
Develop a college and career access initiative	• Form planning team that includes higher Ed and business partners • Establish goals & review current efforts /models • Develop plan & strategies	Task-Force w/ CPSD MSPN DHSP	June 2010-June 2

Appendix 3: Commission Environmental Scan Reports

- **Middle School Youth: Summary Data Report**
  (Presented February 12, 2009)

- **Cambridge After-School and Summer Activities for Middle School Youth: Preliminary Resource Data**

  (Presented March 5, 2009)

Cambridge Middle School Youth

Summary Data Report

Presented to Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Middle School Youth

February 12, 2009

Prepared by the Aspen Institute at Wheelock College

Data Sources

- CPSD
  - Blue Ribbon Commission Report
  - School-Afterschool Partnership Youth Survey & OST Enrollment Data
- DHSP
  - Enrollment data
  - OST Family Survey (2006-2008)
  - Prevention Coalition – MS Health Survey (2007)
  - DHSP Youth Division Family Focus Groups
- Other
  - MA DOE – MCAS results (2008)
  - Cambridge Public Health Department – Public Health Assessment (2006)
  - State and national data (NCES, Public Agenda, Afterschool Alliance)

WHEELOCK

Data Limitations

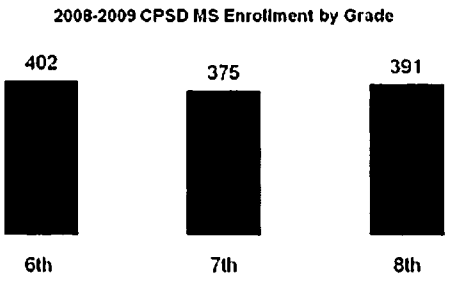
- Sampling of data – not comprehensive
- Self-reporting by youth – Validity(?)
- Limited comparison data
- No coordinated OST data collection
- Deficit-based vs. asset based data

WHITLOCK

Cambridge Middle School Enrollment (2008-2009)

Total Cambridge Middle School-Age Population (ages 11-13): **1350**
(Approx)

Total CPSD Middle School Enrollment (Grades 6-8): **1168**
(Somerville: 1240; Brookline: 949)

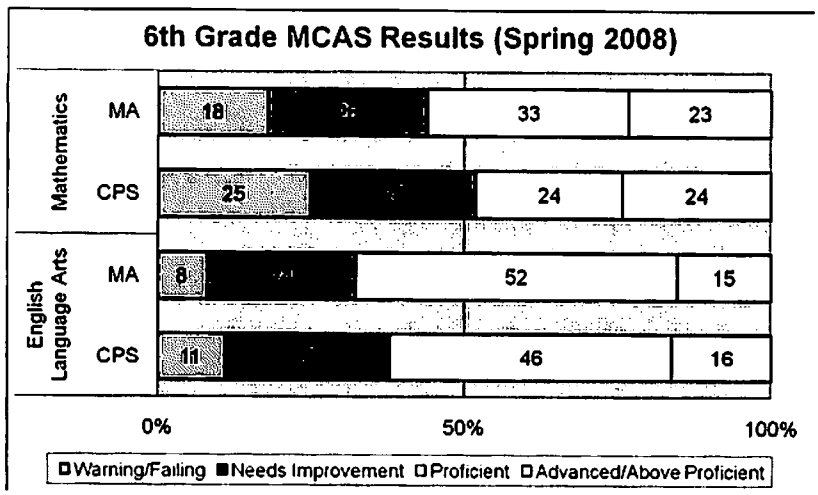


SPED	27%
Free-Reduced Lunch	44%
LEP	4%
African American	35%
Asian	11%
Hispanic	14%
White	36%

Source: CPSD, 2009

WHITLOCK

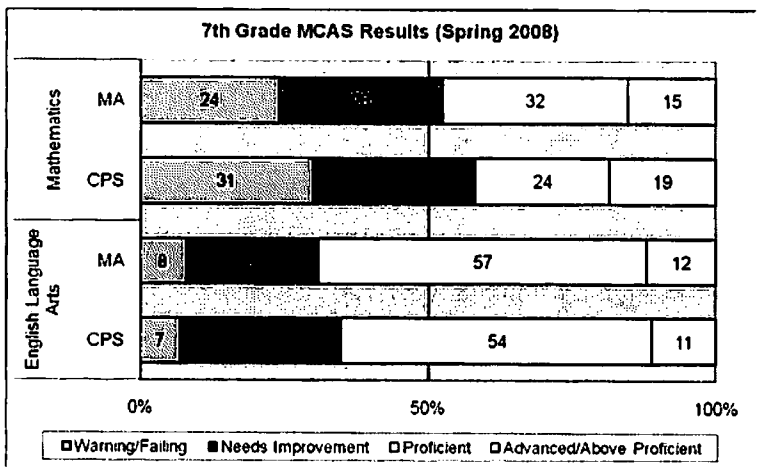
Academic Performance: 6th Grade MCAS Results (Spring 2008)



