



Engaging Cambridge Middle School Youth in Out-of-School Time Opportunities 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The [Middle School Network](#) (MSN), an initiative of the [Cambridge Agenda for Children Out-of-School Time](#), aims to ensure equitable access and engagement of middle schoolers (students in 6th, 7th or 8th grade) in out-of-school time (OST) experiences in Cambridge. The [Cambridge Agenda for Children Out-of-School Time](#) (AFC) is dually anchored in the [Cambridge Public Schools](#) (CPS) and the [Department of Human Services](#) (DHSP) in Cambridge, MA, positioning MSN as an initiative leveraging resources for youth across multiple systems and institutions. During the past nine years, MSN has used a range of strategies to engage OST professionals, teachers, school leaders and families to increase access and engagement of middle schoolers in OST opportunities, particularly young people from low-income families & communities of color. MSN:

- **Advocates** for the value and power of OST opportunities, the need for resources and the importance of a networked approach to support middle schoolers.
- **Mobilizes & connects** OST professionals and school based professionals through regular network meetings, data sharing, and professional development to tackle persistent equity and access issues youth are facing.
- **Identifies & addresses needs and barriers** through opportunity workshops, resource guides and problem-solving support for middle schoolers facing barriers to participation.
- **Provides individualized support** to connect identified middle schoolers to meaningful OST opportunities through a case managed support system.

In fall 2016, MSN partnered with [Give a Summer](#), a not-for-profit dedicated to expanding access to summer opportunities to all middle schoolers, to design and implement a survey to gain a more comprehensive picture of middle school engagement in OST opportunities across the City of Cambridge.

This report shares the findings from two surveys. The first survey asked middle schoolers about their summer program participation and experiences and was taken by 954 middle schoolers attending one of CPS's five middle grade campuses (CPS 6th-8th graders attend one of four "upper schools" or its only Kindergarten-8th grade school, a Spanish-English dual-immersion program). The second survey asked middle schoolers about their participation and experiences in afterschool programs and was taken by 874 middle schoolers. These surveys are the most in-depth and comprehensive assessment of middle schoolers' engagement in OST opportunities done by any school district in the country.¹ This report shares the work and lessons learned from the strategies implemented by MSN and Give a Summer, and highlights the value of using data to inform individualized support and case-

¹ Almost no city or school district systematically gathers information to learn from middle school students about their access to afterschool and during summer opportunities, what they would like to do, and what challenges they face. "Why youth access to summer opportunities matters and how we can understand and increase it." Give a Summer, 2016, pg. 20-23. <https://perma.cc/3HH5-U79Z>

management systems to ensure the equitable access and engagement of middle schoolers' OST opportunities.

Key Findings

Most Cambridge middle schoolers (68%) attend summer programs and 91% are interested in participating in at least one summer program activity

We were pleased to see high levels of engagement of Cambridge middle schoolers with summer programs, a finding which is consistent with enrollment data MSN has also collected directly from OST programs. Middle schoolers' survey responses support our belief that system-building between schools and OST programs in Cambridge and individualized support leads to high rates of student engagement in OST opportunities, which are nearly double national averages of summer program participation.²

However, some middle schoolers (16%) report consistently missing out on OST opportunities

In a community with many varied OST opportunities and a system of support devoted to helping middle schoolers access them, we need to better understand why some middle schoolers consistently miss out on the benefits of participating in facilitated OST opportunities. Surveying all Cambridge middle schoolers about their experiences of OST opportunities is a critical tool revealing gaps in equity and access as well as the barriers that contribute to them.

Cambridge middle schoolers have diverse interests and challenges, and they need individualized help to connect to OST opportunities

We found that, despite common assumptions about cost being the core barrier to access, Cambridge middle schoolers face diverse challenges. Summer program cost was a major barrier for 8% of middle schoolers, but other barriers included difficulty getting to programs (8%), believing programs were full (5%), and not knowing about afterschool programs (15%). Very few students did not know about summer programs (3%), likely the result of the summer opportunity workshops MSN run in middle schools every winter.

Also, while half (51%) of middle schoolers were interested in sports summer programs, six other activities (leadership development, performing arts, visual arts, STEM, music, general enrichment) were of interest to between 19% and 26% of middle schoolers. This finding affirms the importance of asking and listening to middle schoolers about their individual interests and challenges, and then

² The most recent version of the only national survey of summer program participation found that 33% of parents report that at least one of their children participated in a facilitated summer program. "Summer Learning Programs Help Kids Succeed". Afterschool Alliance, 2015. <https://perma.cc/BY49-SKQ9>

using this information to support them through individual case-management. Individual support to middle schoolers (which in Cambridge is facilitated by MSN Liaisons) is critical to address the needs and interests of middle schoolers who otherwise might miss out on meaningful OST opportunities.

BACKGROUND

Cambridge's Middle School Network (MSN) was founded in 2009 as a response to the Mayor's Blue-Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth. The plan released by this commission, *Shared Youth, Shared Strategies*³ identified system-level strategies for increasing the participation of middle school youth in out-of-school time opportunities (OST), with a special focus on the need for greater coordination (rather than a larger number of options for middle schoolers). This goal, informed by significant research on the benefit of OST opportunities for middle school youth, has been the focus of the MSN's efforts over the past nine years.

Strategically, MSN works to:

- **Advocate** for the value and power of OST opportunities, the need for resources and the importance of a networked approach to support middle schoolers.
- **Mobilize & connect** OST professionals and school-based professionals through regular network meetings, data sharing, and professional development to tackle persistent equity and access issues. MSN also supports 'point people' including MSN Liaisons, who work under the MSN Coordinator, and designated and stipended faculty members, who act as placement specialists. These MSN team members serve as hubs of information while also supporting CPS middle schoolers and families.
- **Identify & address gaps** through opportunity workshops, resource guides and problem-solving support for middle schoolers facing barriers to participation, such as transportation, registration processes and cost.
- **Provide individualized support** to connect identified middle schoolers to meaningful OST opportunities through case managed support system. This is done by a team of MSN Liaisons, CPS middle school educators - including one faculty member on each middle school (6th-8th grade) campus (referred to in Cambridge as "upper schools") designated as an OST Placement Specialist - and the MSN Coordinator who collectively strive to connect all middle schoolers to both after school and summer opportunities.

For more information about MSN's model and work please see [Appendix A: Middle School Network Logic Model](#), [Appendix B: Middle School Network Organizational Chart](#), [Appendix C: Middle School Network Liaison Model Timeline](#), and [Appendix D: Middle School Network List of Partner Providers](#).

³ Shared Youth, Shared Strategies: A Strategic Plan of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Middle School Youth. June 2009. Prepared by the Aspire Institute and Wheelock College

Key Learnings from MSN

“I have always wanted to go to a sleepaway summer camp. It is a big dream, but there are many problems. I cannot find any, the few that I found are VERY expensive, I have to do a music program for part of the year, so it cannot interfere with that, and my family is not really into sleepaway camps”

- Lucia, 6th Grade⁴

System building increases equity and engagement of middle schoolers in OST opportunities, but it is not sufficient: some middle schoolers require individualized support.

Our early system-building work resulted in increased participation, but there remained a substantial group of other middle schoolers who needed more individualized support to access OST opportunities and overcome a range of barriers.

Collecting data from OST program providers, comparing it to CPS student data and hearing from students themselves are all necessary data sources to understand middle school engagement.

MSN Liaisons, AFC positions responsible for working with CPS and the community of OST providers serving CPS middle schoolers, to support its 6th, 7th, 8th grade youth and their families to increase their awareness of and equitable access to OST opportunities, are constantly working on many levels to find out who is, and more importantly who is not, engaged in programs beyond the school day. They also seek to determine what activities disengaged middle schoolers are interested in and enjoy most. Provider-submitted participation data is useful to track student engagement rates over time for the subset of middle schoolers who attend those programs that report their data⁵, and the timing of when this participation data gets collected and shared is also crucial so that it can be useful in real time for MSN Liaisons. However, programs’ enrollment data alone does not include specific input from middle schoolers themselves on what they think leads to their engagement or lack there of in OST

⁴ Quotes throughout this report were taken from the ‘open ended’ comment section at the end of the surveys. Names have been changed.

⁵ MSN collects data from the major youth serving programs in Cambridge, but not all programs that serve middle school youth are in the network and submit data. The survey allows us to ask students to identify where they went, which includes the very large number of specialty programs attended by high income middle schoolers.

opportunities. We have learned that the insights gained from OST provider-submitted enrollment data needs to be combined with students' survey responses to why they do or do not attend programs so that this the data can be analyzed and the MSN Liaisons are able to conduct their case management approaches as efficiently as possible

Hearing from middle schoolers early in the school year is critical to providing support where it is needed.

Although teachers and school administrators could readily identify some middle schoolers in need of support to access OST opportunities, we suspected that many were still flying under the radar. We learned that depending on adults to identify young people left us susceptible to the tendency to use behavior, race or income as indicators for which middle schoolers “need support.” This practice can be burdened by implicit and explicit biases, and it could miss some middle schoolers who were struggling to figure themselves out, but doing it quietly, without coming to the attention of adults. Therefore, we have found it important to facilitate student surveys, and to start the deep relationship-building work with students who were skeptical, anxious and/or in particularly complicated situations as early in the school year as possible.

