ABSTRACT

EBANKS, SHANELLE JOAN. Integrating Soft Skills Education into Afterschool Programs through Community Engagement. (Under the direction of Dr. Kimberly Allen).

This study seeks to gain insight of best practices of providing soft skills education in out of school time (OST) programs, facilitated by community partnerships. This study examines 1) how OST programs can reduce the soft skills gap, and 2) opportunities for communities to actively support youth acquisition of soft skills. A case study of Citizen Schools and Boston After School & Beyond, suggests that quality programming with mission integration, staff training, supportive environment, youth-adult partnerships, and opportunities to practice soft skills are integral to incorporating soft skills in OST programs. Quality soft skills instruction defines opportunities for greater support and resources in the OST field, largely, staff or volunteers to facilitate soft skills acquisition in youth. Community partnerships should be utilized to address this resource requirement, sustain OST programs, and on a grander scale, holistic youth development. OST providers should nurture these relationships through, clearly defined roles, effective communication, consistent expectations and standards, community-driven solutions, and developing a culture that nourishes partnerships. Implications include directing additional resources to OST programs to enhance soft skills education, and laying the groundwork for successful personal and professional lives for today’s youth.
© Copyright 2016 by Shanelle Joan Ebanks

All Rights Reserved
Integrating Soft Skills Education into Out of School Time Programs through Community Engagement

by

Shanelle Joan Ebanks

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

Family Life & Youth Development

Raleigh, North Carolina

2015

APPROVED BY:

________________________________________  _________________________________________
Dr. Kimberly Allen  Dr. Andrew Behnke
Committee Chair

_______________________________________
Dr. Sarah Kirby
DEDICATION

My sweet and hilarious cousin Corey, this is dedicated to you! You challenged the status quo, defied rules, and chartered a new path as you sought to understand your purpose. You could transform any room with your light, your curiosity was inspiring, and your love of people was contagious. You compelled me to look at the world differently. You helped me to see people, to dig deeper, and seek to understand the complete picture. You showed me we are a culmination of a series of life events. You continuously remind me how important it is to feel and be heard in a safe space, to have freedom to express yourself and explore your potential, and to be nurtured by people who understand and love you. Make the best of every moment and live out loud!

There are so many lessons I never realized I was learning from you. We were just too busy having fun. It took me a while to understand, but even in your absence, especially in your absence, you have been an answer to one of my greatest life questions. In the moments when I think I’ve had enough, I see you in the middle of one of your antics, I see your smile, and I am renewed. You have given new meaning to the work I already loved to do, you hold me accountable. Your life and your light will NEVER be forgotten! Corey Andrew McEwan, I will always love you!!
BIOGRAPHY

Shanelle Ebanks, exhibited a passion for children starting at a young age. Throughout her formative years she had the opportunity to attend schools that offered different learning pedagogies: public school, magnet and Montessori. Each institution had a significant population of foreigners, particularly Spanish speaking along with underprivileged children. She noticed how the language barrier and disadvantage impacted their ability to navigate the school day. It was during this period Shanelle’s passion developed; a passion for seeing youth empowered by closing opportunity gaps. This passion led her to engage in countless school and civic opportunities.

As the years progressed, her passion increased as her understanding of the challenges children face grew. Today, that drive and enthusiasm remains firmly intact. She is passionate about empowering people to live happy, fulfilled lives. She is driven to equip today’s youth with the resources they need to identify and utilize their voice in the pursuit of their passions.

A native of New York, and born to a multi-cultural family, Shanelle has lived in several cities on the east coast of the United States. She is fascinated by the complexities of human interaction. She uses this curiosity to further her ongoing personal pursuit of knowledge to best equip the leaders of tomorrow.

Shanelle received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology with a minor in Spanish from Oglethorpe University in 2010. After graduation, she spent several months as part of a fellowship working as a strategic consultant in a low income private school in Hyderabad, India. Shanelle was inspired to further her education with the vision of truly make a lasting impact in the field of youth development. She went on to pursue her Master of Science degree in Youth, Family, & Community Sciences from North Carolina State University.
Choosing a dual concentration in Youth Leadership Development and Volunteer Management and Administration.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is impossible for me to discuss the impact of community engagement in the lives of today’s youth, without first recognizing the people that shaped my life.

A key is:
1) something that gives an explanation or identification or provides a solution
2) an aid to interpretation or identification (like a clue)
3) to be essential to, play the most important part in (Merriam Webster, n.d.)

This thesis is the culmination of my life’s work and experiences. The following represents a limited list of people who have been key in bringing it to fruition. They represent years of support, conversations, tears, hugs, encouraging words, prayers, and so much more. Collectively, these people have truly been key to this thesis, but more importantly, in challenging and shaping me into the person I am today. I am, because they are.

**Mom**, I will never be able to say thank you enough! Thank you for believing in me and at times seeing more in me than I could see in myself. Thank you for going first, for being the first, for listening to that “thing” that led you on a different path. Thank you for always fighting for light and love.

**Dad**, thank you for loving me, showing me so much of who I am, and challenging me to be better.

**THANK YOU! Uncle Junior**, for being you. There really aren’t words to accurately capture all of what that means. I am still amazed you not only knew the questions I would ask, but were always waiting with the answers. **Auntie Chandra**, for being the bus driver! The driver of truth and love. Thank you for always telling me what I need to hear. **Elder Jimmy**, for our conversations which have brought so much clarity to my life. I hear your voice all the time and your famous one liners are on repeat. **Uncle Colin “Bert”**, for being
so many things for me, most importantly, love, peace, and belonging. Uncle Gary, for reminding me to unapologetically live my purpose and pursue my passions. Uncle Donovan, for the wide range of our brutally honest conversations, your love and support, never allowing me to open a door, and teaching me the true value of sunglasses.

