

After-School Programs in Montgomery County, MD

A Comparative Study on Excel Beyond the Bell

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ABSTRACT

In order to address a dearth of after-school options available to low-income students and provide support to at-risk students, Montgomery County has piloted the Excel Beyond the Bell (EBB) out of school time initiative. When asked to recommend an expansion strategy for EBB, we (1) evaluated EBB program design and practices in the context of County needs and goals and with respect to findings in national Out of School Time (OOST) literature and (2) compared EBB to OOST programs in various jurisdictions around the country. We recommend that EBB focus on expanding its elementary school program over its middle school program, while preserving (a) the zero cost to participating families, (b) the at-risk student referral system, (c) the parent engagement component, and (d) the English language learning component.

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MISSION STATEMENT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are deeply thankful to Montgomery County Council President Hans Riemer for providing the impetus for this entire project, and to his Chief of Staff, Ken Silverman, for extensively coordinating with us throughout our entire research process. We are grateful to Dr. Elaine Bonner-Tompkins, Natalia Carrizosa, and Vivian Yao of the Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight, not only for writing the reports that constituted the springboard for our research efforts, but also for taking time out of their busy days to provide us with helpful insights and sage research guidance. We would like to extend our gratitude to librarians at the University of Chicago, Paul Belloni and Julie Piacentine, for their invaluable assistance in searching through the secondary literature. We would also like to thank the students and staff of the Burnt Mills Elementary School EBB program for being so welcoming to us during our site visit, and especially EBB administrator Marhonda Williams, for her time and effort spent coordinating our site visit. Special thanks is owed to Adrienne Clutter, for going out of her way to provide us with helpful resources and for sharing her enthusiasm for EBB with us. We thank the OOST program administrators from various jurisdictions in Maryland, Virginia, and Georgia for their time spent providing us with helpful information about their programs. In addition, our thanks goes to Dr. Sandra Simpkins of the University of California Irvine for sharing her insights on OOST research. Finally, we are thankful to Public Policy Professor Sorchia Brophy of the University of Chicago, for sharing her experiences with us and pointing us in the right direction.

I. Overview & Key Findings

Researchers were asked to recommend an expansion strategy for the Excel Beyond the Bell (EBB) program. In order to craft our recommendation, we:

- (1) Evaluated EBB program design and practices in the context of County needs and goals and with respect to findings in national Out of School Time (OOST) literature
- (2) Compared EBB to OOST programs in various jurisdictions around the country

Background

In order to address a dearth of after-school options available to low-income students and provide support to at-risk students, Montgomery County has piloted the EBB initiative, consisting of an elementary school program and a middle school program. Excel Beyond the Bell Elementary (EBBE) is an OOST program serving students in grades 2-5 that currently operates in four elementary schools in Montgomery County. A variety of recreational enrichment activities are allotted half of program time, and academic instruction led by MCPS teachers makes up the other half. EBBE's recreational enrichment activities include an English language improvement component. Excel Beyond the Bell Middle (EBBM) is an OOST program that currently operates in seven middle schools in Montgomery County. EBBM offers middle school students a variety of recreational enrichment activities in areas such as career exploration, civic engagement, STEM education, arts, and physical activities; students choose which activities they would like to attend. Both after-school programs operate for approximately three hours per day, four days per week, are offered at no cost to families, serve hot meals, and provide transportation home. Unlike EBBM, EBBE includes a parent engagement component. EBBE has 125 slots per site, which are exclusively filled through a referral system targeting at-risk students; EBBM has over 250 slots per site, which are filled by a combination of referral and non-referral enrollees.

Task 1: Evaluate EBB Design & Practices

We found that EBBE in particular addresses a critical unmet need for elementary-age OOST programming in Montgomery County, intervenes at a time of maximum potential impact in the child's development and academic career, increases student enthusiasm for education, and contains distinctive academic instruction and parent engagement components that have the potential to lead to better academic outcomes for at-risk students, including higher attendance and higher performance in reading and mathematics.

The academic literature indicates that a student's attendance and behaviors as early as elementary school may be predictive of that student's chances of graduating high school (Lehr et al. 2009). Allocating resources towards identifying at-risk students at the elementary level and enrolling them in high-quality enrichment and academic support OOST programs can lead to high payoffs in terms of improved student outcomes. We found that the EBBE program has an excellent referral system which incorporates best practices established in the academic literature; it is highly effective at identifying at-risk students and giving them access to beneficial recreational and academic enrichment. Moreover, Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) surveys find high unmet need for OOST programs among low-income families in Montgomery County, as for-profit childcare options are often unaffordable. OLO reports indicate that only 8% of Montgomery County OOST slots are devoted to the elementary school level. This makes programs like EBBE all the more important.

In line with the preferences and behaviors of middle schoolers, EBBM includes neither academic nor parent engagement components, instead focusing entirely on recreational enrichment. Attendance four days per week is mandatory for EBBE enrollees, while the EBBM enrollees, who are free to attend only the activities that interest them, attend the program an average of two days per week. EBBM's structure is conducive to increasing student motivational beliefs as well as allowing students to develop a passion for activities that interest them.