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2008); Public School Districts; Cambridge Assessment Data

WHITLOCK

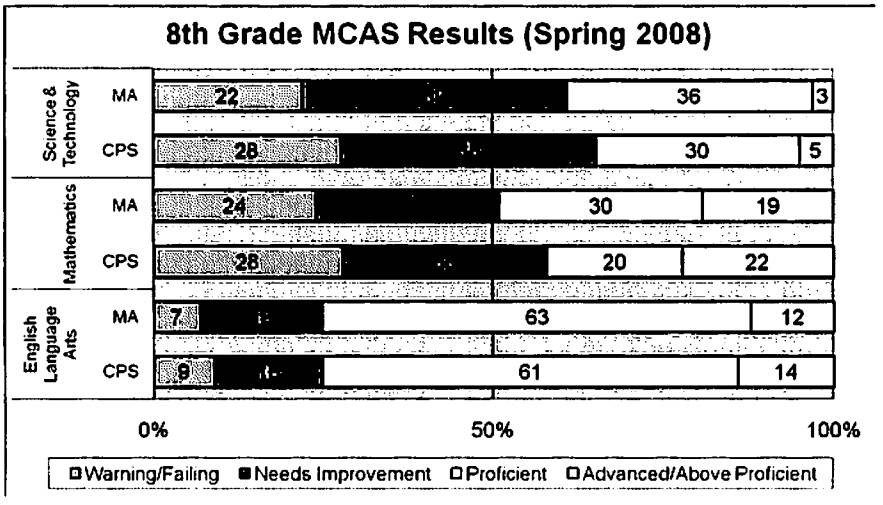
Academic Performance: 7th Grade MCAS Results (Spring 2008)



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2008); Public School Districts; Cambridge Assessment Data

WHITLOCK

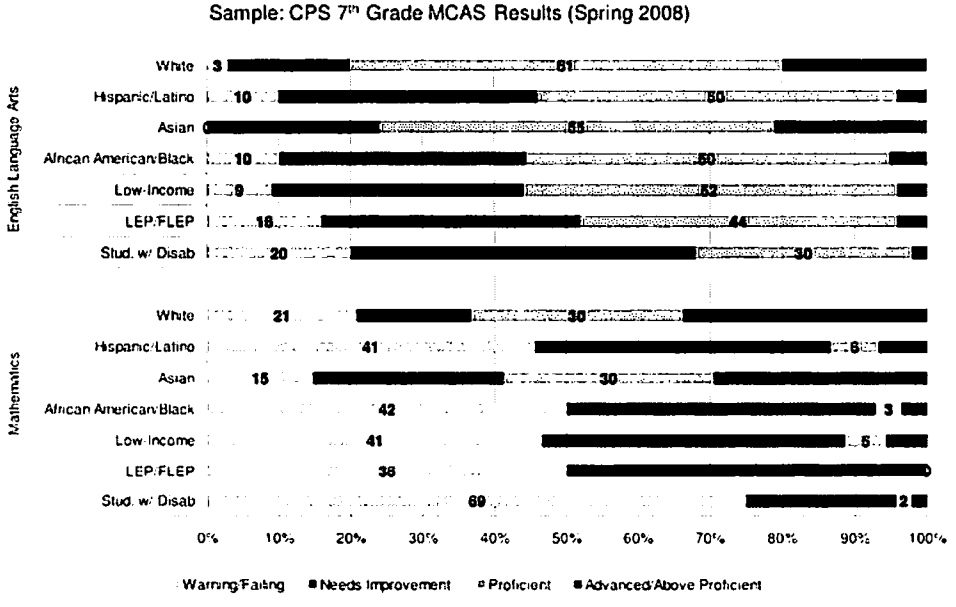
Academic Performance:
8th Grade MCAS Results (Spring 2008)



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2008). Public School Districts. Cambridge Assessment Data.

