RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

SOCIAL POLICY HUB FOR
EQUITY RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

FUNDING
RHODE ISLAND'S
RECOVERY

INVESTING IN OUT OF SCHOOL TIME

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Rhode Island College
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

ABOUT SPHERE

The mission of SPHERE is to engage Rhode Island College students and faculty, in partnership with Rhode Island community members, in conducting and disseminating research for equitable educational and social policies. SPHERE endeavors to help Rhode Islanders understand, and become more involved in education policy decisions. SPHERE aspires to be a leading education and social policy institute in Rhode Island. As a policy hub, SPHERE connects with Rhode Island's education stakeholders in multiple spheres of influence by linking research, policy, and practice.

SUGGESTED CITATION:

McKamey, C. & Restler, V. (2021). *Funding Rhode Island's Recovery: Investing in Out of School Time.* Social Policy Hub for Equity Research in Education.

OVERVIEW

" *Funding youth development organizations and youth work professionals provides a three-fold recovery investment.* "

Rhode Island is a leader nationwide in the field of youth development, widely recognized for our vibrant 21st century partnerships, for innovative public-private models, rigorous and deeply researched assessment tools, creative programming in areas like youth activism and the arts, and both Bachelor's and Master's Degree training programs in the field.

Although Rhode Island is a model for the rest of the country, we are increasingly in need of expanded youth development programming, especially as we navigate a global health pandemic and a renewed commitment to racial justice and equity. Our current out of school offerings do not come close to meeting statewide demand--for every Rhode Island K-12 student enrolled in afterschool, 3 more young people would participate if a program were available.[1] And in order to meet the needs of Rhode Island families and grow out of school time (OST) Programming, we need to recruit, train, and support high quality youth workers.

OST learning is a smart and cost-effective use of public funds—studies confirm that out of school time education benefits academic learning,[2] social-emotional growth,[3] school retention,[4] and supports our local economy by allowing parents and caregivers to work while young people are safely cared for.[5] Furthermore, as we work towards recovery from the twin pandemics of racism and COVID-19, funding youth development organizations and youth work professionals provides a three-fold recovery investment. OST funding will stabilize and boost jobs in the human services sector. OST funding will provide after school childcare so that parents can re-join the workforce. And OST funding will equalize learning gaps made wider by the pandemic, and will ensure Rhode Island's low income youth, youth of color, and immigrant youth have access to educational opportunities and capacity building.

> *Out of school programs urgently need funding. A survey commissioned by the After School Alliance found that nearly 9 in 10 after school programs have unstable long term funding, and as many as 3 in 4 will close due to lack of funding.*[6]

To this end, we must:

1.EXPAND OST PROGRAMMING

Young people spend MOST of their time - over 80% - outside of school. [7] Out of school time offers important learning opportunities for youth. Every Rhode Island young person deserves an opportunity to participate in after school and summer learning. In 2020, 58,942 Rhode Island youth (44%) would have participated in an after school program if one were available.[8] Put another way, **for every young person in an after school program, 3 more are waiting to get in.** Meanwhile, 20,122 youth remain alone and unsupervised during the after school hours.[9] Out of school programming is critical to the recovery of Rhode Island's youth and families. We must expand out of school time programs to meet the sizable demand of our Rhode Island communities.

2.INVEST IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUTH WORKERS

High quality youth programs require high quality youth workers.[10] In fact, staff quality and effectiveness are the most important factors in youth development programs producing positive youth outcomes.[11] We advocate for 1) expansion of affordable, engaging, high-quality professional development opportunities for Rhode Island youth workers; 2) state investment in an academic training pipeline; and 3) ongoing youth worker training in anti-racist pedagogy, culturally sustaining curriculum, and trauma informed practices.

3.COMPENSATE YOUTH WORKERS FAIRLY

Finally, we urgently need to invest in paying youth workers a living wage. We advocate for a fund to supplement investments provided by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), the city, and private sector. Youth workers do complex, physical, intellectual, and social-emotional work every day and we must value and compensate them accordingly with fair wages, as well as healthcare, family leave, and sick leave.