Task 2: EBB comparison to OOST in various jurisdictions

We examined OOST programs from several counties, making note of how their goals and programming strategies relate to or diverge from EBB goals and strategies. Our analysis divides program goals into two categories: goals that apply to all students and goals that apply to a specific group of students. Within these two categories, we identified several of the most notable or common programming elements. This analysis of the OOST landscape outside of Montgomery County contextualizes unique and valuable features of EBB --including its commitment to remaining free for all participants and its referral system-- and can be used to inform or inspire decision making with regards to EBB programming. Two specific cases in Howard County, MD also present strategies for decision-making with regards to OOST program expansion and allocation of resources.

Our methods for task 2 included using county-level data from the 2016 American Community Survey to identify 11 counties in Georgia that were similar to Montgomery County according to four indicators: total population, high school graduation rate, child poverty rate, and foreign born population (the latter as a proxy for ESOL students). We chose the state of Georgia on the recommendations of OLO researchers. Next, we identified what relevant OOST programs exist in these counties, analyzed written materials describing the programs, and reached out to program coordinators to discuss the successes, setbacks, and key points of the programs. We repeated this research process for 10 counties in Maryland and northern Virginia. Low response rates from officials in these counties presented a challenge.

II. EBB Expansion Strategy Recommendation

Discussion

We believe that EBB is an effective program worthy of expansion. With regard to deciding how to allocate expansion funding between EBBE and EBBM, we suggest three principle considerations:

1. **Efficiency:** Which program maximizes the *estimated amount of OOST delivered per dollar*, as measured by the number of...
 - 1.1. ...OOST slots created per site per dollar? Our estimate: EBBM
 - 1.2. ...enrollees per site per dollar? Our estimate: EBBM
 - 1.3. ...at-risk enrollees per site per dollar? Our estimate: EBBE
 - 1.4. ...at-risk student activity hours per site per dollar? Our estimate: EBBE
2. **Impact:** Which program maximizes the *intensity of impact* delivered to each enrollee?
Our answer: EBBE
3. **Focus:** Which program's *area of impact* most closely aligns with the area of need targeted by policymakers?
Our answer: EBBE

EBBE has the potential to make a significantly greater impact on each individual student participant than EBBM, at least as measured by academic performance. On the other hand, expanding EBBM to an additional site costs less money and serves more students than expanding EBBE to an additional site. Therefore, an expansion strategy prioritizing EBBM would maximize not only the number of new sites per unit of expansion funding, but also the number of students served per site per unit of expansion funding. However, EBBE program participants are exclusively at-risk students identified by a referral process involving MCPS teachers. Conversely, while OLO reports indicate that EBBM participation is partially based on the referral process, participants reflect the demographic profile of the school; not all EBBM participants are at-risk students, the target group. Moreover, because the average EBBE participant attends four days per week, while the average EBBM participant attends only two days per week, an EBBE expansion may mean more at-risk student activity hours per additional site than an EBBM expansion, depending on the proportion of EBBM enrollees who are at-risk students. Depending on the exact difference between the cost of EBBM and EBBE sites, expanding EBBE may result in more activity hours per at-risk student per site per unit of expansion funding than expanding EBBM.

Note: A major caution on our estimates for the efficiency consideration used in the above paragraph: Our estimates assume that a new EBBM site serves 100 at-risk enrollees and costs \$100,000, while an EBBE site costs \$185,000. These numbers were estimated by averaging the data in the EBB OLO Report (OLO Report 2015-2). In particular, our estimate for consideration 1.1, that EBBE maximizes at-risk enrollees per site per dollar, is based on the assumption that at-risk students consist of less than half of EBBM program participants.

Efficiency (1.1) and impact (2) considerations listed above are condensed into the formula below:

$$ROI = \left(\frac{A \times N}{C} \right) \times I$$

$$\text{Return on investment} = \frac{\text{At-risk student program hours per dollar}}{\text{hours per dollar}} \times \frac{\text{Impact per program hour}}{\text{program hour}}$$

Where...
A is the average attendance (in hours per week),
N is the number of at-risk students at the site,
C is the cost to run the site, and
I is a coefficient representing the program's impact per at-risk student program hour.

The above formula, while useful as a heuristic, may be problematic to apply; it is difficult to assign a numerical value to a program's impact. Moreover, the formula does not account for the focus (3) consideration: EBBE and EBBM have substantively different programmatic content, and serve different populations with different needs, which policymakers may prioritize differently.

Alternatively, one could solely rely on academic metrics (such as test scores, graduation rates, or attendance) to determine the coefficient representing the impact (2) consideration (D)*. However, because neither longitudinal data on EBB participants nor detailed survey data on student outcomes were available, we are unable to quantify the impact of on academic outcomes of the EBBE program or compare them to those of the EBBM program.

Recommended Expansion Strategy: Prioritize EBBE

Our findings indicate that EBBE would create a similar amount of OOST slots as EBBM by certain metrics (consideration 1). Most importantly, our findings from qualitative sources and the academic literature imply that EBBE has a higher intensity of impact on at-risk students than EBBM, particularly with regard to academic performance (consideration 2). Moreover, EBBE is more targeted towards the population of greatest unmet need, at-risk students at the elementary level, and aligned with the policymaker's priorities (consideration 3) as we understand them, which include closing the achievement gap and supporting at-risk students' educational success.

