Testimony for School District of Philadelphia Board of Education

Laura Johnson, Sunrise of Philadelphia

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Hello, my name is Laura Johnson. I serve as Deputy Executive Director of Sunrise of Philadelphia and a member of the Greater Philadelphia Extracurricular Collaborative (GPEC). The mission of Sunrise of Philadelphia is to support youth who face adversity to discover their strengths, experience success, and prepare for their future. Since Sunrise's founding in 1999, Sunrise has offered quality out-of-school time programming in partnership with neighborhood public schools across Philadelphia. The Sunrise approach unites caring staff, families, schools, and communities to help young people stay on track to high school graduation and connect to post-secondary opportunities.

Today, I am here as a member of the Greater Philadelphia Extracurricular Collaborative (GPEC) and I want to encourage Dr. Watlington and the School Board to establish an Office of Extracurricular Partnerships, which will allow the District to better meet Guardrail 2 to improve student outcomes. This office would serve as the primary point of contact for all out-of-school time (OST) providers working in Philadelphia schools across funding streams; would report to the superintendent; and would create a common table for District and City officials, principals, and OST providers to coordinate. You'll find a copy of our proposal attached.

I'd also like to introduce two diagrams (also attached that explain why the proposed Office of Extracurricular Partnerships is important. The diagrams show how OST providers and other stakeholders (like principals and the City) engage with the District. OST providers engage with the Office of Schools or the Office of Strategic Partnerships depending on their funding type. These District offices, then, liaise with six other District offices that all support OST operations. Yet, neither the Office of Schools nor Strategic Partnerships interface with the city officials, principals, and providers whose input ensures a program takes place.

In my work at Sunrise I interface with both the Office of Schools and the Office of School Partnerships for various programs that we offer. While Sunrise has strong relationships with both of those offices and values their support issues, miscommunications, and delays still occur often. This requires extra resources to be spent administratively at both the organizational level and at the school district to rectify issues and ensure that quality programming is able to continue.

Such redundancies and exclusions create conditions for miscommunication and inefficiency. Information is passed too many times to too many sources and key stakeholders (like principals) might not have the opportunity to relay important needs and changes that impact OST programming.

An Office of Extracurricular Partnerships that works with OST providers across funding streams, that reports to the superintendent, that creates a common stakeholder table - will make implementing OST programs better coordinated and more efficient.

Thank you,

Laura Johnson
Deputy Executive Director
Sunrise of Philadelphia
GPEC Leadership Team Member

Towards Equity, Coordination, and Collaborations

A Proposal for the Office of Extracurricular Partnerships at the School District of Philadelphia

## Introduction

The School District of Philadelphia has a long history of hosting extracurricular activities offered after- and before school, over the summer, and on breaks. Whether led by school staff, coaches, or community organizations, out-of-school time (OST) programs are an asset. Study after study show: students' academic performance improves when they participate in extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities capture students' imaginations, and when that happens, students are happier, healthier, and better able to learn.[i]

Because extracurricular activities create conditions for better learning, the School District of Philadelphia and the City of Philadelphia invest heavily in the OST ecosystem. This year, the District plans to spend $50 million on OST programs.[ii] The City of Philadelphia allocates another $42 million a year to complement the District's work.[iii] The Philadelphia Board of Education, further, adopted Guardrail 2 as part of its Goals and Guardrails framework. Aiming to provide students with a well-rounded education that includes opportunities to participate in the arts and athletics, Guardrail 2 recognizes the importance of OST programs to the District's academic success.

Given the District's interest in creating a robust OST network for Philadelphia schools, we encourage the Philadelphia School District to establish the Office of Extracurricular Partnerships. This is an office that serves as the primary point of contact for OST providers working in Philadelphia schools across funding streams. This is an office that allows the District to align its OST resources equitably and facilitate operational clarity among District offices, school staff, and OST providers themselves. We believe such an office will allow the District to use its current investments more efficiently and leverage more support towards its academic goals.

