Nashville, Tennessee

Sharing Data is a Calculated Move

Schools Partner with Afterschool Providers to Improve Youth Services

School and afterschool staff gather to talk data.

When it comes to cooperation between schools and afterschool programs in Nashville, what was once unthinkable has become routine.

Throughout the year, public schools and out-of-school time (OST) providers share data about nearly 1,500 of the city's neediest youth, including grades, formative assessment performance data, participation in afterschool programs and survey results about their developmental assets. And twice a year, dozens of school and OST staffers meet to talk about the data and how to use it to align services with student needs.

The arrangement puts Nashville on the cutting edge of the nationwide movement to strengthen collaboration between schools and OST providers. The National League of Cities declared that the partnership "has helped make Nashville's coordinated system of afterschool programming a paradigm for other cities."

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The partnership exists because city leaders from across sectors came together to create a youth master plan, using the Forum for Youth Investment's Ready by 21 strategies to fundamentally change how they work with young people.

Planning

The roots of the arrangement date to the early 2000s, as city leaders grew increasingly frustrated that their many efforts to prepare all children and youth for success were not achieving sufficient results. One reason, they believed, was that the many public and private entities that work with youth were not working together well enough.

In 2010, a mayoral task force set out to create a children and youth master plan, bringing together dozens of leaders from government, business, education and nonprofits. The Forum played a hands-on role throughout the process, providing Ready by 21 tools and technical assistance to collect and analyze data, determine the needs of local youth, and develop goals and strategies to meet those needs. (See the story about how the plan was built.)

The plan's objectives included creating a system to share data about young people among the organizations and public agencies that serve them. "These entities find it difficult to be as effective as possible without an adequate 'picture' of the clients they serve," the plan said. Afterschool providers, for example, knew little about what the kids in their programs did in school; teachers knew next to nothing about what

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their students did after school. While some schools and OST providers occasionally shared data, the practice was not routine and there was no consistent analysis or planning based on the data.

"The school district can't address all the barriers to student achievement alone," says Laura Hansen, director of information management and decision support for Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS). "Organizations working with our students need to have information on what the district is struggling with, as well as about the needs of individual students."
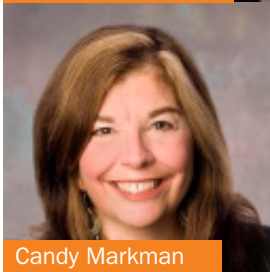
Sharing

The Nashville AfterZone Alliance (NAZA) seemed like a good place to start making changes. NAZA is a partnership of 15 afterschool providers, created in 2010 as part of the master plan. As of fall 2014, those providers will collectively serve almost 1,500 needy students from 25 middle schools.

NAZA and Metro Nashville Public Schools created a data-sharing process that is composed of three main technical elements: The school's systems student management database, a NAZA database of information about youth in afterschool programs, and the data warehouse (run by MNPS) that brings together the information from those two systems. The schools use the data warehouse to produce reports and analyses.

The data shared by the schools include grades, performance data, demographics, attendance and disciplinary actions. Data shared by providers include what programs youth participate in and how often, youth-reported internal and external assets, and the results of the Youth Program Quality Assessments of specific programs (conducted through the Forum's Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality).

Convening

NAZA sites started collecting and tracking school and afterschool data on a pilot basis in 2010. What's making that data more powerful are the "data dive" sessions: the new routine of bringing together the school and provider staff to talk about what the data show and how to use it. They've committed to meeting at the beginning of each semester. The first formal "data dive" meeting occurred last fall, when 80 school leaders and OST providers met in a conference room at the city's main public library. The second was in January.

They've talked about using the data to:
- assess and improve quality of afterschool services,
- shape afterschool time to better meet the social/emotional needs of students,
- align expanded learning opportunities, and
- quickly identify school attendance, behavior and academic issues among participants in afterschool programs.

Marielle Lovecchio, a former community development director for the Center for Refugees and Immigrants of Tennessee (which provides an array of youth services, including practicing English skills), says the conversations between schools and afterschool providers are game changers. "The most powerful piece was getting an understanding of how the schools were starting to take what we were doing pretty seriously and believe in the ability [of OST providers] to impact student performance behaviors," says Lovecchio, who is now a zone director at NAZA.

The challenge is to make changes based on those data and conversations. Says Candy Markman, director of the Mayor's Afterschool Initiatives, "We're getting much more intentional about putting people together and giving them carved out time to do some planning and thinking."

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