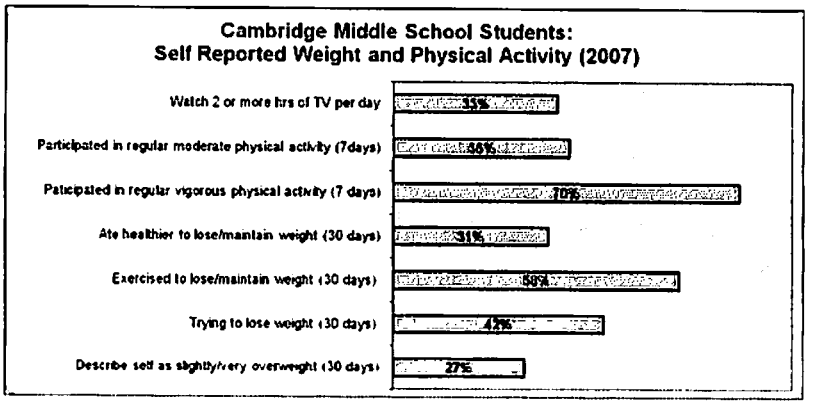
WHEELOCK

Academic Performance:
Results by Subgroups (Spring 2008)



Physical Health/Activity

- 20% of Cambridge public school children in grades K-8 are overweight vs. 14% statewide and 18% nationally
- An additional of 18% Cambridge public school children are at risk of being overweight

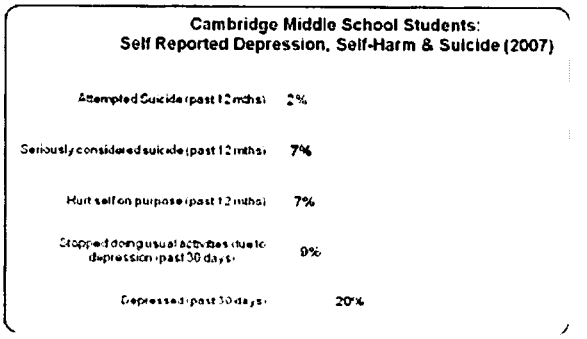


Sources: Cambridge Health Alliance (2007), Cambridge Public Health Assessment, Center for Disease Control (2006), Cambridge MS Health Survey (2007).

WHITLOCK

Social-Emotional Health – Self-Reported

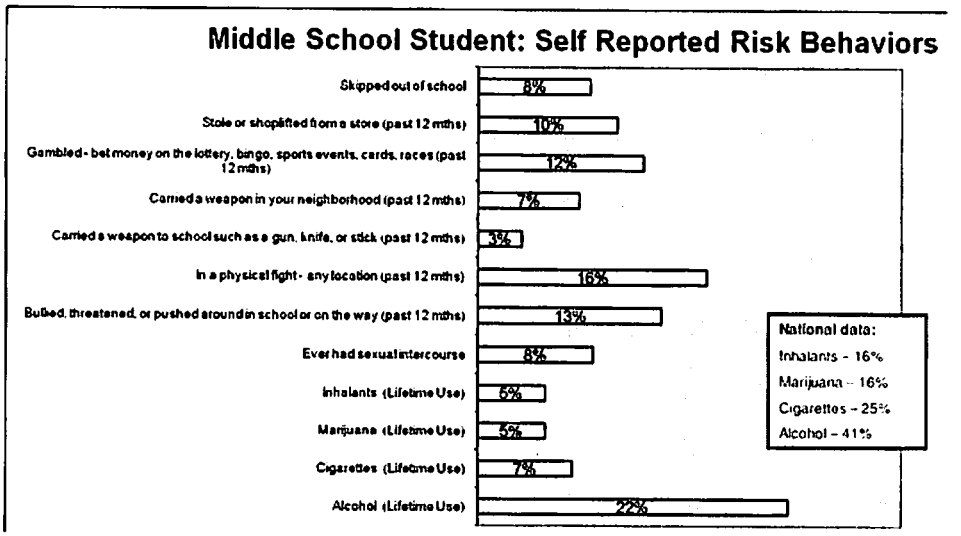
- 42% of middle school students report that a family member or close friend has died (past 12 mths)
- 19% of middle school students report having recently moved (past 12 mths)
- Top 5 issues middle school students report worrying about "fairly often" or "most of the time":
  1. MCAS (32%)
  2. School Failure (21%)
  3. Weight Problems (18%)
  4. Violence in Neighborhood (12%)
  5. Physical Health Problems (10%)



Source: Cambridge MS Health Survey (2007).