EXPAND OST PROGRAMMING

Our context: Twin pandemics

The COVID-19 pandemic has crippled our economy, disrupted our educational system, and negatively impacted Rhode Islanders, especially working class BIPOC[12] communities that have been hit hardest with unemployment[13] and illness. Young people -- and especially working class youth of color in urban communities -- have been navigating immense financial, educational, emotional, and health challenges. They have endured extended isolation, reduced physical activity, interrupted academic learning, and increased stressors like food and housing insecurity, and trauma from the ongoing harms of systemic racism. With a majority of schools having to be hybrid or virtual, parents have struggled to support their kids' learning. In a national survey, nearly two-thirds of parents reported needing help across a range of learning supports, including providing physical space for their children to work, guidance in supporting their children's mental and emotional health, and technical help with homework.[14]

During the pandemic, and especially as we work to recover, OST programs are critical in supporting Rhode Island youth and their families. The pandemic has shown us the importance of connections and relationships. Despite a lack of centralized government messaging and support, after school programs have continued investing in relationships with young people, communities, parents, and schools. In some cases, OST programs have been a lifeline for communities, linking families with food, resources, and social connection. We cannot afford to underfund and extinguish these relational sources of education, community, and healing. Investing in OST programs will provide important educational, social justice, and financial returns to the state for young people, parents, and for the Rhode Island economy.

WHAT IS OST?

Out of school time learning (OST), also known as youth development or youth work, is a strengths-based approach to working with young people (ages 6-18) across a variety of formal and informal contexts. School-aged youth spend approximately 80% of their time outside of school,[15] and youth development programs support young people's learning and growth during these times including before school, after school, on weekends, during vacations, and over the summer. Youth development programs focus on a range of skills and content including academics, athletics, arts, STEAM,[16] youth activism, and behavioral health to name a few. Youth development is holistic, multifaceted, social, academic, experiential, artistic and more.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: ARISE

The ARISE Youth Leaders Program has remained vibrant in virtual space. Since March 2020, twenty youth from across the state have pivoted to virtual meets twice a week. Young people engaged in anti-Asian racism workshops to combat xenophobia; they organized to stand in solidarity with Black Lives; continue to fight for an adequate civics education (Cook vs Raimondo); served as community advisors for the Nellie Mae Education Foundation; developed a virtual youth-led campaign to advocate for the removal of the word "plantations" from our state's name; and joined intergenerational and multi-racial coalitions to organize for census completion, the Providence Alliance for Student Safety (PASS), and OurSchoolsPVD.

BENEFITS OF OST

OST BENEFITS YOUTH

Out of school time education plays a critical role in Rhode Island communities. Youth development programs have been shown to reduce dropout rates,[17] promote English language learning,[18] provide essential nutritional support,[19] and help young people develop social-emotional skills,[20] among other vital outcomes. And while out of school time learning serves a diverse racial and socioeconomic demographic, this work is critical for supporting marginalized communities--working class BIPOC youth and families. Public funding for out of school programming is essential to providing high quality, educationally enriching free or reasonably priced out of school support for young people. And this investment pays dividends-- OST experiences set up young people to earn better wages as adults. Following this logic, a 2003 study found that for every $1.00 invested in OST, $3.50 returned to the RI economy. [21] Another study in California estimated the return to taxpayers ranged from $2.99 to $4.03 for every dollar spent on after school programs.[22]

89% OF RHODE ISLAND PARENTS SUPPORT PUBLIC FUNDING FOR OUT OF SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMMING.[23]

OST BENEFITS FAMILIES

For working parents and caregivers, OST provides essential childcare so that they can participate in the workforce. A majority of Rhode Island parents -- 89% -- support public funding for after school. In 2020, 91% of parents in Rhode Island surveyed were satisfied with their child's overall afterschool program experience.[24] Yet many families encountered challenges to enrolling in after school programs. In December 2020, for every young person in an afterschool program in Rhode Island, 3 more -- nearly 59,000 young people -- were waiting to get in.[25] In December 2020, **81% of RI parents agreed that after school programs help them keep their jobs.** [26]

OST BENEFITS OUR ECONOMY

Investing in OST provides both direct and indirect benefits to the economy. Funding OST programs stimulates the economy through job creation, frees up parents and especially women to return to the workforce, and provides workforce development for young people. OST programs provide direct jobs for youth workers and workers in related industries.[27] Furthermore, OST enables parents and caregivers to maintain their jobs or return to the workforce, while providing a safe place for their children to learn and play. Massive job loss has been a devastating consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic-- in September, nearly one million people dropped out of the workforce. Women, and especially women of color, have been impacted most -- 4 times as many women dropped out of the workforce as men.[28] The McKinsey Global Institute has estimated that women's equal participation in the workforce could add up to $1 trillion in Global GDP growth by 2030.[29] OST programs are an essential component in supporting women to return to the workforce, to be able to financially support their families, and to contribute to the economy. Youth development is workforce development -- teaching young people and adults to work together, to problem solve, to gain "21st century skills," to use the arts to imagine and re-imagine possibilities -- these are essential to building our future state workforce, citizens, and democratic participants. Alongside the clear economic incentives, funding OST means supporting racial justice and gender equity. Our collective success with young people across the state depends on our investment in the youth workers who lead with them to support our communities and change the world.

