CHAPIN HALL
CENTER FOR CHILDREN
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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

Executive Summary

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INTRODUCTION

This report covers the third year of Chapin Hall's process evaluation of the Prime Time Initiative of Palm Beach County, Florida, a system-building effort to strengthen the quality of after-school programs in the county. During the past two decades, the after-school field has expanded enormously, partly in response to increasing concern about developmental and achievement gaps between low-income children, especially those of ethnic minority backgrounds, and their more advantaged peers. Opportunities to participate in constructive after-school activities are still more limited in low-income communities than in more affluent communities, and questions remain about the effects of after-school programs on children's development and academic achievement.

At the same time, as the field has evolved and grown, practitioners and policymakers are learning that programs are more likely to have effects when they address multiple developmental domains, are led by professional staff and are of high quality, and engage children on a regular and sustained basis. Improving quality remains challenging, however, as the field is still plagued by problems of unstable funding and staffing as well as difficulty developing realistic expectations and quality standards for a diverse array of providers. Intermediary organizations such as Prime Time can be a critical resource for bringing together diverse perspectives, advocating for and developing quality standards, and linking programs with needed supports and services, including professional development for staff, to meet those standards (e.g., Halpern, Spielberger, & Robb, 2001; Johnson, Rothstein, & Gajdosik, 2004; Yohalem, Wilson-Ahlstrom, & Yu, 2005).

The Prime Time Initiative

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

Prime Time is considered an important component of a growing infrastructure of community services and supports put in place to promote the healthy development, school readiness, and school success of children in Palm Beach County. The programs and systems that make up the growing infrastructure of services for families and children in Palm Beach County are intended to function collaboratively and support families and children at different

stages of their development. Currently, these programs and systems are focused on serving families in four targeted geographic areas (TGAs)—the Glades, Lake Worth/Lantana, Riviera Beach/Lake Park, and West Palm Beach—that have high levels of risk for poverty, teen pregnancy, crime, and child abuse and neglect.[1]

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

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

Thus, Prime Time's main strategies for achieving its goals are as follows:

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

  In January 2006, Prime Time initiated an 18-month QIS pilot project in targeted areas of Palm Beach County. The QIS is a multi-step process that begins with baseline assessments by trained outside assessors on a standardized measure of program quality called the Palm Beach County Program Quality Assessment (PBC-PQA) developed by the High/Scope Foundation. The PBC-PQA uses a 5-point rating scale to measure all aspects of program environments (i.e., physical, social, and personal), with particular focus on youth voice and engagement. The process also includes self-assessments by program staff, the development of program improvement plans based on assessment, the provision of staff training and curricular resources to implement improvements, and reassessment by outside assessors using the PBC-PQA. Programs participating in the pilot also received a monetary incentive at the beginning of the QIS process.

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

Thirty-eight after-school programs, serving more than 4,000 children and youth in the TGAs, participated in the Prime Time Quality Improvement System (QIS) Pilot Project.[2] These thirty-eight programs represent the variety of after-school programs in the county: Fourteen are school-based programs and twenty-four are community-based. Twenty-six of the thirty-eight are operated by community-based organizations, nine are managed by schools, and three are managed by parks and recreation departments. Half of the programs serve both elementary and middle-school children, while eleven serve elementary school students and eight serve middle-school (and in one case, high school) students. Twenty-eight of the programs also participated in a pre-QIS project the previous years to prepare them to take part in the QIS.

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

    Curricular resources. Through its links with community organizations, Prime Time provides a large variety of curricular resources known as modules and program enhancements or overlays. The curricular resources vary in topic, format, and duration, and are offered in various developmental areas, including arts and culture, academics, health, and sports and recreation. This year, Prime Time finalized contracts with both the Center for Creative Education (CCE) and the YMCA of South Palm Beach County to provide all of the modules that previously had been provided by Prime Time. Since August 2007, CCE has been managing and providing modules in the areas of arts and culture. As of October 2007, the YMCA assumed responsibility for providing modules in the areas of health and fitness, and sports and recreation. Prime Time has had long-standing relationships with both organizations, which have the capacity to better meet the requests of a larger number of programs than Prime Time could. Both organizations also intend to build upon and expand the current range of curricular resources for programs.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

  In addition, the resource advocates have continued their activities to increase the quality of and participation in after-school programs geared toward middle-school youth in the three TGAs. This special project, the Knight Middle School Enhancement Project, is expected to end in 2 years. Thus, the community resource advocates are currently stepping up their efforts to identify new programs that are ready to receive the assistance that Prime Time can provide in anticipation of the end of the Knight Project.

