



Bolstering Learning for Maryland's Students during the Pandemic:
THE CASE FOR PARTNERSHIP

Table of Contents

- 3 Introduction
- 5 Key Findings
- 10 Recommendations
- 20 Glossary

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The Y in Central Maryland and the 50 State Afterschool Network*



INTRODUCTION

As the new school year approaches, states, school districts, and staff are making plans to reopen their doors for students, parents, and partners. Some school districts have already released draft reopening plans with instructional time mostly or completely virtual up to January 2021. Others are considering the possibility of hybrid models to offer some in-person instructions and supports. Regardless of the model, schools face major challenges ahead that have implications for instructional models, parent/family engagement, transportation, staffing, and costs.

This fall, we will need ALL HANDS ON DECK to engage and support our young people. Community partners that provide youth development opportunities can and must be part of a new collaboration that includes youth, parents/families, and community members in support of schools. Through collaboration, a new vision is possible for this partnership to implement unique and innovative approaches to the unprecedented crisis presented by COVID-19, and in doing so, make lasting changes that will rebuild learning to accelerate success for students with particular emphasis on making educational opportunities more equitable.

When the pandemic forced schools and businesses to close, the Maryland Out of School Time Network and Maryland MENTOR immediately began hosting youth development-focused town halls. From March

to June, nearly 1,000 people participated in training and community sharing. As an outgrowth of those town halls, community leaders and youth development [organizations from around the state](#) came together to plan and offer a series of visioning and listening sessions to discuss how youth development organizations ([out-of-school time programs, mentoring, and community schools](#)) could serve as resources and partners in the reopening and recovery. Eleven sessions were held to include the voices of over 400 individual leaders in the field. The message was loud and clear:

Together, schools and community partners can offer children re-entry to a stronger, more robust learning environment than either can do alone. Everyone will need more resources, and collaboration is the key.

The two strongest recurrent themes during our visioning and listening session were digital equity and concerns about community-wide trauma.

→ The number one challenge for engaging and connecting with young people is access to the internet, followed by devices. More progress has been made on distributing devices, than on finding lasting solutions for internet access. While Governor Hogan has invested some of the CARES Act funding to both rural and urban broadband, a much greater and collaborative effort will

need to be made to reach the estimated 30% of children who currently do not have access to the internet and to address internet speed and reliability. Creative efforts to [create mesh networks and advocate for better internet services](#) and support from our internet services providers are underway and should be given full support.

- Youth development leaders recognized that many of our students experienced trauma before the pandemic, and many more will be impacted either directly by the virus or through the ongoing risks, loss of personal connection, and the strain of uncertainty. Maryland is beginning to move forward with more universal trauma-informed approaches, and these efforts need to be accelerated.

During these sessions, the conversation was grounded in a set of principles that was refined and added to by participants. The principles helped shape the field's collective recommendations for the ways our organizations can partner with schools, school districts, cities, counties, and the state government to provide critical support to Maryland's young people during this historically challenging time.



Guiding Principles

- Recognize the impact of systemic racism and work to dismantle racist practices and mitigate the impact of racial and economic disparities
- Focus on young people at the center of our work
- Build on the benefits of school and community-based organization partnerships and collaboration, grounded in scholarly evidence.
- Engage young people and families' voices in planning and decision-making
- Make safety a priority for youth and youth development professionals
- Provide full breadth of experiences, including arts and life skills, to compliment and support academics



Photo credit: The Y in Central Maryland

KEY FINDINGS

The following pages include key findings from these town halls and visioning sessions, culminating in a set of recommendations curated by the participating organizations.

KEY FINDING

First, Ask Young People

Since young people must stay at the center, our report and recommendations would not be complete without their voices. In our statewide survey, we asked young people a set of open-ended questions:

- What are you looking forward to this fall when you return to school?
- What worries you about going back to school? What questions do you have?
- When schools open, what kind of opportunities do you want available to you afterschool or outside of the school day?
- What do you value about the programs you participate in outside of school (for example, afterschool clubs, sports, mentoring)?
- What do you value about the programs you participate in outside of school (for example, afterschool clubs, sports, mentoring)?
- What other kinds of support and resources would you want when you go back to school?