## Ongoing challenges to District-wide equity, communication, and coordination

In Philadelphia, we are fortunate to have a vast network of OST providers eager to help the District expand school supports so that students thrive. Yet, there is no single point of contact for OST providers working in Philadelphia schools across funding streams. OST programs run by the District report to the Office of Schools while providers with philanthropic or 21st Century

Community Learning Center grants work more closely with a number of offices including the Office of Strategic Partnerships, Athletics, and Arts. Several District offices communicate with the City of Philadelphia's Office of Children and Families but whether or not providers have direct lines to the City or District depends on funding streams. Further, to run school-based OST programs, all parties—from the City, to District, to providers across funding streams—must also collaborate with principals hosting OST providers at their schools to run school-based programs.

Absent a dedicated office to lead the coordination of OST programs, the District faces two challenges that undermine its commitment to equity and ability to serve Philadelphia students.

1. Challenges engendering the uneven distribution of OST programs across the District.

Because no office at the District keeps a comprehensive list of OST programs based at schools across Philadelphia, too much is left to individual efforts and chance when schools and OST programs partner. Without taking a macro perspective to the allocation of OST providers across Philadelphia schools, District offices, school staff, and OST providers struggle to execute a coherent strategy that directs resources, attention, and support to OST deserts across the city. They have no road map to guide where OST programs operate, little support for matching programs to a school's identified need. Their ability to leverage the necessary public and private funds for a given area is also hampered.

2. Challenges hindering operational clarity

As it stands, a single provider may have to interact with offices at the City, the District, and school to stand up programs throughout the year. Offices often have a different understanding of the procedures guiding program implementation, and so the involved parties are not likely to share a common understanding on protocols. In this context where multiple messages are communicated about, for example, the availability of funding or facilities, everyone's ability to deliver quality programs suffer. Much energy is spent on deciphering rules, less on serving students and families. At times, the School District and external partners discover operational challenges too late – after program implementation and student recruitment have started – which disrupts relationships with students and families.

The challenges detailed above will continue to hinder District efforts at implementing its Goals and Guardrails without the District's intervention. By establishing an Office of Extracurricular Partnerships, District resources can be used more effectively to create a holistic school community that tackles inequity and supports student learning for better academic outcomes.

**The Office of Extracurricular Partnerships: a general framework**

An Office of Extracurricular Partnerships can mitigate both resource inequities and operational challenges. Situated within the District, this office can take a bird's eye view to the allocation of extracurricular activities. It can identify schools that are in need of extra support and facilitate the relationship between principals and providers to align resources. Charged with coordinating District communications, the office can further give providers and schools one message that then guides program implementation.

When forming the Office of Extracurricular Partnerships, we urge the District take the following approaches. We believe our framework offers significant improvements to current District offices that interface with OST providers as well as to ongoing plans for establishing an office dedicated to OST programming. Should an Office of Extracurricular Partnership adopt the perspectives below, we believe the office will be better situated to improve the alignment of resources and operational clarity. The office will also be better prepared to help the District direct resources like philanthropic dollars to areas where students have great need.

1. The Office of Extracurricular Partnerships should have a regular line of communication to the superintendent and representation within his executive leadership.

2. The Office of Extracurricular Partnership should convene a stakeholder table that includes the City of Philadelphia, key District offices (like the Office of Schools, the Office of Strategic Partnerships, Athletics, and Arts) and OST providers themselves.

3. The Office of Extracurricular Partnerships should facilitate OST activities for providers across all funding streams and contract types so that the office works with OST programs run by the District or community organizations.

With these broad approaches in mind, we further recommend the Office of Extracurricular Partnerships assume the following responsibilities:

1. Coordinate OST program placement and school matching across the District.

   - Serve as a first point of contact for OST providers or initiatives looking to work with schools.

   - Facilitate introduction, relationship building, and communications between OST providers and school staff.

   - Work with SDP leadership across offices, as well as City and philanthropic partners to coordinate and align efforts so that resources can bolster OST programming at target schools.

- Maintain a comprehensive listing of extracurricular opportunities outside of the bell schedule at each school, including both teacher- and community-led offerings, inclusive of all funding sources or payment arrangements.