THANK YOU! Ashley, for being the most amazing friend and cheerleader (habit #8 – for John & Corey). Travis, for never accepting the shortened version and for giving me the best gift, your love. Rene, for demanding authenticity and reminding me the real me is more than enough. Jeffanne, for inspiring me with your perseverance, strength, and faith. I am so thankful for where it all began…sticky notes. Danielle, for reminding me how important it is to follow your heart and pursue happiness. Quentin, for sitting in the same room and ignoring me all of those days writing this paper, following up on deadlines, all of the mental health checks, and our friendship. Toshiba, for your super super outlook on life, passion for the work we do, and heart for God and His people! Rhonda, for all of your prayers, faith in me, and humor. I still don’t understand how your hugs move mountains, but I cherish every one of them. Paul, for setting our foundation of trust and honesty, your huge heart, keeping me laughing, and putting in the tough work to make dreams a reality. Lavita, for being a rock, a sounding board, and a huge source of strength and support throughout this entire journey. The Wrights, I’m not sure who adopted who, but thank you for letting me “move in,” not only to your home, but more importantly your hearts. You wanted an extra daughter right? Sandy, for always listening, asking questions, offering suggestions, and being a huge supporter. How do you remember everything?!? It has been an honor learning from you! Ida, for being more than I think you ever realized. I LOVE our conversations.
Dr. Allen, thank you for throwing your full support behind me and this work. Your confidence and support has been incredibly reassuring. Drs. Allen, Behnke, and Kirby, thank you for giving me the space to do this my way and ultimately, helping me find my unique voice in this process.

…it takes a village…

Thank you to every “little person” who I have had the privilege of working with and learning from. You inspire me to be greater and challenge me to continue seeking knowledge. You give me hope. You give my life meaning. It is an honor to work alongside you, to be your advocate, and to be a part of your village.

References

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................................................. 4
  2.1 Theory .................................................................................................................................................. 4
  2.2 Soft Skills ........................................................................................................................................... 4
  2.3 Importance of Soft Skills – Personally ............................................................................................... 6
  2.4 Importance of Soft Skills – Professionally .......................................................................................... 7
  2.5 Out of School Time Programs ............................................................................................................. 9
  2.6 Teaching Soft Skills in Out of School Time Programs ......................................................................... 11
  2.7 Developing & Practicing Soft Skills ..................................................................................................... 13
  2.8 Characteristics of Quality Out of School Time Programs .................................................................. 15
  2.9 Challenges to Quality Out of School Time Programs .......................................................................... 16
  2.10 Community Engagement to Realize Out of School Time Programs’ Efforts of Teaching Soft Skills ......................................................................................................................... 17
  2.11 Community Partners ......................................................................................................................... 18
  2.12 Engaging and Impacting Community Partners ............................................................................... 19
  2.13 Summary .......................................................................................................................................... 20

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY ...................................................................................................................... 21
  3.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................................... 21
  3.2 Research Design ................................................................................................................................. 21
  3.3 Selection of Case Study Participants .................................................................................................. 21
  3.4 Participants ....................................................................................................................................... 23
  3.5 Procedure ......................................................................................................................................... 24

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS .................................................................................................................................... 27
  4.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................................... 27
  4.2 Quality Programming with Mission Integration ............................................................................... 27
  4.3 Staff Training .................................................................................................................................... 29
  4.4 Supportive Environment .................................................................................................................... 30
  4.5 Youth-Adult Partnerships .................................................................................................................. 30
  4.6 Opportunities to Develop Soft Skills ................................................................................................. 31
  4.7 Clearly Defined Roles ......................................................................................................................... 35
  4.8 Effective Communication ................................................................................................................... 37
  4.9 Consistent Expectations and Standards .............................................................................................. 38
  4.10 Community Driven Approach and Solutions .................................................................................. 39
4.11 Develop a Culture that Nourishes Partnerships .................................................. 40

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION ................................................................................................. 45
  5.1 Limitations ............................................................................................................. 47
  5.2 Implications ........................................................................................................... 48
  5.3 Future Research Recommendations ...................................................................... 49

VI. CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................. 51

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 52

APPENDIX ......................................................................................................................... 61
  Appendix A - Citizen Schools and Boston After School & Beyond Interview Questions .... 62
  Appendix B – Checklist to Evaluate OST Programs Teaching Soft Skills and Engaging the Community to Further these Efforts ............................................................. 63
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Elements necessary to teach soft skills in OST programs ........................................... 27

Table 2. Elements necessary to incorporate community engagement in OST programs .... 27

Table 3. Boston After School & Beyond ACT Skills Framework............................................... 29
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Soft skills are a wide range of characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes utilized to navigate daily life (Lippman, Ryberg, Carney, & Moore, 2015). These are skills that one needs to achieve professionally and to have healthy relationships with others and oneself (Achieve-Connect, 2015). Soft skills are vital to healthy and productive, personal and professional interactions (State, 2015). Collaboration, communication, critical thinking, problem solving, adaptability and imagination are just a few examples of soft skills (Wagner, 2008).

Personally, soft skills provide the capacity for healthy relationships, not only with others, but also with oneself (Durlak, Mahoney, Bohnert, & Parente, 2010). Professionally, soft skills compliment hard skills required for a job, initially allowing one to be eligible for employment and later competitive for corporate advancement (Holmberg-Wright & Hribar, 2014).