MSN Liaisons need more time to work with students.

MSN Liaisons provide powerful supports to help middle schoolers access OST opportunities. As youth workers in the community, many of them excel as using their time to effectively build trust and relationships with young people in peer groups as well as with families. They also spend a great deal of their time soliciting suggestions from teachers about which middle schoolers to work with. Overall, the MSN Liaisons need more time to work directly one-on-one with middle schoolers in need of support.

The Role of a Middle School Survey

Based on these key learnings from implementing the MSN model over the past nine years, we identified a need for a comprehensive way to gather middle schoolers' perspectives on OST engagement, including their interests and perceptions of barriers. As a next step in our system-wide supports, we designed a survey in collaboration with [Give a Summer](#) to allow us to more effectively find middle schoolers in need of help and provide more individually tailored support for a diverse range of young people.

METHODOLOGY

The Problem

- The need to better identify middle school youth in need of help accessing OST opportunities, and to work with MSN member programs and staff, CPS schools, families and the students themselves to navigate and eliminate barriers in the way of their engagement in OST activities.
- The need to include more perspectives and input from middle schoolers on their experiences, interests, and participation.

Survey Design

We conducted two surveys with middle schoolers.⁶ The first survey, in fall 2016, asked Cambridge middle schoolers about their summer 2016 OST experiences. Based on Give a Summer's prior experience, we felt that asking middle schoolers in the fall would yield the best information about their previous summer experiences, provide sufficient time to analyze and act on the survey findings, and guide our individualized support to middle schoolers who were missing out. A second survey asked about middle schoolers' afterschool experiences during the 2016 - 2017 school year, and middle schoolers completed this survey between November 2016, and March 2017. The survey was not confidential giving us the opportunity to provide individual follow up support. Students identified themselves by selecting their name from a drop down list of all students.

The **summer survey** had up to 29 questions⁷ and covered three main areas:

- **Cambridge middle schoolers' summer 2016 experiences**, including program attendance, length of attendance, enjoyment, and activities participated in.
- **Cambridge middle schoolers' summer 2017 interests**, including overall interest in attending a summer program and interest in specific activities (e.g., STEM, sports, visual arts, etc.).
- **Perceptions about and challenges accessing summer programs**, including student's familiarity with summer program opportunities, program cost, difficulty getting to programs, and program length.

The **afterschool survey** had up to 27 questions and asked about afterschool participation, including middle schoolers interests and challenges accessing afterschool opportunities in programs located both at schools and in the community.

⁶ Before surveying middle schoolers, Give a Summer and Cambridge Public Schools entered into a Memorandum of Agreement governing their work together as well as an extensive Student Data Privacy Agreement.

⁷ The survey skipped questions when those questions were not applicable for individual students. For example, if students answered they did not attend a summer program, they were not subsequently asked the question about how much they enjoyed their summer program experience.

Participants

Every young person enrolled in 6th, 7th, or 8th grade at Cambridge Public Schools five district middle schools had the opportunity to complete a survey.⁸ Surveys were completed in class on computers and took approximately 20 minutes to complete, depending on the grade level. We received very high response rates to both surveys. 82% of middle schoolers responded to the summer survey (954 out of 1157 middle schoolers), and 75% of middle schoolers responded to the afterschool survey (874 out of 1163 middle schoolers).⁹

	# of middle schoolers	# of middle schoolers who responded to a survey	Overall response rate (%)
All middle schoolers	1157	954	82
<i>In grade:</i>			
6	402	339	84
7	398	316	79
8	357	299	84

Figure 1: Summer survey response rates

Data use

We used the survey data for student-specific, school-wide, and community-wide analysis to inform strategies and work with middle schoolers in need of additional support to access and engage in OST opportunities. Specific data use strategies included:

- Student-specific:** We created dashboards for each school of their middle schoolers' survey responses. Additionally, based on the survey responses we identified groups of middle schoolers who needed more in-depth conversation or were likely to miss out on OST opportunities. We had two goals in sharing this information: first, to inform schools about middle schoolers who were likely to miss out on OST opportunities, and second, to help MSN's liaisons and teachers support middle schoolers access opportunities that matched their individual needs and interests (See [Appendix F: Student Dashboard Examples](#) and [Appendix G: Personalized Summer Program Recommendations](#)).
- School-wide:** We shared 1-page summaries with schools of their middle schoolers' survey responses as well as longer presentations with summary data and comparisons. We compared results across grades and between middle schoolers who attended programs and those who did not. The goal of sharing this information was to identify for school leadership broader issues, any

⁸ If a student did not attend a program, they were not asked questions about their program experience.

⁹ In between the couple months during which the two surveys were created, the number of middle schoolers enrolled in Cambridge Public Schools changed slightly.

specific trends affecting their middle schoolers, and suggest actions to take. These actions might include focusing on a grade that was behind in engagement, addressing a common challenge (e.g., transportation), or problem solving around an unmet program interest (e.g., visual arts programs) (See [Appendix H: Example 1-page Action Plan for MSN Team/School](#)).

- **Community-wide:** This report is one of the ways we are using the data at a community-wide level. The community-wide analysis of the data supports the effort of MSN members, including OST providers, youth workers and MSN Liaisons to learn more about Cambridge's overall range of opportunities and challenges for middle schoolers looking for OST opportunities. This analysis informs our focus on providing more individualized support to middle schoolers. In addition, the survey generated a much more comprehensive list of where Cambridge middle schoolers spend their summers.

FINDINGS

Engagement

Middle schoolers overwhelmingly enjoy OST opportunities

80% of middle school summer program attendees said they enjoyed or very much enjoyed their program. Strong enjoyment was consistent across grades and schools.

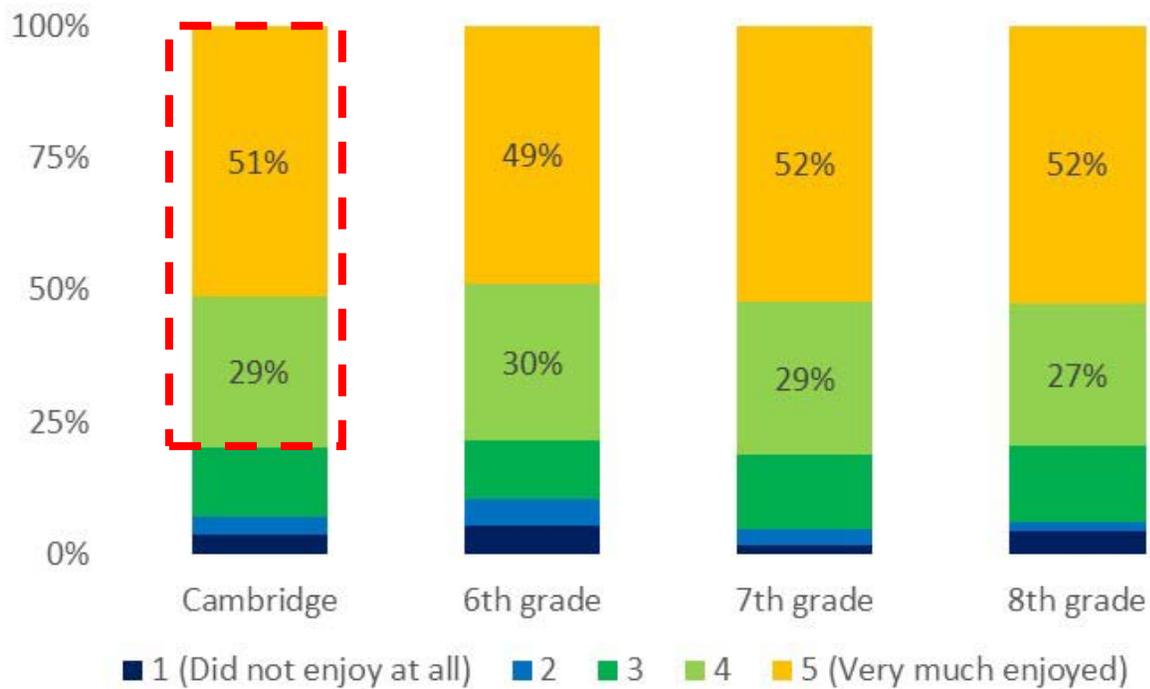


Figure 2: Summer program enjoyment

"It is pretty cool to sail on the Charles River during the summer, and you can make new friends"

-Elijah, 6th Grade

High attendance in summer programs

68% of Cambridge middle schoolers report attending at least 1 summer program, a slightly higher participation rate than at neighboring public middle schools¹⁰ and nearly double national averages.¹¹

