Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success

A Family Engagement Initiative Pilot in School-Based Afterschool Programs

Final Report to the Michigan Department of Education

May, 2015

MICHIGAN
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Education

Michigan
21st Century
Community
Learning Centers

Soaring Beyond Expectations

I.   Introduction

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) programs were created to provide academic and enrichment opportunities and educational development for students and families during non-school hours. The MDE stipulates that 21st CCLC grantees involve families in afterschool programming as well as providing literacy and related educational services directly to adult family members when grantees demonstrate need (Michigan Department of Education, 2014). However, involving families has been a challenge for many out-of-school time programs (Cavanagh, 2012). MDE's 21st CCLC 2010-11 annual report showed that only 36% of the MDE programs required family involvement of all students in the program (Reed, Van Egeren, & Bates, 2012).

With the purpose of increasing the amount and intentionality of family engagement in 21st CCLC programs, MDE commissioned the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality to design, implement, and evaluate a family engagement pilot with selected 21st CCLC programs. The project included two primary elements: Design of a family engagement initiative and a proof of concept pilot in a small number of sites to learn more about both the efficacy of the initiative design concept and feasibility of implementation in 21st CCLC sites. Key evaluative questions were: Did the initiative concept produce the intended staff practices and youth experiences? Could the initiative be implemented feasibly? Was the experience received with high customer satisfaction from stakeholders (e.g., families, afterschool program staff and managers, school personnel, etc.)?

The positive value of a family's engagement[1] in a child's education is a tenant widely shared by policy makers, educators and researchers (D'Angelo, Rich, & Kohm, 2012; Kreider, Caspe, Kennedy, & Weiss, 2007; Redding, Murphy, & Sheley, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). A substantial evidence base exists to suggest that family engagement and afterschool programs are likely an effective combination: Family engagement in children's education at home, school, and afterschool (Afterschool Alliance, 2008; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Kreider et al., 2007; Mo & Singh, 2008) and youth participation in enriching afterschool programs have both been shown to foster a wide range of school success outcomes (Durlak & Weissberg, 2010). Further, afterschool programs are perhaps uniquely positioned to link youth, families, schools, and communities and are increasingly focused on engaging parents (Harris, Rosenberg, & Wallace, 2012). Finally, their structure and more holistic developmental purposes often make afterschool programs accessible and approachable to both youth and their families, suggesting that in cases where families are not able to provide school supports, afterschool program staff may act as a

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[1] We prefer the term *family engagement (cf Ferlazzo, 2011)* as *engagement* connotes a more collaborative "doing with" and *family* recognizes the caregivers engaged may include others besides parents. However, we will refer to research using the terminology presented in the literature and are not making distinctions in meaning among terms *parental involvement*, *family involvement* or *family engagement*.

substitute for some important youth experiences of family engagement (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003). This intervention uses the afterschool service to produce youth experience of family engagement and to engage the youth as an active producer of their own families' engagement in successful transition to secondary education.

II.   The Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success Initiative

In this section we describe (1) the theory of action for the initiative design, and (2) the Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success initiative elements and delivery sequence.

Theory of Action

The middle school years are a transitional period. In addition to the physical, mental and emotional changes that emerge in fits and starts in early adolescence, middle school academics and structure demand more of youth in a setting that may not be well suited to their developmental needs (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). For some youth, motivation, self-esteem and engagement in school go down at the same time the stakes go up. Middle school students tend to be self-absorbed and caught up in the moment, but they are on the cusp of being able to engage in more abstract thinking and envision their future selves (Wood, 1997). One premise for this intervention was that, with scaffolding and substantial support, middle school youth may be able to engage in the adolescent task of identity exploration (Erikson, 1968) towards the motivating potential of orienting toward their future selves. The rationale for selecting this age group for the intervention is threefold: a) families may be more motivated to get support and information when their children are undergoing rapid change and increased risk, b) already involved families tend to decrease involvement during middle school and may be open to an alternative avenue for involvement, and c) increasing future orientation, academic motivation and academic support as early as possible may change youths' trajectory in the crucial high school years.

Our theory (see Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Steinberg, Darling, & Fletcher, 1995) posits more likely effects as the multiple environments in the lives of youth align and connect around these three types of supports. We aimed to utilize the unique position of afterschool programs to increase family engagement effects by reinforcing positive youth experiences across settings (home, school, afterschool).

The theory of action was developed in consultation with expert practitioners and with a review of relevant literature which is included as Appendix A. The theory is described in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 describes three concentric circles. The outer circle includes the implementing agents in the settings which are linked through the initiative – home, afterschool program, school day classrooms, and other community settings. The middle circle describes the core processes that implementation of the initiative

implies. The three core processes include: Positive developmental experiences and environments, Increased supports for schooling, and Academic socialization. Finally the inner circle is the ultimately desired outcomes related to youth school success.

Figure 1.
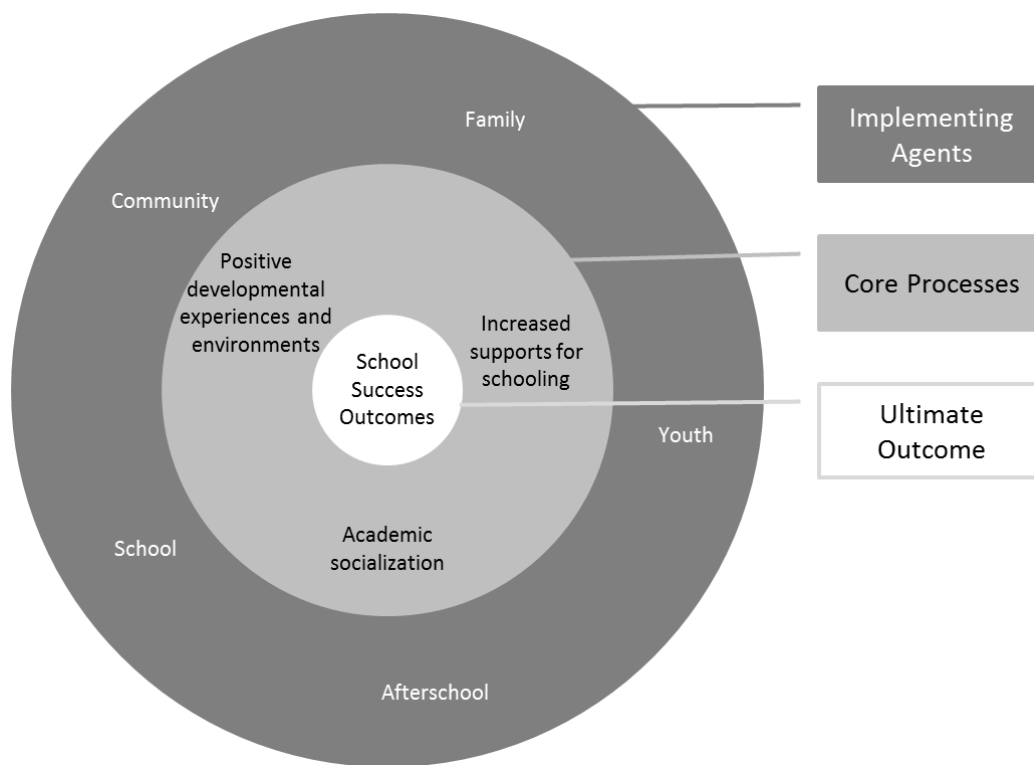
Graphic model of intervention processes

Figure 2 provides further detail on the middle ring – describing the design elements, staff practices, and key youth experiences that constitute the core processes of the initiative. The staff practices[2] are intended to activate the core processes in afterschool settings. The initiative gives youth, their families and afterschool staff coaching, social support, tools, and shared language and experiences centered on these core processes. While in Figure 2 the core processes are displayed as three separate processes, in reality, they are interdependent and interwoven throughout the program.