Bill Strickland, president and CEO of Manchester Bidwell Corporation summarized that in order to make successful lives, one has to pursue each moment with intentionality (Strickland, 2002). The personal and professional value of soft skills, coupled with the intentional pursuit to develop these skills, necessitates today’s youth be empowered with the tools to create meaningful, well rounded lives.

Today, there are nuclear families, single-parent homes, and other variations of fragmented families and communities (Mahoney, Parente, & Zigler, 2009). The confusion in these environments destabilize relationships and activities necessary for psychological growth (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). As society has changed, places that were once
considered reliable sources of soft skills education have eroded or no longer exist. In the past, these skills were taught at home, reinforced in school and also within the community to create a sense of preparedness by the time youth entered the work force (Mahoney et al., 2009). Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ (2006) research indicates there have been increasing levels of chaos in all environments in which people interact, i.e. families, child care facilities, youth programs, neighborhoods, schools.

In response to this chaos, an evolution in the manner in which people communicate and connect has occurred. A great deal of communication is now facilitated through technology (Turkle, 2012). While technology is an asset in bridging communication gaps, it has changed the nature of human interaction (Turkle, 2012). Youth are progressively communicating more through technology with less face-to-face interactions (Turkle, 2012), which has exposed the necessity of structures or organizations that teach, model, and reinforce soft skills.

There are multiple opinions about what stage of life soft skills should be taught and who should be responsible for imparting these skills in the lives of today’s youth. Soft skills should be taught by people who have already developed these skills, to ensure youth understand, acquire, and refine these skills (Schubert, 2003). Ideally, soft skills should be taught in multiple settings, but this paper specifically explores the benefits of teaching them within the out of school time (OST) environment.

OST programs consist of all adult supervised programs organized for youth outside of the traditional school day (Little, Wimer, Weiss, & Harvard Family Research Project, 2008). These programs include summer programs, before and after school care programs, youth clubs, organized sports, and more (Vandell & Shumow, 1999). OST programs have evolved
to serve as supplementary education to the traditional school day, often emphasizing learning through more informal and engaging techniques, placing emphasis on the holistic development of youth. The intersection of the OST space and quality soft skills instruction underscores an opportunity for an infusion of resources into the field. Ensuring OST programs are equipped to teach soft skills requires well-trained instructors to engage youth in meaningful, thought-provoking conversations and activities (Bronfenbrenner, 1967). For many programs, this is not possible with their existing budget or allocation of resources. This paper suggests community engagement should be utilized to help fill this resource gap.

Through community engagement, OST programs have the potential to engage a plethora of people and businesses who can support the programs on multiple levels. It is easy to consider community engagement for financial assistance, but partnerships need not end there. For example, community stakeholders can pool their resources to support OST programs with time, expertise, and leveraging their networks for support and awareness. For these relationships to be nurtured, OST programs must take care to develop an environment for them to flourish.

This study will explore the best practices of two exemplary organizations in the OST field, Citizen Schools and Boston After School & Beyond. This study will examine 1) how OST programs help teach and reinforce soft skills in youth, and 2) how to leverage community engagement to ensure quality soft skills education for today’s youth. The exploration of these topics, will yield a framework for other organizations to equip youth with the soft skills necessary to successfully navigate their personal and professional lives.
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theory

In 1967, Bronfenbrenner researched the impact of differences in student’s behavior and how this affected the quality of the overall classroom’s learning experience. He determined students with deficits - intellectual, emotional, and social, will not automatically adapt or be made whole because of the quality of their learning environment. These deficits must be addressed and countered, otherwise, they will negatively impact the self-esteem, confidence, motivation, and can cause feelings of inferiority within the student and affect the entire class (Bronfenbrenner, 1967). To address this developmental gap, Bronfenbrenner proposes all stakeholders become involved in the lives of these students. This includes, students, parents, and other adults of diverse backgrounds to partner to close the gap and even offers afterschool programs as a viable solution. Examining the nature of Bronfenbrenner’s deficits (1967), they can be largely categorized within the scope of soft skills. He suggested, youth centered and supervised environments are a fitting medium for this instruction (Bronfenbrenner, 1967), like out of school time (OST) programs.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris’ (2006) research indicates increasing levels of chaos in all environments where people live, i.e. families, child care facilities, youth programs, neighborhoods, schools. Soft skills help one successfully navigate different systems. Exacerbated family dynamics highlight the necessity of the community support of after school programs to ensure youth are learning soft skills.

The theory largely informing this paper is Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner describes the levels of the environment in which people interact and factors that affect one’s development. He describes them as levels increasing in
distance from the individual, yet each level impacts the individual. The microsystem is the level and environments that directly affect the developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The mesosystem examines relationships within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The exosystem looks at relationships between settings, which effect the developing individual, but they do not operate in, e.g. parent’s job (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The macrosystem examines how the overall culture affects the developing person, and lastly, the chronosystem reviews the impact of changes or consistency over time on the developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

2.2 Soft Skills

Soft skills are a “broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals” (Lippman et al., 2015, p. 5). Critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, leadership, agility, adaptability, initiative, entrepreneurialism, curiosity, imagination, effective oral and written communication, and accessing and analyzing information, express a range of soft skills that help one to thrive in all aspects of life (Wagner, 2008). John (2009) adds introspective skills of good judgment, self-discipline, and self-confidence. To synthesize, soft skills are assets people need to succeed academically and/or professionally, effectively connect and collaborate with others, and have a healthy relationship with oneself (Achieve-Connect, 2015).

