The Prime Time Initiative of Palm Beach County, Florida

QIS Development Process Evaluation: Year 2 Report

Executive Summary

Julie Spielberger
Tracey Lockaby

2006

Chapin Hall
Working Paper

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

This report covers the second year of a 3-year process evaluation of the Prime Time Initiative, a system-building effort to strengthen the availability and quality of after-school programs in Palm Beach County, Florida. During the past two decades, the after-school field has expanded enormously. This growth has occurred 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, although uncertainty about the role of after-school programs in closing those gaps remains. Opportunities to participate in constructive after-school activities are still more limited in low-income communities than in more affluent communities, and questions remain about the effects of after-school programs on children's development and academic achievement

At the same time, as the field has evolved and grown, practitioners and policymakers are learning that programs are more likely to have effects when they address multiple developmental domains, are of high quality and led by professional staff, and engage children on a regular and sustained basis. Improving quality remains challenging, however, as the field is still beset 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

About a decade ago, community stakeholders in Palm Beach County formed the Palm Beach County Out-of-School Consortium and, subsequently, a coordinating council, to share resources and enhance existing after-school programs for elementary and high school youth. Over 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's early work focused on fostering networking among providers and exploring ways to improve the quality of programs serving elementary and middle-school children in the TGAs and foster participation in after-school programs. During 2004-2005, Prime Time created committees to establish quality standards for Palm Beach County programs and develop a quality rating system (QRS) which could be used to measure progress towards those standards. In 2005, Prime Time conducted a pilot of a quality improvement process called the "pre-QRS" project to test this process in a small number of programs.

In 2006, Prime Time continued this work but, as described below, shifted its focus from quality rating to quality improvement. Its overarching goal is to create an integrated and sustainable system of standards, supports, and resources for all after-school programs in the county that is tailored to the needs of individual programs. 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 aims to position Prime Time as a county-wide intermediary, as opposed to a funder or provider of services. Correspondingly, in order to strengthen the system of supports for after-school programs, Prime Time also seeks to develop capacity in local institutions to provide program enhancements and staff training to programs.

Thus, Prime Time's key activities during 2005-2006 included developing and testing a range of strategies to improve program quality. These activities included the following:

• **Develop and pilot a Quality Improvement System (QIS)**

The approximately 18-month QIS pilot, which began in January 2006, 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—for example, creating opportunities for youth to contribute to and share responsibility for program activities, to be challenged, and to develop in all areas (physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively/academically). The process also includes self-assessments by program staff, the development of program improvement plans based on assessment, the provision of staff training and curricular resources to implement improvements, and reassessment by outside assessors using the PBC-PQA.

Thirty-eight diverse after-school programs, serving more than 4,000 children and youth in the TGAs, are participating in the Prime Time QIS pilot. The QIS process was the culmination of more than a year's work and planning by Prime Time staff and board members,

---

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

consultants, program providers, and other community members. It also reflects an important shift in Prime Time's approach to program improvement from a quality *rating* system (QRS) to a quality *improvement* system (QIS). This decision was made last year based on the assumption that Prime Time's work would be more effective if it were a supportive rather than a judgmental process. Thus, programs participating in the pilot were provided a monetary incentive at the beginning of the process. This up-front funding along with the efforts to engage staff in assessing their own programs were key differences between the QIS and the QRS: in the latter, funding was tied to improvements on a rating scale.

- **Provide a range of curricular resources and staff development opportunities**

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 and 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.

In addition, through its links with community organizations, Prime Time provides a variety of curricular resources known as modules and program enhancements, or overlays. The curricular resources vary in topic, format, and duration, and are offered in various developmental areas, including arts and culture, academics, health, and sports and recreation. Modules are short-term activities of six to nine sessions in duration that provide an introduction to a particular field or skill, while overlay programs are more intensive, longer-term components that are integrated into the regular after-school program schedule and delivered by both the regular after-school staff and experts provided by community organizations. 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.

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. In the fall of 2006, consortium meetings were restructured as networking events to be more responsive to provider needs and broaden participation in the consortium. In this regard, Prime Time is also encouraging the consortium to be more independent of Prime Time in their networking activities.