Based on our findings as summarized in task 1 and elaborated below, we recommend an EBB expansion strategy designed to maximize impact per student: prioritizing EBBE expansion over EBBM expansion. We recommend focusing on adding new EBBE sites at elementary schools that meet the following criteria: (listed in order of importance)

- (a) are high poverty or mid-high poverty schools
- (b) are in middle school clusters with a preexisting EBBM site (this creates a continuity of educational support from elementary to middle school) [Finding 3]
- (c) would require minimal additional investment in transportation (this preserves expansion resources for core program functions, maximizing the number of EBBE slots created per unit of expansion funding) [Finding 11]

In addition to the core components of academic and recreational enrichment, we further recommend the preservation of the following components of the EBBE program that our findings identify as key elements:

- (a) the zero cost to participating families [Finding 8]
- (b) the at-risk student referral system [Finding 2]
- (c) the parent engagement component [Finding 6]
- (d) the English language learning component [Finding 9]

III. Extended Findings on EBB Design & Practices

Finding 1: Elementary and middle school OOST programs increase students' attendance, academic achievement, and personal growth -- these benefits persist even after students have graduated from the program, setting students on track for future success.

Recommendation: Continue to invest in high-quality OOST programming.

Dozens if not hundreds of studies have been conducted on the effects of OOST programs consisting of academic and recreational enrichment, which are offered in many school districts throughout the country. A selection of these studies, discussed in detail below, broadly find that students who attended high-quality OOST programs experienced statistically significant academic impacts such as increases in school-day attendance and math and reading scores. Studies also find that students who participate in such programs experience more personal growth than students who do not participate; these personal growth impacts include higher self-esteem, self-confidence, and career aspirations, which can translate into decreased delinquent behaviors. Moreover, studies show that the effects of OOST are felt most strongly by low-income students, non-white students, and at-risk students. This has generated interest in using OOST programs as a tool to close the achievement gap.

The qualitative rationale behind OOST programs is straightforward. OOST programs' academic components give students who are at a disadvantage additional instructional time to catch up to their peers and learn content that they struggle with during the school day. Miller et al. (2003) finds that "afterschool programs can make a difference in building prerequisites for school and lifelong success [...] students who are low-income, or have low school attendance, limited English proficiency, or poor test scores show the greatest gains."

A multitude of OOST studies demonstrate that OOST involvement increases reading and math scores among both elementary aged and middle school aged students (Klein and Bolus 2002, Lauer et al. 2006, Reisner et al. 2001). In addition, OOST programs provide educational enrichment activities in supportive environments with peers that contribute to personal growth and the development of enthusiasm and interest in productive, educational pursuits. A study of 4,400 middle school students across 34 school districts finds that not only do students who participate in 21st century CLC programs see statistically significant improvements in math scores, but they also demonstrate heightened enthusiasm through increased class participation (US Dept. of Ed. 2003). Vandell, Reisner, and Pierce (2007) conclude that low-income elementary and middle school students who participate in OOST programs develop better work habits and have higher academic achievement and decreased delinquent behavior compared to non-participating students. A meta-analysis of 73 programs finds broad increases in self-confidence and self-esteem among OOST participants (Durlak and Weissburg 2007). Publicly funded and available OOST provides high-impact services to low-income students, who would otherwise not have the resources to access these developmentally-important activities.

Finding 2: OOST programs at the elementary level have a greater effect on the achievement gap and student attendance than those at the middle school level.

Recommendation: Prioritize elementary school OOST for expansion rather than middle school OOST, and preserve EBBE's high-quality referral system as the program is expanded.

Although OOST can help close the achievement gap in both middle and elementary school, elementary level OOST has the largest impact on the achievement gap even after students' graduation from the OOST program. Lehr et al (2009) finds that students at risk of dropping out of high school can be identified as early as 3rd grade by examining a student's attendance patterns, behavior, and academic performance within the year. Indeed, a student's habits in elementary school persist throughout adolescence and can shape their success, which necessitates the work of an OOST program to instill motivation, enrichment, and passion within at-risk students.

EBBE refers at-risk students for extra care and attention after school, ensuring that at-risk students succeed throughout high school and beyond by identifying students at a critically early age and establishing long-term interests and motivational beliefs. Conversations with administrators indicate that EBBE's referral system does an excellent job at achieving best practices. According to the US Department of Education's "Early Implementation" study (2004), school administrators or teachers personally reaching out to families and encouraging them to sign up for OOST programs is a key best practice. Having principals work with teachers to determine eligibility on a student-by-student basis, and thus using factors beyond low-income status, is another best practice that EBBE fulfills.

This critical early identification of at risk students allows for important early intervention through enrollment in quality OOST programming. This early intervention produces important outcomes throughout a student's academic career and beyond. An elementary school student's consistent participation in a school activity translates directly to their interests and motivation levels in middle school: "Children who participated in an activity, children who participated consistently across multiple years, and children who were highly active have higher adolescent motivational beliefs 4 years later than their peers" (Simpkins, Vest, and Becnel 2009). Furthermore, according to Simpkins et al, the students in the study that participated for all the years that the program of interest was available had "higher self-concept and interest" in that activity than students who only participated for 1-2 years.

Elementary school students are also heavily affected by OOST academically, which supports the reduction of the achievement gap. A meta-analysis of over 100 OOST studies in schools around the country found "significant positive effects for students who were at risk of failing in reading or math. Narrowing the reading achievement gap through afterschool programs was found to have most effect in lower elementary school" (A Summary of Formal Evaluations 2008). The specialized extra care and attention that students receive during their most vulnerable developmental stage in after-school programs are important in narrowing the achievement gap because it is that same attention that allows low-income, disadvantaged, at-risk, and/or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) elementary students to show the greatest gains linked to participation in after-school programs (Miller 2003).

