

**ATTITUDES TOWARD OST AND
PROJECT MY TIME AMONG PARENTS,
STUDENTS, AND SCHOOL AND
PROJECT MY TIME PERSONNEL
IN WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**An Integrated Topline Summary of Findings
From A Multi-Phase Assessment**

Prepared for:



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INTRODUCTION

The DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation (CYITC) was formed in June 1999 as a 501(c)(3) organization to link public and private resources, creativity, and commitment to address the long-term needs of children, youth and families in Washington, D.C. CYITC's mission is to design strategies that promote the importance of investing in our children and youth; to support the development of strategic alliances to strengthen the quality, quantity and accessibility of services and opportunities that foster the healthy development of children and youth; and to create an evaluation framework designed to measure the effectiveness of individual programs and youth-serving agencies throughout Washington, D.C.

CYITC has been working with The Wallace Foundation to develop effective out-of-school time (OST) programs for middle school students in the city. In 2005, a grant from The Wallace Foundation enabled CYITC to contract with Market Street Research, Inc. of Northampton, Massachusetts, to conduct a multi-phase study assessing middle school students' OST programming needs.¹ Based on the findings of the 2005 study, CYITC developed a pilot OST program called Project My Time in three middle schools, and expanded the program into two additional schools in the fall of 2007.

CYITC contracted with Market Street Research to conduct a multi-phase assessment of the pilot program, including attitudes toward and preferences regarding OST among key stakeholders. This multi-phase study included:

- ▶ A series of focus groups with **students** participating in the Project My Time program. We also conducted self-administered surveys of students at the three pilot schools offering Project My Time, and of students at the schools it expanded into, but which did not offer the program at the time the survey was conducted.²
- ▶ A telephone survey of **parents** of students who attend the five D.C. middle schools that offer Project My Time programs.³
- ▶ A self-administered survey of **school and Project My Time personnel** of CYITC's OST initiative and the Project My Time programs, including teachers, non-teaching staff, administrators, and OST program directors.⁴

This report presents a top-line summary of the findings of all phases of this study.

¹ Market Street Research, Inc. *OST Service Needs Assessment: Washington D.C. Middle-School Students: Results of a Multi-Phase Research Project*. March, 2006.

² Market Street Research, Inc. *Stakeholders' Attitudes Toward OST and Project My Time in Washington, D.C.: Findings From Focus Groups and Self-Administered Surveys of Students*. August, 2007.

³ Market Street Research, Inc. *Parents' Attitudes Toward OST And Project My Time In Washington, D.C.: Findings From A Telephone Survey Of Parents*. March, 2008.

⁴ Market Street Research, Inc. *Stakeholders' Attitudes Toward OST and Project My Time in Washington, D.C.: Findings from a Self-Administered Survey of Stakeholders*. April, 2008.

METHODOLOGY

Market Street Research, Inc. conducted a multi-phase study of key stakeholders in CYITC's OST program, Project My Time. The phases included in this summary report include focus groups with and self-administered surveys of students; a telephone survey of parents of students who attend schools that offer Project My Time; and a self-administered survey of school and Project My Time personnel. We began the study by meeting with representatives of CYITC to clarify the research objectives and to obtain background information about the organization.

Focus Groups and Self-Administered Survey of Students: Market Street Research organized four **focus groups** of middle-school students participating in Project My Time programs, to be held at the schools during the program's operating hours. When Project My Time was launched, parents of participating students signed consent forms giving permission for their children to participate in this type of research project.

Program leaders recruited participants for the focus groups. Project My Time participants were provided with recruitment instructions to ensure a mix of grade levels and genders. Three groups were conducted with African-American students in sixth through eighth grade, with one group each at Kelly Miller Middle School, Lincoln Middle School, and Charles Hart Middle School. An additional group was held at Lincoln Middle School with Spanish-speaking Hispanic students in sixth through eighth grade. The focus groups were conducted between June 22 and 24, 2007.