- **Develop capacity of and partnerships with 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, another activity during 2006 involved negotiating agreements with a variety of agencies to deliver the services previously provided or facilitated by Prime Time, including Family Central for program quality assessments, Palm Beach Community College for professional development, and organizations specializing in arts and culture, sports and recreation, academics, career development, and health and nutrition 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 is engaged in several activities to both increase awareness of the importance of after-school programs and support new after-school programs in the TGAs. Last year, Prime Time staff worked with operating programs that had already been identified by CSC, the Knight Foundation, and the Picower Foundation as needing the support and resources that Prime Time offered. This year, two community resource advocates are working to identify a variety of new programs, including programs that may not be operational but have identified children with needs and have some staff, either paid or volunteer, and to connect them to needed resources.

  In January and in March of 2006, the community resource advocates held meetings to which they invited all programs in the county (at various stages of development) they could identify. The purpose of these meetings was to introduce Prime Time and to clarify its role as an intermediary organization that provides resources and supports but not funding. The community resource advocates' focus has been on letting programs and individuals (if they are not yet parts of programs) know what Prime Time does and what kinds of supports and assistance it provides. They regularly make presentations about Prime Time at community meetings to neighborhood groups, politicians, and various other interested individuals.

- **Promote Prime Time as a county-wide intermediary**

  In addition to its efforts in the areas of advocacy, increasing awareness, and outreach, Prime Time has worked to streamline its organization and reestablish and reinforce its identity as an intermediary organization. A marketing consultant has been helping Prime Time try to create a consistent identity (with clarity about its function and how it is organized), primarily through a reworking of their Web site, which was launched in August of this year. 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. It should be noted that Prime Time also is currently involved in a special 5-year project called the Knight Middle School Enhancement Project. The goal of this project is to increase the quality of and participation in after-school programs for middle-school youth in three targeted communities: Riviera Beach, North West Palm Beach, and the Glades. The middle-school years are challenging for many low-income youth, and it is believed that participation in after-school programs greatly reduces the chances of dropping out of school and engaging in risky behavior, while increasing academic engagement, self-esteem, and positive social behaviors. This enhancement project is being monitored by Prime Time and is not part of Chapin Hall's second-year evaluation.

A Process Evaluation of Prime Time

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

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

These questions, particularly the last one, have continued to guide our work in the second year of the evaluation, although High/Scope and Prime Time will be largely responsible for documenting the results of the QIS.[2] In addition, 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 observe and comment on Prime Time's identity and function as an intermediary organization.

Thus, the goal of our data collection efforts in the second year was twofold: (1) to document the QIS implementation activities and understand how participants in the QIS pilot felt about the new system in relation to their experiences the previous year, and (2) to 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 primary method was individual interviews with more than fifty informants to gain their perspectives on Prime Time's goals and activities and on the quality of implementation. These included Prime Time staff; a range of after-school providers; representatives of High/Scope, Family Central, Palm Beach Community College, and CSC; and youth development professionals serving as consultants to Prime Time. In addition, we conducted observations of selected after-school programs, meetings, trainings, and other events, and reviewed and analyzed available reports and documents.

---

[2] High/Scope was engaged to develop the PBC-PQA used in the QIS pilot and train local assessors and program providers in its use, as well as to provide some of the training for providers on youth development. Although Chapin Hall reported on assessment information collected during the pre-QRS pilot in the first year of the evaluation, High/Scope and Prime Time will be preparing a report of the results of the QIS pilot, which will include an analysis of the baseline quality of programs and changes over time as well as providers' use of curricular resources, training, and other supports in the program improvement process.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

One of the key findings in the second year of the evaluation was that Prime Time's identity as an intermediary, although still evolving and not always understood, is much clearer to program directors than it was a year ago. When we asked directors for their perceptions of what Prime Time is and its role in the after-school community, the themes mentioned most often were supporting program staff and directors and enhancing program quality through access to resources, staff training, and on-site technical assistance. Directors typically mentioned the specific supports of modules and program enhancements first in their comments before mentioning others, reflecting the prominence and popularity of this very practical support. However, most directors also highlighted Prime Time's commitment to and consistent focus on staff development and program quality, as well as its positive approach to improving quality. In describing Prime Time's approach, they noted the development of common standards based on current research and "best practice," which apply equally to all programs. Prime Time's approach was described as unbiased and professional and was viewed favorably even by directors whose programs were in need of improvement.