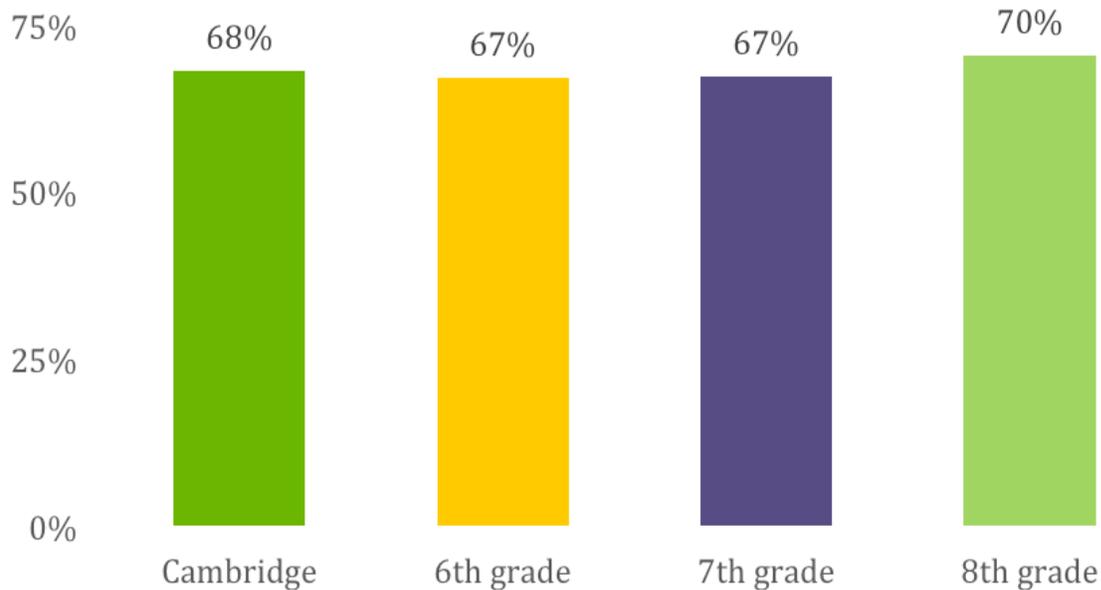


Figure 3: Summer program attendance

“The programs at Frisoli [Cambridge Youth Center] are really helpful for me”
Jocelyn, 8th Grade

¹⁰ Data from a survey of 5 other schools located in Greater Boston area showed that between 50% to 60% of middle schoolers report attending a summer program in 2015. “Why youth access to summer opportunities matters and how we can understand and increase it.” Give a Summer, 2016, pg. 6. <https://perma.cc/3HH5-U79Z>

¹¹ A 2014 national survey of summer program participation surveyed parents of school-age children and found that 33% of parents report that at least one of their children attended a facilitated summer program. “Summer Learning Programs Help Kids Succeed”. Afterschool Alliance, 2015. <https://perma.cc/BY49-SKQ9>.

High attendance in afterschool programs

Cambridge middle schoolers report attending afterschool programs on average 2.7 times a week, in line with national averages.¹² Research has found frequent attendance at afterschool programs increases the benefits that young people receive from afterschool programs.¹³ Afterschool participation was also fairly consistent across Cambridge public middle schools, except for in one school (label “C” below). We are currently working even more intensively with that school and MSN member programs to determine how to best support their students’ engagement going forward, and to see what types of additional supports are necessary.

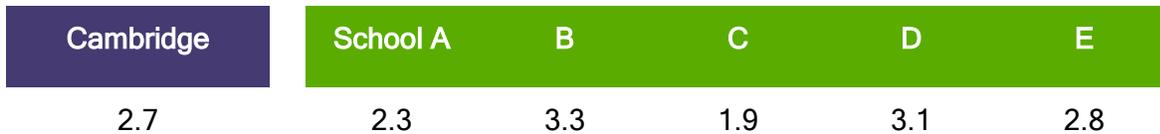


Figure 4: Average days per week middle schoolers attend afterschool programs

Most (78%) middle schoolers are interested in summer programs

53% of middle schoolers also reported being interested in summer programs, with another 25% saying they were somewhat interested.

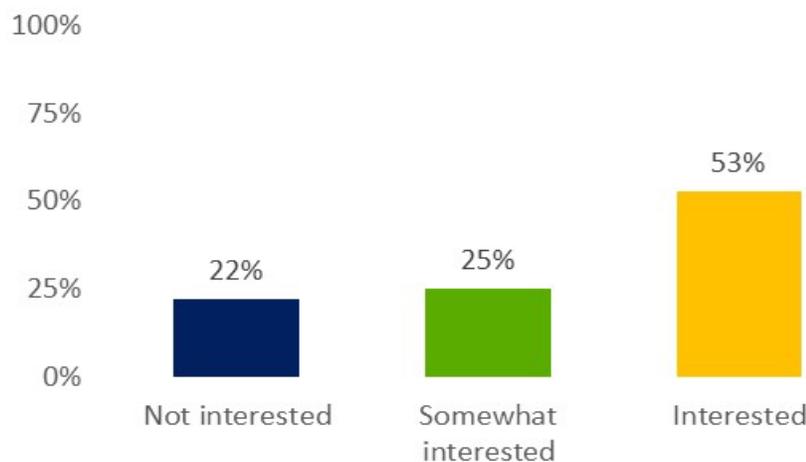


Figure 5: Percent of students generally interested in summer programs

¹² In a national survey during the 2013 - 2014 school year, 73% of parents report that their children attended an afterschool program, and of those who attended, they did so an average of 3.6 days a week. As a result, the average student attended an afterschool program 2.6 day a week (73% students attended x 3.6 days a week on average). This national survey did not allow students to mark that they attended afterschool programs on the weekend, whereas our survey did. See “America After 3 PM Topline Questionnaire,” Afterschool Alliance, 2015, pg. 4. <https://perma.cc/9VTS-ZY22>

¹³ One of the three conclusions of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time on studies of afterschool programs is that “frequency and duration of afterschool participation increases benefits.” See “Making the Case: A 2009 Fact Sheet on Children and Youth in Out-of-School Time,” National Institute on Out-of-School Time. <https://www.niost.org/pdf/factsheet2009.pdf>. Frequency over time matters too. Research on afterschool programs in New York City found that students who participated in the program for two or more years report more positive attitudes toward school, better experiences in school, and greater confidence in their academic ability compared to peers who were in the first year of the afterschool program. Sanzone, J., et. al. (2011). Staffing and Skill-Building in the DYCD Out-of-School Time Initiative: Findings from 10 Programs. Policy Studies Associates, Inc. Washington, D.C

"I have an idea about a new type of computer memory system that replicates the brain. I wish there was a program that could help me with that"

- Jason, 7th Grade

Even among those "not interested" in summer programs, a clear majority would like to be part of at least one specific type of facilitated summer activity

Interest in at least one specific summer activity is high even amongst middle schoolers who indicated that they were "not interested" in summer programs. 22% of middle schoolers reported they were generally uninterested in summer programs, yet 71% of those middle schoolers indicated interest in participating in at least one facilitated summer activity, such as STEM or visual arts. In total, almost all (91%) middle schoolers could name a specific activity they wanted to do at a summer program. This finding suggests that middle schoolers tend to understate their interest in programs when asked generally, but that almost all are interested in engaging in specific activities at summer programs.

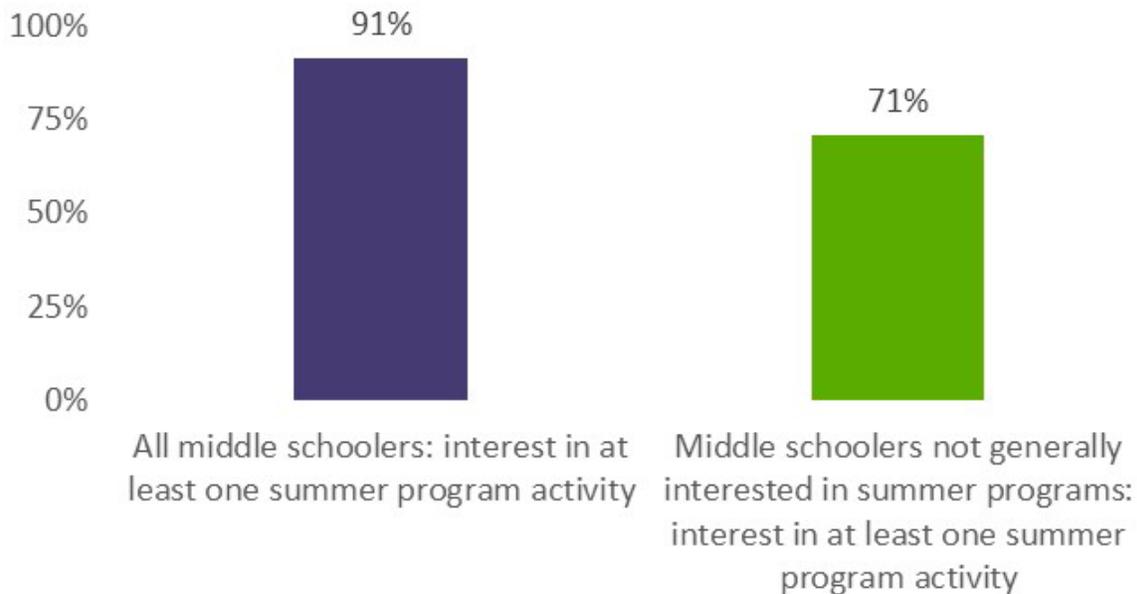


Figure 6: Percent of middle schoolers interested in participating in at least 1 summer program activity

"I feel like a lot of the programs are aimed at kids who like athletic activities and that's not really what I like doing"

- Harriet, 8th Grade

Friends strongly influence middle schoolers' attendance and interest in summer programs

Middle schoolers were 52% more likely to attend a summer program and 129% more likely to be interested in one if they thought most of their friends attended summer programs compared to if they thought few of their friends attended. While educators and parents have a significant role to play in supporting middle schoolers' interests in summer or afterschool opportunities, these findings reveal the crucial role friends and peers play in shaping middle schoolers' summer aspirations and plans.

