Lesson 4: Assessment, Tracking, and Professional Development

Evaluation tools and techniques help after-school programs run smoothly and effectively.

by Jenny Parma; tutorial provided by Hillary Salmons and Elizabeth Devaney

In the previous lesson, you learned about standards for building quality after-school programs. In this lesson, find ways to assess these standards and run well-oiled after-school programs through quality-assurance assessments, data tracking, and continued professional development.

Quality-Assurance Assessments

Quality-assurance assessments help document the progress of programs in action. Put a quality-assurance team in place to make routine checks on programs in each community campus—using the quality standards created in Lesson 3 as the baseline—so providers and partners are more informed and more readily able to make program-enhancing decisions. For example, members of the PASA staff and quality advisors observe each after-school program for an hour once a year and rate the program on quality standards using a self-assessment tool. Thereafter, the team meets with the instructors to discuss strengths and areas for improvement, and to develop an action plan.

The self-assessment tool PASA uses for monitoring programs, the Rhode Island Program Quality Assessment (RIPQA), is based on the High/Scope Education Foundation's nationally valid Youth Program Quality Assessment Tool (YPQA). PASA has customized the tool to fit the Rhode Island quality standards, with an emphasis on self-assessment rather than evaluation or judgment. PASA has found that providers are much more willing to engage in a continuous improvement process if the stakes are low (i.e., not tied to funding) and evaluations are focused on self-improvement.

For more information on the self-assessment tool, read the RIPQA overview in the supplementary materials that follow.

Data-Tracking Tool

A data-tracking tool is important for knowing where young people are at all times and for short- and long-term program evaluation. A tracking tool is key for day-to-day program management, from printing attendance sheets and bus lists to tracking down students in an emergency. For assessment purposes, a tracking tool can provide incisive data about student attendance, program popularity, and student participation—from a program- to a citywide level. This data can be culled to help make adjustments to overall program quality. In addition, a tracking tool can be used to see student trends so you'll know strategically which programs to fund and how to engage students more fully in the future.

VOCABULARY

» **Quality-Assessment Tool:** An applied tool (usually in paper form) used to assess certain aspects of an after-school activity or program. It can be used by after-school program staff as part of their ongoing quality improvement or by an outside observer. Participants may also use self-assessment tools to assess their own growth or progress.

» **Data-Tracking Tool:** A computer-based data collection program that can be used to store data on program participants, track attendance and participation, and generate reports.

Assessment, Tracking and Professional Development (continued)

Information from the data-tracking tool can be used in longitudinal studies. By comparing grades, test scores, attendance, participation, retention, and social and emotional variables periodically, you can see the impact of the program over time.

PASA uses web-based data management and tracking software through youthservices.net, which was developed by Cityspan Technologies. The tool has the capability to track data across the entire city, providing a valuable resource for Providence in presenting system-wide data to advocate for increased after-school funding and support.

To see different types of information from PASA's data-tracking software, download sample reports from youthservices.net.

Workshops and Continued Professional Development

Monthly workshops and continued professional development also help ensure that staff and after-school providers stay informed about youth. PASA and its affiliates offer monthly professional development workshops for after-school providers statewide on a range of topics, including creating a safe and supportive after-school environment, providing youth with leadership opportunities, and integrating academic standards into after school enrichment programs. Go to mypasa.org/prof-dev for more information.

In addition to monthly workshops, PASA also offers an eight-week, thirty-two-hour Building Exemplary Systems for Training Youth Workers (BEST) certificate program, which is based on the nationally recognized Advancing Youth Development curriculum.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

On the pages that follow and online, read more about PASA's assessment tool and see how they track student and program data online in these documents:

» Summary of the Rhode Island Program Quality Assessment Tool (RIPQA) at edutopia.org/pasa-lessons.

» Sample data-tracking report from youthservices.net.

KEY POINTS

» Make routine quality-assurance assessments by observing after-school programs and rating them against your list of quality standards using a standardized tool.

» Track student and program information, including student trends and program attendance, to help make short- and long-term improvements.

» Partner with software companies to put together efficient tracking tools.

» Use data from assessments to work with instructors and staff on areas that may need improvement.

» Offer continued professional development workshops to keep everyone up to speed on best practices.

Sample Data Tracking Report

AfterZone Slots/Enrollment
Creation Date: 12/16/2008 11:06:32 AM PST/PDT

Group: **Providence After School Alliance**

Report Period: **9/29/08 to 12/11/08**

Total Students Served: 993

Gender	Students
Female	476
Male	517

Enrolled in How Many Programs?	Students
1	326
2	266
3	163
4	99
5	51
6	41
7	19
8	14
9	10
10	3
12	1

Scheduled Days per Week	Students
1	203
2	468
3	317
4	5

Slots

Total Available Slots:	2901
Total slots filled initially[1]:	2431
Percentage of slots filled initially:	83.8%
Total number of unique individuals enrolled initially:	971
Total slots filled at conclusion[2]:	2341
Percentage of slots filled at conclusion:	80.7%
Total number of unique individuals enrolled at conclusion:	990
Total slots vacated during course of session by reason[3]:	
Switched to a new program	28

Sample Data Tracking Report (continued)

Doing poorly in school	5
Conflict with other non-PASA activities	1
Didn't like the program and not interested in another	6
Unknown	12

AfterZone Student Count by School and Grade[4]

North End/East Side
Total Served: 226

School	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade	Total
Charlotte Woods Elementary	0	0	0	1
Home schooled	1	0	1	2
Hopkins MS	52	40	37	129
Martin Luther King Jr Elementary	5	0	0	5
Nathanael Greene MS	0	1	3	4
Perry MS	2	0	0	2
Private School	0	0	1	1
Times 2 Academy	34	30	17	81
Veazie Street Elementary	1	0	0	1

Olneyville
Total Served: 276

School	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade	Total
Perry MS	54	69	45	168
Springfield MS	11	58	38	107
Not Specified	1	0	0	1

West End/South Side
Total Served: 479

School	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade	Total
Bridgham MS	65	46	36	147
Charles N. Fortes Academy	1	0	0	1
Gilbert Stuart MS	80	59	33	172
Roger Williams MS	59	62	35	159

[1] Total slots filled initially: Slots filled at some point in the first three weeks of the report period
[2] Total slots filled at conclusion: Slots filled at some point in the last three weeks of the report period
[3] Participants may be counted more than once if they vacated slots multiple times during the report period.
[4] AfterZone data taken from participant form