Soft skills can also be referred to as interpersonal skills, life skills, social and emotional learning, people skills, social intelligence and are closely related to one’s emotional intelligence quotient, or EQ (World Public [WPL], 2015). Regardless of the name, they are tools that enhance one’s ability to perform tasks well and can determine the
ease with which one completes them (Harland, 2012). However, the most valued soft skills may vary from industry to industry. Further complicating matters is soft skills, or what some might view as optional skills in one field, can actually be considered required, hard skills in another field (Schulz, 2008). For example, as an engineer, communication skills are not necessarily essential to job performance, but would greatly enhance one’s ability to connect with colleagues and clients. However, as a news anchor or reporter, communication skills are fundamental to career success.

2.3 Importance of Soft Skills – Personally

Hard skills or technical skills are learned throughout one’s life, more than likely developing with each successive level of completed education. Soft skills, however, are not currently instilled as rigorously as hard skills (Klaus, 2010). Soft skills create the environment for hard skills to flourish and ultimately determine how effective they can become (John, 2009). Not only are soft skills vital to the utilization of hard skills, they have personal implications as well. Development of soft skills has led to increased self-confidence, social competence, leadership skills, and community engagement (Durlak et al., 2010).

Psychologist and sociologist, Sherry Turkle (2012), outlined the influence and potential technology has on personal development and human interaction, mainly, the way people relate to one another and themselves. Technology has helped facilitate people being more connected; however, the connections are becoming more shallow, which leads to a growing sense of isolation (Turkle, 2012). Headlee (2015) noted that daily, youth spend hours interacting with one another and the world at large via technology but are losing opportunities to develop their soft skills. One of the most important soft skills is the ability to confidently have an intelligent conversation (Headlee, 2015). Success is not about what you
know, but how you communicate it (Klaus, 2010). Turkle (2012) reported people are afraid to have conversations because it occurs in real time and they lose an element of control. Further, people are vulnerable and afraid of intimacy and being alone, which even for short periods of time, inspires anxiety and seeking connections (Turkle, 2012). To overcome this cycle, Turkle (2012) suggests people need to become introspective and comfortable with being alone, so quality relationships can form. This is the solution to loneliness and needs to be taught to children (Turkle, 2012). She does note there are opportunities for technology to aid in this process of true connections to one’s self, community, and planet rather than further weakening these relationships, but people have to seek them (Turkle, 2012).

Similarly, Harland (2012) determined soft skills empower people to become advocates for themselves, their families and communities. They help people be aware of the short and long term implications of their actions (Harland, 2012). Research indicated once individuals had an opportunity to participate in soft skills training, many participants were interested in future training and felt more confident, which they felt would translate to all areas of their life (Curran, 2010).

2.4 Importance of Soft Skills – Professionally

Soft skills are an integral part of success in professional settings. While the specific number varies between fields and industries, it is generally agreed soft skills are more important than hard skills in the workplace (Klaus, 2010). It is largely accepted 15% of the skills required to complete a job are hard or technical skills, while soft skills make up a staggering 85% (Wats & Wats, 2009). Based on the demand for soft skills there is a discrepancy between what education institutions are preparing young adults for and the requirements of the work force (Murti, 2014). Industries have been reporting for years that
young adults entering the workforce are ill equipped for the entry level jobs they seek, which are largely dependent on these skills. Employers note potential employees are academically qualified, but lack the necessary soft skills (Cappelli, 1995; Schulz, 2008). A ManpowerGroup (2015) study, reported 1 in 5 employers had difficulties filling job which they attributed to insufficient soft skills. For example, Klaus (2010) reported businesses were seeking employees who could effectively collaborate, problem solve, empathize with and motivate other employees, and be innovative. ManpowerGroup (2015) went on to say the soft skills most lacking are professionalism, enthusiasm, motivation, and willingness to learn. Despite a shortage of these types of skills having been reported for years, Klaus (2010) reported even business schools were not properly equipping students.

A lack of soft skills is not only affecting employability but also advancement opportunities within organizations (Holmberg-Wright & Hribar, 2014). More seasoned professionals are struggling to climb the corporate ladder or advocate for a raise (Weber Finley, Crawford, & Rivera, 2009). Currently, supervisors complete less of the industry’s technical work and utilize soft skills in greater measure as they provide more management and leadership support (Holmberg-Wright & Hribar, 2014).

Soft skills are a valuable part of what makes one marketable and successful in the work environment (State, 2015). Moreover, soft skills increase an employee’s competitiveness and opportunity for advancement within the work place (Schulz, 2008). There is a growing disparity in the skills young adults believe they possess, the skills required of the field, and what employers are finding in the interview process (Holmberg-Wright, & Hribar, 2014). Employers are increasingly changing their recruiting and interview tactics with the intent of ascertaining the scope of a potential employee’s soft skills.
Soft skills are an integral part of an organization’s success as they vie to be lucrative in highly competitive markets (Holmberg-Wright, & Hribar, 2014). As organizations seek to develop viable products and services, innovation is strongly valued (Wagner, 2008). Bancino & Zevalkink (2007) reported there were three main driving forces behind industry’s search for soft skills 1) increasing the bottom line, 2) being competitive in the field, and 3) globalization. These three factors demand organizations corporately increase efficiency and effectiveness (Bancino & Zevalkink, 2007). Soft skills are a large portion of what employees contribute to the workplace, especially customer service centered industries (WPL, 2015). Understanding the value of soft skills, some employers are more willing to accept employees lacking necessary hard skills and train them, rather than individuals lacking some soft skills (Wagner, 2008). These employers do so on the belief it is easier to teach hard skills than provide soft skills training (Wagner, 2008). Ultimately, employers seek employees that will be effective early in their time with the organization (Schulz, 2008).