Percent of middle schoolers reporting how many of my friends attended summer programs?		Percent of middle schoolers, grouped by rating of friends' attendance, who:	
		Attended a summer program	Are interested in summer programs
Very few or none of my friends	28%	53%	31%
Some of my friends	30%	64%	47%
Most or all of my friends	42%	81%	71%
<i>Greater likelihood if most vs. very few</i>		0.52x	1.29x

Figure 7: Perception of friends' engagement in OST opportunities

"CIT [Counselor in Training] at Outback was amazingly funnn... the problem is when all my friends will do the Mayor's Youth [employment program for 14-year-olds] I don't make the cut since I'm born in August"

Nicolas, 8th Grade

Some Middle Schoolers Consistently Miss Out

A sixth (16%) of middle schoolers are 'doubly disengaged' from opportunities outside school – missing out on programs after school during the school year and in the summer

When we consider who self-reported as not participating, both the summer responses (38%) and the afterschool responses (39%) showed that slightly less than 40% of young people were either not participating at all in programs or were participating minimally¹⁴. We are consistently strategizing and doing the case management work to support those less-to-low engaged students. However, we also found it significant that 16% of middle schoolers are in both non/low participation groups - they are “doubly disengaged” during the summer and afterschool. This is equivalent to about a sixth of the middle school population. This also suggests that non-participation in summer and afterschool programs is tightly linked for many students.

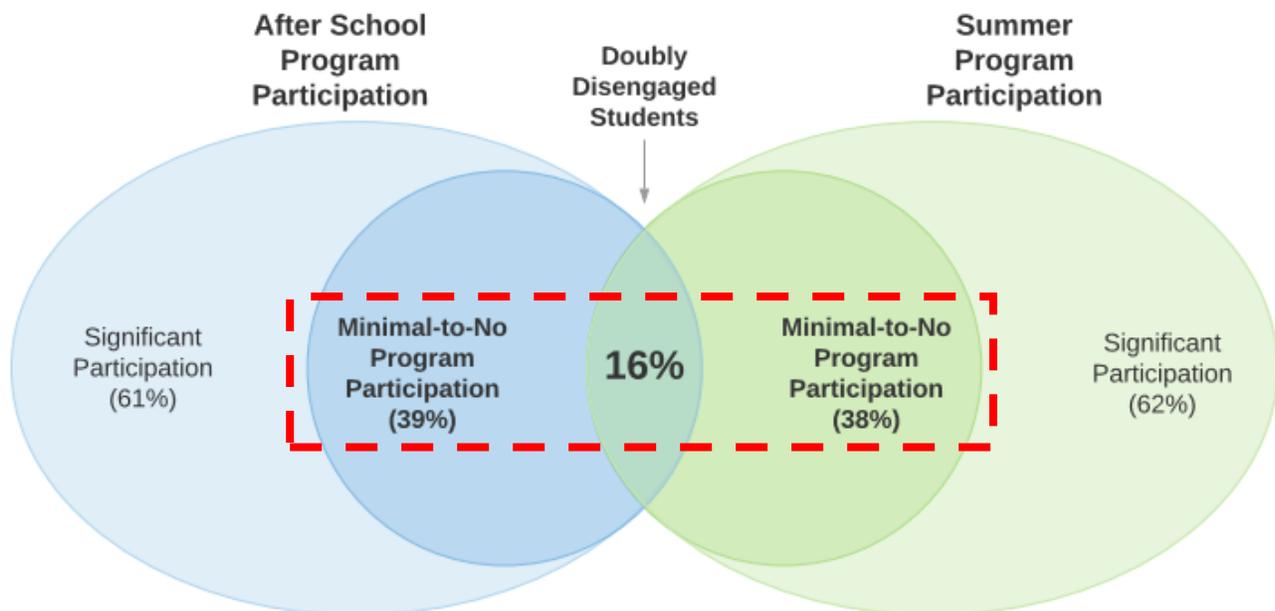


Figure 8: Percent of all Cambridge middle schoolers reporting minimal to no summer and afterschool program engagement.

“Why do people keep asking me? I’m not being rude. My dad doesn’t want me to go to any summer camps at all”

- Omar, 6th Grade

¹⁴ Minimal to no summer program engagement is attending a summer program for one week or less (or not at all). Minimal afterschool program engagement is attending an afterschool program for one day per week or less (or not at all).

African-American/Black¹⁵ students and students on free or reduced lunch are over-represented in the group of middle schoolers who were “home all summer” – those who did not go to summer programs AND did not travel with family.

When we separate out students who did not participate in summer programs or indicate they were travelling for at least one week or more, we found a remaining group of students whom we refer to as the “home all summer” group. The “home all summer” group accounted for 7% of all students, and this is where income and racial disparities emerged. Young people in the “home all summer” group were more likely to be African-American/Black or qualify for free or reduced lunch.

While 46% of all Cambridge middle schoolers qualify for free and reduced lunch, 74% of the middle schoolers in this “home all summer” group (who both missed out on summer programs and family travel) qualified for free or reduced lunch.¹⁶ Similarly, the “home all summer” group was 42% African-American/Black, whereas African-American/Black students represent only 27% of the middle school population in Cambridge.

This overrepresentation of African-American/Black and free or reduced lunch students in the “home all summer group” indicates that there is a lack of equity in access to summer opportunities - from both structured programs and family travel.

¹⁵ Racial and ethnic group references are aligned with Cambridge Public Schools’ use of categories provided by the Massachusetts Department of Early and Secondary Education, which parents self-select during school registration processes.

¹⁶ MSN conducted this analysis by matching middle schoolers’ summer survey responses to their Cambridge Public Schools information on free or reduced lunch eligibility.

Patterns of participation: engagement with one OST opportunity is linked to much greater engagement with other OST opportunities

Middle schoolers who attended a summer program were 52% more likely to attend an afterschool program than their classmates who had not attended a summer program. In turn, students who attended an afterschool program were 78% more likely to have attended a summer program compared to their peers who did not participate in an afterschool program.

Students - who took both surveys - self-reported attendance at afterschool and summer programs

	Afterschool	Summer
Overall*	75%	69%
Based on summer program attendance		
If attended at least one summer program	83%	--
If did not attend summer program	54%	--
Greater likelihood of attending	0.52x	--
Based on afterschool attendance		
If attended at least one afterschool program	--	76%
If did not attend afterschool program	--	43%
Greater likelihood of attending	--	0.78x
*Among students who filled out both summer and afterschool surveys. These participation rates are slightly different from overall summer or afterschool participation rates because they only include students who took both surveys.		

Figure 9: Student reported attendance at afterschool and summer programs

"I wanna play volleyball, I wanna learn how to draw realism and improve my realistic drawings, I wanna learn how to sing correctly, I wanna learn algebra and geometry, etc..."

- Maria, 8th Grader

Middle Schoolers Report Varied Interests and Challenges

Middle schoolers report varied interests and challenges: except for sports, no more than 26% of middle schoolers are interested in any one summer program activity

Students are interested and participated in a wide range of activities and should not be simply sorted into different categories. Still, data indicates that sports was both the most common activity at summer programs (44% of middle schoolers who attended a program played sports there) and popular interest among middle schoolers (51% of all middle schoolers are interested in playing sports next summer). Apart from sports, students were interested in a range of other activities, and no other activity had more than 26% of middle schoolers interested in participating in it next summer. The data also revealed that students' interest outpaced their participation in the four categories of activities focused on arts and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), which indicates that we need to continue our efforts to connect youth to those types of programs and/or there may not be enough opportunities in those categories currently available.