Importantly, the QIS process, which was a major undertaking in the first half of the year, has been very well received. The approximately 18-month QIS pilot includes the following components, with the first five phases occurring during the period covered by this report:

- Baseline assessments by outside assessors with PBC-PQA (March and early April 2006)
- Training for program directors in self-assessment (March 2006)
- Self-assessments (April and May 2006)
- Review of baseline assessments and training for directors on how to use data to plan improvements (May 2006)
- Development of improvement plans based on assessment results (summer and fall 2006)
- Provision of appropriate Prime Time supports (on-site peer coaching, professional development staff training and scholarships, and curricular resources and program enhancements) to implement program improvement plans (fall 2006 and winter 2007)
- Reassessment with PBC-PQA (spring 2007)

At the time of this report, all but three of the programs had completed their initial program improvement plans and five coaches had been selected, trained, and matched with a small number of programs to provide on-site mentoring and coaching. A number of new workshops and trainings were offered in fall of 2006 to respond to some of the specific needs that were identified in the baseline assessments and were incorporated into the program improvement plans.

To determine baseline quality, trained assessors visited a program on two to six different days, depending on the size of the program, and observed different groups of children and different activities using the PBC-PQA. The PQA includes the following four subscales: *safe environment*, which describes both the physical and emotional safety and health of the environment; *supportive environment*, which describes adult support for children's learning and

development; *interaction*, which describes peer interactions within the program and how adults can support healthy peer relationships; and *engagement*, which describes opportunities for youth to plan, to make choices, and to reflect and learn from their experiences.

On average, the Palm Beach County programs achieved higher scores in the first two areas than in the other two subscales, which is consistent with other quality improvement initiatives (Akiva, 2005). The average rating was highest—4.46 out of a possible 5.0—on the first subscale, *safe environment*, with all but two of the thirty-eight programs receiving ratings of 4.0 or higher on this subscale. The second subscale, *supportive environment*, received adequate ratings for the most part, with the overall average of 3.8 approaching 4.0. The range of scores for this subscale was the smallest, indicating that there was less variability among programs in the pilot. The third and fourth subscales, *interaction* and *engagement*, received lower overall ratings—3.35 and 2.64, respectively—and had more variability in the range of scores between the lowest and highest score than the other two subscales.

Although Prime Time is only half-way through the 18-month pilot, consistent with the shift in focus from quality rating to quality improvement, the QIS has encouraged broad participation. Prime Time staff and consultants have communicated frequently with providers—frontline staff as well as directors—although some providers appear easier to engage than others. The baseline assessment process ran reasonably well, although it was an enormous task to collect the assessments within a short period of time. Most directors seemed comfortable with the PBC-PQA tool, and a majority of the directors we spoke with appeared comfortable with the external assessment and self-assessment procedures. Providers also were accepting of the results of the external assessments, which often were consistent with their internal self-assessments. They also found the process of interpreting the assessments and using them to develop program improvement plans easier than they had anticipated.

On the other hand, there were some complaints about the timing and complexity of scheduling the observations for the external assessments and implementing the self-assessment with staff. This underscored the importance of the on-site technical assistance provided by the quality advisors. Even though directors and staff participated in a group training to learn about the instrument and the process, some needed additional assistance applying what they had learned.

Throughout the first half of the QIS process, Prime Time staff and consultants pushed the view that improvement starts wherever programs are currently and will proceed at different rates depending on baseline quality and the specific areas that need to be modified. Thus, Prime Time 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. Again, although some directors expected resistance from their staff or that staff would find the process difficult, in most cases they found that their staff enjoyed being part of the process and learned from it. They conveyed the view that the QIS is shaping up to be a participatory system in which Prime Time is working *with* providers rather than doing something *for* or *to* them. At the same time, a number of providers remain uneasy about the outcome of the pilot— that is, what real improvements will be made and how, and what system will be in place at the

end of the pilot. And still prominent among their concerns is how funders will use the assessment information for decision making.

The fact that some providers are still uneasy about the distinction between support and assessment in the QIS and uncertain about how ratings at the end of the pilot will be interpreted and used by CSC and other funders is not surprising at this point in time. It will be important to track changes in perceptions of the assessment process in the third year as the QIS evolves, and also of Prime Time's activities to expand the reach of its resources to the broader community of after-school programs. These activities include restructuring of the consortium into networking events, the work of the new community resource advocates, and the hiring of a marketing consultant. The long-term goal to make the range of its services—scholarships, professional development activities, assessments, modules and overlays, and coaching— available to all after-school programs in the county remains the same. Although the strategies for achieving this goal are still emerging, the vision is clearer than it was a year ago.