2.5 Out of School Time Programs

For this study, OST programs are defined as an array of safely organized and supervised programs, conducted outside of the traditional school day, which are dedicated to encouraging further education and development of youth, kindergarten through twelfth (K-12) grade (Little et al., 2008). These programs can include summer programs, before and
after school care, enrichment lessons, clubs, organized sports, and tutoring (Vandell & Shumow, 1999). OST programs are also sometimes referred to as afterschool care or extended learning opportunities or time.

The need for OST programs has increased as more demands are being placed on adults every day. The trend of single-parent homes began in the 1980s and grew well into the 1990s, disproportionately with single mothers and absent fathers (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Children raised in single-parent homes with no other person consistently serving in the parent role, are more likely to suffer from hyperactivity, withdrawal, lack of focus, and face challenges academically, with delayed gratification, misbehavior, and absenteeism (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The 2011/2012 National Survey of Children’s Health found over 40 million children ages 6 to 17 years of age participate in at least one OST program (National Survey [NSCH], 2012). OST programs have garnered more attention as parents have demanded more supervision for their children and multiple stakeholders have insisted on research based accountability (Kane, 2004). Parents are also seeking greater academic support for their child(ren) and to supplement arts, sports, and additional enrichment programs removed from public schools due to financial constraints (Wallace Foundation, 2008).

In response to these demands, federal funding, largely through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program and The Child Care and Development fund have been dispersed in conjunction with local and state funds to support OST programs (Wallace Foundation, 2008). With such investments, there is greater accountability and requirements for progress and improved quality in the OST field. While OST programs may be well
intended they are not all equal or actualizing their potential to empower and enrich the lives of youth (Hynes & Sanders, 2011). Little et al. (2008) noted the problem begins with limited research on the quality of OST programs. Currently, there is not a widely accepted model for developing OST programs (Wallace Foundation, 2008). Consequently, it is imperative to support OST programs that maximize quality, research driven instruction, and place great emphasis on soft skills instruction and holistic development.

While there are over 40 million children involved with OST programs, upwards of 19 million children are not engaged in OST programs (NSCH, 2012). Over 19 million children are missing valuable opportunities to improve soft skills, develop talents, decrease the prevalence of risk behaviors, and reap the benefits of greater connectivity to their school (Wallace Foundation, 2008). Not unlike Bronfenbrenner’s observation in 1967, when programs that support youth are not coordinated, the poorest children are most likely to suffer.

A number of large scale OST organizations have recently emerged, operating across cities or even regions in the quest for best OST practices (Collaborative, 2012). The Wallace Foundation is an example of one such organization. It collaborates with several large cities around the country and supports a model of coordinated, citywide OST programming through a public or private entity (Wallace Foundation, 2008). This entity is responsible for planning changes, involving the community, and coordinating resources that can improve the culture of OST programs throughout the city.

2.6 Teaching Soft Skills in Out of School Time Programs
Soft skills are typically learned as one navigates life, and in general, professionals actively work to refine them through continued education or training (Weber et al., 2009). However, many professionals and institutions have differing opinions on when soft skills should be taught. Some suggest soft skills instruction should be incorporated into higher education, like technical training programs (Bancino & Zevalkink, 2007). Others emphasize their place in advanced degrees, like an MBA program (Klaus, 2010; Porter & McKibbin, 1988). Some professionals believe soft skills training should occur on the job with ongoing training as one advances within the organization (Evenson, 1999). Progressive organizations are adopting this model and investing in internal soft skills training for skills especially pertinent to their field (Klaus, 2010). Other professionals argue soft skills instruction should be incorporated into K-12 education (Evenson, 1999). While some believe soft skills should be taught in conjunction with hard skills and instilled at all levels of education (Schulz, 2008).

Ideally, quality soft skills education should be integrated into all arenas where youth are present. However, this is not always the case. Classrooms are often burdened with hard skills education with minimal room to incorporate soft skills training, and/or educators simply may not value soft skills (Schulz, 2008). Tony Wagner -- co-director of the Change Leadership Group at Harvard Graduate School of Education -- also indicates schools or classes that incorporate soft skills education into the curriculum, it is not always implemented in a manner that develops these skills (Wagner, 2008). In Wagner’s (2008) observations, he found the majority of teachers focused on teaching test preparation and less than 5% of classrooms included teaching that actually inspired critical thinking. When met with students who did not know the answer to questions that required critical thinking, teachers often
simply gave students the answers (Wagner, 2008). OST programs are positioned to supplement youth’s education, especially in school environments that gloss over or completely skip soft skills instruction.

OST programs provide youth with the opportunity to explore, develop, and discover skills, talents, and new areas of interests. Bronfenbrenner cited an opportunity to close the achievement gap, in a nontechnical environment that provide remedial support for youth through activities they find engaging (Bronfenbrenner, 1967). This should be conducted by people who are trained to work with youth and then train other adults to engage. These adults should invest in the development of youth, providing direction and wisdom, in a safe space for youth to explore (Hall, Yohalem, Tolman, & Wilson, 2003). They should also demonstrate an understanding of developmentally appropriate soft skills to prepare youth to master soft skills in the proper sequence (Norman & Jordan, 2006).