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[2] Staff practices refers to strategies or activities implemented by staff designed to produce certain specific youth experiences. The phrase "staff practices" in this usage could also be referred to as "best" or "promising" practices in the sense that we conferred with expert practitioners and relevant evidence to select the staff practices.

Figure 2

Theory of Action for the Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success Initiative

Program Design	Afterschool Staff Practices	Key Youth Experiences

Core Process 1: Positive developmental experiences and environments

a) Afterschool staff provide high quality instruction, as measured by the Youth PQA b) Afterschool staff and families receive training on adolescent development	c) Afterschool staff provide coaching for families on positive communication strategies d) Afterschool staff connect youth and families to sports, clubs, and activities at the high school or in the wider community	e) More opportunities for belonging, choice, collaboration and leadership; supportive, caring adults; and creative and engaging activities f) Student knowledge of and connection to adults leading high school activities

Core Process 2: Increased supports for schooling

g) School provides liaison to increase communication between school staff, afterschool staff, and families h) School makes grades, assignments, attendance, and behavior available to families and afterschool staff online or on a regular basis	i) Afterschool staff access grades, behavior, and attendance and support family monitoring and advocacy for youth's school success j) Afterschool staff support communication between school staff and families for networking, parent voice and parent education k) Afterschool staff communicate with school about curriculum and professional development opportunities	l) More frequent monitoring and advocacy m) Greater family knowledge of school performance n) More time on academic support during afterschool program

Core Process 3: Academic socialization

o) School staff leads presentation for families and afterschool staff on educational provisions and requirements p) Afterschool staff adapts and implements Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success Curriculum	q) Afterschool staff engage youth in activities that foster self-awareness and future orientation, including: o Building knowledge of careers and education pathways o Assessing 21st Century skills and identifying strengths o Youth-led conferences on plans for the future	r) Planning for local education pathways and careers s) Identifying skills strengths t) Youth present their future plans in a youth-led conference with family u) Youth discuss academic pathways with family

Supports for Implementation

v) Introductory webinar and day-long training for afterschool staff and school representative prior to program launch w) Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success Curriculum (i.e., activity guides and materials) x) Technical assistance and implementation supports for lead Afterschool staff from a coach

Initiative Elements and Implementation Sequence

The Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success initiative is summarized in Figure 2. In general, the program design elements create a rich environment focused on student school success. Meanwhile, afterschool staff implements practices to create key youth experiences that have been shown to foster school success. Use of the Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success curriculum facilitates the implementation of many of the design elements, staff practices, and key youth experiences. Supports for implementation include training and technical assistance provided to participating sites.

Initiative Elements

Three initiative elements—curriculum, school connections, and supports for implementation—are each described below. Table 1 presents the implementation sequence.

Curriculum. The Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success: Youth, Families, and Schools Aligned and Connected curriculum was developed based on a review of the literature (see Appendix A) and input from expert practitioners. The curriculum was designed around six themes with activities for youth and families to be implemented over the course of six to eight weeks. Most of the curricular activities are intended to engage youth in activities that foster self-awareness and future orientation, and to provide coaching for families on positive communication strategies. The curriculum contains lesson plans, activity descriptions, handouts, agendas, and program materials and was provided to the site staff upon enrollment in the initiative. Generally, one theme is introduced each week, although sites can extend the program using the optional activities provided, if desired. A few themes contain plans for joint family and youth activities. Meals and time to socialize with other families was part of the family program. A summary of the curricular activities and their connection to the core processes are detailed in Appendix B.

School connections. In order to implement ongoing academic support aligned and connected with school day content, certain organizational supports were required by the participating school. The school had to provide online access to youth grades and/or assignments to youth, families and afterschool staff. Also, a designated school liaison—a counselor or school social worker—was needed to support communication between school day and afterschool staff and advocate for youth. This liaison was asked to present at an information session for afterschool staff and families on educational provisions and requirements for academic success in high school. The afterschool program also had to have the support of the school administration and a 21st CCLC project director.

Supports for implementation. Participating sites attended an introductory one-hour webinar and day-long training prior to program launch. Participation at these training events was required by the program director, site lead, and a school representative for each site. Prior to the training, sites received the Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success Curriculum (i.e., activity guides and materials).

Technical assistance and implementation supports (e.g., initial and contingency planning, problem solving, phone and email check-ins) were provided to the lead afterschool staff from a Weikart Center coach. Also, during the first unit of the curriculum, a Weikart Center representative delivered a training on adolescent development to afterschool staff and participating families at each site.

Table 1

Implementation Sequence

Date	Activity
Before August 2, 2013	Site application process; Sites get statement of support from school staff; School liaison identified
August 29, 2013	Introductory Webinar Training
September 18, 2013	One-day Live Training; Curriculum provided
October 11, 2013 – December 13, 2013*	Afterschool staff implement curriculum
During first unit	One-hour Training on adolescent development
During second unit	Afterschool staff and families receive access to school grades, behavior, attendance records
During fifth unit	School liaison leads presentation on academic provisions and requirements

This was the target date. Inclement weather and extenuating circumstances altered the final implementation dates at several sites.

III.   Evaluation of the Pilot

Pilot Participants

Recruitment of Afterschool Programs. In order to be selected to participate in the pilot, afterschool programs needed to: Serve middle school youth; demonstrate existing family engagement efforts, have cooperative relationships between afterschool and school day staff; have site coordinator and a representative of the school attend the one-day training; commit to implementing a minimum of eight weeks of programming including a kick-off and final celebration meeting; and finally, collect evaluation data. The sites submitted an application documenting their ability to meet these criteria. Three sites participated in the pilot, from seven sites that submitted an application.

Recruitment of Youth and Family Participants. Sites were charged with recruiting families to participate in the program during the school year. For the purposes of the pilot program, the recruitment strategy was to invite and recruit families that were likely to be able to commit and follow through on a 6-8 week program. These families would tend to be families that were already involved with their children's schooling or school activities. Sites were given coaching and customizable recruitment flyers and strategies and suggestions for recruitment. Families were invited to a kick-off meeting at each site to learn

more about the project. The sites also worked to increase family engagement by removing barriers to participation—picking a time when more family members were available, providing food, child care or transportation assistance. We received enrollment forms for six families from Site A, seven from Site B, and three from Site C. Four additional families participated at Site C, but did not return family enrollment forms. Some families had more than one child in the program and in a few cases a family was represented by both parents. See Table 2, below.