For the **self-administered surveys** of students, Market Street Research designed three questionnaires, including two for surveying students at schools already participating in Project My Time—one to be completed by students who were enrolled in Project My Time, and one to be completed by students who were not enrolled in the Program. We designed a third questionnaire to be completed by students in middle schools that do not offer Project My Time programs, but that expected to launch the programs in the fall of 2007.

DC schools were responsible for the administration of self-administered surveys. Students were asked to complete the self-administered surveys by their teacher in the classroom. At participating schools, a total of nine students completed the questionnaire for students enrolled in Project My Time, and a total of 68 students completed the questionnaire for students who are not enrolled. At schools where the Project My Time program was not yet available, a total of 82 students completed surveys.

Telephone Survey of Parents: CYITC provided Market Street Research with a list of phone numbers of students who attend schools where Project My Time is offered and were either currently enrolled in the program or were enrolled the previous spring. CYITC gathered the names from its participant database. Each household was screened to ensure that the respondent has a child enrolled in one of the schools where Project My Time is offered. In all households, we spoke with the adult responsible for making decisions regarding OST activities for children in the household. Market Street Research surveyed a total of 65 parents with children at one of five middle schools, including: Charles Hart Middle School, Kelly Miller Middle School, Lincoln Middle School, Jefferson Middle School, and MacFarland Middle School.

Research Data Design, Inc. conducted the telephone interviews from their call center in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Interviews were conducted between November 6, 2007 and February 13, 2008. The response rate for this survey (i.e., the proportion of respondents contacted who participated in an interview) was 47.1%.

Self-Administered Survey of Stakeholders: CYITC provided Market Street Research with a list of email addresses of teachers, administrators, non-teaching staff, and OST program directors at schools where Project My Time is currently offered. CYITC gathered the names of contacts at the schools that offer Project My Time. Each respondent was screened to ensure that they were affiliated with one of the schools where Project My Time is offered. Market Street Research surveyed a total of 179 stakeholders, including teachers, school administrators, non-teaching staff, and OST program directors.

All online surveys were self-administered through the Vovici online survey system, hosted by the Vovici Corporation. In addition, representatives of CYITC proctored paper surveys in the affiliated schools to facilitate completion of the survey. Respondents received gift cards in appreciation for their time. Paper surveys were sent to Market Street Research, where they were data-entered by Market Street Research staff. Self-administered online surveys were completed from November 26, 2007 through March 14, 2008. Proctored paper surveys were completed from March 9, 2008 through March 14, 2008.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Awareness of and Familiarity with Project My Time

A major finding to emerge from this research is that **there is considerable room to increase awareness of and depth of knowledge about the Project My Time program.** Students who are not enrolled in Project My Time often have never even heard of the program, and listed this lack of awareness among the major reasons they are not participating in the program. Among parents whose children are or have been enrolled in Project My Time, many do not recognize the “Project My Time” name and know their child’s OST program by a different name. The vast majority of school and Project My Time personnel in this research are aware of Project My Time, but many do not feel highly familiar with the program.

Decisions About Project My Time Among Parents and Students

We asked parents and students in this research how they found out about Project My Time and other OST activities, and what criteria are important to them in selecting OST activities and in choosing Project My Time.

First, in terms of the **sources of information** parents and students used to find out about Project My Time and other OST activities, students usually heard about the program from their teachers, their friends, or saw a flyer or poster about the program on school grounds. Parents tended to find out through the same channels, such as by hearing about the program from their child’s teacher or reading notices distributed by the school. Parents also looked online for information about OST activities.

Parents and students generally make decisions about OST activities together. Parents and students use slightly different criteria when assessing OST activities, however. As might be expected, **students’ primary focus is on fun:** they look for activities that are interesting, entertaining, and engaging. Parents, meanwhile, have a lengthier and more nuanced set of criteria they consider in these decisions. **Parents need to feel they are placing their child in a safe environment after school.** They hope that by enrolling their children in a structured OST program, their child will do better in school, learn valuable skills, make friends, and learn to get along better with other children. Parents must also deal with practical concerns when making decisions about their children’s out-of-school time, such as making sure that their child’s OST activities are affordable and that it is convenient for the child to attend, in terms of where the program is located, the ease of getting the child there and home again, and the hours the program operates.