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> *The McKinsey Global Institute has estimated that women's equal participation in the workforce could add up to $1 trillion in Global GDP growth by 2030.*
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INVEST IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

An abundance of research suggests that the quality of out of school youth programming and services is dependent upon the quality of staff. [30] Youth workers with adequate training report feeling more competent and able to support young people in their development and learning.[31] And substantive training has also been linked to retention of youth workers and reduction in costly staff turnover rates.[32]

WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS DO?

Youth work comprises a wide range of skills, approaches, and competencies that vary based on the age of youth, type of program, and social and community contexts. Typical youth work positions (even at the entry-level) require interdisciplinary proficiency in education including pedagogy and curriculum planning across a range of subjects that are academically aligned and consistent with philosophies of out of school time programming; nonprofit administrative skills in budgeting and accounting, staff management, data tracking and analysis; and the ability to navigate collaborations with diverse stakeholders including school personnel, parents and families, staff and volunteers.

Youth workers also engage complex social, emotional and culturally responsive work. Research shows that youth workers must be skilled in developing culturally responsive pedagogy and facilitation;[33] trauma-informed care;[34] building relationships with young people and other staff members;[35] co-constructing and leading with young people in after school programs;[36] and addressing the complex and varied needs of youth, including supporting young people's mental health, academic needs, and socio-emotional development.[37] This work happens on a daily basis and also happens in times of crisis like this one.

> ***STORIES FROM THE FIELD: MOUNT HOPE LEARNING CENTER***
> *Mount Hope Learning Center provides after school programming and tutoring to youth and has historically offered adult education classes in the evenings. After the pandemic lockdown in March 2020, the organization pivoted to offer virtual tutoring and an in-person summer camp. It also served as a community resource hub, providing 30 families with food deliveries starting in April 2020 and continuing through the summer. It also held drives for other important goods like toys, coats, and holiday meals. Dropping off food at each family's residence, youth workers from MHLC maintained connections and relationships with families and young people as they navigated the pandemic.*

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Youth workers need comprehensive professional development. They need feedback on ongoing "deliberate practice;"[38] opportunities to build and grow anti-racist pedagogy and curriculum practice; and advanced training in certificate and graduate programs so that youth workers can hone their skills, stay in the field, and grow into leadership roles. This commitment to professional development is well-recognized in the Rhode Island out of school time learning community. Our state has great local resources including The Rhode Island Afterschool Network (RIAN), The Providence After School Alliance (PASA), Rhode Island College's Youth Development BA and MA programs and other organizations that offer excellent ongoing affordable professional development workshops for youth workers. Rhode Island must incentivize and fund access to these robust professional development opportunities.

FAIR COMPENSATION

Youth work is rich, challenging and multifaceted work, work that provides great value to our communities and work that deserves a living wage. Yet, the data shows that while job satisfaction is high, the availability of high-quality, living-wage youth work jobs is low.[39] While the average salary for an elementary school teacher working 10 months in Providence, Rhode Island is $44,341,[40] a youth worker earns an average annual salary of $34,366.[41] And even these statistics obscure the lack of full-time jobs with benefits available in the field of youth development. Studies document that many youth workers work part-time and that a full three-fourths of youth workers do not receive health benefits.[42]

Youth and families know firsthand how impactful OST experiences can be. They know that OST is a space of profound learning, deep relationships, community connection, and safety. And the data bears out the tremendous benefits of OST for children, families, and our state's economy. Still, the work of OST is consistently devalued--owing in part to racist, sexist frames that view care work as "natural," "intrinsically fulfilling," or "unskilled."

IT'S TIME TO VALUE YOUTH WORK AND YOUTH WORKERS FOR THE SIGNIFICANT VALUE THEY PROVIDE TO OUR YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES!

CONCLUSION: URGENT NEED

IN SUM, WE OFFER THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **EXPAND OST PROGRAMMING**

   to meet the sizable demand of Rhode Island youth, children and families;

2. **INVEST IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

   to ensure high quality programs, led by high quality youth work professionals;

3. **PAY YOUTH WORKERS LIVING-WAGE JOBS WITH BENEFITS**

   to promote this vital work and sustainability in the field.

OST is a sound investment that will help parents return to the workforce, provide growth and educational opportunities for young people, and help to transition Rhode Island out of crisis and into economic productivity. It is urgent that we invest in our workforce, our young people, and our future.

> *OST programs are vested in our communities, and they need our investment.*

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