Table 2
Number of participants at each site

Site	Families participating	Students participating
Site A	7	8
Site B	7	9
Site C	7	8

Data collection

Data was collected from families, students, site coordinators and staff before, throughout and after implementation. Extensive application forms (from site coordinators, project directors and school administrators) and enrollment forms from participating families provided baseline data. The families were asked to fill out session evaluation forms after each meeting. Surveys for students, site coordinators, afterschool staff and school liaisons were designed to be filled out at the final celebration/debrief session. At the final family meeting for each site, Weikart Center staff also conducted focus group sessions and activities designed to collect more qualitative feedback from participants. However, as inclement weather and program delays cancelled or greatly delayed this planned final celebration at two of the sites, phone interviews and online surveys were substituted for those sites. Staff at each site were interviewed after the pilot.

Table 3
Sources of data collected by site

Data Source	Site A	Site B	Site C
Site Application	1	1	1
Family Enrollment Application	6	7	3
Session Evaluation Forms	18	13	3
Post Family Survey	6	4	3
Post Youth Survey	6	5	7
Post Site Staff Survey	1	3	2
Family Focus Group	1	0	0
Youth Focus Group	1	0	0
Family & Youth Focus Group (3 month post-initiative)	0	1	0
Post Youth Interview	0	3	0
Post Family Interview	0	1	0
Post Site Staff Interview	3	2	2

Results

Implementation Variations by Site

   Overall implementation of the three initiative elements—curriculum, school connections and supports for implementation—was satisfactory for all three sites. Table 4 displays the implementation of these elements across the core processes from Figure 2. However, implementation looked considerably different across the three sites due to leadership, school support, and inclement weather. Below the table, we describe the story of implementation at each site individually to shed light on the site characteristics that affect implementation, outcomes, and the feasibility of the initiative.

Table 4
Program design elements and supports implemented by site

	Site A	Site B	Site C
Core Process 1: Positive Developmental Experiences and Environments			
a) Afterschool staff provide high quality instruction, as measured by Youth PQA*	3.72*	2.75*	3.36*
b) Afterschool staff and families receive training on adolescent development	yes	yes	yes
Core Process 2: Increased supports for schooling			
g) School provides liaison to increase communication between school staff, afterschool staff and families	yes	yes	yes
h) School makes grades, assignments, attendance, and behavior available to families and afterschool staff online or on a regular basis			
School makes grades accessible to afterschool staff	yes	yes	yes
Assignments accessible to families and students online	yes	yes	no
Afterschool staff at school 3-6 hours during school day	yes	yes	yes
Afterschool site coordinator communicates daily with school day staff	yes	yes	yes
Site coordinator communicates with school day staff about all students in program	no	yes	yes
Core Process 3:Academic Socialization			
o) School staff leads presentation for families and afterschool staff on educational provisions and requirements	yes	adapted	yes
p) Afterschool staff adapts and implements Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success curriculum	yes	yes	yes
Supports for Implementation			
u) Introductory webinar and day-long training for afterschool staff and school representative prior to program launch	yes	Different staff attended training than led initiative	No school representative present
v) Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success Curriculum (i.e., activity guides and materials)	yes	yes	yes
w) Technical assistance and implementation supports for lead Afterschool staff from a coach	yes	yes	yes

* External assessments of program quality were conducted during November and December of 2013 independently of this pilot. Youth PQA Instructional Total Scores are computed by averaging the Supportive Environment, Interaction, and Engagement domain scores. A national norm sample indicates an average Instructional Total Score of 3.23

Site A. The Site A program is a mature and motivated program with strong leadership and an experienced site coordinator as their lead for the project. The site coordinator pursued participation in the Navigating Your Way pilot, and the team had met prior to the training to begin planning. The site coordinator, assistant project director and school liaison attended the training in September and had done the preparation assignment. They also had surveyed families about potential interest at the beginning of school year during the enrollment process for the afterschool program and came in with ideas of families to recruit, intentionally selecting motivated families likely to be committed or invested in the program. They left the training with a date secured for the first family meeting. They started and finished on schedule—the initiative began at the end of October, 2013 and all of the units, celebration, and data collection were completed before December 13, 2013. The school liaison actively participated in attending sessions and contacting family members and school staff. The assistant project director also attended four of the sessions. One program leader who knew the youth well led all the youth sessions, while the site coordinator led the family sessions. Planning sessions were held each week with youth leaders and the site coordinator.

At Site A, for the "This is Me" projects, they integrated a program-wide goal of supporting the youth in use of technology by having the youth create slide presentations created on iPads—a motivating incentive for the youth. The youth worked on their presentation each week and used the slide deck in the youth-led conference with their family members. The youth-led conferences were scheduled to occur on the same evening, facilitated by different staff members. At the follow-up celebration a week later, youth and family members voluntarily stood and added testimonials about their appreciation of the program during introductions. The integration of technology into the project helped Site A to combine two program goals – family engagement and technology – into one initiative.

Site A's experienced site coordinator embraced the curriculum and had a vision of how the project could benefit the afterschool programs goals for the year. The project director involved was very supportive making the implementation high quality—smooth, on schedule and effectively delivered.

Site B. For Site B, the original project lead identified for the project could not attend the training, but the Assistant Project Director attended in her place, along with the site coordinator and school liaison. As the implementation process began at the program site, the project lead identified on the application was assigned additional outside responsibilities and was not able to fulfill the duties of the role. However, by late October, roles were reassigned and clarified and implementation of the program improved and the site coordinator became the project lead for Site B. He had attended the training with the other team members and led the project, along with the school liaison and the support of the assistant project director. Site B elected to modify the initiative by having the all of the youth in the program do the youth

activities during the afterschool program. Nine of those students participated in the full initiative with their family members.

They finished units one through five before break, but didn't start the "This is Me" at the beginning of the initiative as designed and needed to finish the "This is Me" projects and schedule and finish the youth-led conferences in January. Three planned celebration and feedback sessions were postponed due to snow days and poor weather conditions. A modified celebration and feedback session was ultimately scheduled for April when weather was presumed not to be a factor. In spite of the three month delay following the official end of the program, four family members and youth attended the celebration and participated in a focus group, including one grandfather who came in spite of the fact that his two granddaughters were not able to attend at that time. Although the time lapse between the end of the sessions and the celebration was not part of the original plan, the delay allowed for an assessment of lasting effects of the program that would not have happened otherwise. These findings are shared later in this report.

Site C. The implementation process for the Site C program was a challenge for various reasons. Multiple meeting postponements due to inclement weather impaired timely completion of the pilot. Implementation at Site C was also impeded by lack of trained, experienced, and/or consistently available staff and support staff. The site coordinator and the project director attended the training, but the training participants had to depart early due to school obligations. A representative from the school was unable to attend the training which we felt affected the school's minimal support the Navigating Your Way pilot. School administrative support may have been affected by the school principal being on leave for an extended period. The site coordinator, a first year program manager, lacked the organizational and prioritization skills needed to properly implement the program. During weekly check-in calls and emails with the coach, the site coordinator seemed to have a clear understanding of the tasks and time required to successful implement the program. However, the lack of experience and time management skills hampered the full program implementation. The site coordinator had difficulty in coordinating session times with other evening activities that were sponsored by the school. The first session of the Navigating Your Way pilot, unit one, started late and was cut short—the room was not immediately available, the site coordinator and project director arrived after the scheduled start time. The project director arranged and brought food to the first family meeting, but was not closely involved thereafter. Only a few of the families signed up were there, so the site coordinator talked about rescheduling for families not able to attend and giving them the information as it provided foundational content for the remaining sessions. The facilitator for the student sessions was absent several days due to family emergencies. Therefore, the site coordinator ended up facilitating an abbreviated version of the activities with the youth for one session.