We received over 100 responses from students ages 5 to 18, living in 10 counties. Students from across the state reported that they were most looking forward to:

- 1 Connecting with their peers and teachers;
- 2 Engaging in club and sport activities, even virtually; and,
- 3 Having more structured learning time.



My school lacrosse team had helped me immensely in several areas such as self control and confidence.”

Madison M., Prince
George's County, Age 15



Understandably, they expressed anxiety over school cleanliness, the health of their educators, compliance with masks and social distancing, and the impact of complicated schedules. They are afraid that things they like about school, including socializing, extra-curricular activities, and sports, would be missing from the return.

They also provided some insights that we should keep in mind during conversations about reopening:

- Many students reported that they liked virtual lessons. In particular, one mentioned that they were getting better grades now that they were taking classes online and hoped they would have the opportunity to continue in the future.
- Students appreciated new flexible grading methods, less testing, and more focus on project-based learning.

While students want to return to school, they want to do so safely and they are especially cognizant of the impact the virus could have on teachers.

Students in Maryland want out-of-school time (OST) activities that support their health and reimagine extended learning time and support for students and families. It is critical that COVID-19 relief measures and funding are invested in developing virtual and semi-virtual opportunities for youth that go beyond instructional time.

“

I worry that teachers are going to be forced to do double the work with no support and the most risk.”

Catherine Z.,
Montgomery County, age 17

KEY FINDING

Youth Development Programs, Proven Effective

Prior to COVID-19, 80% of a young person's life was spent outside the traditional school day and school year. With limited resources and heartfelt passion, many community-based program providers have stepped up to fill the gap, engaging young people in afterschool and summer learning opportunities based in youth development principles.

Before and since the pandemic disrupted lives, OST programs provided critical supports to students and families. Programs offer:

- Caring adults
- Mentors
- Positive peer relationships
- Social and emotional learning
- Targeted academic supports
- Arts, STEM, and other hands-on learning opportunities
- Meals
- Health, nutrition, and physical activity
- Leadership and service experiences
- Career and college readiness
- Civic engagement
- Social justice advocacy

America After 3PM revealed that 150,112 Maryland children (16%) participate in an afterschool program, yet 280,319 children

(36%) would be enrolled in a program if one were available to them. With 87% of Maryland's parents satisfied with their child's afterschool program and 64% agreeing that afterschool programs give working parents peace of mind, more work needs to be done to ensure that all children in Maryland are able to take part in an afterschool program that keeps them safe, inspires learning, and supports working parents.

OST promotes resilience and helps young people thrive by providing integral developmental supports from caring adults in safe and supportive environments. Students who regularly participate in quality afterschool programs develop strong social skills, improve their work habits and grades, and have better attendance and graduation rates. According to the Afterschool Alliance, after going to afterschool programs, 69% of students improve their homework completion and class participation, 62% of students improve their behavior in class, and 1 in 2 students improve their math and reading grades.

Studies tracking the impact of mentorship and the arts on student success show similarly positive results on student and family success.

→ In a study by the *National Mentoring Partnership*, young people who were at risk for falling off-track but had a mentor were:

- **55%** more likely to enroll in college,
- **78%** more likely to volunteer regularly,
- **130%** more likely to hold leadership positions, and
- **90%** are interested in becoming a mentor. ([Mentoring Impact](#))

→ In a *Public/Private Ventures Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters*, it was found that students who meet regularly with their mentors are 52% less likely than their peers to skip a day of school and 37% less likely to skip a class. ([Making a Difference, 2000](#))

→ Young adults who face an opportunity gap but have a mentor are 55% more likely to be enrolled in college than those who did not have a mentor. ([The Mentoring Effect, 2014](#))

→ In addition to better school attendance and a better chance of going on to higher education, mentored youth maintain better attitudes toward school. ([The Role of Risk, 2013](#))