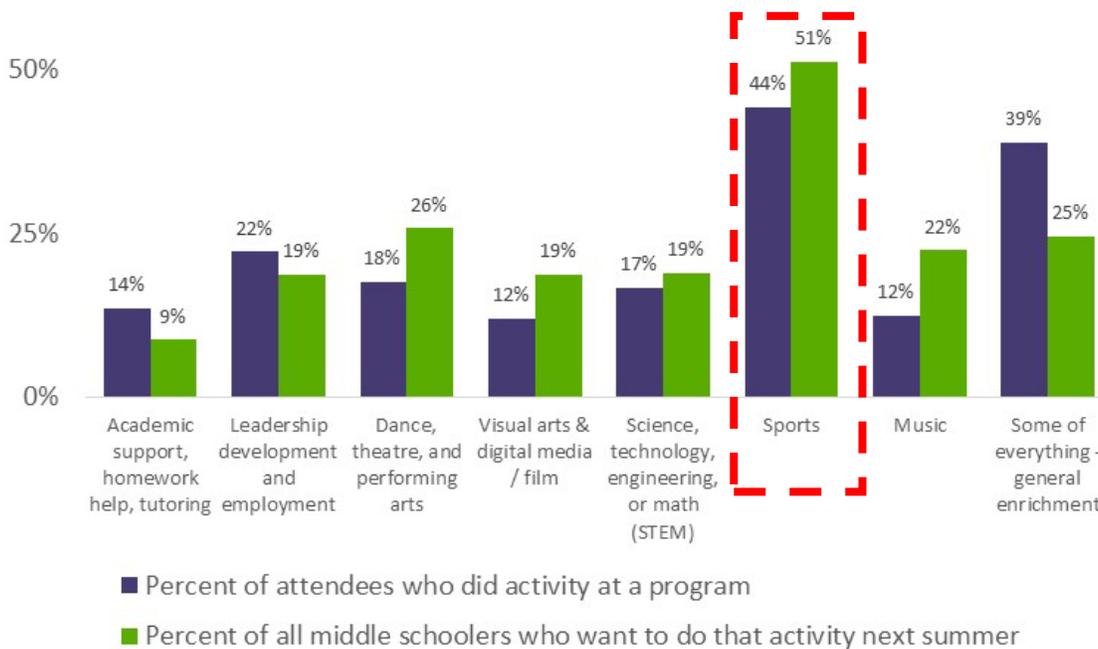


Figure 10: Middle schoolers' participation and interest in specific summer program activities

Middle schoolers face a diverse set of major barriers

Middle schoolers self-report facing a diverse range of barriers to attending OST programs. While no individual barrier affected more than 15% of middle schoolers, several barriers substantially impacted between 5% -10% of students, and these students and families are often those with whom we conduct our most intensive case management work.

The challenges identified by middle schoolers to accessing OST opportunities both during afterschool and over the summer varied; middle schoolers said that not knowing about programs (15%) and programs being too expensive (9%) were challenges to their participation in afterschool, while programs being too expensive (8%) and already full (8%) were their most significant challenges to attending summer programs.

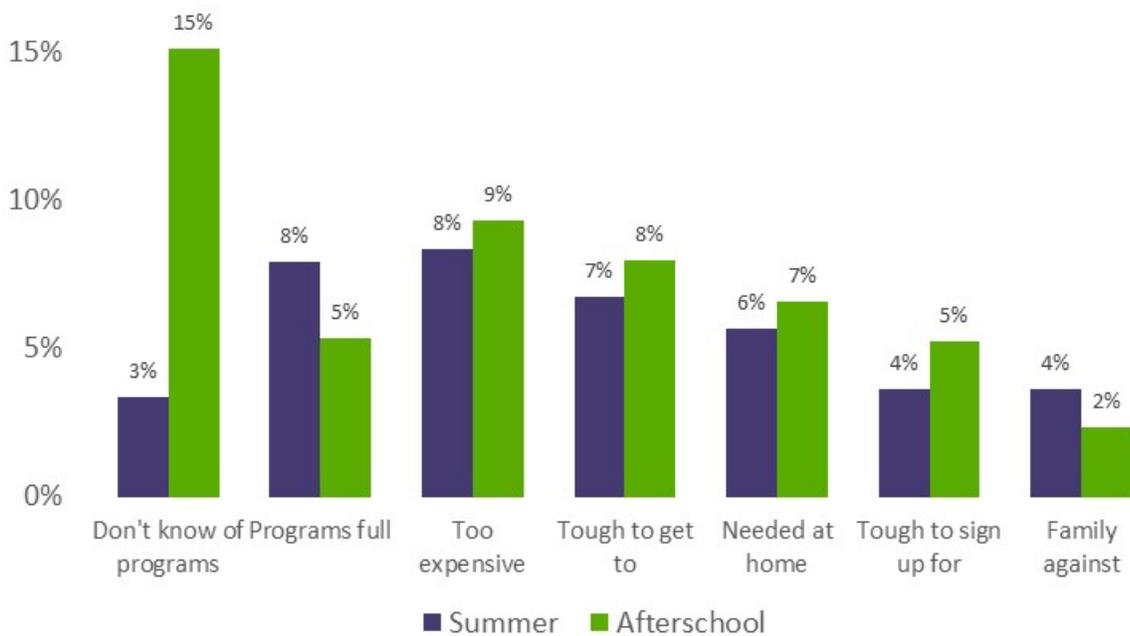


Figure 11: Percent of middle schoolers who report a given barrier as a major barrier to attending a summer or afterschool program

"... are there any girls' basketball teams I could play on?"

- Jenny, 6th Grade

CONCLUSIONS

Reflecting on Middle Schoolers' Engagement

When middle schoolers engage with OST opportunities, they enjoy them

Cambridge middle schoolers love their summer programs and go to them often: they report summer program participation rates that are nearly twice the national average. Although our MSN Liaisons have found that middle schoolers may initially resist engaging in new summer experiences, our survey findings demonstrate that when Cambridge middle schoolers engage with OST opportunities they overwhelmingly enjoy them - a huge testament to the quality and range of programming MSN members provide and make available throughout Cambridge. This finding should encourage us to continue our efforts to increase participation knowing it is very likely it will maintain or increase youth enjoyment.

It is crucial to support every middle schooler's ability to pursue OST opportunities because almost all of them are interested in at least one OST activity

The measure of middle schoolers' interest in OST opportunities is not how many are interested in "summer programs" but how many are interested in pursuing their unique passions outside of school. Almost every Cambridge middle schooler reported wanting to do something specific at a summer program next summer - even those who said they were 'not interested' in summer programs generally.

These results echo our experience working directly with middle schoolers to discover their unique interests. We sometimes hear from middle schoolers that they are not interested in summer programs, but when we talk further with them we discover that, for example, they are very passionate about visual arts, STEM or sports and would love to do more of that activity outside of school. Once they have a specific idea of what they could do and how it taps into their growing identities, even initially uninterested students begin to see programs as opportunities to pursue their passion.

This is a significant finding for any adult trying to engage middle schoolers seemingly uninterested in OST programs because it highlights that the issue is likely not a lack of interest, but a lack of specific information about opportunities tailored to the young person's interests. This also indicates why individualized support is necessary: it is difficult to help young people discover OST opportunities that match their passions without one-on-one time between a young person and an adult who they trust.

Next steps:

- **Continue existing coordination efforts that support overall high engagement**
 - ↪ Continue to invest in compiling opportunities into Resource Guides three times a year so that there is a comprehensive, curated resource of options that can be helpful to parents, to young people and the adults who want to help them get engaged
 - ↪ Continue to coordinate opportunity workshops with all middle schoolers on summer options and explore additional ways - such as school year opportunity workshops that could help to reduce the number of upper schoolers who self-report not knowing about programs as being a “major barrier” to their attending them - and to bring the breadth of options to young people, rather than hoping they will find programs on their own
 - ↪ Continue to work as a city to address barriers including coordinating transportation, increasing scholarships and supporting communication between schools and programs
- **Focus on individual interests in the presentation of OST program options**
 - ↪ Connect OST program options to young people’s specific passions
 - ↪ Emphasize to all audiences that OST programs allow middle schoolers to find their talents, specialize in what they love, and practice trying new things
- **Include student perspectives in efforts to drive awareness about OST opportunities**
 - ↪ Use this data and student stories of experiences in OST to highlight the great experiences and unique skills that young people can gain through program engagement.
 - ↪ Edit and/or add survey questions in future years to ask more questions about the quality of their OST experiences
 - ↪ Use near peers, like high school students, to share their experiences and choices they have made during OST hours, both during their middle grade years and in high school
 - ↪ Expand peer-group approaches to OST engagement, such as having a group of friends choose a program to try together

Middle Schoolers Missing Out

Focusing intensive efforts on doubly disengaged middle schoolers is likely to be the most effective way to move the needle on equitable engagement

Our findings indicate that middle schoolers disengaged from both summer and afterschool activities are facing a complex set of barriers to engagement. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to address inequitable engagement. These findings indicate that some middle schoolers are consistently not participating in OST programs (see Figure 8), a dynamic that did not surprise us given our anecdotal experiences reaching out to individual middle schoolers. The lost opportunities that result from this reinforcing cycle of non-participation in OST opportunities loom especially large when we consider that the cycle is taking place during a time in middle schoolers’ lives when their identities are rapidly being shaped by their experiences and choices.

Conversely, attendance at summer and afterschool programs is also tightly linked (see Figure 9), suggesting that if middle schoolers successfully try one OST program, they may be more likely to get involved with additional OST opportunities in the future. Engaging middle schoolers in OST opportunities can happen at any time during the school year giving the middle schooler opportunity to consider the possibilities of what else they can do outside school.

Patterns of non-participation suggest that our most intensive efforts should be focused on subgroups of middle schoolers who are disengaged (or have never been engaged) in summer or afterschool activities, rather than efforts aimed at all middle schoolers. If these individual efforts are successful, the benefits of a positive experience is likely to move a young person into a more consistent pattern of engagement: the more new experiences he/she/they tries, the more likely he/she/they is going to try new things in the future. A willingness to try things is essential for success in the future, both in and out of school.