Site C also struggled to collect the required data. The Weikart Center guest speaker for unit one collected three feedback forms from the attendees, but feedback forms from the other units were not received. Online surveys were submitted by three family members. The Weikart Center conducted interviews with the site coordinator and project director, but focus groups or interviews with family members and students were not conducted due to scheduling conflicts.

After much rescheduling and numerous missed deadlines Site C completed the units by the end of March. The site coordinator was determined to complete the pilot initiative despite all the challenges. The project director's support was instrumental in making sure the site coordinator was able to complete pilot program by assisting with the deadlines. They did not have the intended celebration and focus group session with the families due to delayed timelines and scheduling. However, the Weikart Center coach did provide a mini-celebration of cupcakes and certificates for participants at a Site C Town Hall parent meeting in April.

Analysis of the variation in implementation reinforces the importance of site readiness and resources as requisites for successful implementation. Administrative supports and resources at the site level are critical. Site coordinators and the implementation team should be invested and experienced and have a minimum of two-three hours to devote to preparation each week, including time for dinner logistics, preparing activities, reviewing content and arranging building logistics. The program staff who led the youth activities also need to be trained and should be consistent for the duration of the program. Active planning and involvement by the school liaison and the project director are key factors to success as well.

Customer Satisfaction

Overall satisfaction. Overall, participating sites, families and youth expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the Navigating your Way initiative. Families and youth from Site A both said at the final celebration that they wished the program could continue and during introductions spontaneously expressed how much the program meant to them. Asked if they gained valuable knowledge and/or developed valuable skills, all family participants responding from these sites (N = 5) said "to a great extent." Of those responding, 80% said the initiative *to a great extent* was a "good use of my time and effort" and one responded *to some extent*. The youth agreed. The vast majority of those responding (83%) said it was a good use of their time and effort to some extent (33%) or to a great extent (50%). One parent said, "love everything this program does." All of the youth responding indicated they learned something that would help them *to some extent* or *to a great extent*. Half the staff responding said the program was worth their time and effort *to a great extent* and half said *to some extent*. Most participants indicated on the enrollment form that they would like more interaction with other parents or families. One family

member added "assuming they have similar goals." They were looking for encouragement, support for homework, or valued the collective impact of families coming together. The post-intervention surveys of families reported valuing the interaction with other families and the support for homework and schooling they received. Families from Site A expressed wishes that the program didn't have to end.

Youth satisfaction. Youth feedback on the surveys and in focus groups and interviews was positive. "It shows me to be responsible." "It will teach me to be smarter, wiser." "I think everybody should have did [sic] this because it helped people in your future. It helped you a little bit like -- what you want to do in life."

Satisfaction with Curriculum Content and Design. Generally, family feedback on the content was also very positive. On the qualitative section of the post-workshop evaluations, 70% of the families wrote "nothing," "n/a" "liked everything" or equivalent when asked what they disliked. An additional 12% said not having enough time was what they disliked. In the post-workshop evaluation and in focus groups families reported valuing the personality tests and resulting discussions: "Loved everything," "gave me insight into my child's personality with respect to my own," "this was the most useful meeting," " My kid enjoys these times with me and I enjoy debating/discussing with him—typically when we're in the car."

Multiple times staff implementing Navigating Your Way expressed appreciation for the design of the curriculum—it came complete with detailed agendas, lesson materials and optional activities. One site coordinator said the personality theme was the most impactful, another said soft or 21st century skills for the youth and educational pathways for the families. However, staff reported some of the younger students struggled with worksheets comparing and contrasting careers, and a game involving money and paying bills. Staff at one site reported not liking the 21st century skills theme as well, partially due to misplaced expectations due to the label "21st century skills." Staff had varied feedback about the educational pathways theme. A few activities were adapted. Site B already provided youth and families with extensive orientation to high school and the afterschool program and only had one eighth grade student, so they did not have high school counselors come in. That site used college-age staff to talk about high school educational requirements and other preparation for college. Site A reported very positive responses to the information about educational pathways and the visit from a high school staff person, but thought presenting the information in the spring would have been even more effective. In terms of the design of the intervention, a number of family members expressed a desire for more time for interaction with each other and more joint time with the youth. One site did the personality theme as a joint activity with youth and families together and reported it went well.

The youth-led conferences were designed to be the culminating event of the initiative. Fidelity in implementing the program appeared to be the key to success here. Where staff prepped youth and families and began work on the "This is Me" projects from the beginning of the program as specified in the

curriculum, the youth-led conferences flowed well and sometimes went past the allotted time and were even reported as inspirational by one observer. Where the "This is Me" projects were not introduced until late in the program and staff did not practice or coach the youth ahead of time, the conferences, according to staff, "didn't feel fluid" and parents did a lot of the talking. Families from each site were positive about the youth-led conferences. A Site A family member valued "Watching my son be engaged and very excited about his future." A Site B program family member reported finding out "what my child wanted to do and how I can help." A Site C parent said "Seeing my son present his thoughts and ideas about his life was really cool." Most of the youth valued the opportunity to express themselves, particularly their personalities, their "specialties" or career goals, although two surveyed said "barely anything" was useful about the conferences.

Social support for families.

Families reported experiencing social support through participation in Navigating Your Way. Family members from all three sites expressed the value of sharing with other parents or wanting more time to socialize or share with other parents:

- "I like this program a lot because you were able to talk with other parents and get different tips and ideas as far as what they did with their child to get things going, as far as their goals…Just having support was really nice." – Site B parent
- "More frequent—I would love to see a parent only group." – Site B parent
- "You don't have to be as cautious in a group like this as you would with like your [laughs] neighbor." – Site B parent
- "the more parents are involved, I think it would keep us all motivated" –Site A parent.
- "I would appreciate these types of supports for daughter who is in high school. If I had had this type of support for her 9th and 10th grade year, I would of felt more prepared." – Site B parent

Key Youth and Family Experiences

Communication. The Navigating Your Way program was designed to increase communication between afterschool programs, schools, families and youth (Core Process 2). Communication is a needed element for academic socialization (Core Process 3) and improvements in family/child relationships (Core Process 1). The presumption behind the design of this program was that it is easier or more convenient for parents or guardians to communicate with afterschool staff than with school staff, at least at the middle school level. This assumption proved correct. According to the site and family applications, almost twice as many families communicate weekly with afterschool staff than with school day staff. Although very few families communicate with school day staff daily, daily communication is common with afterschool staff (see Table 5 below).