→ And here in Baltimore, a randomized control trial study of Higher Achievement (an afterschool program) programming conducted by MDRC showed Higher Achievement students' core grade point average (math, reading, science and social studies) improved more than the control group's grades two years after they had applied to the program. ([Aiming Higher: Assessing Higher Achievement's Out-of-School Expansion Efforts, 2020](#))



Photo credit: The Y in Central Maryland



Photo credit: The Y in Central Maryland



Anime club introduced me to a group of like-minded people and made my time at my school great. I also was in the citywide band. It was so nice to work with so many people from different schools, and when we had our concert I felt proud.”

Lord M., Baltimore City, Age 15

KEY FINDING

Addressing the Whole Child, Not Simply Learning Loss

Getting students back on track is not just about addressing core academic subjects. While we want to accelerate learning to help students catch up, we should be mindful that approaches that integrate the arts and other enrichment areas have a strong research base for being highly effective, positively impact other academic areas, and increase students' interest and engagement. School partners

often specialize in offering high quality arts, STEM/STEAM, cultural/global education, social-emotional learning, creating service learning opportunities, and supporting youth-lead social justice efforts. Having access to a broad array of diverse opportunities leads to better youth outcomes. Americans for the Arts research supports the relationship between arts participation and academic achievement:

- A student involved in the arts is four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement.
- Students who take four years of arts and music classes average almost 100 points higher on their SAT scores than students who take only one-half year or less.
- Students whose families have low income, but are highly engaged in the arts are twice as likely to graduate college as their peers with no arts education.

Focusing solely on academic remediation and limiting or eliminating access to partnerships that open students up to the broader world—supporting career exploration, engaging creatively, and taking action—will likely produce challenges to student engagement.

Youth with disabilities and their families have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 as many of the services students require are provided during the school day and can be difficult to replicate in virtual settings. OST programs provide important social and emotional connections and engagement opportunities for youth with disabilities and should be included in plans to provide supports to students as schools reopen. Families that have been impacted by lack of access to services can learn more about their rights through Disability Rights Maryland at <https://disabilityrightsmd.org/coronavirus/>.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are intended to inform the decisions of local and state leaders and local education agencies as reopening plans emerge and are solidified for the coming year.



Recommendations on Reopening

Critical Investments Include Partners

- ✓ Create public/private partnerships to coordinate efforts to expand broadband and solve internet access inequities permanently. A patchwork and BandAid approach will continue to leave behind many students and families denied access to critical educational and social supports.
- ✓ Require schools to develop a plan for their trauma-informed approaches, including restorative practices. Trauma will be universal, requiring universal approaches. Many community-based partners have expertise in trauma-informed care, restorative practice, mindfulness, and social-emotional learning.
- ✓ Provide resources to local school districts to encourage and support partnerships with community-based organizations.
 - Allow maximum flexibility for 21st Century Community Learning Centers and other state-level grant programs (LEAP, PSOE, Next Generation Scholars)
 - Continue expansion of community school model
 - Utilize CARES Act and future Federal aid to support community/school partnerships
 - Advocate for additional Federal funds for states specific to education and community partnerships

Partnerships Between Schools and Community-Based Organizations

Partnerships with organizations that bring resources to students can have exponentially more impact if the partnership recognizes the partners' respective strengths and challenges, as well as their unique contributions to children's achievement. A culture of partnerships provides young people with rich and engaging learning and development opportunities, as well as necessary services that removes obstacles to learning and engagement.