Part of facilitating healthy youth-adult relationships is allowing enough unstructured time for youth to spontaneously interact with adult staff (Barr et al., 2006). This enables youth to feel comfortable and understand the value of partnering with staff, which is crucial in the personal development of soft skills. If youth do not understand the skills staff can impart, they are less likely to continue to participate in the OST program (Barr et al., 2006). Staff and volunteers should be appropriately trained to confidently navigate typical challenges that arise in this potentially high stress environment (Schubert, 2003).

2.7 Developing & Practicing Soft Skills

It is important to give youth the opportunity to practice their soft skills in the context of a safe space, with trusted individuals as it is rare to receive constructive feedback on soft
skills while job hunting (Schulz, 2008). Further, many youth are unaware they lack soft skills (Holmberg-Wright & Hribar, 2014). Combined, these two elements could cause serious frustration in the pursuit of personal and professional advancement. Youth should have the opportunity to practice the use of soft skills, addressing negative experiences, or aspects of an experience, review the experience, and correct their behavior (Evenson, 1999). The solution of instilling soft skills in youth should start years before they will truly be held accountable for them when they enter the workforce.

When youth participate in programs they find interesting and engaging they exert more effort and are greater motivated to participate in activities, rather than when they are bored and more apathetic about programming (Vandell et al., 2005). The environment youth learn in should be encouraging and supportive. There is great value for youth in completing difficult but attainable goals and refining skills, especially in an enjoyable and engaging community (Report, 2009). Harsh criticism or insults are not the basis of effective change; it can break spirits and strongly discourage program participants (Carnegie, 2010). According to Carnegie (2010), everyone desires to feel important and appreciated. If this can be done in the process of helping youth hone their soft skills, they are much more likely to retain the lessons being taught.

OST programs can be structured to teach soft skills, but youth should have ownership in the learning and acquisition of their soft skills (A. Hill, personal communication, April 14, 2014.) Piaget (1932) studied child psychology and found children’s mental cognitive processes are very different from adults. He defined the term discovery learning, explaining children learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning process with the freedom to explore. He also found that children build on their existing knowledge and experiences to
have a greater understanding of the world around them, and as such need to firmly understand a concept before building on it (Piaget, 1932). The best way to engage youth in programming is to involve them in designing the program curriculum (Barr, et al., 2006). A study conducted on an Afterschool Matters program, gave high school students this opportunity through project based activities (Barr, et al., 2006). As a result, youth came to highlight the necessity of soft skills, e.g. communication, teamwork, assuming personal responsibility, sequencing and prioritizing tasks, and working through personal differences (Barr, et al., 2006).

2.8 Characteristics of Quality Out of School Time Programs

While OST programs have demonstrated an overall positive affect on youth, not all programs are effective at bringing forth positive, lasting change in their participants (Durlak, Weissberg, Pachan, 2010). There is not one specific set of best practices for OST programs but there are cornerstones of an effective OST program (Hall et al., 2003). For an effective OST program, it needs to have proper infrastructure, clearly outlined mission & vision, resources to fulfill these goals, and an effective feedback system to continuously evaluate and improve the program to best meet the needs of the target audience (Boone, Safrit, & Jones, 2002). The program should: be organized in a physically and emotionally safe environment, meet basic care and service standards, facilitate caring relationships and relevant and challenging experiences, opportunities for youth to develop their voice, exercise their choice and contribute to their community, through personalized, high-quality instruction, holding youth to high expectations and standards, and develop networks and community connections (Hall et al., 2003.)
Quality OST programs are research driven. They have a keen awareness of the demographics they serve and understand their chief needs (Wallace Foundation, 2008.) This can include which areas are not being served, attendance trends of participants and what aspects or types of programming are interesting and effective for the groups served. Research driven approaches can also measure the impact of the program, recruit new participants, and even lobby for additional support through the city (Abare, 2015). Progressive programs or cities like the ones partnered with The Wallace Foundation in their 2008 survey, even connected their findings with school attendance and academic records to garner a more complete vision of the needs of youth and their families. From all of these findings, an important step is to operationalize quality relative to each program and/or city.

2.9 Challenges to Quality Out of School Time Programs

Unfortunately, there can be a number of barriers to quality OST programming that vary within and between programs, communities, regions, and participant’s ages. Some of the common challenges OST providers face, which can often be countered or mitigated by community engagement, are: participant to staff ratio, consistent funding and the cost of the program, locating and retaining qualified staff, and program specific characteristics, i.e. sponsorship or location, transportation, age appropriate programming, and disparities in gender (Vandell & Shumow, 1999). Bronfenbrenner (1967) also added the race of the youth profession and participants were also factors OST programs could address through community partnerships. Additionally, lack of communication, clearly defined roles, and staff turnover can challenge quality programming (Rulf Fountain, Gamse, & Velez, 2014).

Challenges can be many for OST programs, but it is imperative that the solutions to address them are specifically tailored to the communities in which they are implemented.
(Abare, 2015.) In addition to solutions fitting the community, the community should be involved in the process of identifying the solutions (Vandell & Shumow, 1999). Generally, the best people to identify problems and solutions to barriers of quality OST programming are the people who live and work in those same communities.

2.10 Community Engagement to Realize Out of School Time Programs’ Efforts of Teaching Soft Skills

Quality, equal education often costs more than is anticipated and increased costs are usually met with frustration and resentment (Bronfenbrenner, 1967). Whatever the total economic costs, there are greater psychological ramifications that cannot be ignored. It is important for youth to have role models for them to aspire to and mentors to support them in achieving life goals (Bronfenbrenner, 1967). Bronfenbrenner (1967) suggests community engagement is imperative for all youth, especially those who do not have role models in their network. Community engagement is an effective method of supporting OST programs in the pursuit of addressing soft skills deficits because humans live in communities, which make problems interpersonal, (Croake, 1983). To these problems, no one person has the all of the solutions (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015).