Table 5
Post Survey: How often families communicate with…
(N=12)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
Afterschool staff	67%	36%	--
Teachers, school staff	8%	67%	25%

On post surveys all youth and family members reported increased communication about the value of education as a result of the program. Family members and youth also reported increased communication on other topics related to academic socialization—see Tables 6 and 7 for percentages by topic and reporter. ." Most families seemed satisfied with the level of communication between afterschool staff and school day staff, one family member noting that afterschool staff can be counted on to "be on him" if there are missing assignments. However, one person commented "love everything that this program does. The only improvement would be more direct communication between teachers and after school program administrators Family members were grateful for the additional avenues of communication the afterschool program provides:

> I think an afterschool program helps a lot towards navigating my child's success in school and in life because he has staff there to help him get through his homework and his life issues, good or bad. He has those same adults that he is able to talk to if he has an issue and doesn't feel he can talk to anyone at home. Sometimes as a middle schooler it is hard to open up about certain topics to a parent, and to have a responsible adult available can't be a bad thing.

Table 6
Family responses to "As a result of this Family Engagement Initiative, have you had more conversations with your children that…."
(N=11)

Topic	Percent
Convey value of education	100%
Involve discussion of learning strategies	100%
Involve making and supporting youth plans and preparations for the future	100%
Convey belief child is capable of success through effort	100%

Table 7
Youth responses to "As a result of this program have you had more conversations with your family that…."
(N=17)

Topic	Percent
Help you see the value of education	100%
Help you see that you can meet your goals if you work hard	82%
Help you to understand how you learn	71%
Help you to make plans for the future	71%

One staff member interviewed said that "since this program, and since we've met with those parents that were in the program, they've reached out to me a lot more." School liaisons at Site A and Site B – a school social worker and teacher consultant – reported communicating with both teachers and parents about youth who had work to make up or whose grades were suffering, including family-initiated contact.

Family Communication with Youth. Better communication between adult family members and their children was the most notable and frequently expressed outcome of Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success. Both youth and family members emphasized this in focus group, interview and survey responses. In addition to more conversations around the specific topics or content of the initiative presented above, both youth and their family members reported more general improvements in communication. (See Table 8). These helped fuel better relationships. In response to "how has this initiative stretched or changed your relationship with your child?" parents noted it was "better", "It shows my child that we're all on the same page. We all want what's best for him," and "She was already positive, but it teaches her to focus and open her mind to all limits." About the student-led conference, one Site C student said, "It was my turn to talk and I liked that."

Table 8
Examples of improvements in communication

Adults	Youth
"[We] talk to each other with respect" "Because [before] I only saw it from the parent's side, like you said, yelling and screaming…I just feel like now it is easier." He's much more open to things…we just have better tools for discussions."	"It kind of helps to be able to talk to my mom, one-on-one and be able to address thoughts—what she's been thinking about and what I've been thinking about." "It kind of helped me communicate with my parents, my mom and dad, about what's been going on in school. If I've been having problems or, you know, things that come up in my mind…communicate them and kind of figure it out."

Academic Socialization

Future orientation. The theory of change linked staff practices that fostered self-awareness and future orientation to improved academic outcomes. Academic socialization promotes aspirations and effort toward future success. Most of the activities helped youth focus on their future and promoted self-awareness. As outputs, the vast majority of the youth (73%-91%) reported they knew how their personal strengths and interest match up with possible careers, understand the academic choices and behaviors that will lead to success, were motivated to pay attention and do well in school and had goals for their future. One youth relayed that he "learned there are possible classes for politics and economics" that supported his career aspirations. As previously noted, youth had more conversations with their families about school

performance or content. Additionally, the youth-led conferences allowed families and youth to engage around the youth's goals, plans, and self-expression in a supported environment.

Youth led conferences. The youth-led conferences themselves were expressions of academic socialization—conversations around schooling, aspirations and goals. In addition, family members gained information needed to support ongoing academic socialization in the home. When asked "What worked well about the youth-led conferences?" family members replied:

- "Watching my son be engaged and very excited about his future."
- "Learned about what my child wants to do with her life."
- "Learn things you might know, things you might not know."
- "Found out what my child wanted to do and how I can help."

IV. Discussion and Recommendations

School or afterschool efforts around increasing family engagement often focus on getting families to attend isolated events, getting families to volunteer, or encouraging families to work with their children at home. Sometimes schools will offer information on how to be a better parent. This initiative takes a different approach, providing a cohesive and coordinated combination of supports and activities oriented around three core processes: providing positive developmental experiences, increasing supports for schooling, and providing academic socialization. Program quality assessments conducted independently of the pilot provide evidence of average quality programming based on national sample norms. The schools provided information to support family monitoring of school progress linking families, afterschool and school. The curriculum primarily focuses on offering positive developmental experiences oriented towards academic socialization. This occurs as youth and families participate in joint or parallel activities that provide them with a shared language and common topics—encouraging constructive talk about identity-related topics and harnessing that identity exploration towards academic motivation and goals. The youth and family activities progress toward a culminating youth-led conference. This provides youth with a supported opportunity to practice developmentally important skills and families with a supported opportunity to practice—and transition, if need be—to appropriately autonomy-supportive family dynamics.

This pilot demonstrates that combining career exploration, personality and skills assessment, and family engagement—while utilizing the unique potential of the afterschool program to connect and align schools, youth, families and communities—is an approach that can positively affect youth and their families, even after the program is over. Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success was well received by families and youth. The curriculum was implemented, albeit not without delays and challenges. Both the implementation of the initiative and the data collection requirements of the pilot placed additional demands on the staff and participating sites. Examining the stories of the three participating sites shows there are areas where program adjustments are warranted. Based on these results, we make the following recommendations.

All the families and youth reported that, as a result of their participation in this program, they had more conversations about one or more of the topics related to academic socialization: the value of education, goals, learning strategies, plans and preparations for the future, that the child is capable of success through effort. The families and youth participating in a focus group three months post-program reported continued positive effects on family relationships. All the family members surveyed indicated they gained relevant knowledge or valuable skills as a result of their participation. As research evidence suggests academic socialization is the form of family engagement most correlated with youth school success in middle school (Hill and Tsyon, 2009) and academic socialization experiences were

successfully achieved by each program, regardless of implementation difficulty, the basic premise is supported by this proof-of-concept pilot.

Recommendations

Prior evaluation of site resources. This pilot clearly points out the importance of determining the readiness and resources of the sites selected to implement the Navigating Your Way initiative. The sites must be mature programs with experienced site coordinators and a continuity of staff for the duration of the program. The site coordinators must be invested in implementing the program. Program staff that will lead youth activities, as well as site coordinators, project directors and school liaisons must be able to attend the full training. A grantee administrator, project director or assistant project director) should be part of the training and planning process so they understand what guidance and support is needed to support the project. Site coordinators and participating program staff must have additional planning and preparation time to devote to preparing for the weekly family and youth activities. Even with detailed activities, materials and agendas provided, the site coordinators and program staff implementing youth activities need an estimated two hours of preparation time each week.

Application process. We recommend changes to the application process. The application form may be shortened—some of the detail about how the *school* engages with families is unnecessary—but still including portions for school administration, afterschool site coordinators, and project directors is important. Additionally, a deeper understanding of readiness than can be assessed by a paper application is called for. We recommend a site visit or at least an interview to see what sites are doing currently to engage families will help to assess the program staff's readiness for participation and the investment from the hosting school. The school should be ready to support logistics by providing space, supporting marketing and referrals, and working with the appointed school liaison. The application process should begin the spring before the initiative takes place.