Next Steps:

- **Use survey responses to refine our efforts and support middle schoolers more effectively**
 - Use survey data to identify subgroups of priority students to talk to first. For example, this can include:
 - ◇ First timers: students who did not attend a summer program but are interested in attending one (7% of students surveyed)
 - ◇ Disengaged from summer: did not attend a summer program and are not interested in attending one (12%)
 - ◇ Students to get back on track: attended a program but do not want to attend one next summer (9%)
 - Use survey responses and distinctions above to plan the types of conversations that are needed for each young person and who should have that conversation (“Is this a conversation that is likely to be effective with an adult he/she does not know? Does it require a level of trust?”)
 - Use individual survey results to determine what information they need to gather before going into a conversation (“I know he said he wants an arts program, so I should print those flyers”) and how to effectively approach having different types of follow up conversations (“This is not something we should talk about at lunch while near friends”)
 - Cross reference the youth survey results with school staff referrals and opportunity workshops’ planning sheets to create a master list that incorporates multiple data sources
 - Strengthen family engagement - early and often in the process, especially for our outreach to middle schoolers who indicated a lack of interest in programs, so that our approach can be strengthened by our effort to work with families and to include their knowledge of their child’s interests, skills, the constraints they face, and their hopes and dreams for their children

Varied Interests and Challenges

Middle schoolers need individualized support because each of their interests and challenges are so varied and cannot be generalized across peers

A key finding of the survey is that there is not one major barrier preventing middle schooler engagement in OST opportunities and that, except for sports, middle schoolers are interested in a range of OST programs. This affirms our on-the-ground work, which has often revealed the uniqueness of middle schoolers' interests and challenges. For example, the reasons behind a statement such as "I don't do summer programs" are varied: from student responsibilities to take care of siblings ('needed at home'), to concerns about stretching an already tight family budget ('too expensive') to skepticism that there are programs that will meet their specific interests. This finding emphasizes the importance of helping middle schoolers navigate diverse barriers based on their individual circumstances. Moreover, rather than simply promoting OST opportunities in general, it is important to support middle schoolers as they discover opportunities that match their interests.

Next Steps:

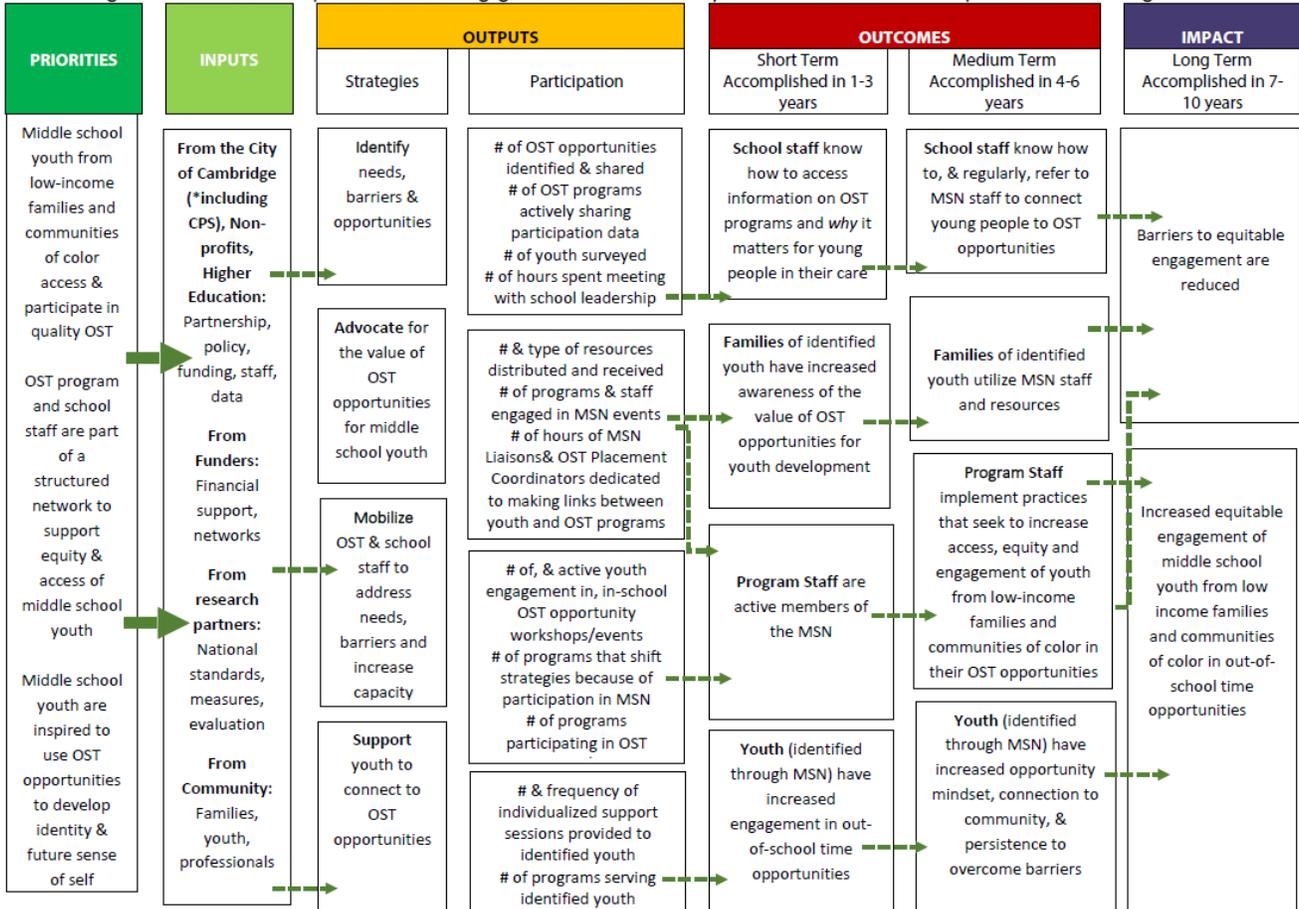
- **Continue to learn about and address the root causes of inequity and the unique barriers that some families face in Cambridge**
 - ↪ Continue our commitment to becoming more cultural proficient to work more effectively with families from diverse different backgrounds, traditions, experiences, values and customs.
 - ↪ Name power dynamics that we must confront when improving access in an inequitable system to ensure that young people, families, school and OST educators are prepared to stop inequitable patterns.
 - Expand efforts to increase equity and access, by providing more support around scholarships and registration processes so once a young person is interested we can get them enrolled and do not miss opportunities to have them benefit from structured OST experiences.
- **Invest in individualized support**
 - ↪ Increase the capacity of MSN Liaisons to spend more time, including with individual young people during the school day. As of the 2017-18 school year, MSN Liaisons are limited to an average of 10 hours per week on campuses which they spend on a wide range of duties engaging and supporting students.
 - ↪ Further integrate MSN Liaisons into school-based student support structures, where conversations and case management efforts are already at an individual scholar level
 - ↪ Continuously emphasize with MSN Liaisons that they work with all adults to increase youth engagement and participation in OST, and that it starts with identifying and supporting young peoples' needs and interests, rather than recruiting them for specific and/or available programs
- **Continue to work with OST providers/MSN members**
 - ↪ to identify and work with young people that they know or see often

- w> including those who are aging out of their program, or need or want to try a new opportunity outside of what they already do outside school
- **Focus on leveraging and building genuine relationships with middle schoolers we want to support**
 - w> Start early in the year building relationships so that summer program conversations can benefit from existing trust and knowledge about each other
 - w> Have middle schoolers identify an adult that knows them well, and have MSN Liaisons support those adults by providing them with program information and problem-solving support (therefore leveraging existing relationships, rather than solely focusing on building new ones)
- **Make it easier for educators of all kinds to provide individualized support**
 - w> Ask school day educators to identify the middle schoolers they already know or see often, to spread the legwork of conversations among multiple adults
 - w> Continue to provide easy-to-use tools for educators, such as the MSN Resource guides and view books, to use in conversations with middle schoolers, so they can spend less time looking up information and more time talking to young people and families:
 - ◇ Use Give A Summer's new personalized recommendation tool in individual conversations; survey responses are tied to local program opportunities, so educators can sit with a young person, punch in their interests and challenges, and generate program recommendations specific to that young person (see [Appendix G: Personalized Summer Program Recommendations](#))