Recommendations for Cross-Cutting Issues

- School leaders include program partners in high-level planning groups, task forces and committees involved with both planning and implementation of strategies to address COVID-19 school and program adaptations to ensure collaboration and reduce duplication of efforts.
- School leaders leverage community school coordinators and expand the Community School Coordinator Model (*see Glossary*).
- Partners continue to leverage their relationships with families to help identify and re-engage families and students who became disconnected to school during the pandemic.
- Community partners that have been working to augment distribution of food and access to the internet and devices be connected and aligned with schools.
- Leaders calculate the benefit of the approximate 10% of philanthropic dollars raised in Maryland from private sources that are used by youth-serving groups to supplement and support academic and extracurricular enrichment programs. This contribution from the OST community would be difficult to replace if not kept intact.
- Expanded learning providers continue to ensure that students are having positive social interactions with adults and peers in safe and supportive environments that value youth engagement and learning.
- School leaders prioritize youth with disabilities in providing safe in-person programming and ensure partners are designing virtual and in-person programs that utilize universal design and accommodations.

- Leaders seize the opportunity to redesign students learning experiences and as new approaches are created, particularly in the virtual space, priority should be placed on:
- Curriculum that is culturally responsive, relevant, and anti-racist
 - Opportunities that allow students greater leverage to lead and design their learning experience
 - Supporting positive and connected peer-to-peer and adult-student relationships
 - Utilizing a trauma-informed approach
 - Diversified approaches to assessing student success that do not rely heavily or exclusively on testing

“

I think afterschool clubs and sports are awesome because they give you something that you know you will enjoy in the school day.”

Clara B., Montgomery County,
age 11



Photo credit: Maryland MENTOR



Recommendations for Partners in Virtual Learning

- ✓ Leaders, in developing their plans for the short- and long-term re-engineered learning environment, utilize program partners to augment, collaborate, and design virtual learning experiences that provide variety, extensions on school day learning, and different/new approaches to online learning. They should share the responsibility with teachers.
- ✓ As referenced in the hybrid model below, community partners may serve as a resource to provide safe and supportive spaces for students to go when families work and homelife responsibilities make it difficult to provide supervision.
- ✓ Align around technology instruction, access, privacy, and safety.
 - Share school system's technology guidelines and policies with community partners, so that economies can be realized between all resources providing hardware and connectivity.
 - Familiarize partners with school system technology platforms and software where possible. With proper agreements, allow access abiding by confidentiality protocols for data sharing to better assess impact on student success.
- ✓ Schools and community partners work to create a cost-effective method to coordinate device distribution and broadband access.
- ✓ Mutually establish a mechanism for students and families to access approved partner content and programs on devices issued by either source.
- ✓ Utilize community resources to support parent engagement in expanded computer literacy, and better able to support virtual learning.
- ✓ Leverage partners as advocates for increased internet access including the development of mesh networks and student/community advocacy to improve equity of access to commercial internet and broadband.

Examples of youth development partners working with schools to enhance virtual learning:

SPOTLIGHT

University of Maryland Extension Wicomico County 4-H

The first grade classes at Westside Primary School in Quantico, Maryland were in the process of completing an embryology project when COVID-19 caused the schools to shut down. Mrs. Williams, lead teacher and school librarian, and Wicomico Program Assistant Barbara Barga each took incubated fertilized eggs to their respective homes, where the hatching and development process was filmed. The incubators were provided by the Wicomico County Extension Office. Mrs. Williams and the 4-H team followed the chicks through the first three days of development. The events were live-streamed through the school's website to families and posted on the University of Maryland Extension-Wicomico County 4-H Facebook page.



SPOTLIGHT

University of Maryland Extension Garrett County 4-H

This past school year, the Garrett County 4-H in-school monthly programs, run by a team that includes University of Maryland Extension 4-H Youth Development staff Karen Wood and Michelle Harman along with Master Gardener Coordinator Ashley Bodkins, provided programming focusing on Environmental STEM - Plant and Agricultural Science to 10 classrooms in 3 schools. They incorporated Google Science journaling, digital microscopes, and robotics into the lessons. The program provided each classroom with all supplies needed to conduct an experiment comparing the growth rates of paperwhites in soil (geoponics) versus water (hydroponics).

The classrooms participated in the experiment, but when the study was concluding, schools closed due to the pandemic. The paperwhite science experiment continued virtually with a Facebook post made each Friday by Garrett County 4-H for schools to view and share results. For five weeks, they shared a comparative study of growth rate in paperwhite bulbs using geoponic versus hydroponic systems.