Furthermore, elementary OOST programs succeed in preventing truancy by providing enriching activities for students to look forward to, which increases their interest in school and learning overall. Chapin Hall's Study of Chicago's After School Matters Program found that students who

participated in their elementary OOST program missed fewer days of school than their classmates, and that students who participated most frequently failed fewer core academic courses (A Summary of Formal Evaluations 2008). The researchers in this study concluded that by creating an incentive for students to attend school regularly and giving them something to look forward to after school, After School Matters helped improve academic performance. Additionally, they found that more than half the students who attended regularly improved both academically and behaviorally. Classroom teachers reported that students made the most progress in turning in homework on time, completing homework satisfactorily, and participating in class. An evaluation of LA'S BEST, an elementary school OOST program in LA schools, by the UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation, echoes this pattern by revealing that students' regular school-day attendance improved once they began participating in the afterschool program and reported higher aspirations among their students regarding finishing school and going to college.

Finding 3: OOST programs at the middle school level provide significant support during a critical point in youth development.

Recommendation: Allocate EBB expansion funds in order to maximize a continuity of support through elementary and middle school; prioritize elementary schools in middle school clusters where the middle school is already an EBBM program site.

According to researchers' discussions with MCPS administrators, the middle school years are an important point in youth development, particularly the 6th grade year, during which the transition from elementary school to middle school occurs. Although certain needs that exist at the elementary school level are no longer widely applicable during middle school (i.e. childcare or the explicit need for constant adult supervision), the agency that middle schoolers gain and the typical distancing from parents that occurs at this time create different needs that can still be addressed by the provision of OOST.

During the middle school years, the need for adult supervision transitions from a way to address childcare needs to a way to provide effective guidance to young adolescents or prevent them from becoming involved in crime-related activity. OOST programs at the middle school level provide a space for middle school students to be mentored, supported, and introduced to productive activities that are beneficial to their cognitive and psychological development.

A report by the Afterschool Alliance cites a study that assessed math scores in middle school students attending OOST programs. It found significant gains ("of up to 12 percentiles") in standardized math test scores of OOST attenders over their OOST non-attending counterparts. Academic effects also manifest beyond test scores; Zief, Lauver, and Maynard's (2006) systematic review of the literature also found increases in achievement including higher college attendance and career goals among middle school OOST participants. In discussions with researchers, MCPS administrators emphasized that the 5th to 6th grade transition is a pivotal phase of student development; academic performance during this period is considered to be predictive of academic outcomes through high school.

Continuity of OOST between elementary school and middle school could ease the important 5th to 6th grade transition. As students enter a new school, it can be comforting and natural to gravitate toward the familiar. Evidence suggests that extracurricular habits and motivational beliefs developed at the elementary school level mirror habits present during adolescence (Simpkins et al. 2009).

Therefore, providing programming at the elementary school that mimics that of the middle school is likely to encourage attendance at the middle school level. Currently, EBB exists at both the elementary and middle school level. Programming continuity between EBB elementary schools that feed EBB middle schools could be a key support during the 5th to 6th grade transition, leading students who are at an important point in their development to adopt safe and productive extracurricular commitments and maintain and develop positive motivational beliefs.

Finding 4: Acute but unmet need for OOST enrichment exists at the elementary level in Montgomery County.

Recommendation: Prioritize elementary-level OOST slots when expanding programs.

Despite the known benefits of OOST programs both nationally and locally, OOST programs in Montgomery County significantly under-serve elementary school students. Less than 4,000 out of 42,740 slots are allotted to programs that exclusively serve elementary school students; as a result, elementary students are eligible for less than 8% of Montgomery County OOST program slots (OLO Report 2016-11). The vast majority of county after-school program slots serve secondary and mid- to high-income students. The same OLO report finds that EBBM has seven sites and over 1700 student participants, whereas EBBE only operates in four sites and has approximately 500 student participants. Although EBBE, a program which only recruits students based on referrals, has less sites and total participants, EBBE programming has a substantial waitlist while EBBM programming is below enrollment capacity. The imbalance between the number of sites with EBBM and EBBE programming not only reveals the need for more elementary after-school programs, but also echoes the relevance of Finding 3; expanding EBBE programs makes for a smoother, more enriching transition into existing EBBM programs.

Moreover, the demand for OOST programming is most acute at the elementary level, especially among low-income families. Unlike middle school students, who are typically at the age where they can be left alone at home after school, elementary school students require greater supervision from either parents or daycare centers. Working parents who cannot be present before or after school resort to childcare out of necessity. These necessary childcare services account for 17% of income for a FARMS-eligible family of three. As a result, any low-income families struggle to provide their elementary-age children with after-school care due to the scarcity of accessible OOST programs and the high costs of daycare.

The enrichment that free OOST programs can provide is already well-received by the community. Parents and elementary students alike speak to the benefits of EBBE programs, citing EBBE as an opportunity for kids to “develop their creative skills through non-academic activities” and “do better in the regular school classes” (Yao 2017). The community holds a deep appreciation for EBBE and hopes it continues and expands in the following years. Anecdotal evidence shows that EBBE has had a transformative effect for some at-risk children; one child, an immigrant from Cameroon, remarks that “before the [EBBE program] started, I was getting trouble every single day, but now I don’t get in trouble anymore” (OLO Report 2016-11).