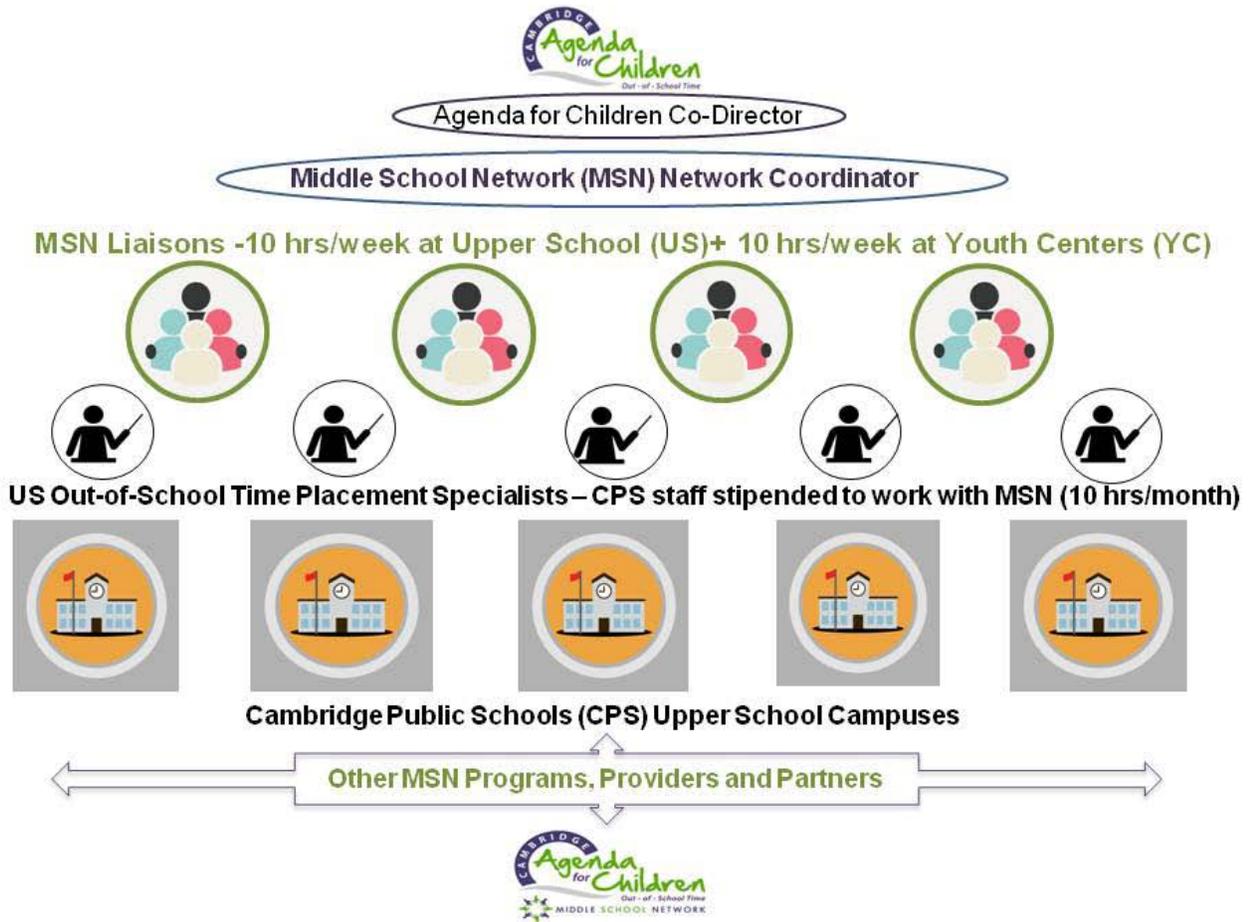
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Middle School Network Logic Model

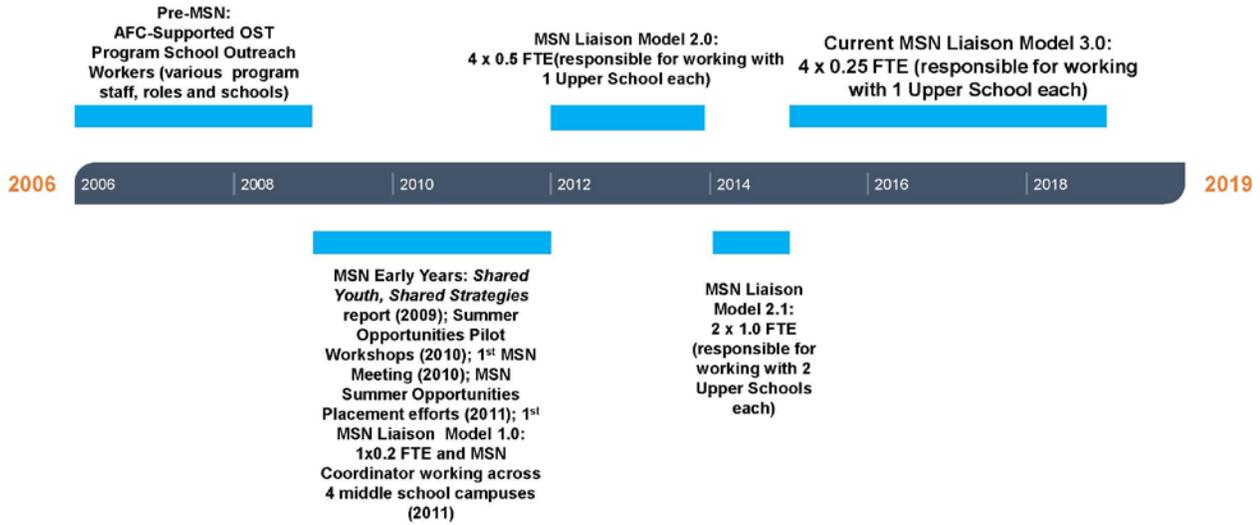
Overarching Goal: To ensure the equitable access & engagement of middle school youth in out-of-school time experiences in Cambridge.



Appendix B: Middle School Network Organizational Chart



Appendix C: Middle School Network Liaison Model Timeline



Appendix D: Middle School Network List of Partner Providers

Agassiz-Baldwin Community Center
 Beyond the 4th Wall
 Breakthrough Greater Boston
 Cambridge Camping Association
 Cambridge Community Center
 Safety Net Collaborative (Cambridge Police Department/Cambridge Health Alliance/CPS/DHSP/others)
 Cambridge Public Library
 Cambridge Public School Department
 Cambridge School Volunteers
 CitySprouts
 Community Art Center
 Community Boating
 Community Rowing, Inc
 East End House
 Frisoli Youth Center
 Gately Youth Center
 Innovators4purpose
 Maud Morgan Arts
 Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program
 Middle School Activities Club
 MIT/Wellesley Upward Bound Program
 Mmmaven school of DJ'ing
 Moore Youth Center
 Moses Youth Center
 Parkour Generations Boston
 Phillips Brooks House Association
 Pop Warner
 Premier Hoops
 Russell Youth Center
 Science Club for Girls
 Tutoring Plus of Cambridge
 War Memorial Recreation Center
 Work Force/Cambridge Housing Authority
 The Young People's Project
 YMCA of Cambridge

Not a provider but involved:

- Cambridge Public Health Dept
- Find It Cambridge
- Family Policy Council

Appendix E: Survey Construction

The surveys were created in Google Forms. We employed “if, then” logic in various parts of the survey to make it easy for middle schoolers to fill out the survey, target questions appropriately, and identify which middle schoolers completed which survey.

- **Prepopulate information so students can easily identify themselves.** We created one unique survey for each grade at each Cambridge middle school. In each grade’s survey, we first asked students which Teacher’s classroom/homeroom they were members of; then, using Google Form’s “Go to section” functionality, the survey then moved students to a new section that listed the students in that homeroom. Students then selected their name, then moving on to the start of the general survey questions.
- **Using multiple sections to ask students appropriate questions.** For example, in one section we asked students if they attended a summer program. If they did, they next saw a section asking about their summer program experience. But if students had not attended a program, they skipped the section asking about their summer program experiences. This reduced students’ frustration at answering questions that did not apply to them.

Appendix F: Student Dashboard Examples

Areas for action			Program participation and vacation last summer				
Priority students for individual follow up							
# of students 194	# of students 117	# of students 83	Did you attend a summer program or summer camp over the summer?	Did you go on a vacation over the summer?	During what months did you take a vacation?	For how long did you go to a summer program or summer camp?	Did you enjoy your summer program or summer camp?
Interested in attending a program but didn't go to one last year	Not interested in attending program and didn't go to one last year	Attended program last year but not interested in attending one next summer	Yes	Yes, for a few weeks	June, July, August	2 weeks	Very much enjoyed
			Yes	No	Did not take a vacation	4 weeks or more	Somewhat enjoyed

Interest and student perceptions				What do students want to do at programs this summer?								
Interest	Student perceptions about summer programs											
STUDENT interested in summer programs?	Help with school	Help with future	Do friends attend?	I am not interested in any activity	Academic support, homework help, tutoring	Leadership development and employment	Dance, theatre, and performing arts	Visual arts & digital media / film	Science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM)	Sports	Music	Some of everything - general enrichment
Very interested	Yes, helps a lot	Yes, helps a lot	Most of my friends						Yes	Yes		
Somewhat interested	Yes, helps	Yes, helps a little bit	Most of my friends							Yes		

Barriers - Student Ratings										Student comment																					
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Survey choice</th> <th>Reference</th> <th>Score below</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Not a problem at all</td> <td>-></td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Small problem</td> <td>-></td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Medium problem</td> <td>-></td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Large problem</td> <td>-></td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Very large problem</td> <td>-></td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Does not apply or not sure</td> <td>-></td> <td>--</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>										Survey choice	Reference	Score below	Not a problem at all	->	0	Small problem	->	1	Medium problem	->	2	Large problem	->	3	Very large problem	->	4	Does not apply or not sure	->	--	
Survey choice	Reference	Score below																													
Not a problem at all	->	0																													
Small problem	->	1																													
Medium problem	->	2																													
Large problem	->	3																													
Very large problem	->	4																													
Does not apply or not sure	->	--																													
Don't know of programs	Not interested in options	Programs full	Too expensive	Family vacation conflicts	Tough to get to	Needed at home	Tough to sign up	Family against	Friends don't go	Student comment																					
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0																						
0	0	--	0	1	0	0	0	0	0																						

Appendix G: Personalized Summer Program Recommendations

Each season, MSN creates resource guides to afterschool or summer opportunities. [Give a Summer](#) used those guides to create a database of programs. Give a Summer translated program information into “scores” that mapped to the program activities and challenges students were asked about in their survey. Then, Give a Summer calculated how good a match each program in its database was for each student and recommended the top five matches.

