WHERE STAFF AND STUDENTS WANT TO BE:
How to Create a High Quality Out-of-School Climate

Part One of a Two-Part Series on High Quality Out of School Time
THE PROBLEM:
POOR STUDENT OUTCOMES IN TEXAS PUBLIC EDUCATION

The Texas public school system is the second largest in the nation, after California, serving over 5.3 million students. Unfortunately, Texas schools are failing in student outcomes. According to the 2017-18 Texas STAAR Performance Report compiled by the Texas Education Agency, only 43 percent of Texas third graders met grade level in reading. For all Texans in all grades (3rd – 8th), 46 percent met grade level in reading. Reading level statistics have a major impact on a student’s academic future. Educators and researchers have found that students who cannot read at grade level by third grade often struggle in later grades and many fail to earn a high school diploma. In fact, a national study conducted by Donald J. Hernandez and the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that “students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave high school without a diploma than proficient readers.”

Texans know the importance of education and want it to be a priority for Texas leaders. A key finding in a recent poll conducted by Raise Your Hand Texas found that Texans think the state needs to invest more in public education and that education is the most important issue for the Governor and the Texas Legislature to address this year.

The solution for improving student outcomes, especially third grade reading levels, lies in elementary programming. Specifically programming with high quality (HQ) curriculum and HQ climates to help students achieve grade level reading or above grade level reading by third grade. HQ elementary education programs, both during and beyond school hours are successful and create positive student outcomes when they are taught in a HQ climate and funded from sustainable sources.

At the Andy Roddick Foundation, we believe that HQ youth development and student achievement outcomes can only be generated through HQ programming. Moreover, combining quality in-school practices and quality out-of-school time (OST) supports provide students with a well-rounded and comprehensive learning climate that not only impacts academic achievement but also social and emotional well-being, health, and behavior and attitude.

THE SOLUTION:
A HQ OUT-OF-SCHOOL CLIMATE

The Andy Roddick Foundation defines a HQ OST climate as a space where students and staff want to be, and where parents want their children to be. It’s also the “foundation for the shared norms, goals and values that define the program culture and environment.” HQ OST climates do not develop naturally; rather programs need to “define goals for a positive site climate early in the planning process so it can inform key elements of staff planning, training and site logistics.” Participation in HQ OST learning programs and activities benefit students in many ways, including:

• Increase in academic performance,
• Increase in school attendance,
• Increase in graduation rates, and
• Increase in physical health and social emotional health.

HQ OST also prepares students for the future. According to the Texas Expanded Learning Opportunities Council, established by the 83rd Texas Legislature and comprised of 13 individuals from various educational, nonprofit and corporate industries, “HQ OST programs support students and helps them prepare for college, careers or military and not lose what they learned in school.”

The Andy Roddick Foundation supports and aligns with the eight categories of standards created by the Texas Partnership For Out of School Time (TXPOST) to improve the quality of OST. These standards include: safe environments, health and nutrition; staff and volunteer management; programming and activities; diversity and inclusion in programming; family engagement and community partnerships; relationships and interactions; school linkages; and program sustainability, evaluation and awareness. All eight categories help shape and sustain a HQ OST climate.
SUPPORT A HQ OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNING CLIMATE

By creating a HQ OST learning climate, the Andy Roddick Foundation generates and measures the positive impact it has with participating students in its summer and afterschool programs.

The Foundation measured a cohort of elementary students participating in its 2017 Summer Learning Program and 2017-18 afterschool program to determine the year-round impact of HQ OST programming. The Foundation’s programming included: a 34-week afterschool program, 6-week summer program, a 3-day spring break overnight camp, and family engagement activities occurring at least 5 times per year.

Key outcomes from the 2017-18 year-round outcomes analysis included:

- 79 percent of participating students met reading standards on the STAAR test compared to 60 percent of their non-participating peers at their school;
- Students outperformed their peers at their school and across schools in the same school feeder pattern on all areas of the STAAR;
- Students also outperformed their peers across the school district on the STAAR test in reading, writing, and math;
- Students had a higher average of daily attendance than their peers, with participating students attending four more days per year than non-participating peers at their school;
- Students showed a statistically significant increase in their sense of competency socially; and
- 97 percent of guardians increased or maintained feeling involved in their child’s education. 11

These outcomes show that HQ OST programming is an effective way to improve student outcomes and ensure more students are performing on-level academically—setting them up for future success. Through year-round HQ OST programs, the Foundation is helping students become more connected to school, build self-confidence, develop critical thinking skills, and connect with caring adults. This all starts with creating a HQ OST climate where students can be successful.

BY THE NUMBERS

STUDENTS OUTPERFORM THEIR PEERS ON STAAR TEST

READING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>79%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>58%</th>
<th>67%</th>
<th>72%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARF Participating Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student at the Same School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student in the Same Feeder Pattern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student in Austin ISD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student in Austin ISD (not matched on income or ethnicity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MATH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>82%</th>
<th>65%</th>
<th>64%</th>
<th>66%</th>
<th>70%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARF Participating Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student at the Same School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student in the Same Feeder Pattern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student in Austin ISD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student in Austin ISD (not matched on income or ethnicity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WRITING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>75%</th>
<th>29%</th>
<th>29%</th>
<th>47%</th>
<th>58%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARF Participating Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student at the Same School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student in the Same Feeder Pattern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student in Austin ISD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student in Austin ISD (not matched on income or ethnicity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SCIENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>64%</th>
<th>57%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>93%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARF Participating Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student at the Same School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student in the Same Feeder Pattern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student in Austin ISD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating Student in Austin ISD (not matched on income or ethnicity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STUDENTS IMPROVE PEER RELATIONS AND FAMILIES ENGAGE IN EDUCATION

TEAMWORK

97%

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

From start of summer to the end of the school year, students showed a statistically significant increase in peer relations.