WHITLOCK

Risk Behaviors



Source: Cambridge MS Health Survey (2007)

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Risk Behaviors

Eight Graders at Risk

Risk Behavior	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade
Skipped out of school	6%	6%	**12%**
Stole or shop-lifted	8%	8%	**14%**
Gambled, bet money	8%	10%	**19%**
Carried weapon in neighborhood	5%	8%	**10%**
Ever had sexual intercourse	3%	4%	**17%**
Alcohol (lifetime use)	16%	18%	**33%**
Marijuana (lifetime use)	1%	5%	**9%**

Source: Cambridge MS Health Survey (2007)

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Violence & Safety

- 8th graders were more likely to report witnessing violence in their neighborhood -- 22% of 8th graders vs. 16% of 6th-7th graders.

Source: Cambridge MS Health Survey (2007)

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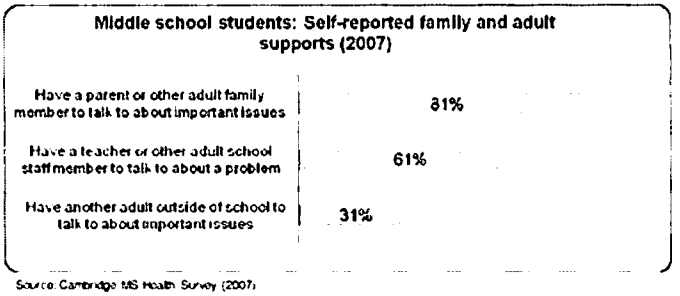
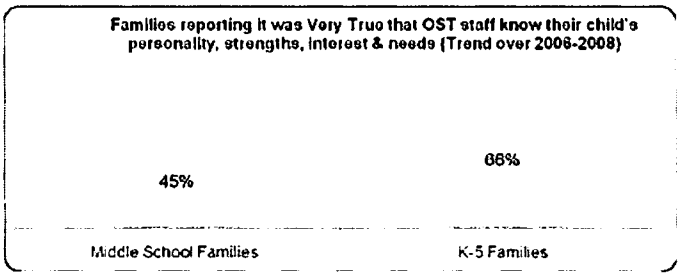
Family & Adult Support



Source: Cambridge MS Health Survey (2007)



Source: DHSP OST Family Survey (2006-2008)

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Participation in OST Activities: Enrollment trends (SY2006-SY2009)

Middle School Students enrolled in OST programs: **400+ /year**

- 33%--35% of CPSD MS enrollment (vs. 23% nationally and 22% in urban areas)
- Significant 1-year jump in enrollment among CPS 8th grade from approx. 25% (SY2006-2008) to 32% (SY2009).
- Key development: launch/expansion of three middle school-focused after school programs in SY 2009 (Frisoli/King Open , MSP/Peabody and East End/Kennedy-Longfellow)

Demographic Trends	OST MS Students	CPS MS Students
SPED	32%	27%
Free-Reduced Lunch	49%	44%
LEP	4%	4%

Source: CPSD School-Afterschool Partnership (2009); Comparison data: NCES (2006); After School Alliance (2007)

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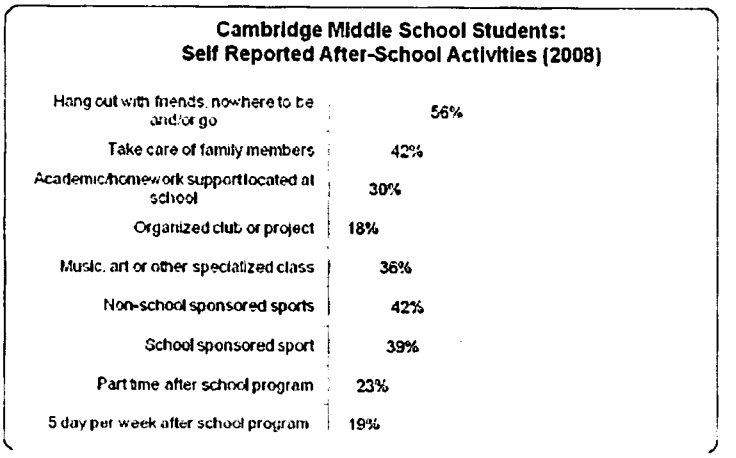
Participation in OST Activities: Self-Reported



Source: After-School Partnership & Cambridge Public Schools (2008), Middle School After-School Survey