Many of Prime Time's other strategies to improve the quality of after-school programs in the county were still evolving during the past year. Nonetheless, program directors and other informants appreciated the range and flexibility of the supports Prime Time provides. They were particularly pleased with the on-site technical assistance provided by the quality advisors and community resource advocates because it could be tailored to their individual needs. Directors also recognized the importance of the informal and formal staff development opportunities provided through Prime Time and Palm Beach Community College. However, they noted that it was challenging to make time for training for themselves and, especially, for their frontline staff when substitutes were not available or when they had to travel a long distance to attend a class or training. This suggests that Prime Time should explore whether training and college classes could be offered at other, more convenient community sites than currently available.

A majority of directors commented favorably on the variety and quality of the curricular resources provided in the modules and program enhancements. Some directors, however, complained about the quality and timeliness of the module instruction they received and the need to go through Prime Time to obtain this resource. This suggests that Prime Time's efforts to institutionalize these resources in local community organizations should be well received by providers.

General Challenges for Prime Time

Prime Time's broad mission to bring together a range of stakeholders and activities, including a diverse group of providers, funders, intermediaries, families, and community-based institutions to create a system naturally poses many challenges. Those that emerged during the second year of our evaluation are the following:

- **Responding to the diverse needs of the provider community**

  Prime Time is attempting to respond to the needs of a very diverse network of programs, which have different goals, organizational structures, resources, and levels of baseline quality. These programs include school-sponsored school-age child-care programs, Beacon

Centers based in schools but run by community organizations, public parks and recreation programs, and a variety of community-based programs operated by small faith-based and immigrant organizations and larger, well-established agencies such as Boys & Girls Clubs and the YMCA. Licensing requirements differ; many are licensed, others are not or are not required to be licensed. Programs serve different communities and have different focuses (e.g., academic, enrichment, socialization, and recreation), depending on their resources and the needs of their communities. Programs are also located in different areas. As noted earlier, providers in the Glades do not feel they have as much access to curricular resources and professional development as providers in other parts of the county.

A related matter is the lack of information about the range of after-school programs in Palm Beach County—that is, the availability, types, and sizes of programs in different parts of the county, and how many children are engaged in after-school activities (Children's Services Council, 2005). In this regard, the work of the community resource advocates in identifying new programs in the TGAs is an important part of the effort to understand and describe the universe of after-school programs in the county and the needs of these programs.

- **Communicating and building, and maintaining relationships**

As the after-school system in Palm Beach County grows and becomes more complex, increasing attention must be paid to channels of communication and to making sure people remain connected and informed. Our data collection did not reveal any serious problems in this area, although some of our informants commented that there are a lot of pieces to this emerging system. There were also some complaints about the availability and quality of curricular resources, although most resources seem to have been chosen carefully. But in working with community partners, it will be important to clearly establish roles and responsibilities and maintain frequent communication and oversight to ensure they provide high-quality services and to make sure Prime Time and its partners understand each others' goals and organizational structures.

Likewise, frequent communication with providers to keep them informed of new developments and clarify expectations remains important. The providers we interviewed were very favorable in their comments about the ability of Prime Time's staff to build relationships, but there were a few who seemed to feel uninformed or left out. In addition, it will be important to make sure that those who were involved in the pre-QIS process and in the preliminary work to develop the quality standards are kept informed about the new PBC-PQA and assessment process.

Building relationships, communicating, and collaborating with diverse constituencies are difficult. Last year's consortium meetings were popular with a majority of providers, but others did not find them valuable and felt they took unnecessary time away from their work with children. Initial impressions of 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. The fact that they are being held in a variety of locations is also broadening providers' knowledge of the larger community of after-school programs as well as the resources available to programs. These monthly events might also be an opportunity for the leadership and other staff of Prime Time to report on their activities and learn firsthand about the interests and concerns of providers.

- **Clarifying the role of assessment, standards, and the QIS**

  Despite what appears to be widespread support for the QIS and the shift from a system of quality ratings and accountability to a system of quality improvement and support, the role of assessment and standards is not well understood. In addition, there appears to be some disagreement about the form of the final QIS and how it will be used to both measure quality and support quality improvement. These issues and how to resolve them are likely to become clearer in time as Prime Time, providers, and funders learn more about the process of program improvement. In addition, clarity will depend on discussion and decision making on the part of Prime Time and other community stakeholders about what to hold programs accountable for and how to do it.