From the inception of an OST program, it is crucial to structure it in a manner that its success is not contingent on any one particular person, rather it is durable enough to endure changes in staff or community partners (Wallace Foundation, 2008). One way to increase viability of an OST program is with community engagement. As a community, greater respect for OST programs and quality programming can be cultivated by demanding and supporting quality OST programming. With increased community support of OST programs, and ultimately youth, young adults will realize failure is not an option, which puts a different
level of pressure on them, reducing the likelihood of them giving up so easily (Canada, 2013).

2.11 Community Partners

Community partners should take ownership for their contribution to improving the OST field and the responsibility should be shared amongst partners (Abare, 2015). This begins with parents as they are crucial to holistic youth development, and their presence or absence has implications that impact the entire life of the child. In 1967, Bronfenbrenner cited parental absence as an indicator of the likelihood of a student performing below grade level. Parental encouragement helps provide children with the ability to mature and develop with a sense of belonging (Allen, El-Beshti, & Guin, 2014). Healthy parent-child relationships increase the child(ren)’s participation in activities related to topics they mutually find engaging, which inspires the child to explore, creatively imagine, and manipulate their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Through strong partnerships with schools, youth can excel in both OST and school environments. OST programs rely heavily on schools for numerous reasons, everything from facility space and staff, to sharing of information that impacts youth (Wallace Foundation, 2008). Research has shown soft skills instruction and academic enrichment in OST programs reinforce and increase academic achievement for program participants while in school (Little et al., 2008; Fletcher & Padover, 2003).

Corporate partners can serve to help close the resource gap by providing funding, volunteers, and/or expertise to the OST program (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015). Organizations sanctioning an employee volunteer program can improve
the organization’s image throughout the community (Benjamin, 2001). Additionally, it can improve morale in the work place, while positively impacting employees.

To start a community based OST partnership, the involvement of city leadership is necessary to advance efforts as they are able to rally support and leverage their connections to bring the OST program to fruition (Wallace Foundation, 2008). This highlights the city leadership’s ability to procure funding and bring greater attention to policies that could affect the viability of the OST program. This includes the capacity to mobilize a community, reframing potential boundaries to allow all parties to bring the best aspects of the experience to the table, strengthening OST programs (Ernst & Chrobot-Mason, 2010.)

2.12 Engaging and Impacting Community Partners

Effectively managing a network of partners can be challenging to OST providers with limited staff, time, and/or management experience (Schwarz & McCann, 2011). Leveraging these relationships requires deep commitment, flexibility, and perseverance to be successful. Essential to this process is clear communication and a strategic multi-year plan that is truly utilized and sustains stakeholder engagement (Wallace Foundation, 2008). It is imperative to ensure one can actually manage community partners and carefully select organizations whose focus aligns with the mission of the OST provider.

Much attention is placed on outcomes of community engagement to further soft skills education in OST programs. Volunteers often partner with an organization or cause with the emphasis being on how they can impact the organization. However, there is also great personal and professional impact to the volunteer. Volunteers often reported marked benefits, including greater life purpose or meaning, sense of belonging, an opportunity for
personal reflection, new found skills, increased confidence and self-esteem, among other life changing benefits (Duggal, Farah, Straatman, Freeman, & Dickson, 2008.)

2.13 Summary

This study will examine how OST programs incorporate soft skills education and community engagement to prepare youth to be productive citizens. Possession of soft skills allows youth to better navigate their personal lives and helps ensure preparedness for the professional sphere of their life. This research reviews the compatibility of teaching soft skills in OST programs and ways to ensure the viability of the program.

Community engagement provides an avenue for facilitating soft skills engagement in the OST field. Community members have opportunities to serve in various capacities, sharing their expertise and supporting OST programs on multiple levels. Community engagement provides a viable solution to the increased resources quality soft skills education demands, and enhances the lives and/or businesses of volunteers. In this study, methods of establishing and nurturing community engagement is explored as a solution to imparting quality soft skills to youth through OST programs.
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine best practices for out of school time (OST) providers related to teaching soft skills and engaging community support for these programs. Citizen Schools and Boston After School & Beyond (BASB) were examined utilizing a multiple-case, case study (Yin, 2003). These organizations were selected based on their definition of soft skills, integration of soft skills in their mission, interactions and partnerships with various community members and groups, and maintenance and growth of those collaborative relationships.

3.2 Research Design

In this paper, exploration of soft skills and community engagement in OST programs examined through a case study (Hays, 2004). Hays defines a case study as an in-depth review of a topic through detailed descriptions and interpretations with the intent of identifying the unique characteristics of the participants. This study employs a multiple-case, explanatory case study, which Yin (2003) describes as a case study examining differences between cases and examines causality of interventions. Case studies commonly combine multiple methods of data collection (Eisenhardt, 1989).

3.3 Selection of Case Study Participants

Citizen Schools and BASB were chosen on the basis of their soft skills focus, which they embrace through their 21st century skills and ACT initiative, respectively. Additionally, these organizations were built on community engagement and partnerships, and rely heavily on them to carry out their respective missions. In reviewing the data about trends within the
OST field, specifically teaching soft skills and engaging communities, both organizations were referenced in multiple publications, including several national studies, examining pioneering OST practices (Wallace Foundation, 2008; Collaborative, 2012; Cabral, 2006; Kane, 2004; Rulf Fountain et al., 2014)

The two organizations were also selected because of their long history in the OST field. Citizen Schools is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year (J. Ellington, personal communication, December 8, 2015). BASB has been formally in existence as BASB for 10 years, after merging two previously existing organizations (About BASB, 2015).