Below is an example of the 1-page personalized program recommendation handout Give a Summer created. It lists a fictitious student’s interests and how the student rated different program-related barriers, and then presents the top five recommended summer programs for that student. Along with each summer program option is some detail on how the summer program matches a student’s interests and their self-reported barriers.

What activities is Sample interested in?

Academic support, homework help, tutoring
 Leadership development and employment
 Dance, theatre, and performing arts
 Visual arts & digital media / film
 Science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM)
 Sports
 Music
 Some of everything - general enrichment

Select from dropdown on right side of cell

Not interested
 Not interested
 Very interested
 Very interested
 Very interested
 Not interested
 Not interested
 Not interested

How challenging are these barriers to summer programs?

Summer programs are too expensive
 Summer programs conflict with family vacation
 Tough to get to summer programs (no bus, etc.)
 It's tough to sign up for summer programs

Select from dropdown on right side of cell

Large problem
 Small problem
 Large problem
 Small problem

Program recommendations based on unique interests and barriers

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Name of program	Innovators4Purpose: Innovators Playground	Beyond the 4th Wall Theatre: Summer Musical	Maud Morgan Summer Creative Arts Workshops	Flagship Clubhouse	Id Tech Camps and Id Teen Academ
Contact Information					
Website	http://innovatorsforpurpose.org/	http://www.beyondthe4thwall.com/	http://www.maudmorgan.com/programs	http://clubhousebeat.org/about-us	idtech.com
Phone number	michaeld@innovators4purpose.org	617-710-3864	617-349-6287 x29	617-589-0468	888-709-8324
Location					
City	Cambridge	Cambridge	Cambridge	Boston	Cambridge
Neighborhood	Mid-Cambridge	--	--	--	--
Detail and eligibility	Hands-on learning with Math & Science labs; collaborate with industry professionals	Auditions in late April/early May; sign up at http://www.beyondthe4thwall.com	Clay and other visual arts	Drop-in STEAM makerspace: design, art photo, music, programming and more	Various day and overnight STEM, programming, app development, and game design programs

Does program offer top student activities?

Science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM)	Yes!	No	No	Yes!	Yes!
Dance, theatre, and performing arts	No	Yes!	No	No	No
Visual arts & digital media / film	Yes!	No	Yes!	Yes!	Yes!

Major barriers avoided

Summer programs are too expensive	Yes: No cost	Yes: Low cost and financial aid available	No	Yes: No cost	No
Tough to get to summer programs (no bus, etc.)	No	No	No	No	No
Summer programs conflict with family vacation	Partly:	No	Yes:	Yes:	Yes:

Appendix H: Example 1-page Action Plan for MSN Team/School

Suggested steps to increase afterschool and summer program participation at SCHOOL "A"

Prepared by Give a Summer based on SCHOOL "A" summer participation survey

Updated January 11, 2017

Key findings:

- **SCHOOL "A" attendance of 66%** ranges from 58% of 6th graders to 77% of 8th graders and is overwhelmingly at 4-week programs
- Students across grades strongly enjoy their programs
- **About 54% of students are very interested or interested in summer programs.**
- SCHOOL "A" students are well matched to their summer programs and participate in a broad range of activities
- SCHOOL "A" students face a range of barriers that differ across grades, with **program expense and family vacation conflicts most affecting 6th graders**

Help students access AFTERSCHOOL programs by:

- **Using the accompanying Excel to target three groups of students at high risk of not participating in afterschool programs:** 1) students who didn't attend a summer program but want to, 2) students who did not attend a program and don't want to next summer, and 3) students who did attend a program but don't want to next summer.
- Look at slides 6 - 8 in PowerPoint for sense of range of student activity interests. Use slide 8 to help **suggest related programs that a student with one interest might also like.**

Help students access SUMMER programs by:

- Targeting different barriers by grade:
 - ↪ 6th grade: highlight programs that are low cost and work around family vacations
 - ↪ 8th grade: highlight programs that might work around family vacation plans, and learn more about why students are needed at home
- **Focusing on the 14 students who didn't attend a program last year are interested in attending one.** These students face greater barriers across the board than their peers. Then also work with students disengaged from summer (33 students) and students to help get back on track (16 students). See accompanying Excel for these students' names.

Utilize accompanying resources:

- Presentation that goes into more detail on survey findings
- Excel file that shares:
 - ↪ All programs students at SCHOOL "A" attended
 - ↪ All individual survey responses
 - Lists of students to prioritize for individual support as well as their survey responses

Appendix I: Middle School Network Case Study

Middle School Network CASE STUDY

Ranya

9/12: I (Middle School Network Liaison) talked with Ranya, a 8th grader during lunch when I sat at her table to talk about some OST opportunities. We talked some about what they each did after school and Ranya specifically said nothing but that her and her sister in 5th grade wanted to play soccer. I asked her more about what made her interested and if she wanted to play on a team. She said yes and I told her about Cambridge Youth Soccer (CYS). She knew about it and I told her that the season started last week but that I would still check if she could join. She said she would like me to do that but hinted that it might be hard for her family to pay. I said that I would be able to speak with them about possibly getting some financial help and that it was still worth applying. She agreed and I let her know I'd follow up with her when I had gotten info from CYS.

Later that day, I called Susan Ruff, CYS Executive Director, and asked her if there was room for the two girls to play and that their family might need financial assistance. She said that yes they can still register and financial assistance can be provided. All I needed to do was email her the two girls' information (name, grade, DOB, contact info etc.)

9/15: I spoke with Ranya during morning advisory and got the necessary info for CYS. I then emailed the info for both girls to Susan.

9/17: I heard back from Susan who said she would be in touch with the family and that both Ranya and her sister would be registered free of charge and placed on teams but in different leagues because of their grade difference. She then included John Delancey the coordinator of the Upper School league so that he could answer any questions further

9/19: I spoke with Ranya at lunch to make sure that CYS had been in touch with her family. She said they had been but that there was some confusion around what they had talked about mainly because her mother's English is not very good. I said that she could call them again but that I would also be in touch with Susan and John to get the necessary info. I made sure to write down what specifically she was confused about and needed to know. I then got her home phone number and mother's name and said when I get the info I will call her mom.

I then emailed John and Susan with the specific questions Ranya had and heard back from John later that day with all the questions answered. He also copied Ranya's soon- to-be coach on the email so he would be expecting Ranya and be clued in on the back and forth going on between myself and CYS. The coach later emailed me saying he was looking forward to seeing Ranya at the game tomorrow.

Later that evening I called Ranya's mom and spoke to her while Ranya was connected on another line. I relayed the info I received from John and made sure they fully understood that tomorrow was the first game and where they needed to go, when to get there and the equipment Ranya needed to play. I gave them the name of her coach and also told them sports store near the field if they needed to get anything and that the coach said he would have extra equipment if needed. Both Ranya and her mother seemed to know what to do and I gave them my number in case they had any further questions.

I emailed John and Ranya's coach to say that I had spoken with her family and that everything should be all set.

9/22: On Monday morning I checked in with Ranya to see how the game went. Everything went smoothly and she said she had a great time!

Reflection: Ranya

I later spoke with Ranya about her experience with CYS:

Q: How did the soccer season go? And, would you want to do it again?

A: It was fun! I liked it because the people on the team were nice, helpful and they accepted me. The field was far, but it was good and clean and had a lot of space. Yes, I would do it again.

Q: How do you think you benefitted from playing soccer?

A: It made me want to join more teams like that.

Q: How do you think soccer will help you in the future?

A: It could help me with social skills, making new friends, and I would recommend it to others.

Q: How did I help you get involved with the team?

A: You helped me because I thought I would have to pay and you helped me get it for free. You also helped me fill out the paperwork, which my mom really liked. And, it made me want to ask you in the future to join more things.

Reflection: Susan Ruff

I emailed Susan and asked to her to answer some questions about her experience getting Ranya connected:

Q: How was having the MSN Liaison in the schools an asset to CYS?

A: The MSN Liaison was very helpful to Cambridge Youth Soccer in connecting students who had not had a CYS experience connect with our program through their school, and participate in our fall soccer.

Q: What made connecting Ranya to CYS successful?

A: CYS is committed to improving our outreach to students who do not know about our programs. We are happy to cover any registration fees, and equipment fees, but we often do not have a way to get this information to the students. Julia was able to reach us by email, and we connected Rayna to a team and her new coach within a few days. Rayna was able to get out on the field and enjoy her team.

Q: Were there any challenges about connecting Ranya?

A: The main challenge was to get the signup information to Rayna so that her parent or guardian could agree, without making the registration process overly complicated and discouraging. Julia was very helpful in relaying questions and answers between Rayna, her family, and CYS.

Q: Other thoughts?

A: I am hoping that CYS can work with Julia again in March to bring more students into our soccer program for the spring season. I thought the fall was a good start to an expanding partnership.

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