Finding 5: EBBE increases student enthusiasm for and interest in education.

Recommendation: Take measures to increase data collection and quantify EBB's impact on student attendance and motivational beliefs.

EBBE has a significant impact on student enthusiasm, increasing enthusiasm not only for extracurricular activities, but also for EBB's academic component and regular school time activities. When surveyed about the strengths and weaknesses of the program, teachers who participated in EBBE identified this as a key success. In fact, more than half of the surveyed teachers noted both an increased attentiveness to schoolwork and increased enthusiasm among EBBE participants, not just in EBBE, but also in regular school time. One teacher found that EBB's greatest success was that "[students] came to class ready and willing to learn" while another added that "students were more engaged during the school day" (Dream Academy Staff Survey 2017). Others mentioned that even most students who were initially disinterested or even disrespectful ultimately came to appreciate the program and show excitement in their work.

The results of these surveys were confirmed by researchers during a site visit to the EBBE program. Students were enthusiastic about the recreational enrichment activities. During breaks, students seemed genuinely looking forward to participating in the activities. During activities, students were focused and attentive, and seemed genuinely interested in the learning material. Notably, the program was making the students excited to be at school. When students see the physical space of the school as a place where fun activities happen, it stands to reason that they are more likely to be enthusiastic about activities during regular school hours. Students also demonstrated an interest in college, asking researchers questions about their college experiences. This experience coheres with findings in academic literature that suggest students who participate in after-school programs tend to have stronger motivational beliefs and significantly higher college and career goals (Zief et al 2006). This important psychological impact can result even from OOST programs that do not have significant academic impacts.

The four day per week EBBE program has a stringent attendance requirement, limiting students to three absences per semester. This exposes students to a wide range of activities that they might never have tried otherwise. As shown in the teacher surveys, although students were not always initially enthused about certain activities, they generally demonstrated an increase in interest and even initially disinterested students were able to ultimately gain something from the experience. Several teachers cited EBBE's attendance requirement as one of the primary benefits of the program, saying that students were opened to new experiences and acquired skills they never would have otherwise.

Similarly, EBBM has a substantial impact on student enthusiasm. The program operates in a different style than EBBE, lacking an academic component, and instead focusing solely on providing safe recreational activities. The program provides different activities for students to try, offering each on different days, and it allows students to choose which activities they attend. Because students only attend activities in which they are personally interested, it is likely that they are more enthusiastic about their time in the program, and, as a result, their time at school. Students are overwhelming happy with the program, as indicated by participant satisfaction surveys. In 2013, 90.8% of students reported satisfaction with the program, and 91.1% of students reported satisfaction with the program in 2014.

One difficulty that we encountered in this portion of our study was the lack of available attendance data. While general research suggests that the student enthusiasm supported by OOST programs has positive long-term effects on student attendance (Lehr et al. 2009), we could not determine whether such a link exists in Montgomery County due to the unavailability of such data. A thorough analysis of attendance patterns could help administrators more effectively evaluate the impact of EBB.

Finding 6: EBBE increases parents' engagement in their children's education, heightening academic outcomes.

Recommendation: Preserve the parent engagement component of EBBE as the program is expanded.

EBBE requires parents of students enrolled in the program to dedicate two hours of their time to parent engagement each month. This requirement can be fulfilled through volunteering to assist recreational providers during program time, conducting a reflection activity with their child, or attending PTA meetings. In addition to being highlighted as a best practice in the academic literature in general, quantifiable success of the parent engagement component is observable for EBBE specifically. For instance, *PTA attendance at Burnt Mills ES has increased by "54-59%" since the Burnt Mills EBBE site was implemented*, according to administrators. Increasing PTA attendance in underprivileged communities is crucial; OLO reports indicate that under-attended, under-organized PTAs in low-income areas have created a gap in efforts to inform parents about educational support programs and resources for at-risk students (OLO Report 2018-2). In a study of at-risk students at 100 sites in Chicago, parent engagement with the school was one of five key factors in predicting whether or not math and reading scores improved over time (Bryk et al. 2010).

A plethora of evidence suggests that increasing parent engagement is important to increasing academic achievement, especially among at-risk, minority, and low-income students. Multiple longitudinal studies show that parental involvement in the child's education --even informally-- is a strong predictor of the child's academic achievement (Le Fevre and Shaw 2011). Moreover, the literature suggests that this effect is strongest for Hispanic students, suggesting that parent engagement components may be an effective step towards closing the racial achievement gap. This makes sense; during the elementary years, the relationship to the parent may be the strongest social tie in the child's life. Therefore, parent involvement in the child's education heightens the importance the child places on education and on academic success.

An EBBM parent engagement requirement is not as feasible, according to EBB administrators, due to the nature of the parent-child relationship in middle school. Administrators say that such a requirement would only discourage student participation. Indeed, the scientific literature indicates that parent engagement in education tends to decrease after elementary school, as the parent-child tie begins to be superseded by the child's relationships with his or her peers. At the same time, evidence suggests that parent engagement is a predictor of better academic outcomes for students in all grade levels (Le Fevre and Shaw 2011).

Finding 7: EBBE includes an academic component, enabling teachers to create continuity between the regular school day curriculum and OOST activities.