Timing. Another implementation recommendation is to have the intervention take place in winter or early spring, after the first of the calendar year, but before the end-of-year flurry of activities and fatigue. While the many weeks of unusually severe weather that hampered delivery of the program this year may not be typical, there are also other reasons to recommend implementing the program toward the latter part of the school year. Site coordinators and program staff have time to acclimate to the school year and get to know the youth and families in the program better before recruiting and setting up the intervention. Also, site coordinators felt that educational pathways part of the curriculum would be most helpful later in the year when youth are planning the next year's schedule, and for eighth-graders, anticipating the transition to high school.

Coaching support. A coaching component is an essential aspect of successful program implementation. Coaches help identify resources, plan, prioritize and trouble shoot and they provide accountability to keep scheduling, recruitment, and data collection on track with program sites. The coach also worked with the programs on curriculum adaptions and implementation strategies to fit the needs of the program.

Booster sessions. Follow-up meetings, re-convenings, or booster sessions several months after the end of the celebration would provide families with a chance to renew and share motivation about what they learned during the initiative. Initially, when families were asked at the close of the program about what supports or activities would help keep up the momentum and achievements of the initiative, they did not identify any additional supports. However, when families from the Site B program re-convened three months after the close of the program, the enthusiasm for re-connecting was palpable. Families shared a common language and goals and expressed interest in being able to remain connected with each other, at least by email. Warily anticipating the approach of high school, one mother expressed a desire to continue to have these kinds of supports.

Age groups. When asked about what age groups for which this intervention is most appropriate, most participants indicated middle school is the appropriate age group. However, looking at the content, a couple of the aspects of the curriculum seem more in aligned with certain ages. While the adolescent development content was well received by family members or parents sixth, seventh and eighth graders, providing this information parents and families to children of the on front edge of adolescence – perhaps fifth grade and sixth grade – makes the most sense. However, the career-focused aspects of the curriculum are developmentally and practically more relevant to youth closer to mid-adolescence. Site B staff reflected "some of our younger kids struggle with [a couple activities] versus maybe the eighth graders who found it easier."

Recruitment. This pilot intentionally targeted families that were most likely to be able and willing to come to a weekly meeting for eight weeks. We recommend, at this time, this recruitment approach continue. This means that not all families participating in the afterschool program are ideal candidates for participation in the initiative, and in fact that those families most in need of support may not be able to participate. For the success of the program, it is important to maximize the participation of the families so that relationships can be built among families and staff and so that the continuity of the program and the cumulative benefit of practice and learning prepare families for the youth-led conference. However, as a staff person from Site B stated, the time commitment was a lot to ask of parents. The temptation might be to get greater family participation numbers by using units as stand-alone sessions. While many of the activities and units could conceivably operate as independent units, the trade-off would be the continuity of the program toward the youth-led conference and the ongoing interaction with other families and

program staff. The family meetings built family skills for supporting the youth in the culminating youth-led conference. Likewise, although the youth curriculum can be (and by the Site B was) used with all youth, regardless of whether family members participated, the feedback from youth and families highlights the value of linking family and youth activities and the effect it has on family communication.

Recommendations for wider rollout. The results of this pilot illustrate how youth can grow in future orientation and families benefit by better communication as a result of participating. We recommend a slow expansion of the initiative to more sites to ensure the needed infrastructure supports are in place and that only sites who are equipped to implement the initiative well are selected. If the sites that participated in the pilot this year wished to continue the program, we recommend recruiting new families to the program. However, there are several options for families with youth still in the program. They could participate as "veteran members" and be encouraged to share what they learned over the past year. Ideas mentioned by the families include having field trips to the high school, hosting a career fair, remaining in touch through email or social media or doing other joint youth and family activities. Another option might be to allow families who participated this year to join in the meal and continue sharing separately afterwards during the regular Navigating Your Way agenda. As with all our initiatives, adaptation to specific needs and sites is intended.

Recommendations for future research and evaluation. The evaluation of the pilot project focused primarily on the activities specified by the curriculum. As the theory of change posits the value of the linkages between school, afterschool, and families, future evaluation should investigate the nature and frequency of these linkages as they occurred in conjunction with the Navigating Your Way program. We recommend recording which activities within a lesson were implemented. Recommendations for future use and additional study of the feasibility of implementation should also attend to assessing organizational support and readiness, recruitment capacity and readiness for implementation. Additionally, we recommend integrating the evaluation of Navigating Your Way toward Secondary Success with overall program evaluation and quality improvement systems that are linked with providing development supports linked to school success. If a wider rollout with sufficient sample size is eventually achieved, deeper analysis of the effects of academic socialization, family social support, and school involvement would advance our understanding of effective family engagement.

Appendix A: Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this initiative was for afterschool programs to work with families, schools, and youth in ways that support youth's academic success and encouraged family participation in that process. The theory of change posits that afterschool programs can affect youth's school success directly and indirectly. Programs can support school success by the totality of experiences provided in a high quality afterschool program and by specific activities that reinforce content or that motivate youth or develop mindsets or competencies that support learning (Farrington et al., 2012). Afterschool programs also support youth indirectly through increasing meaningful family engagement. The core processes by which programs effect change can be summarized as 1) positive developmental experiences, 2) advocacy and alignment which increase supports for schooling, and 3) academic socialization including promoting future orientation in youth. This review of family engagement literature examines practices and interventions most effective for middle school students. Zeroing in on these practices is especially important for this population, as family engagement tends to decrease in middle school (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006b) at a time when academic challenges increase (Mo & Singh, 2008). Most of the extant literature focuses on family engagement related to schools and school programs. Research on family involvement with afterschool programs is relatively scarce, so this review includes both school day and afterschool research.

Impact of family engagement. Youth benefit from having their families involved in their schools and in their learning. From the fifty-one studies reviewed by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, one overarching conclusion emerged: taken as a whole, these studies found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including improved academic achievement. This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students at all ages (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006a) including middle school (Mo & Singh, 2008). Among the studies reviewed by SEDL, the benefits for students included (Henderson & Mapp, 2002):

- higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests or rating scales,
- enrollment in more challenging academic programs,
- more classes passed and credits earned,
- better attendance,
- improved behavior at home and at school, and
- better social skills and adaptation to school.

For secondary students, a meta-analysis showed the overall effect of highly involved parents was about half a standard deviation across educational outcomes (Jeynes, 2004-2005).

Types of family engagement. Family engagement, also called parental or family involvement, can encompass many different types of behaviors or characteristics on the part of caretaking adult family members. One useful framework delineated six types of parent involvement: (1) parenting—establishing supportive home environments for children; (2) communicating with the school about children's progress; (3) volunteering—helping at school, home, or other locations; (4)assisting with learning at home (5) decision making—serving as representatives or leaders on school committees; and (6) collaborating with the community—identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs (Epstein, 1987).

Schools typically have standard ways to foster involvement—parent-teacher conferences, parent-teacher organizations, newsletters, and volunteering opportunities. Aiming for greater impact, one successful school intervention with early adolescent youth focused heavily on family management practices and even offered therapy to at-risk families (Stormshak, Connell, & Dishion, 2009; Stormshak et al., 2011).