Recommendations for Partners in Hybrid Models

- ✔ Community organizations provide alternative locations for students to go when they are not in school on the alternating schedule. Following the CDC guidelines, as child care providers have done for emergency service personnel, programs can open with reduced sizes and thoughtful safety precautions.

- ✔ Asset mapping be undertaken to identify alternative places to offer programming for students who have parents who are working or need additional support. For example, churches, halls that are used for concerts/weddings, athletic facilities, outdoor pavilions, or tenting could be used for additional spaces.
 - County/local governments can help in the identification, procurement, and certification of alternative locations.
 - Alternative locations must meet health and safety standards, though some licensing requirements should be reviewed for possible waiver without compromising safety.

SPOTLIGHT

The Y in Central Maryland

The Y in Central Maryland has responded to COVID-19 in myriad ways that support children and families, including caring for children of essential workers across 15 Y sites, serving approximately 500 children per week over a 14-week period beginning in mid-March. Program content was drawn from OST programming best practices—keeping children active and learning while also keeping them safe through enhanced health and safety measures. Drawing on the success of that experience, the Y is also providing outdoor day camp experiences to thousands of Maryland children this summer, helping them to regain a sense of normalcy and safety in highly uncertain times. Safety procedures include staggered drop-off and pick-up, capacity limits, routine hand-washing, social distancing, and daily health checks.



Recommendations for Partners Returning to Full In-Person Learning

- ✔ In each community, space configuration and air quality are different for every building, whether a school, rec center, community center, etc. When entities are making decisions on safe building capacity and room use, inclusiveness can be achieved as partners are willing and able to align to safety protocols, CDC guidelines, or specific district- and school-based standards.
- ✔ Share professional development on safety and district policies.
- ✔ Create detailed space sharing agreements and facility use policies, whether for a public school building or a privately owned/operated community building.
- ✔ Coordinate meal distributions, janitorial services, and transportation services with afterschool and summer programs.
- ✔ To mitigate student exposure, coordinate on the groupings of students attending before and afterschool programs together.
- ✔ With potential elimination of school resource officers, the need for social-emotional support in the school building can be served through partnership with OST providers skilled in social and emotional learning program delivery.
- ✔ Identify seamless, safe transportation options to transition children to or from school and OST programs.

Partnership Recommendations for All Models



PARENTS

- ✓ Communicate with your school, local school boards, and your children's extracurricular programs about the programs and partnerships your children value.



SCHOOLS LEADERS

- ✓ Share your schools' and school districts' needs through formal mechanisms available to you, such as the PIE (Partners in Education) Portal used by Baltimore City Public Schools. Community partners are available to work with you.
- ✓ Reach out to existing community partners to engage them in solutions.
- ✓ Consider how the CARES Act and future federal funding can support your schools priorities through partnerships.



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

- ✓ Reach out and connect with your school partners.
- ✓ Participate in and ask for invitations to forums, committees, and action teams that are supporting schools in planning and implementation.
- ✓ Participate in advocacy to federal, state, and local officials for additional resources to create an enriched re-entry and learning environment for their constituents.
- ✓ Connect with students and families to design learning experiences that meet students needs and complement/ augment school offerings.

Partnership Recommendations for All Models

(continued from page 17)



BUSINESSES

- ✓ Provide sponsorship to support school and community-based organization partnerships.
- ✓ Consider opportunities to volunteer to serve youth through the community-based organizations providing youth enrichment programs.
- ✓ Offer/donate technology such as laptops, wi-fi, hotspots, etc.



LOCAL & STATE ELECTED OFFICIALS

- ✓ Maintain flexibility in available state and federal funding.
- ✓ Pursue disaster relief and emergency funding that is available to states.
- ✓ Use resources in COVID-19 response and recovery funding to support diversity, equity, and inclusion in re-opening and re-entry planning for students.