Participation in Project My Time and Other OST Activities

Students who are enrolled in Project My Time report that they attend activities about two or three days a week on average, and when they are not at Project My Time, they spend time after school in other structured OST programs or activities. Students who are not enrolled in Project My Time tend to spend their time after school with family or other adult supervision, or they spend time unsupervised, either alone or with friends.

Parents of enrolled students report that their children attend activities about four out of five weekdays, on average. Parents' reported levels of participation may be higher than students' reported levels in part because parents are not very familiar with Project My Time. As we described earlier, parents of enrolled children may not recognize "Project My Time" as the name of their child's program. By the same token, parents whose children participate in more than one structured OST program (as many do) may very well be reporting how many weekdays their children spends in all of their OST activities combined, rather than the number of weekdays their children spend in Project My Time activities, specifically.

Parents of enrolled students gave the same responses as students themselves in terms of what students are doing on weekdays they do not attend the program: that is, they are generally being cared for by a family member or other adult, or participating in another structured OST activity. Most parents said their child's current level of participation in the program is ideal for them.

Image of and Satisfaction with Project My Time

This research finds that, overall, stakeholders are highly satisfied with Project My Time. The issues that drive satisfaction vary depending on the stakeholder group. Students feel there is room to improve how safe they feel in the program and how much fun they are having. Parents have concerns about transportation and program hours. School and Project My Time personnel have a need for better communication with CYITC and Project My Time.

Satisfaction Among Parents and Students: This study finds that **parents are highly satisfied** with the Project My Time program. They believe the program offers high-quality activities. They appreciate the academic focus of activities, such as tutoring and time for homework, and they believe the program has had a positive effect on their children, by improving self-esteem, confidence, attitude, or grades. They believe Project My Time is safe and well-supervised and they say their children clearly enjoy their activities, which gives them great confidence in the program. One of the best indicators of satisfaction with a program is parents' likelihood to re-enroll their children, and the vast majority of parents in this research report that they are highly likely to re-enroll their children next year.

The primary complaint about Project My Time from the perspective of parents is that transportation and the program's hours are a problem. Some parents do not want their child walking home from the program after dark, and Project My Time ends after dark during the winter months.

Students who are participating in the Project My Time program are generally satisfied with the program. The amount of fun they are having in the program is the key driver of satisfaction, with students reporting that they enjoy what they're doing after school and find their activities interesting and rewarding. There is some room to improve student satisfaction with the program, however, with the two biggest concerns being safety and entertainment. Some students do not feel safe at the program, citing concerns about disruptive or threatening peers. Others feel they are not having much fun in the program, and describe activities that are boring, unfocused, and repetitive.

Satisfaction Among School and Project My Time Personnel: School and Project My Time personnel in this research have a **highly positive image** of Project My Time. They believe they have witnessed very encouraging transformations among participating students, including

academic achievement, improved social skills, improved self-esteem, and leadership abilities. School and Project My Time personnel have a highly positive image of Project My Time's overall goals and objectives and the range and types of programs it offers. They believe the program helps them meet their own goals for students, particularly in its function as an academic resource.

School and Project My Time personnel identified a variety of ways CYITC and Project My Time could better meet their needs. **The major theme to emerge from this research is communication.** These stakeholders need better communication from and about the program. They want to feel more involved and included in the program's initiative. They see room for improvement with regard to the effectiveness of communication about the program's goals and objectives and the progress made to date. They also see room to improve their communication with CYITC representatives in terms of their accessibility and responsiveness.

School and Project My Time personnel were asked about their **satisfaction with Project My Time site directors** as well. Stakeholders' experiences varied depending on the school they are affiliated with. Many are highly satisfied with their site director, while stakeholders at a few schools expressed dissatisfaction.

Finally, OST program directors indicate that there is **room for improvement regarding how well the Project My Time model fits the structure of their OST activities**, with several saying they have needed to make changes related to staffing, the activities they offer, location, hours, policies or procedures in order to fit this model.