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

  In addition to its efforts in the areas of advocacy, increasing awareness, and outreach, Prime Time has continued its efforts to streamline its organization and reestablish and reinforce its identity as an intermediary organization. A marketing consultant has been helping Prime

Time try to create a consistent identity (with clarity about its function and how it is organized), primarily through a reworking of their Web site, which was launched in August 2006. The Web site is intended to become the main portal for communication for their most important stakeholders, providers of after-school program services.

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

A Process Evaluation of Prime Time

The primary purpose of Chapin Hall's 3-year process evaluation has been to document the evolution of the QIS and assess its effectiveness in improving the quality of after-school programs for elementary and middle-school students in Palm Beach County. The following three questions were identified as central to the evaluation when it began in the fall of 2004:

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

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

Thus, the goal of our data collection efforts in the third year was to continue observing and documenting Prime Time's implementation of the QIS in 37 after-school programs serving elementary- and middle-school-age students. Specifically, our focus was: (1) to continue to document the QIS implementation activities and understand how participants in the QIS pilot are experiencing the system, and (2) to again review all of the components that make up Prime Time and support the QIS process, including professional development and staff training, the provision of curricular resources, and community outreach and marketing. Our methods included interviews with a wide variety of stakeholders; observations of selected after-school programs, meetings, trainings, and other events; and review and analysis of available reports and documents.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A key finding in the third year of the evaluation was that the QIS pilot process was a success, a success that can be attributed to both Prime Time's hard work as well as after-school program providers' new understanding of the QIS process. Because providers were able to observe real examples of positive change in their programs this year, they were able to reflect on the process of change. Whereas some directors expressed uncertainty and some ambivalence about the QIS in the first and second years, all participants in the pilot who were interviewed in the third year expressed more satisfaction and understanding of the process. Although some directors remained uneasy about the outcome of the pilot and how the QIS results would factor into funding decisions, they seemed to recognize that these concerns were matters to discuss with their funders rather than Prime Time. Thus, Prime Time has continued to both establish and reinforce its role as a multifaceted intermediary among its leadership and staff, the provider community, other intermediaries, and funders.

Prime Time's accomplishments this year seem even more remarkable when one considers the leadership changes and fairly rapid organizational growth that it has undergone in a short period of time. Interviews with a range of program directors participating in the QIS pilot indicate that Prime Time continues to be a highly regarded and trusted resource among this group of providers. In addition, there appears to be growing awareness among other after-school providers in the county about Prime Time's work, the resources it facilitates, and the importance of quality in programming.

Prime Time's goals during the past year included completing the pilot of the QIS, while continuing to increase the capacity and responsibility of local organizations to provide curriculums and other program enhancements to after-school programs. In addition, they continued to work on establishing ongoing professional development, increasing outreach to new programs, and developing community awareness of the importance of high-quality after-school programs for children and youth. In the evaluation, we focused on the continuing development of the QIS but also observed the implementation of Prime Time's other strategies to develop a comprehensive, countywide system of supports and resources for out-of-school-time programs.

As noted above, the QIS pilot concluded successfully with thirty-seven of forty original programs participating in the final reassessment, and thirty-one programs completing all phases of the QIS, including program improvement plans. Although some providers were more engaged than others, the QIS pilot process encouraged the participation of a diverse group of providers. Prime Time responded to concerns and suggestions raised by directors in the last 2 years in terms of difficulties managing the baseline assessments and concerns about how the QIS results would be used by Prime Time and funders. Prime Time helped to reinforce its role as an intermediary and facilitator of quality improvements when it established the assessment process in a different organization, Family Central.[3]

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[3] In collecting the baseline assessments, Prime Time staff tried to separate itself from the process to emphasize its role as one of support rather than assessment. However, it became necessary for a Prime Time staff member to be involved in the process to oversee the training of the assessors and the logistics of conducting the assessments to facilitate communication and relationships among the programs, the assessors, and Prime Time. In the new QIS, however, Family Central staff will have primary responsibility for building relationships with providers to explain

Directors understood the value of both internal and external assessment and, by the end of the pilot, were comfortable with the PBC-PQA instrument. This tool proved to be both a useful measure of quality and a tool for bringing about that quality. Although collecting the baseline assessments was a complicated task, the process of collecting the follow-up assessments began earlier in the year and ran more smoothly. Responding to the concerns of providers, Prime Time devoted more time to the reassessment process. There appeared to be an increased level of comfort with the process among program directors and their staff. Program directors also reported less concern with how the assessment data would be used by Prime Time and funders than they reported the previous 2 years.