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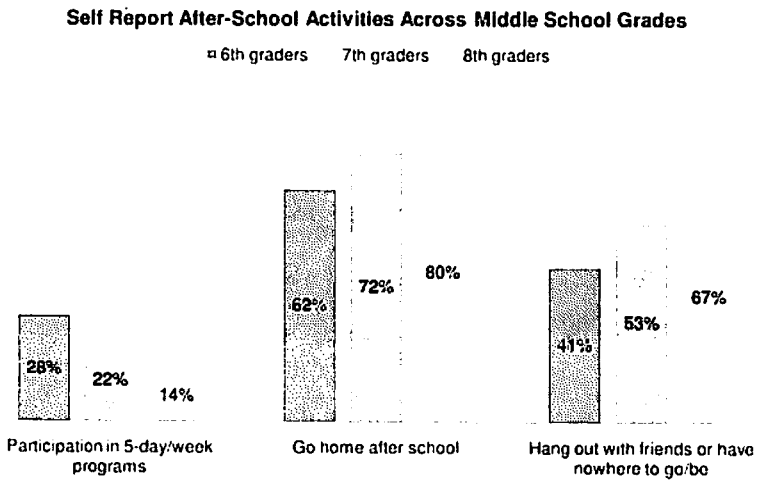
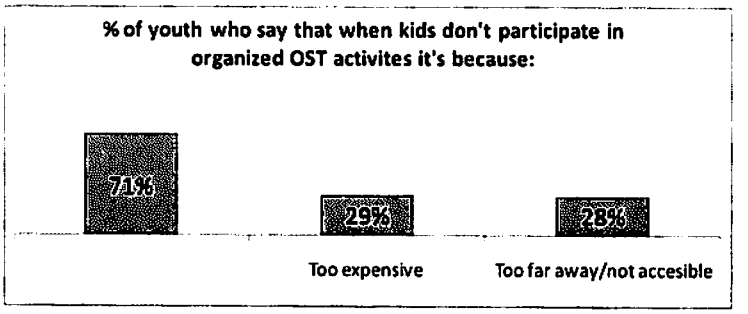
Participation in OST Activities

Participation in OST activities decreases with age/grade.



Source: The Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Education (2008). Report to the School Committee.

Participation in OST: Influencing Factors



- DHSP Youth Division focus groups with family & youth also identified lack of information ("I didn't know about it") as a factor influencing participation.

Source: Public Agenda, All Work and No Play, 2004. Cambridge DHSP Youth Division (2007)

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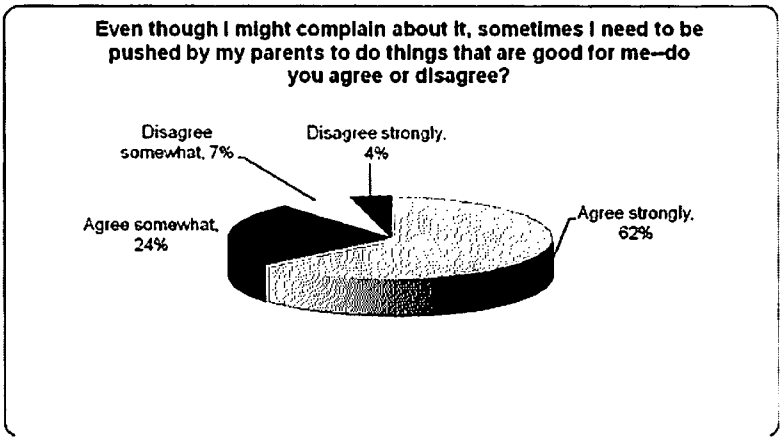
Participation in OST: Influencing Factors

Needing a push…



Source: Public Agenda, *All Work and No Play*, 2004

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Family Feedback

Blue Ribbon Commission Parent Focus Groups

1. How can we better meet the academic and social needs of our middle school students?
   Most popular response: "Provide opportunities for students to mingle across the city, during and/or in after-school programs"

2. How can we better prepare our middle school students for high school?
   - Most popular response: "Provide more after-school learning and connection to community"

Source: The Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Education (2008), Report to the School Committee

Implications/Discussion

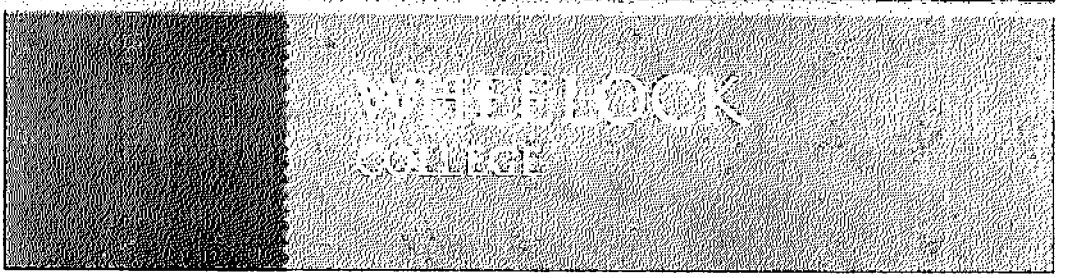
- OST participation rates of CPS middle school students tends to range between 30-35% -- but this data is hard to track/inconsistent, suggesting a strong need for systematic data collection.
- Academic data points to math and science as a area were middle school students can use support – what role can OST programs play?
- Many middle school youth are not participating in OST programs because they are "not interested" – what role do/can parents and other important adults play in this decision?
- 8th graders are a high risk group – and should continue to be a focus of program planning efforts
- Building stronger connections between middle school youth and OST staff might be a focus of program improvement and recruitment efforts
- Others?