Barriers to Participation and Strategies for Increasing Enrollment

One of the goals of this research was to identify what issues might be preventing students from participating in Project My Time at all, or to a greater extent than they do. The primary barriers include:

- ▶ **Program hours and transportation home.** One of the biggest problems identified by parents and students in this research is that it is difficult for students to get home after the program ends. Some students live in walking distance from the program, and while this may be an asset for the most part, parents do not want their children walking home from the program after dark. During the winter months, Project My Time ends after dark (at 6:30 p.m.), which is a problem for these parents and students.
- ▶ **A lack of awareness of the program.** As has been described previously, many non-participating students were not even aware of the program's existence prior to participating in this research. Many participating parents do not recognize "Project My Time" as the name of their child's OST program. Even school and Project My Time personnel do not feel highly familiar with the program.

Safety is a concern for many students as well, with students citing problems with threatening peers as a barrier to participating in Project My Time. This was not perceived to be as much of a problem among parents, although some did identify this as a barrier as well.

Finally, most stakeholders in this research believe Project My Time offers a very high quality of fun, interesting, and valuable activities. Some students felt their activities were not highly engaging, however, and they expressed a desire for **activities that are more interesting**

and entertaining. It is worth noting that students who attended a focus group were especially likely to voice dissatisfaction with program offerings, and it is possible that these expressions of boredom might be in part a performance for the sake of their peers.

One potential problem CYITC and Project My Time face in working to resolve these barriers is that **school and Project My Time personnel may not acknowledge the barriers these problems present for other stakeholder groups.** For example, school and Project My Time personnel do not believe that a lack of adequate adult supervision in the program (which relates to children's feelings of safety) or the program's hours are major problems preventing students from attending the program.

Reaction to Strategies for Increasing Attendance: We asked parents and students about possible strategies for increasing attendance among enrolled students. The results of this research showed that there is reason to be cautious in implementing any reward- or penalty-based attendance policies. Parents and students had a **strongly negative reaction to the idea of policies that penalized students for missing sessions**—reactions to these concepts tended to be hostile, and the general sentiment was that if such policies were implemented, students would simply leave the program.

Reactions to a reward-based attendance system are not much more encouraging, however. **Reward-based policies appear to ignite a mercenary attitude among students** (some of whom are already receiving some sort of stipend or other incentive to participate in the program), and are interpreted as bribery to participate. Many students deduct that if they must be bribed to attend an event, the event must have no inherent value. **Students believe the best policy for ensuring regular attendance in an OST program is to offer consistently exceptional activities.**

Attitudes About Specific Types of Programs and Activities

Saturday Programs: We asked parents and students about their interest in programs on Saturdays. This research finds there is support for this option: students were moderately interested in attending Saturday programs and parents were highly interested.

Academic Assistance Programs: Project My Time offers an academic assistance program. Most of the students in this research are **not utilizing academic assistance programs** currently, and most parents report that their child is not enrolled in such a program. Many are interested in these programs, however, particularly programs that focus on teaching study skills and offering tutoring on specific subjects. Parents and students perceive the strongest need for **assistance with math.**

School and Project My Time personnel are particularly supportive of the idea of academic assistance programs, and perceive a great need for every type of assistance we asked about (i.e., study skills, tutoring, dedicated homework time). They see the most need for assistance with math and English, and some need for assistance with science, social studies, and history as well.

Special Events: This research finds **tremendous support for special events** to bring parents and students together. Students are interested in having special events, performances, or celebrations that their parents can attend to see what they have been working on in the program. Parents are highly interested in such events. Most school and Project My Time personnel believe increased parental involvement in OST activities will be highly beneficial for students, and they feel the best method for attaining this would be to hold events at the school to bring parents and students together.