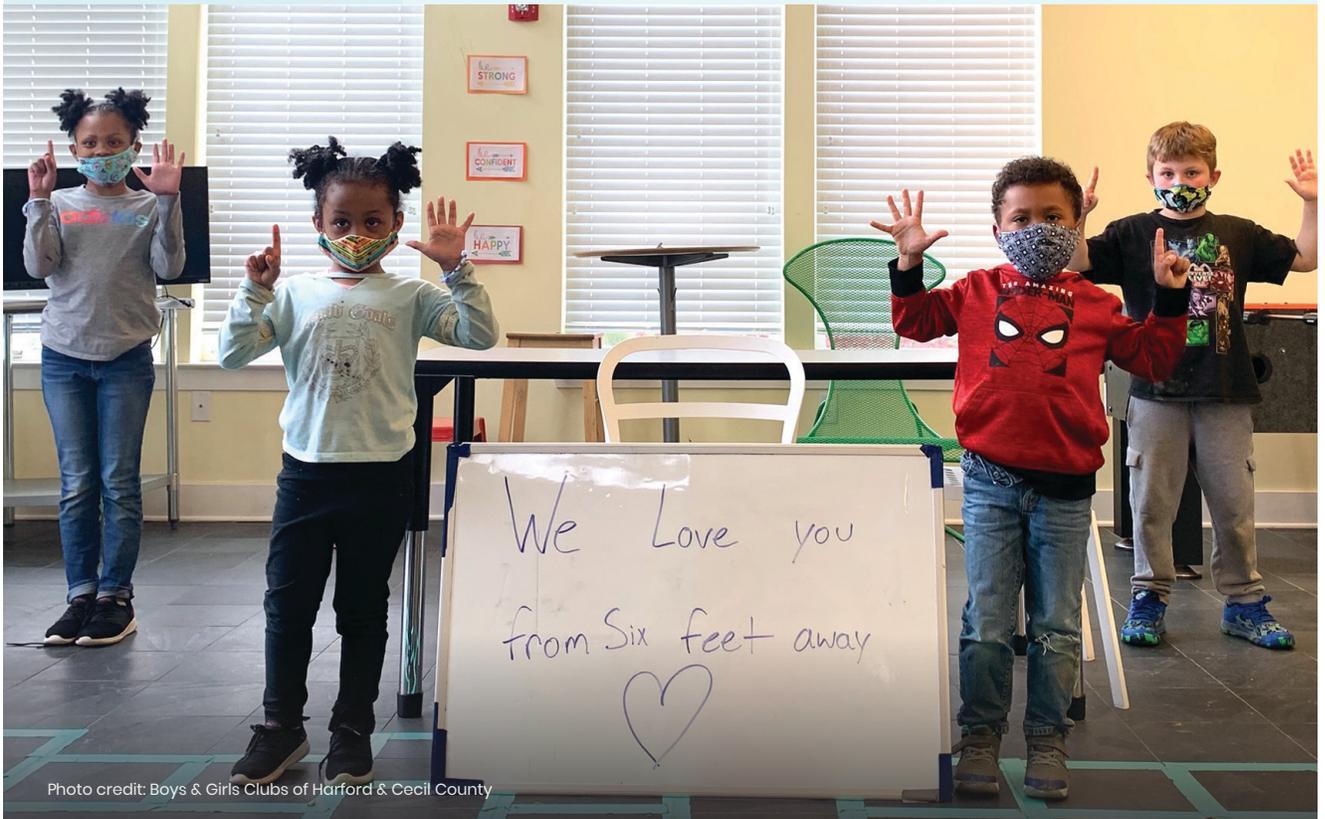


Photo credit: Boys & Girls Clubs of Harford & Cecil County

Requirements to Achieve Partnership

A meeting of the minds, understanding of mutual benefit, and an agreement on priorities set the stage for collaboration between schools and community-based partners.