Cambridge After-School & Summer Activities for Middle School Youth

Preliminary Resource Data

The Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth

Prepared By: The Aspire Institute at Wheelock College
March 5, 2009



Data Sources

CPSD

- City Council & School Committee Roundtable Report on Afterschool, Summer Programs for Children 0-18. (2007-2008)
- School-Afterschool Partnership: After-School Out–of-School Time (ASOST) Enrollment Data (2008-2009)
- CPSD Schools-At-A-Glance Document (2008-2009)

DHSP

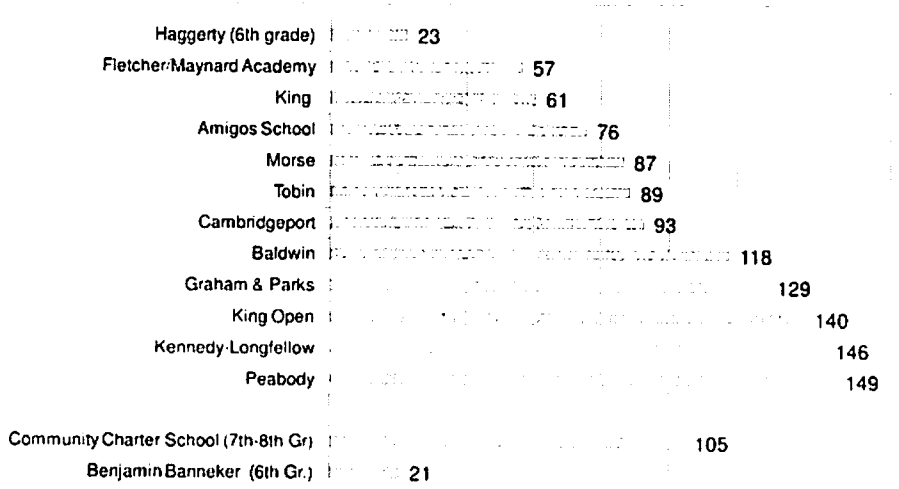
- Cambridge & Somerville Online Resource Guide
- DHSP Resource Guide (2008)

Cambridge Public Health Department:

- Cambridge Moves Report (2008)

Middle School Enrollment by School

Includes Grades 6-8, unless noted otherwise.



3 Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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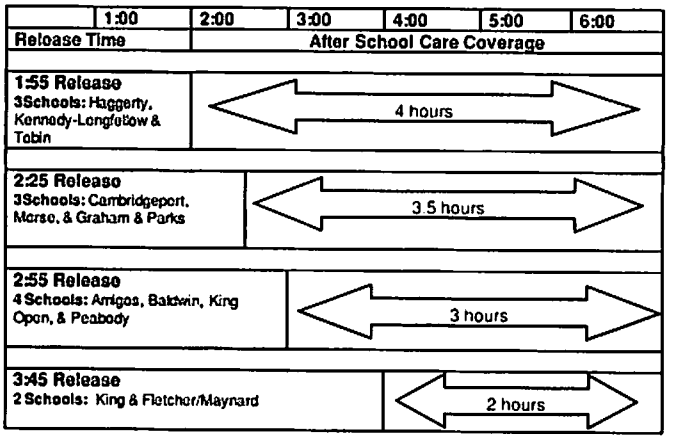
CPSD K-8 School Release Times



- Late bus picks up students between 3:45 and 5 PM
- Average OST program hours: 2 – 6PM

4 Source: CPSD

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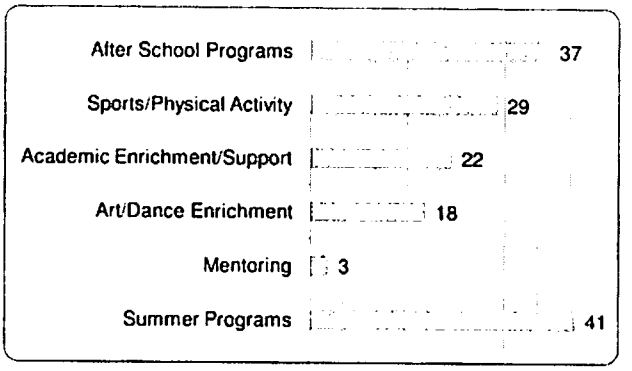
Middle School OST Resources Overview