Recommendations Following From This Research

In this section, we will briefly summarize the major recommendations we made to CYITC and Project My Time over the course of this multi-phase assessment. For detailed recommendations, we advise the reader to see the Executive Summaries for each phase of this research. The major recommendations stemming from all phases of this research include:

- ▶ CYITC and Project My Time must work actively to **increase awareness** of Project My Time among students and parents, and deepen knowledge of the program among all constituencies. The Project My Time program is still in its early stages and has not been in participating schools for very long. It is clear, however, that a lack of awareness of the program is a fundamental problem preventing participation. The program needs to build name recognition among parents and students, and convey compelling information about what the program offers that will be meaningful to its key constituency and address the needs most meaningful to them.
- ▶ CYITC and Project My Time must identify strategies for enhancing methods and materials for **communicating** with its stakeholders. This was another major theme to emerge from this research, and relates to the recommendation above to increase overall awareness of the program. The program should examine its current methods for communicating with stakeholders, given the room for improvement identified by this constituency. CYITC and Project My Time may want to employ the Internet to greater effect. The Internet is one of the top three sources parents use to find out information about OST activities, and a well-designed site or weblog could offer a means of keeping stakeholder groups informed about and involved in the program in a way that is entertaining, immediate, community-building, and cost-effective to develop and maintain.
- ▶ CYITC and Project My Time should consider options for **altering program hours** to address concerns about children walking home from the program after dark. The telephone survey of parents was conducted during the winter months (November through February), and this emerged as a major concern. Nonetheless, the program's hours were identified as a problem even among students who participated in focus groups held in June. The program should examine opportunities to offset these concerns, such as implementing a "safe transport" program or the option of an earlier end-time during the winter months.
- ▶ It is highly advisable for CYITC and Project My Time to include a celebration, performance, or other **event for parents and students** at the end and, ideally, the beginning of the program as well. The appeal of such events is a highly consistent finding from all phases of this research. Moreover, such events provide an excellent opportunity for the program to enhance awareness of and familiarity with the program.
- ▶ **It is inadvisable to implement an attendance policy.** If CYITC and Project My Time determine that they must implement such a policy, a policy rewarding good attendance is likely to be less destructive than a policy punishing poor attendance.
- ▶ The program should continue efforts wherever possible to **maintain and enhance the high quality of its programming**, particularly the extent to which the activities are interesting and fun, and the program leaders are perceived to be knowledgeable and inspiring. Most of the stakeholders in this research believe the program offers

high-quality programming. The extent to which some students report feelings of boredom and a desire for more stimulating, engaging activities, however, warrants continued monitoring of activity quality. Students may be the program's harshest judges, and it might be unrealistic to expect every student to report high levels of satisfaction with the program. Nonetheless, it is advisable for Project My Time to continue its commitment to ongoing improvement.

- ▶ CYITC and Project My Time should implement or maintain **homework assistance and Saturday programs**, given the level of support for these activities. Stakeholders perceive a particular need for math tutoring.
- ▶ CYITC and Project My Time should **target specific stakeholder groups** to address unique needs. Specifically, our research finds that school and Project My Time personnel affiliated with Kelly Miller Middle School have a less positive experience of Project My Time, and these stakeholders are likely to benefit from an effort to determine whether there are operational issues adversely affecting their satisfaction with the program. In addition, administrators have a much more positive experience of Project My Time, and their perceptions differ in key ways from those of other stakeholder groups. If administrators are not perceiving the problems identified by other stakeholders in this research, they will be less effective in any effort to resolve these problems.
- ▶ CYITC and Project My Time should identify opportunities for **site directors** to play a larger role in student recruitment and provide consistent delivery of services across participating schools. School and Project My Time personnel see some room for improvement in site directors' involvement in student recruitment. Moreover, stakeholders affiliated with specific schools report lower levels of satisfaction with their assigned site directors, and it will be worth further examination to determine what issues might be preventing these stakeholders from having a fully satisfying experience with these representatives.

In summary, Project My Time currently has a very positive image among its stakeholders. There is strong support for the program and a belief that it greatly benefits participating students. The major issues for CYITC and Project My Time to focus on, moving forward, are strategies for enhancing awareness of the program, communicating effectively with its stakeholders, and a continued effort to develop and adjust the program and its offerings so that they are most strongly in line with stakeholders' needs and preferences.