Programs have had more success with attracting families to one- time events, but this does not necessarily translate to these parents knowing their child's grades or even the classes in which they were enrolled. Family stresses, workloads, and lack of time limited family attendance at school functions, and many found it easier to monitor their children's progress from home. Intensive programs that were directly linked to their child's education attracted only a small group of parents, but were successful in helping parents engage meaningfully in their child's education (D'Angelo, Rich, & Kohm, 2012). A report funded by the U.S. Department of Education recommends initiatives to engage families should be systematic—seen as a core component of system-wide efforts, integrated throughout professional development, curriculum, and community collaboration; and sustained over time. Family engagement initiatives should be linked to learning; build respectful, trusting relationships; build human capital of all stakeholders; engage in collaborative learning and build communication networks among families and staff, and be interactive with coaching and opportunities for families to practice skills (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

After an analysis of the efficacy of different ways to involve parents during the middle school years, Chapin Hall researchers (D'Angelo et al., 2012) provide the following policy recommendations, summarized below:

- Provide parents with information on how to motivate their children academically and communicate expectations in developmentally appropriate ways;

- Build strong relationships with parents, perhaps assigning a staff person this role;

- Address any language barriers between school staff and parents;

- Schedule events that require parent attendance at convenient times, provide childcare, and limit the number of these events;
- Cultivate parent leaders.

Multi-system involvement. Decades of research on positive youth development confirms that the best outcomes for youth are those in which youth experience support across time from the multiple systems in their lives (Deschenes et al., 2010; Steinberg et al., 1995). Ecological theory and empirical research support the notion that when families, schools, and communities provide reinforcing supports, improved outcomes across the life course are more likely (Dryfoos, 2000; Gestsdottir, Urban, Bowers, Lerner, & Lerner, 2011; Lerner et al., 2005; Stormshak et al., 2011). Universal interventions that have both youth and their families involved can have much stronger effects on delaying or preventing substance use than programs for youth alone. For instance, in a random assignment intervention, the Strengthening Families Program: For Parents and Youth 10-14[3] combined with school-based Life Skills Training was associated with a 30% reduction in alcohol initiation compared to Life Skills Training for youth only (4.1%) (Spoth, Redmond, Trudeau, & Shin, 2002). Community involvement and partnerships often support or strengthen other types of involvement (Sanders, 2001). Increasingly researchers and policy makers recommend that family engagement be relational, community-based and focused on learning for youth and family members rather than attendance or event focused (Kakli, Kreider, Little, Buck, & Coffey, 2006; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Riggs, Nakawatase, & Pentz, 2008). The approach taken in the Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success pilot initiative—providing future-oriented, learning-based family engagement aligned and connected across afterschool, school, and family systems—is based on this research foundation.

Core Processes

This section focuses on the literature supporting core processes that support school success: 1) positive developmental experiences, 2) advocacy and alignment which increase supports for schooling, and 3) academic socialization including promoting future orientation in youth.

Positive developmental experiences

Positive developmental experiences for youth—opportunities for belonging, choice, collaboration and leadership; supportive, caring adults; and creative and engaging activities—are important for youth both in school and out. There are several promising practices that increase the opportunities youth have for these experiences. High quality afterschool programs provide youth with key developmental

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3 Some of the ideas and activities in Theme 2 are derived from The Strengthening Families Program: For Parents and Youth 10-14 (Molgard, Kumfer, & Fleming, 1997).

experiences including having a network of supportive peers, participating in extra-curricular activities that spark their passions and develop their skills, and having caring, supportive adults in their lives to provide guidance and encouragement. Studies show these types of programs improve youth social-emotional and academic outcomes (Blazevski & Smith, 2007; Durlak & Weissberg, 2010). Supportive relationships within the family also are associated with improved outcomes for youth. Extra-curricular involvement is another type of key developmental experience that improves the odds for youth (Peck, Roeser, Zarrett, & Eccles, 2008).

Increased supports for schooling

This core process promotes and utilizes partnerships between afterschool programs, families, schools and other community resources to provide opportunities for youth leadership around academic goals and plans**.**

Communication must be a key component for family engagement and afterschool programs that most effectively impact academic achievement. For successful parent engagement, it is critical that communication between the home and the school be two-way—flowing in both directions (Redding, Murphy, & Sheley, 2011). Two-way communication between parents and children is also important, as studies of political socialization suggest that adolescents' communication of information and values can influence adult behavior as well as the reverse (Linimon & Joslyn, 2002). Discussion that focuses on a child's specific strengths and struggles allows both teachers and family members to better support the child's development. Positive language that focuses on solutions helps families remain optimistic (Ames, 1993). Discussion that focuses on a child's specific strengths and struggles allows both teachers and family members to better support the child's development.

Communication that is individualized, practical, and frequent is of most interest to parents (Mart, Dusenbury, & Weissberg, 2012). For this communication to be effective and relevant it should include up-to-date data on child progress, assignments, and curricular content and objectives (Rosenberg, Harris, & Wilkes, 2012) and clearly linked to school goals and school success (Epstein, 2001, Sheldon, 2003). Monitoring—being aware of youth's activities and needs—is identified in a long line of research as an important aspect of parenting (Redding et al., 2011; Rosenberg, Wilkes, & Harris, 2014; Spira, 2005). Timely access to information about student progress supports both families and the afterschool program in advocating for youth access to appropriate supports and resources at school.

Involvement with homework. The research consensus around the effect of family educational expectations and support, does not apply in middle school to homework help (Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1998; Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Two meta-analyses found a negative relationship between homework help and academic achievement for

middle school students (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Patall et al., 2008)). All studies may not disentangle the effects of nagging or arguments about homework, increased family involvement with students who are disaffected or struggling, and parents showing positive interest in homework. One study that distinguished among types of homework involvement found that perceived conflict or homework interference related negatively with academic development, while perceived parental homework support and competence correlated positively (Dumont et al., 2012). These differences may account for inconsistent findings about the effectiveness of family engagement with homework, as family engagement can be detrimental if it is controlling and negative in affect (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Training or assisting parents in homework involvement with interactive assignments has shown positive benefits (Patall et al., 2008; Van Voorhis, 2003).

Academic Socialization

During the middle school years, according to researchers Tyson and Hill (2009), the form of involvement with the strongest relationship to academic achievement for middle school students focuses less on showing up at school events or helping with homework and more on families indirectly supporting their children in developing the mindsets and orientations that support academic achievement and guiding youth's educational choices and pathways. They call this form of involvement "academic socialization" and define it as

> "communicating parental expectations for education and its value or utility, linking schoolwork to current events, fostering educational and occupational aspirations, discussing learning strategies with children, and making plans and preparations for the future" (Hill & Tyson, 2009, p. 742).

This especially effective form of family includes discussing school and assisting with academic planning (Ho Sui-Chu & Douglas, 1996). Across many studies, parental expectations and aspirations—a key element of academic socialization—are the strongest family-level predictors of academic achievement in youth (Jeynes, 2004-2005, 2007) and are increasingly important during adolescence (Fan & Chen, 1999; Jeynes, 2005). In a meta-analysis of studies on parental involvement with secondary students' educational outcomes, parental expectations and style had the largest effect sizes (Jeynes, 2004-2005). By the end of high school, "communicating with school, supporting the school by attending events, and communicating with other parents" had little to no effect , but the importance of type of activities summarized as "academic socialization" and enhancing learning opportunities had the strongest effect on high school students and educational expectations of parents of eighth grade students had the biggest impact on 12th grade test (Catsambis, 1998).