- 60 organizations offering approx. 150 OST programs/activities to middle school youth In Cambridge
- Types of Programs/activities:



- 12 programs focus specifically on Grades 6,7 or 8

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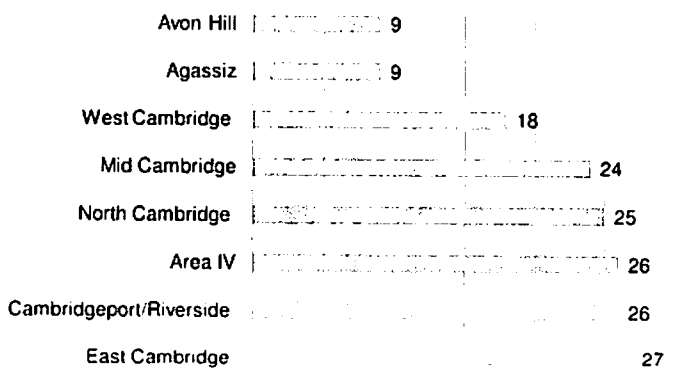
Middle School OST Resources Overview

OST activities distribution by Cambridge Neighborhood:



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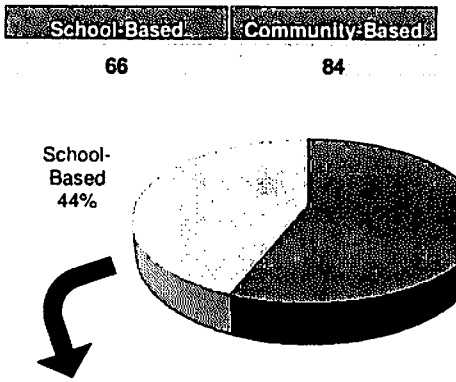
Middle School OST Resources Overview

OST Activities–School-Based or Community-Based



- Of School-based programs, 79% (55) are run by community non-profits or DHSP

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Middle School OST Resources Overview

Clustering of Older CPSD Middle School Youth (Gr. 7-8)

By After School Program:

The majority of after school programs (79% / 29 of 37) serve 15 or more 6th grade students. **However, there is a significant drop in the number of after school programs that serve high numbers of 7th / 8th grade students.**

- Only 6 of 37 after school programs have 15 or more 7th/8th grade students
- Only 5 of 37 after school programs have 10 or more 8th grade students

By Activity:

Older middle school students gravitate towards certain activities

- Over half (51%) of 8th grade students and 38% of 7th grade students report participating in school-sponsored sports (vs. 18% of 6th grade students)
- 35% of 7th/8th grade students report participating in specialized art, music or dance classes

Source: CPSD/School-Afterschool Partnership

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Middle School OST Resources Overview

Middle School Partnership Sites – Snap Shot

Site	Enrollment	7/8 Enrollment	% From Partner School	% From Neighborhood	Years in Operation
Peabody/ Gately Youth Ctr	80	52	68%	85%	3
Kennedy-Longfellow/ East End House	85	50	85%	30%	1
King Open / Frisoli Youth Ctr	28	28	40%	60%	1
Total	193	130			

- MSP sites account for approx. 45% of overall CPSD middle school ASOST enrollment