- Students at the center of the conversations
- School leadership teams that include community stakeholders
- Clear expectations and shared accountability including delineation of roles and responsibilities
- Shared professional development
- Plan for sustainability, including forming ongoing, long-term relationships
- Evaluation for effectiveness
- Articulated shared vision, values, objectives, and common language
- Mutual respect for the expertise of the partner, avoiding overlaps and redundancy
- Commitment to standards, quality, and continuous program improvement
- Creation of effective communications tools and systems to share information and connections
- Sharing of resources to build efficiencies (ex. materials, technology)
- Alignment of instruction to reinforce, but not replicate, school day through curricular collaboration
- Needs assessments and gap analysis to best prioritize partner roles
- Data sharing to ensure accountability using consistent measures, including clear goals and metrics
- Careful selection of partnerships, taking into account organizational culture
- Formal agreements
- Additional resources



Photo credit: Boys & Girls Club of Parkersburg

GLOSSARY

What is Out-of-School Time (OST)?

Traditionally, an out-of-school time program is a learning opportunity, based in youth development, that is offered in either a school or community-based setting for school-age youth outside of the traditional school day or year including before school, after school, on weekends, and over holidays and the summer. OST programs operate on many different models and schedules, often in partnership with schools, and are designed to meet the needs of students and working families. OST programs are supported through a variety of funding mechanisms, including but not limited to, private and public grants, public agencies (like Recreation & Parks), school contracts, and parent fees.

School-aged licensed child care programs are OST programs that operate under the guidelines of licensure through the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Not all OST programs are licensed child care programs. During COVID-19, the lines became blurred between child care and OST programming. This also often happens during summer, when summer day camp replaces child care for some families. Further exploration of the benefits of OST as part of the child care continuum and child care as part of the OST continuum of services might generate a new appreciation for the benefits of all systems designed to care for and educate youth.

What is Youth Development?

Positive youth development is a framework that views young people through an assets based lens and encourages youth leadership, voice, and choice as a core principle in programming. From a youth development perspective, young people are not problems to be fixed. A youth development approach encourages agency within young people and helps develop positive relationships with peers and adults to provide a network of support and creates opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making.

Much of the conversation around reopening and returning to school has been limited to how to best provide instructional time. Young people need a broader range of support and stimulation, especially now that they are spending more time indoors and isolated from traditional social and educational opportunities. With consideration and investment from districts and state education departments, out-of-school time programs can redesign their offerings to mitigate losses to youth's social and educational development.

What is a Community School?

A community school is a place-based strategy that aims to make the school building a hub for community resources and reinvestment. Rather than an institution where teachers teach and students learn, community schools provide a wealth of resources to meet the needs of students and families including health and social services and community engagement and development. This holistic approach leads to better student outcomes, such as increased attendance and academic success and strengthens community fabric.

OST programs are the heart of a community school and are natural venues to expand learning and partnerships for students and families beyond the traditional school day and year. Both community schools and out-of-school time programs act as structural catalysts for schools and districts to adopt robust, effective strategies to engage in open, asset-driven dialogues with students, families, and community entities. They also mobilize stakeholders by demonstrating investment and commitment to the success of students and families.

During COVID-19 community school coordinators were frontline services providers that ensured students and families had access to critical services like food and technology. They have also served as community connectors and advocates, helping students and families communicate their needs to their schools and districts, celebrating student milestones, and boosting morale and resiliency.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a formal or informal developmental relationship between a young person and, most typically, a caring, trained, non-familial adult acting in a non-professional supportive capacity to provide relationship-based support that benefits one or more areas of the mentee's development. Though the model of mentoring is normally within the confines of a dedicated program and for a minimum of one (calendar or academic) year, many youth-serving organizations have adopted mentoring practices which center developmental relationships and leverage recognized mentoring best practices.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit www.mostnetwork.org/resources/recovery.



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 [@MDOutofSchoolTime](https://www.facebook.com/MDOutofSchoolTime)

MOST is one of 50 statewide afterschool networks made possible by the generous support of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and local matching investment. It is also a state affiliate to the National Afterschool Association.

The following organizations endorse this report, including the recommendations:

