**TEMESCAL** Associates
**Connecting Best Thinking to Strategy and Practice**



# BEDROCK TO ROOFTOP:
## BUILDING SUCCESSFUL HIGH SCHOOL AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

**PROGRAM BEDROCK**
**Understanding the Needs of Older Youth: Adolescents and Youth Development**

The bedrock of any effective program serving youth is a strong understanding of the young people they serve and the direct implications for the design and implementation of the program. **For those running programs, do they have a strong understanding of the needs, behaviors, and developmental tasks unique to older youth, ages thirteen to nineteen?**

An understanding of youth development and the critical features of programs that promote healthy youth is crucial. **How can we apply youth development principles directly to our day-to-day practice? In what ways can we learn more about contemporary youth culture, how youth view the world, and how they communicate and express**

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themselves? Further, how can we engage youth as partners in designing programs that reflect their interests and needs?

Among high school youth, there are critical differences in needs and issues facing an incoming freshman and a graduating senior. The developmental landscape over these four years is not flat, thus it is important that our programs are not flat. **What are examples of program approaches that take into account the unique differences among youth as they mature across these four years? What kinds of** *program ladders* **– leadership and skill ladders - can be created to increase their retention and engagement across time?**

## FOUNDATION CORNERSTONES FOR SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

Two critical features that need to be in place are strong program staff that are directed by a clear program vision, and the full engagement and partnership of the school site leadership. These serve as the cornerstones that all programs must have if they are to attract and retain young people and ensure the improvement of academic and youth development outcomes.

### *School Leadership*

Success in school is both an educational and youth development outcome. If a program hopes to promote young people's academic progress, it must have a strong partnership with the school site leaders. This partnership must be based on a shared vision of how they will work together to support students who are at risk for failure.

It is through the influence of school site leaders that programs are able to secure program space and student referrals. But this is not enough to ensure a successful program. Programs need the help of school site leaders in enlisting the support of school personnel, including counselors, teachers, and coaches. The program must be viewed by school stakeholders as an important contributor to the school's larger mission. It is essential that afterschool programs and school site leaders review school performance data to identify youth in need of support and guide program design.

Schools do not have a strong track record of authentically engaging young people or sponsoring programs that reflect contemporary youth culture. **How can a school site principal or leader embrace new approaches that extend beyond those used during the school day? How can we all draw upon the recent research on high school reform efforts to increase learning and positive attachment to school and apply this to our high school afterschool programs?**

### *Program Vision, Leadership, & Staff*

Program staff must be led by a leader who has a strong understanding of the developmental needs and interests of young people and a clear vision of how a program can successfully meet these needs. They should be committed to the features of program quality that they wish to see consistently demonstrated throughout their program. **What are the qualities of an effective program leader and how does he or she convey this vision to all program**

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**stakeholders? What are the qualities and skills that staff must possess in order to engage older youth? What are the approaches that leaders use to inspire staff, maintain high expectations, and provide effective supervision?**


## FOUNDATION ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

In addition to the two cornerstones necessary for successful afterschool programs, there are four more essential elements that make up the foundation of an effective high school afterschool program. These elements are cited below:

### Academic Supports & Guidance

As stated above, success in high school is both an educational and developmental outcome. This is often defined by young people graduating on time, developing a sense of purpose that is linked to their education, and developing plans for life after high school.

If afterschool programs are to successfully affect young people's academic success, the program should have access to school performance data to identify youth at academic risk. This allows us to assist youth in staying on track for graduation. **How are afterschool programs currently accessing and utilizing school performance data?**

Research tells us that incoming ninth graders who have struggled in middle school are at high risk for failure in high school. **What strategies have programs developed to identify and engage incoming ninth graders in ways to support their successful transition? How have successful programs utilized older teens to provide academic tutoring and mentoring to younger peers? How have programs engaged athletic coaches to promote academic support for high school athletes?**

For young people who are off track for graduation, we now have good program models that offer credit recovery opportunities afterschool. **How are these opportunities structured to engage youth while complying with state and district requirements? How can we better prepare young people to pass the high school exit exam?**

Many young people are still looking for reasons to engage in their high school education. Afterschool programs can provide exposure to real world experiences that are linked to their core curriculum and the opportunities for young people to develop advanced skills in their areas of interest. All youth, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, should be considering higher education as a viable option after they graduate. **How can afterschool programs provide youth and their families with knowledge and experiences that help them create a realistic pathway to college?**


### Youth Leadership

If we expect young adults to exhibit responsibility and leadership, they must have the opportunities to practice. Engaging young people in leadership opportunities is a critical element to any high school program, as it builds among youth a sense of ownership and

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essential skills. **What approaches can programs use to give youth the opportunity to participate in all aspects of programming, including program design, youth outreach and publicity, implementation, and program evaluation? How have youth been involved in participating in the selection and hiring of program instructors and vendors?**

Many programs provide youth with the opportunity to receive training and take on responsibilities that can lead to later employment within the program. **How can we prepare young people to effectively organize and lead activities with their peers?  What approaches do programs use to establish *leadership ladders* that retain participants across time?  How can programs structure their incentives and compensation for youth?**

It is important to note that developing opportunities for youth voice requires a unique understanding and a high level set of skills on the part of staff.  See *Program Cornerstones*: *Program Staff: Vision, Leadership and Advanced Skills.*