Recommendation: Preserve the academic component of EBBE as the program is expanded, and attempt to quantify the academic benefits of the program.

The continuity between regular school time and OOST allows for teachers to pick up right where they left off – lesson plans fit well together, and OOST allows for a thorough review of the day’s material, especially if enrollees are struggling to comprehend one topic or another. This gives students struggling with schoolwork an opportunity to catch up with the rest of the class, keeping them from falling behind their peers. EBBE teachers have reported that students see learning gains, especially in reading, and there exist anecdotal cases of transformative effects for some students. Administrators say that EBBE gives teachers the opportunity to do hands-on learning activities that engage students in innovative ways, further bettering their enthusiasm and academic performance. Similarly, studies show that students who attended OOST programs with an academic focus reported better academic performance (Russell et al. 2006).

In regular school time, teachers are focused on teaching to the median student, who is often more advanced than an at-risk student. The referral system used by EBBE makes it so that the median student *is* an at-risk student, allowing teachers to develop their OOST lesson plans to cater to the needs of at-risk students. Additionally, teachers who notice specific students’ academic or behavioral needs during the regular school day have a chance to address those needs during OOST, an advantage that relies on continuity between OOST and the classroom.

This academic intervention is especially beneficial at the elementary level. Students at this age are far more likely to participate enthusiastically in academic extracurriculars than middle school students, a fact which justifies the lack of a similar academic component in EBBM. Moreover, as elementary school attendance patterns and academic performances are relatively reliable indicators of high school dropout rates and academic performance (Lehr et al. 2009), it stands to reason that academic intervention at this level can have a lasting impact on students. Intervention at this age can have large impacts on academic performance (Russell et al. 2006) and works toward closing the achievement gap between regular and at-risk students.

Finding 8: Both EBBE and EBBM are offered at zero cost to participants’ families, and this is crucial to the ability of low-income students to participate.

Recommendation: Do not add a participant fee to the EBB program.

Perhaps the most crucial element of EBB’s success, at both the elementary and middle school levels, is its lack of a fee. EBBE and EBBM are both offered at zero cost to families, which is essential for many low-income participants. Often, parents’ only alternatives to free OOST programming are for-profit daycare providers and private OOST academic and enrichment programming for elementary school children. Unfortunately, nearly all of the private OOST care providers utilized in Montgomery County for before and after-school care, enrichment, and academic programs rely on individual parent fees for services (OLO Report 2018-2).

As a result, 45% of survey respondents in the aforementioned OLO Report agreed that fees to participate in OOST programs were too expensive. The unaffordability of OOST programming in

the elementary and middle school level is impedes low-income families access to afford adequate, enriching OOST programs. The existence of free EBBE and EBBM programming serves low-income families who would otherwise not enroll their children in activities that could benefit their academic performance and personal growth.

Finding 9: EBBE includes an English language learning component (EBBM does not), addressing a significant unmet need in Montgomery County for English language learning support programs.

Recommendation: Preserve the English learning component in EBBE as the program is expanded; for elementary schools with a high population of ESOL students, consider increasing the amount of program time devoted to the English language learning component.

As of 2017, there are 11,456 ESOL students out of 71,833 total students from K-5 in Montgomery County, meaning that approximately 16% of K-5 students in the County are ESOL students (OLO Report 2018-2). Despite the vast number of ESOL students, the responders of OLO's provider survey found that "insufficient bilingual OOST programs exist in the County" (OLO Report 2018-2). An effective way to introduce ESOL programs is via OOST programs: "Afterschool programs can offer creative and effective programming that builds on the strength of ELs [English Learners] and redefines their success to incorporate not only acquiring English but also growing into well-rounded, active, and empowered members of society" (Bhattacharya, Quiroga 2008). Our project leader's site visit to Burnt Mills ES revealed that one of the five areas of enrichment in EBBE is based on English language instruction for all native English speaking students and ESOL students, a programming component that does not exist in EBBM. EBBE's English learning programming provides critical OOST support to English learners and helps ensure their success throughout their K-12 experience.

In an academic landscape where ESOL students do not receive the optimal attention they need to learn material and the English language, English learners face the unfortunate truth of having lower graduation rates, test scores, and higher dropout rates on average (Bhattacharya, Quiroga 2008). The isolation that comes with not being an English-fluent student prevents ESOL students from feeling integrated in their school system, thereby becoming at-risk students. Remediating this issue involves a strong presence of OOST programs. Evidence suggests that the social setting of after-school programs heavily affects an English learner's in-school performance (London, Guarantz, and Norman 2008).

Since EBBE includes an English learning component, ESOL students are able to utilize the highly-social English learning enrichment within the program to their advantage in both language acquisition and academics. The comprehensive vocabulary, reading, and writing practice students receive with the English learning component allows all students, especially ESOL students, to further hone their skills in English. Since younger K-5 students possess the ability to learn a second language more quickly and efficiently (Meulman, Wieling, Sprenger, Stowe, and Schmid 2015) than older students, and EBBE already has a pre-existing ESOL component, it is more effective to focus expansion efforts on the EBBE English language programming than to add an ESOL component to EBBM.

Finding 10: Procurement rules sometimes interfere with EBBE’s ability to retain teachers and non-profit recreational providers, inhibiting programmatic continuity.