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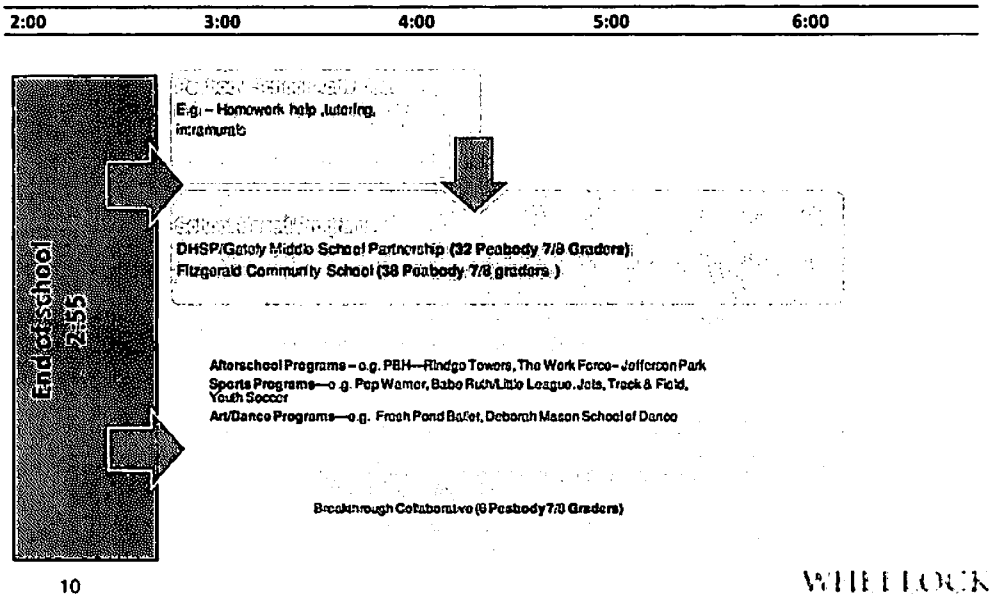
School-OST Profile: Peabody School

- Grades 7-8 Enrollment: 101



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School-OST Profile: Peabody School

Key findings:

- 50% (or higher) of Peabody 7th/8th grade students stay within the school/school proximity to attend after school programs multiple days a week
- Collaborative onsite school-community program targeting middle school youth (Gately-MSP)
- Range of nearby/neighborhood resources – but not clear to what extent these are being accessed by Peabody students
- Peabody 7th/8th grade students tend not to access other resources across the city –e.g. no Peabody 7th/8th graders are enrolled in a Youth Center other than the Gately/MSP.

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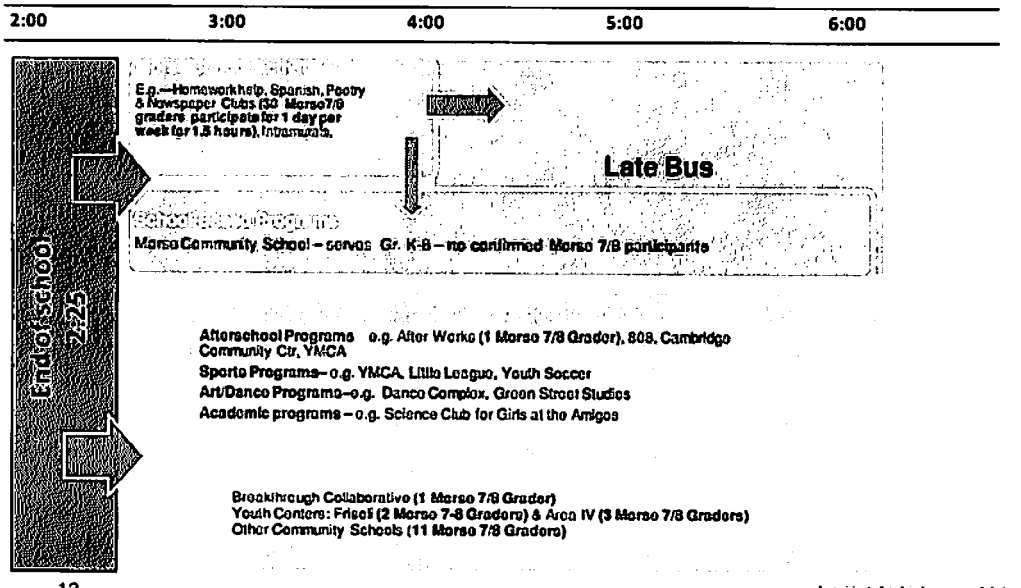
School-OST Profile: Morse School

❖Grades 7-8 Enrollment: 52



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School-ASOST Profile: Morse School

Key Findings:

- Minimal sustained, multi-day OST participation for Morse 7th/8th grade students
- No onsite or close neighborhood after school program specifically designed for middle school youth
- Late bus may impact the number of 7th/8th grade students staying to attend ASOST activities
- Range of nearby/neighborhood resources – but not clear to what extent these are being accessed by Morse students
- Small number of Morse 7th/8th grade students access other resources across the city –e.g. Youth Centers, Afterworks, & Breakthrough Collaborative.

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Implications/Discussion

- The middle school youth population is modest in size, but spread across multiple school settings
- OST/After school experiences & needs of middle school youth vary by school & neighborhood
- Community nonprofits & DHSP offer an array of OST resources to middle school youth—what is their potential to collaborate to reach more youth?
- Programs targeting middle school youth are heavily enrolled & attracting older youth – what can we learn from these efforts?

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