## Technology & Digital Media

Programs that promote digital technology skills are often viewed as optional enrichment opportunities for young people. However, in the 21st century, digital technology is a central part of young people's lives and there are key technology skills necessary for their success in work and other parts of their lives. To apply for a job, one has to be able to create and send a resume electronically. For everyone, the Internet has become the primary source for information and communication. Today's popular communication and music forms rely heavily on the use of digital graphics, animation, and beats.  **How can programs introduce the applied use of digital technology in all areas of programming? How can digital technology be used as a vehicle to promote healthy youth development and opportunities for meaningful leadership?**

## Family & Community Partnerships

High school youth are at a phase in their lives where they are preparing to move from dependency to independence. This has implications for afterschool leaders in how they support parents and youth during this phase. While this is a time that adult family members appear to take a step back from involvement in the lives of their children, afterschool programs can serve to strengthen the bonds between youth, their families, and the school institutions**. How can programs assist families in better understanding youth culture and how they can contribute to the prevention of high-risk behaviors?**

 Programs can serve as intermediaries between the school and the adult family members by helping them better understand the school environment and requirements, increase their involvement in their school life, and effectively advocate for their needs. In addition to helping families better understand their child's pathways to advanced education, programs can provide skill building opportunities for adult family members such as computer literacy, financial literacy, and ESL classes.

In preparing for life beyond high school, young people need to build the required experience, knowledge, and skills necessary for success. An insular program cannot serve these needs; rather it needs to build its own relationships and agreements with organizations within the larger community, so it can offer young people a bridging experience. By working alongside community organizations, these opportunities can include both community service and career and work-based experiences. Young people can find both an audience for their work and in mentors such as community artists, local musicians, organizations that focus on graphic and digital arts, etc. **How can program leaders best identify and prepare community-based resources to enrich their program? Is there a special role that community artists and performers can play in afterschool programs?**

## PROGRAM PATHWAYS

### Expressive Arts

During the high school years is a time when young people are seeking to find their voice and ways to express it. Successful afterschool programs offer young people an array of options to explore tools for self-expression. These tools provide opportunities for learning, practice, and mastery, as well as the understanding of how these tools can be used in future career ambitions. In the words of one young person, "competence is cool." Thus, it is critical that afterschool programs employ highly skilled instructors who are experts in their craft, highly accomplished in their field, and able to translate their skills to others. **How are high school programs helping young people achieve mastery in drama, music, digital filmmaking, dance, and other expressive forms? How are programs tapping into resources in the broader arts community to strengthen their program offerings?**

### Service to Others

As young people mature, their identity grows from who they are with their peers to include who they are in the real world. They are also developing a profound sense of justice and are often ready to address the injustices they see in their community and the larger world. Providing service to others gives young people the opportunity to give instead of get, to see themselves as having true worth, and as a source for positive change. Service learning experiences provide youth with the opportunity to work toward a common goal alongside others who share the same drive.

Service to others come in different forms, including providing support to younger peers or those who are less advantaged, actions that improve the broader community, and making change through community organizing and public advocacy. Research has shown that service to others can provide a direct line to young people's character development and civic responsibility. **What kinds of service opportunities are effective programs offering young people? How do they involve incentives and enlist community partners? How are young people supported in applying their learned service skills to possible career pathways?**

*Career Development*

When working with older teens, programs must be aware that the "clock is ticking": In a short time, these young people will be aged out of the school system and will require the skills to succeed in the larger world. As young people mature, they need experiences to practice adulthood, which means preparing themselves for work.

**What are ways that programs help young people explore possible career options and pathways? How do high school afterschool programs help young people develop the soft and hard skills needed in the workplace? Can afterschool programs utilize apprenticeships and work-based models to give young people skills and experiences they can apply after high school? How do programs structure payment - incentives and stipends – as compensation for real work? How can afterschool programs themselves serve as a work-based learning experience for participating youth?**

*Sciences & Engineering*

One of the major tenets of high school reform is increasing the relevance of young people's education. By providing programs in applied science and technology, we allow young people to apply scientific knowledge to practical problems in the real world. **How can young people's interest in video gaming serve as an introduction to computer science? What does it take to develop a popular robotics program for inner-city youth? Where do programs find the funds to enter participants in applied science competitions? How have afterschool programs created partnerships with corporate partners who depend on attracting young scientists to their fields?**

*Health & Wellness*

In many cases, as young people mature, they are making critical decisions regarding health and fitness without the guidance of supportive adults. **How can afterschool programs engage youth, especially non-athletes, in healthy recreational activities, such as outdoor adventure programs?** Culinary arts programs are extremely popular among youth and they promote knowledge about nutrition as well as important life and work-based learning skills. **How can programs support young people in making healthy decisions regarding substance use, sexual activity, and gang involvement?**

## ROOFTOP: Data & Outcomes

The crowning achievements of any successful youth program are the abilities to collect reliable program data, the commitment to use data to promote program improvement, and the demonstration of improved youth outcomes. **What kinds of program quality and youth outcome data should afterschool programs collect? What are examples of the data collection systems that exemplar programs use and how do they ensure reliability and consistency? How do programs use data to promote program improvement and substantiate improvement on youth outcomes?**