  A related, but less important issue that surfaced in some other interviews involved concerns about the many kinds of monitoring, assessments, and standards that affect programs. Although there was no evidence of real conflicts in requirements, there was a sense that some providers feel burdened or overwhelmed by the amount of assessment and monitoring they are subject to. Despite the up-front funding, this extended to their experience with the QIS. These feelings likely reflect, in part, the timing of the assessments in the pilot and the novelty of the QIS.

- **Training and retaining staff**

  Developing staff qualifications and retaining qualified staff are ongoing challenges in the after-school field, and Prime Time's experiences are similar to those of other system-building initiatives. Directors and staff must perceive training as worthwhile even though it does not result in higher compensation or program improvements. They must make time for training despite the fact that it is difficult to find substitute staff so that regular staff can attend trainings that may be far away or at inconvenient times. In its efforts to provide on-site technical assistance and coaching and to develop training opportunities and curricular resources in other parts of the county, Prime Time is starting to address some of the barriers to staff development and retention. 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 professional-development system.

  It is not yet clear whether or how staff turnover will affect the implementation and effectiveness of the QIS, which can be explored in the next year. Although the thirty-eight programs in the pilot appear in general to be stable programs with some history, the extent to which staff turnover will affect the process and whether additional training and self-assessments will be needed are open questions.

  In summary, Prime Time made enormous strides during the past year. In addition to the QIS process, Prime Time has initiated a range of supports for ongoing program improvement, including varied professional development opportunities, quality advising and coaching, curricular resources such as models and program enhancements, and networking events. It is clear that most providers were reassured by the new QIS approach, in contrast to the QRS model developed the previous year, even though some observers still wonder whether the QIS would have as much effect on improving actual quality as a QRS would have. This suggests

that ongoing communication about the standards and reference to them by trainers, quality advisors, and coaches will be critical to reinforce them.

Conclusion

The after-school community in Palm Beach County is still maturing and Prime Time with it. In the coming year, Chapin Hall researchers will continue to observe the QIS, paying particular attention to the effect of the new peer coaches on staff knowledge and practices and the process of program improvement. Although Chapin Hall's data collection will be limited to review of documents and interviews with selected program directors, additional data on the QIS and program quality will be collected and analyzed by High/Scope. In this regard, it would be useful to have information on quality of experiences from the perspectives of staff and youth in the QIS sites, which has not been collected previously. As baseline results indicate, staff are still learning about what quality means in after-school programs. In addition, given the long-range goal of creating an integrated system of supports, information on the degree of participation in the range of Prime Time activities such as networking events, program enhancements, and professional development, will be useful.

To develop a system of supports and services that meets the quality needs of all after-school providers in Palm Beach County is not an easy task. But in our own observations of programs participating in the pilot, it was rewarding to see the commitment of staff to the children in the programs and their desire to improve the quality of their programming. This suggests there is a strong basis and motivation for improvement. As more and more providers become recognizable parts of the emerging system, it will be important to continue to review the standards developed in 2005 and get feedback on the QIS process. Again, it will be important to keep providers engaged in the process on an ongoing basis. It also will be important to engage other community stakeholders in discussions of the standards, the role of after-school programs in children's development, and accountability, as well as in advocating for quality.

Finally, Prime Time wisely recognizes that programs that are stronger, healthier, and more stable to begin with usually are better able to use and benefit from program improvement supports such as the QIS or general technical assistance. This is one reason that the QIS was preceded by a pre-QIS process in the previous year to try to bring programs up to a basic level of quality and to develop one-to-one relationships with a quality advisor. It is also a reason why there was so much spread in the domains of interaction and engagement. Another important lesson from other quality improvement initiatives is that the program improvement process needs time. It takes time to collect the baseline information needed to develop a plan. It can take time to form useful relationships with technical assistance providers and gather the resources needed to implement the plan. The culture and expectations of agencies, whether it is the school district or a CBO 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. Thus, fully implementing program improvement plans can be a long-term process. Program improvement is not quick, and it is not necessarily straightforward; delays should be expected, especially if staff turn over (Halpern, et al., 2001).

REFERENCES

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

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

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

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

Halpern, R., Spielberger, J., & Robb, S. (2001). *Evaluation of the MOST initiative: Final report and summary of findings.* Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children.

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

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

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

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

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

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

National League of Cities, www.nlc.org, 2006

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

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

National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) (2006). *Making the case: A fact sheet on children and youth in out-of-school time*. Wellesley, MA: NIOST, Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College.

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

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