2. Facilitate engagement with OST providers across funding streams, the City, District offices and individual schools.

- Develop and maintain stakeholder groups to increase shared understanding of District protocols and to solicit input that inform District strategy and problem solving.

- Assist with operational coordination as needed regarding facilities, meals, enrollment, etc.

## OST providers can help

In creating the Office of Extracurricular Partnerships, we ask that you consider all OST providers partners in the process. Due to contract structures and funding streams lying outside the District, many OST providers are seen as vendors to the District. While this is technically true, we believe this perspective to be misleading. Regardless of funding stream, OST providers are de facto partners. We want sustained collaboration and engagement that yield long-term commitments and processes accommodating all stakeholders' needs. We invite the School District to establish the Office of Extracurricular Partnerships with an eye to partnerships across the OST sector. Together we can ensure all students, regardless of need, have access to OST programs that are well run and built to last.

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**The Greater Philadelphia Extracurricular Collaborative (GPEC)** is a robust network of OST providers, allied funders, and OST system partners operating in Philadelphia and its outlying counties. We want children and youth to have equitable access to high-quality extracurricular programming that advances learning and development while supporting families. We began meeting at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to share resources and troubleshoot problems. Since then, we have gleaned new lessons and best practices that we believe can help the School District leverage a broader OST network to its ends.

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[i] "Benefits for Youth, Families, and Communities," Youth.Gov, accessed May 13, 2022, https://youth.gov/youth-topics/afterschool-programs/benefits-youth-families-and-communities.

GPEC

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"CDC Healthy Schools: Out of School Time Supports Student Health and Learning," CDC, revised May 14, 2021, https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/ost.htm.

Jennifer McCombs, Anamarie Whitaker, Paul Yoo, "The Value of Out-of-School Time Programs," Rand Corporation, 2017, accessed April 22, 2022.

"Supporting Student Success Through Afterschool Programs," National Conference of State Legislatures, May 2, 2022, https://www.ncsl.org/research/education/expanding-learning-opportunities-through-afterschool-programs.aspx#:~:text=Consistent%20participation%20in%20afterschool%20programs,college%20and%20career%2Dneeded%20skills.

[ii] Philadelphia Board of Education Action Item, "Contracts with Various Vendors – After-school Enrichment Opportunities and Tutoring Services," October 28, 2021.

[iii] Tracey Hartmann, Rachel Comly, Molly Crofton, Kendra Strouf, "Scanning the System: Support for Quality Programming in Philadelphia's Out-of-School Time," Research for Action, Accessed May 3, 2022.

# Two distinct chains of command for OST programs creates inefficiency

District & ARP funded
OST groups

Philanthropic & 21st century funded
OST groups

**Chief Office of Schools**

**Office of Strategic Partnerships**

Liaises with:
Office of Grant Compliance &
Fiscal Services,
Office of Operations,
Office of Risk Management,
Office of Employee Records,
Office of Evaluation & Research,
Office of Information Technology
& Data Management,
Office of Strategic Partnerships

Liaises with:
Office of Grant Compliance &
Fiscal Services,
Office of Operations,
Office of Risk Management,
Office of Employee Records,
Office of Evaluation & Research,
Office of Information Technology
& Data Management,
Office of Grant Development,
Office of Athletics
Office of Arts & Learning

**Stakeholders whose lines of
communication are inconsistent or
unclear:**
Office of Children & Families
Principals

**Stakeholders whose lines of
communication are inconsistent or
unclear:**
Chief Office of Schools
Office of Children & Families,
Principals

# Two distinct chains of command for OST providers creates inefficiency



OST Provider

Philanthropic or 21st century funded

District or ARP funded

Office of Arts & Learning

Office of Athletics

Office of Strategic Partnerships

Principals

Chief Office of Schools

Office of Grant Compliance & Fiscal Services, Office of Operations, Office of Risk Management, Office of Employee Records, Office of Evaluation & Research, Office of Information Technology & Data Management

Office of Children & Families