Recommendation: Council staff should communicate with the Youth Program Director and EBB site coordinators to arrange exemptions of EBBE teachers and EBB providers from various procurement rules as needed.

Montgomery County’s procurement rules are designed to produce an ethical process free of conflicts of interest. Once a non-profit or individual has earned above \$10,000 from county contracts in a fiscal year, that non-profit or individual must go through additional regulatory hurdles in order to renew the pre-existing contract with the County. However, there are situations in which these regulatory hurdles can be too onerous for a small nonprofit or individual to navigate. If these small non-profits or individuals have special attributes that make them ideal for providing a particular service, their inability to continue providing that service may inhibit programmatic success. For this reason, the County Council has authorized specific exemptions to the procurement requirements for specific programs in a plethora of instances.

The EBBE program contracts MCPS teachers who teach normal-day classes at a school to serve as the instructors in the academic component of the EBBE programming at that school. Teacher feedback indicates that school-day teachers serving as OOST instructors maximizes academic benefits to students; teachers are able to use their knowledge of the student’s strengths and weaknesses from during the school day to tailor OOST instructional time to students’ needs, as well as verify that OOST instruction is aligned with the school-day curriculum. Therefore, ensuring that MCPS teachers who instruct students during the school day are able to instruct those same students in EBBE is an important programmatic goal. However, the EBBE site coordinator for Burnt Mills ES expressed to researchers that many teachers were nearing the \$10,000 limit; in order to continue teaching at the EBBE program, they would have to go through a complex process involving registering as an entity with the state of Maryland.

EBBE contracts nonprofit providers to carry out its recreational component. The EBBE program coordinator for Burnt Mills ES expressed to researchers that the children’s favorite activity was not going to be present during the next semester; the nonprofit provider that offered the activity had reached the \$10,000 limit and was unable to file the paperwork on-time to engage in the process for winning a “multi-line” contracts. Retaining enrichment activities that enthruse children is a significant programmatic consideration that ought to inform deliberations regarding the granting of exemptions to procurement requirements

Finding 11: Inability to secure MCPS bus transportation for some sites has prevented some at-risk students from participating in the EBBE program, according to administrators.

Recommendation: When deciding where to expand EBB programs, consider how the transportation situation at a proposed site might affect the ability of at-risk students to participate; when balancing spending on core OOST functions with spending on transportation under conditions of limited funding, keep in mind the need to maximize the number of EBB slots generated per dollar of funding.

MCPS administrators and the authors of the 2018 OLO report identify transportation availability as a significant barriers to EBB participation. While MCPS consistently provides transportation to and from schools at the beginning and end of the typical school day, “activity buses,” designed to provide transportation home for students who stay after school to participate in OOST programs,

are provided less frequently, usually 2-3 times per week. Some schools completely lack activity buses, primarily due to shortage of funds (OLO Report 2018-2). Low-income families with working parents, who generally benefit from using EBB for child care and enrichment purposes, tend to be reliant on school-provided transportation for their child. Transportation issues are thus barriers to some of the most vulnerable potential EBB participants, whose families are working full-time and are not able to arrange for child care and OOST programming from an outside source. Surveys of county-wide OOST providers and users reveal that transportation has prevented student participation in OOST programs across the county (OLO Report 2018-2).

Due to the finite funding limitations on County government, there may be situations in which every dollar allocated towards additional transportation to and from OOST programs is a dollar diverted from the OOST programs themselves. In attempting to balance funding for the core OOST functions and funding for OOST transportation, the Council should take into account where providing transportation is truly necessary to achieve program goals. Alternatively, to maximize the amount of EBB slots created per dollar of expansion funding, it may be optimal to prioritize EBB sites that would be accessible to at-risk students without additional spending on transportation over EBB sites that would require additional spending on transportation.

IV. OOST Programming Landscape in Selected Jurisdictions: Counties Similar to Montgomery County in Maryland, Northern Virginia, and Georgia

Programs in counties that are geographically or demographically similar to Montgomery County maintain many of the same goals as Montgomery County and seek to address many of the same needs. These goals include improving academic achievement, providing accessible programs, providing child care, supporting emotional and psychological development, and meeting the needs of low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, and ESOL students. Several of the programming methods used to achieve these goals and a description of the programs that employ these strategies are listed below. The programming we encountered can be divided into two categories: programs which appeal to a general audience of students, usually intended to provide child care for students of working parents, and programs which target specific groups of students and intend to meet a clear goal with regard to that group. While our selection is not fully representative of any of the counties, our researchers found that compared to targeted OOST programs, general audience OOST dominates the OOST landscape. Two other major programming categories of note are academic and recreational; while OOST created to provide child care or a safe space for students after school typically gravitates toward recreational programming, OOST that targets an achievement gap relies heavily on academic programming. Many OOST programs also employ both academic and recreational components to heighten student enthusiasm and enrichment.

Program elements found in programs designed for a general audience

(1) Program intent is to meet child care needs for students of working parents

These programs are designed to be widely implemented and open to all students. Their programming is generally simple, and thus cost-efficient and easily replicated across the district, and their marketing general, appealing to the interests and needs of the average student. Unlike EBB programming, which aims to increase accessibility by eliminating fees for parents, the following programs include participation fees.

School Aged Child Care in Anne Arundel County:

Provides recreational activities, snack, and homework time, a template that is simple enough to be implemented widely (across 36 elementary schools) and meet widespread need for childcare at the elementary level.