The on-site technical assistance provided by the quality advisors and, for some programs, the peer coaches, was an important factor in the success of the pilot. Comments from directors about their relationships with their quality advisors were again, without exception, positive. Their comments also reflected the recent changes in staffing and the redistribution of programs among staff, in that several mentioned having new quality advisors, and a couple were not sure who their quality advisors were. Directors praised the quality advisors for their willingness to listen, accessibility, flexibility, responsiveness, creativity, and resourcefulness.

Peer coaching, as a support to the quality advisors, was a new component in the QIS process in the 2006-2007 program year. To learn more about this component, we interviewed a range of informants, including Prime Time staff involved in setting up the peer coaching process, six of the eight program directors working with a peer coach, and five peer coaches, about their experiences. In an effort to learn how participation in the process had impacted programs and staff from an agency perspective, we also talked with agency directors of the programs that were receiving assistance from peer coaches as well as agency directors of the programs where the peer coaches were employed. In all cases, the agency directors with whom we spoke both approved of their staff serving as peer coaches and having their staff work with a peer coach.

Program directors who were working with peer coaches expressed satisfaction with their experiences. Several noted having very positive experiences in which they made considerable progress toward their goals. Other directors, while pleased with their coaching experiences, reported limited progress toward their goals because of factors unrelated to the coach. In the case of one program, becoming licensed as an after-school program was the program director's primary goal, and it was ultimately determined that licensing was "not going to be a possibility" in the facility in which the program was located at the time. Others expressed satisfaction with the relationship and the assistance provided but felt they lacked the time needed to devote to meeting their program improvement goals.

Overall, peer coaches also spoke very positively about their experiences as coaches. They indicated that they had benefited both personally and professionally through the coaching process. They emphasized that taking as much time as needed to

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and facilitate the QIS process. Providers will be expected to be more proactive in arranging their assessments directly with Family Central, although Prime Time will continue to help programs prepare for their assessment visits and interpret their scores.

make clear their role as supporter (versus monitor, funder, or provider) was absolutely necessary to ultimately help programs.

All participants in the peer coaching process also mentioned a number of challenges they had experienced. These included having ongoing program demands eclipsing the program directors' and coaches' abilities to focus on goals; being unable to establish rapport between the program director and coach; and being questioned about the legitimacy of program directors leaving their own programs to go work with others as coaches.

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

Ongoing Challenges for Prime Time

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

Responding to Diverse Needs

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

Communicating, Building, and Maintaining Relationships

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

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

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

Clarifying the Role of Assessment, Standards, and the QIS

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

At the same time, clarifying the role of assessment, standards, and the QIS is likely to be a regular issue as new programs are brought into the QIS. It has taken time for programs who have participated in the development of the QIS, from its early days as a QRS, until now. Across

the field, there are still questions about what quality looks like, the process of change, how best to measure change, and how to hold providers accountable for change. Thus, it will be important to continue to track changes in perceptions of the assessment process as the QIS evolves.

Training and Retaining Staff

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

Indeed, one question we raised in the previous year was the impact of staff turnover on participation in the QIS. The fact that a large majority of the programs in the pilot completed all phases of the process suggests that staff turnover, to the extent it occurred, did not impact the process significantly. At the same time, most of the programs in the pilot were stable programs, which might have made it easier for them to manage staffing problems with Prime Time's support. As new, perhaps less-stable programs become engaged with Prime Time, it will be important to observe how staffing and other issues (e.g., facility problems) affect their ability to use and benefit from Prime Time's resources.[4]

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

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

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

and encourage them to participate in training? These are questions to explore in the context of Prime Time's future work.

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

Although the new QIS process will be very similar to the pilot, Prime Time expects participating providers to be more self-sufficient and take more initiative in the QIS than they did in the pilot. For example, providers will now be responsible for contacting Family Central and making their own arrangements to be assessed. Thus, one important question is how proactive providers will be in obtaining the resources they need, whether it is professional development, program enhancements, or a visit from a quality advisor or coach. Other important questions about the roll-out of the QIS include the nature of the relationship between providers' quality improvements in the QIS and the specific supports provided or facilitated by Prime Time, including peer coaching, professional development, and curricular resources, and what factors make these supports more or less effective.

In addition, Prime Time will continue its work on other strategies to implement its overarching goal of developing a comprehensive system of standards and supports to strengthen the quality of after-school programs throughout the county. In addition to enhancing opportunities for professional development for staff, Prime Time also aims to continue to support other local institutions, such as PBCC, CCE, and the YMCA, to strengthen their capacity to provide needed resources to after-school programs. Important areas to examine in relation to these strategies include the aids and barriers to staff development, relationships between providers and local organizations providing staff training and curricular resources, and ways to reach out and support other programs that have not been previously engaged with Prime Time.

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

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