96.6% 94.6% 94.5% 95.6% 95.9%
Quality learning begins with quality teaching. HQ OST programs need to employ talented and motivated staff willing to embody and promote the program mission, values and policies. When programs employ talented staff with a solid teaching background, they can create sufficiently good learning settings, similar to what students experience during the school day.

Attracting quality staff, however, requires solid organization commitment. First, fair compensation needs to be provided. For instance, the Andy Roddick Foundation Summer Learning Program offers a competitive wage for hired staff, which in turn helps with attracting, recruiting and retaining a highly qualified team. Offering competitive salaries to teachers is closely aligned with Texan values, as the recent Raise Your Hand Texas poll found that Texans value quality teachers and staff when it comes to Texas public schools and “overwhelmingly want teachers to be paid more.”

Another important element to recruiting and retaining quality talent for HQ OST programming is the provision of professional development supports. In both the Foundation’s summer and afterschool programming, staff participates in multi-day training before the start of the program focused on best practices in behavior management, teaching to diversified learning styles, and managing difficult situations. Both the training and program handbook staff receive not only outline policies and procedures but also spend extensive time on the program’s culture, norms, and values and how these align with the Foundation’s mission and core values.

Trainings and check-ins also occur throughout the duration of OST programs. For instance, every Wednesday morning throughout the summer program, the Foundation holds staff meetings to discuss the current week’s activities, plan for the upcoming week, and discuss how to enhance the program experience for students, staff, and families. Staff also receive quality assessments in their classroom with ongoing coaching and support from program leadership.

Because the afterschool program cycle is longer than the summer program cycle, afterschool staff members engage in a minimum of four additional hours of training tailored to their needs. Program leaders also conduct observations of staff using a quality assessment tool with individualized feedback and coaching to improve their approach. Finally, staff receive a monthly newsletter with tips on improving their classroom climate.

When HQ OST programs hire and develop talented and quality staff, they serve not only as teachers but also as role models who display positive behaviors that influence the classroom dynamics. For example, the Foundation’s summer staff is expected to uphold certain behaviors that in return, help students learn problem-solving and communication skills. Staff helps students create a social contract that is used throughout the duration of the program and recognizes and rewards positive behavior as a group. Our work in the Summer Learning Program, reaffirms that children respond well to fair leadership with mutual respect.

**STEP 2 Build Positive Interactions and Relationships**

Next, a HQ OST climate needs to promote positive social interaction among youth, staff and the community. TXPOST states, “These relationships can reinforce the positive developmental norms occurring across all other relationships and settings of a young person’s life.” When positive relationships are cultivated, it can lead to social emotional growth. This is evidenced by the Foundation’s 2017-18 year-round outcomes analysis, which showed a statistically significant increase in students’ sense of competency socially (e.g., peer relations) on a nationally validated survey of social and emotional learning skills.

Additionally, the Foundation summer and afterschool curriculum has a strong focus on connecting diverse community members to students to teach new skills and create an inclusive climate where members of our community are valued. Examples include baile folklórico afterschool classes, partnering with Great Promise for American Indians to bring students and families together for a powwow, and working with local businesses to teach lessons ranging from knitting to financial literacy.

These interactions and relationships benefit teacher engagement as well. Interviews and surveys conducted by the Foundation at the conclusion of the Summer Learning Program found that staff was more motivated and engaged to begin the school year than in years where they did not participate in the Summer Learning Program.

From building positive relationships, students and their families develop better communication with school staff as well as with their peers. In return, it can lead to parents engaging more in their student’s education and increase participation in school events. HQ OST programs allow parents to become more aware of their children’s learning needs and thus become better advocates. For instance, the Foundation’s 2018 summer program evaluation found 95 percent of families attended at least one family night during the program and 99 percent said the program helped them better understand their students’ strengths. During the school year, 98 percent of guardians were involved at school.

**STEP 3 Maintain Low Student-Teacher Ratios**

Low student-teacher ratio is another important element of building a HQ OST climate. Many studies have shown that reducing class sizes, especially in elementary grades, lead to better academic outcomes. Most notable is Tennessee’s Project Star, a four-year study that compared small and large classroom sizes in 42 districts and found “substantial evidence that reducing class size improved student academic achievement.”

Findings also concluded that, “minority and inner-city children gained the most from smaller classes and the more years spent in reduced classes, the longer lasting the benefits.”

Texans also know the benefits of low student-teacher ratios. When asked what first steps should be taken to improve Texas school quality, Texans listed reducing class size among the top five responses.

A low student-teacher ratio influences other aspects of HQ OST climates such as positive interactions and relationships. It also allows for personalized attention, which can lead to increased levels of student participation and engagement. The student-teacher ratio at the Foundation’s summer and afterschool programs is 12:1, with ratios closer to 6:1 during academic lessons.
CONCLUSION

HQ OST climates are necessary to improve student outcomes and put them on a path to success.

However, HQ OST climates require organizational commitment to recruiting and retaining high qualified staff; creating opportunities for building positive interactions and relationships between and among staff, students and families; and maintaining small student-teacher ratios that allow for personalized attention and deeper student engagement.

Committing to these elements requires deep investment along with local and state policies that improve access to and the affordability of HQ OST programs. The future of Texas is worth the investment.

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The Andy Roddick Foundation provides access to HQ OST. The Foundation serves children and youth who are most at risk of falling behind, such as low-income students and English language learners.

HQ OST means a low student-teacher ratio, highly qualified and trained teachers, and whole-child, hands-on learning.

Whether social and emotional development, school day participation, family engagement or academic performance, students who participate in the Foundation's HQ OST programs outpace their peers. It's time we started talking out of school and supporting access to HQ OST for all children and youth.

ENDNOTES