Beyond the Bell in Charles County:

Provides basic recreational activities, open gym time, and homework time. Intended to provide a safe place for middle school students after school.

After-School Program in Cherokee County:

Intended to provide a safe place after school for elementary school children, open to all students.

CASA Program in Loudoun County:

Intended to provide a safe place after school for elementary school children, open to all students.

- (2) *Program provides continuity between the classroom and OOST*

This programming element is characteristic of programs that include an academic component and concentrates on using OOST to fulfill needs identified during the day.

Hot Spots Extended Day Care Program in Harford County:

Programming designed to reinforce concepts and skills learned during the school day using a variety of different, sometimes experimental, teaching methods.

Program elements found in programs designed for specific audiences

Most OOST programs have very specific goals; those which are targeted at specific audiences tend to have the most pointed goals. Often, these programs aim to close an achievement gap of some sort and many target “at risk” or “vulnerable” youth. Methods of identification and recruitment of at risk students vary; the programs listed below use student demographics, county demographics, and school staff recommendations to identify their target audience.

The following programs employ one or more of the following programming strategies:

- (1) *program has a system for identifying and enrolling students from target audience*
- (2) *program has a parental involvement component*
- (3) *program provides continuity between the classroom and OOST*
- (4) *program supports development of life skills (non-academic)*
- (5) *program connects students to resources in the community*

Programs which include multiple strategies from this list can be considered comprehensive. Comprehensive programs approach their goals from many directions, channeling multiple parts of a student’s life toward the fulfillment of the program’s goals.

GEAR UP + Cohort Strategy in Clayton County:

Focuses on low-income youth, supports academic achievement and college readiness.

(programming component 1) Employs an “early learning warning system” in elementary school and testing in the 10th grade to identify at risk students or students with high academic need.

Black Student Achievement Program in Howard County:

Focuses on black students, includes academic achievement and college readiness support.

(programming components 2 and 3) Liaisons connect families, teachers, and students to keep all parties informed about student performance, progress, or potential problem areas.

(programming component 4) Supports wellness education and life skill development.

(programming component 5) Connects students to the community. Community members sometimes provide resources for students and student success is commemorated through a community ceremony.

Hispanic Achievement Program in Howard County:

Focuses on Hispanic students, includes a heavy language-learning component.

(programming component 2) Liaisons support parental involvement.

Youth Empowerment Services in Anne Arundel County:

Focuses on vulnerable low-income middle school students, supports psychological and academic development.

(programming component 1) Program targets students by providing services at two of the lowest-income schools in the county school district.

(programming component 4) Provides life skill development through mentoring, resilience education, substance abuse prevention education, and health and wellness education in addition to academic support.

Partners for Success in Frederick County:

Focuses on students with disabilities.

(programming component 2) Provides activities for students with disabilities and their parents to encourage parental involvement and empower parents and students who are affected by disabilities.

Expansion and Allocation of Resources

OOST programming is valuable, but often inhibited by limits in funding, time, and other valuable resources. The following cases of expansion decisions in Howard County consider issues relevant to EBB expansion in Montgomery County.

Hispanic Achievement Program in Howard County:

A primary objective of this program to develop the language skills of Hispanic students. After recognizing the existence of great need for language development in middle and high school aged students (who require much more rigorous supplementary programming than elementary aged students to develop language skills) as compared to elementary aged students, Howard County re-directed resources from the Hispanic Achievement Program toward upper-level students.

As EBB expands, Montgomery County must choose between EBBE and EBBM expansion. Like Howard County, it is important that Montgomery County be conscientious of where the greatest need exists and consider how impactful EBB can be for each respective age level (see Findings 2 and 4).

21st Century Grant Program in Stevens Forest Neighborhood in Howard County:

Howard County decided to situate a 21st Century Grant Program in the Stevens Forest neighborhood specifically because 100% of students in this neighborhood walk to school or take public transportation.

Because of Howard County's decision, funds in the Stevens Forest OOST program can all be allocated toward programming rather than toward transportation. The program is also very accessible (and thus likely to be better attended) because all students can travel to and from it. This strategy of targeting schools that require limited additional funds for transportation could be beneficial for EBB expansion (see Finding 11).

Situating EBB in the OOST Landscape

EBBE programming, which targets low-income and at-risk students falls into the second category of programming (focused on a particular group). Its strategy for identifying and recruiting students that fall into this target group, a referral system which involves teachers identifying at-risk students and reaching out to their families about enrollment, is a feature that emulates programming element 1, an important element for targeted programs, in a unique way. EBBE programming, like other targeted programs, is comprehensive in that in addition to having a system for identifying and enrolling students from the targeted audience it provides continuity between the school day and OOST (*programming element 3*, see Finding 7) and includes a parental involvement component (*programming element 2*, see Finding 6).

EBBM goals and programming strategies straddle the two categories. On one hand, it is targeted toward low-income and at-risk students. While it does not exclusively use a referral system like EBBE, it targets low-income and at-risk students by partially using a referral system and providing services in low-income schools. On the other hand, EBBM's programming is simple and general within the schools it serves; it provides a safe space for children after school. Programming of this type is characteristic of general audience OOST. While it is partially targeted and has been cited as a component in Montgomery County's efforts to close the achievement gap, EBBM is not a comprehensive targeted program.

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