Families need support and guidance to remain involved and to know how best to help (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Given Hill & Tyson's (2009) research highlighting the importance of academic socialization, it is noteworthy that this is precisely where families feel the need for guidance. Epstein (2008) states

> "Almost all parents value education, but most say that they want and need more information about adolescent development, middle level and high school programs and options, graduation requirements, college and career planning, and community programs for teens. They want to know how to help their teens develop their talents, meet high school requirements, and plan for the future."

Given the importance of academic socialization, the literature provides relatively little information on effective program practices or best ways to engage families to increase youth's experience of academic socialization. Therefore, our intervention design incorporated general findings from a) research about practices of high quality afterschool programs which are linked to social-emotional growth and school success and b) research related to family engagement in school or afterschool. After identifying practices and characteristics associated with school success across domains and settings and we selected those especially suitable for an intervention based in afterschool, particularly those suited to early adolescence or navigating developmental transitions.

Future orientation. While the literature highlights the link between family communication of positive educational expectations and aspirations and youth academic achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009), how those aspirations and expectations might connect to middle school students motivation and behavior is less understood. Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack (2007) recommend involvement that is "autonomy supportive, process focused, characterized by positive affect, or accompanied by positive beliefs". Developmentally, connecting with the adult world and seeing themselves as adults is tenuous and emerging (Steinberg et al., 2009). However, future orientation and envisioning possible future selves is linked to self-regulation and behavior (Hershfield et al., 2011; Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006; Raynor, 1970). Emerging research suggests youth who are better able to visualize themselves as adults are more likely to delay gratification and save toward long term goals (Hershfield et al., 2011). Career education has been linked to academic achievement at the high school level (Stone & Aliaga, 2003). While career exploration lessons have been developed specifically for middle school students[4] (Learning for Life), using this approach with this age group has not been empirically tested.

Career and self-exploration. Legum and Hoare (2004) suggest adding parental involvement may boost the effectiveness of career interventions for middle school students. The National Alliance for

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[4] Selected lessons and materials from this guide were used as part of the Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success curriculum.

Secondary Education and Transition has synthesized research and recognized best practices to develop standards to support youth in secondary school and transitioning to adulthood (National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition, 2005). Selected examples of standards relevant to afterschool programs serving middle school students include the following:

- Schools and community partners provide career preparatory activities that lead to youth's acquisition of employability and technical skills, knowledge, and behaviors;
- Youth understand the relationship between their individual strengths and desires and their future goals, and have the skills to act on that understanding;
- School staff members demonstrate a strong commitment to family involvement and understand its critical role in supporting high achievement, access to postsecondary education, employment, and other successful adult outcomes;
- Communication among youth, families, and schools is flexible, reciprocal, meaningful, and individualized.

The Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success initiative was designed with emphasis on these core processes with a goal to increase meaningful family engagement centered on students' school success.

Appendix B: Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success Curriculum Overview

The Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success Curriculum consists of activity guides and materials for six units of youth and family programming, as well as materials and activity guides for an introductory kickoff event and a youth-led conference for initiative participants. The activities are designed to support the core processes of positive developmental experiences, increased supports for schooling, and academic socialization.

Kick-off. The initial event of the Navigating Your Way to Secondary Success curriculum was a kick-off for families and their children. This event oriented families to the program themes and purposes. It spelled out the pilot nature of the program and the associated requirements for data collection.

Unit One: Careers. The activities in the first unit were organized around the theme of career exploration. During normal program time, youth could explore careers online, take interest surveys and discover the range of potential career opportunities. For this theme, a guest speaker from the Weikart Center provided the families with information and facilitated activities that focused on middle school development and academic socialization. Unit One activities promote youth future orientation through exploration of youth career interests, support family provision of academic socialization, and enhance youth experience of positive developmental experiences by supporting developmentally appropriate family relationships and environments.

"This is Me" Project. A key component of the initiative was the "This is Me" project**.** Each youth created a project—for instance, a book, poster, PowerPoint presentation, or art project—that they worked on over the course of the initiative. Each week they were to add something that represented what they learned about themselves through that unit's activities. This hands-on activity was an opportunity for the youth to be creative in expressing themselves and integrate their career ideas and what they learned about their personality, skills, adult life and responsibilities, and educational pathways. This project then was used as a visual aide in a conference at the end of the initiative where the youth showed their families what they learned about themselves and talked about their goals and ideas for their future.

Unit Two: Real World. In the second unit's activities, youth learned about the costs of various facets of living, budgeting and making lifestyle choices and about other stressors adults face. Instead of a family meeting for unit two, family members received a personal phone call from program staff to help orient families to school resources for assessing grades and assignments, to have afterschool staff answer questions and learn what supports the family needed. Unit Two youth activities were intended link to school success in two ways. First by supporting positive developmental experiences in the family through helping youth better understand their adult family members. The exploration of adult stresses and responsibilities also was intended to enhance youth future orientation. For the adults, the outputs allowed

greater support of youth schooling by enabling timelier monitoring of youth progress and more effective advocacy.

Unit Three: Personality. Unit Three involved both youth and family members taking personality inventories and discussing how similarities and differences among family members affect communication and support needs in the family. The youth also examined how personality may affect career choices. Unit three was intended to promote positive developmental experiences for youth by improving family communication.

Unit Four: 21st Century Skills. In the fourth unit, youth assessed their 21st century skills or those "soft skills" like planning, self-control, social awareness, communication, collaboration, and problem solving that are essential for success in school and life. The youth examined the ways these skills are needed within various careers. The adults discussed strengths and weaknesses of different skill sets and took the skills assessment. Material and discussion about roadblocks to communication and communication skills were presented. Adults were coached on how to communicate supportively during the youth-led conference, when their young person shares about their career goals and explains their "This is Me" project. Unit four activities foster future orientation and mindsets. The families' practice of communication skills support positive relationships in the home and allow effective academic socialization.

Unit 5: Educational Pathways. The fifth unit provided opportunity for school personnel to present information about middle school or high school course options, graduation requirements, college requirements, resources available through the school so youth can better plan out an educational pathway that fits their career and life goals. Unit four is intended to ensure that youth and family members have the knowledge needed to obtain educational prerequisites for college or career. Families need this information to provide adequate academic socialization to their children. This unit is intended to foster future orientation among youth and enhance family provision of academic socialization.

Unit 6: Youth-Led Conference. The culmination of the work and ideas presented in the first five themes was the youth-led conference. This was a conference scheduled with parent or family member(s), their child, a program staff member and possibly a school representative. This conference, for which both youth and families members have been coached and prepared, was the youth's opportunity to exercise leadership and initiative in presenting their plans, career ideas, and goals to their family members via their "This is Me" project. The youth-led conference intertwined all the core processes. A well-coached youth-led conference was itself a positive developmental experience, an exercise in future orientation, a chance for families to provide academic socialization and encouragement for schooling.

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