While these are two individual organizations, their research represents a vast sampling and breadth of information. Citizen Schools research represent community centered programming implemented in several states, with multiple sites in each state (Locations). Within each school site there is also flexibility to implement one of a few variations of their program to best suit the school and community (J. Ellington, personal communication, December 8, 2015). Conversely, BASB results are informed based on partnerships with a large number of organizations in one city and information sharing with national organizations like After School Matters (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). Together, Citizen Schools & BASB’s research findings are amplified due to the volume and diversity of their data sources.

Citizen Schools and BASB are not the only organizations teaching soft skills and utilizing community engagement in the OST field, they were also selected because they are research driven organizations. Each organization has conducted their own research and published their own findings on soft skills education and community engagement. Additionally, they have both partnered with other organizations, foundations, or universities
for external evaluations, publishing scholarly, groundbreaking research (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). Citizen Schools and BASB have also partnered with one another on a couple of initiatives (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015).

Citizen Schools and BASB were also selected to highlight areas of divergence. Citizen Schools is a national organization of afterschool programs for middle school students. While BASB is an intermediary in Boston supporting numerous youth development programs. As an intermediary, BASB serves to develop and coordinate partnerships between OST program providers, philanthropists, business, higher education, the city of Boston, and Boston public schools in the joint effort of supporting youth (About BASB, 2015). Together, these two organizations provide a broad spectrum of OST programming developing whole people, prepared with the knowledge, skill, and experience to become productive citizens.

3.4 Participants

Citizen Schools is a national organization headquartered in Boston, MA, operating in seven states: California, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and Texas (Locations). In total, Citizen Schools partners with 32 schools, 5,300 children, 4,700 volunteers, and 244 AmeriCorps members (Growth Strategy). Citizen Schools is a free enrichment program for middle school students (C. Wright, personal communication December 2, 2015). The program aids students with the transition to middle school and helps prepare them for high school and beyond (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015).
BASB is an intermediary in the Boston OST field, evaluating and supporting 117 OST programs (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). The programs supported by BASB target youth of all ages through a wide range of program design and focus. Collectively, BASB programs and partners work towards the goal of creating opportunities for youth to achieve their fullest potential (About BASB, 2015). To execute this plan, the organization has four main goals 1) convene and communicate, 2) policy development and coordination, 3) research and analysis, and 4) program demonstration and partnerships (About BASB, 2015). BASB leverages assets of their OST partners to orchestrate youth development between OST programs, school, and community partnerships (About BASB, 2015).

3.5 Procedure

The primary data source for this case study was a document review of published materials, supported by content analysis, of both organization’s published materials as well as research conducted by third party entities, i.e. Harvard University, The Collaborative for Building After-School Systems, and The Wallace Foundation. Additionally, interviews were completed for a more comprehensive view of each organization. This procedure of multiple sources, published information from the organizations, reports and articles from independent evaluators, and interviews from organization staff, supports the triangulation of sources model outlined by Patton (1999) to increase credibility of the findings. In accordance with Patton’s research (1999), the results were gathered from materials published over the course of several years and from individuals with varied perspectives on the organizations.

Interviews were conducted with three representatives from the organizations. At Citizen Schools, the questions were answered by J. Ellington, Managing Director for
Durham, NC, and C. Wright, Campus Director at Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School in Charlotte, NC. For BASB, questions were answered by D. Kim, Director of Policy and Communication. These individuals were selected for their knowledge and access to resources about their respective organizations, and ability to provide critical insight and examples that demonstrate the organization’s success. C. Wright of Citizen Schools and D. Kim of BASB were asked a series of questions using the general interview guide method (Patton, 2001). This interview method dictates that there is a specific list of question established prior to the interview but still allows for flexibility with the follow up questions (Patton, 2001). To reduce bias, the specific questions used to guide the interview process (Appendix A) were emailed to interviewees, C. Wright and D. Kim in advance of the phone interviews. J. Ellington’s interview was more of an informal conversational interview (Patton, 2001) with the majority of the questions driven from the Citizen School’s WOW! presentation that both interviewer and interviewee were attending. There were however a few questions from the general interview guide that J. Ellington was also asked.

The general interview guide questions were selected to glean greater understanding on topics unclear from the published research. A question was asked to ascertain how staff and volunteers were trained to ensure they could teach soft skills. There were several questions aimed at gaining additional information on the nature of the organization’s community engagement. Additional interview questions focused on how the organizations execute their mission and maximize resources. Representatives were also asked about specific organizational dynamics that would limit the ability of their work to be replicated.

A two-part process of examination was utilized to review the data. Within case analysis was conducted to search for unique patterns in the data (Eisenhardt, 1989). This
method was also employed to effectively process the volume of data gathered for this research (Eisenhardt, 1989). Searching for cross case patterns (Eisenhardt, 1989), the information was successively divided by data source for each organization, into categories examining similarities and dissimilarities, and then cross examined between organizations.
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The research findings have been categorized into two main categories, 1) elements necessary to effectively teach soft skills and 2) elements necessary to incorporate community engagement to support out of school time (OST) programs infusing both factors into their programs. Each element is listed below in tables 1 and 2.

*Table 1. Elements necessary to teach soft skills in OST programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Soft Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality programming with mission integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth-adult partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to develop soft skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. Elements necessary to incorporate community engagement in OST programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incorporating Community Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearly defined roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent expectations and standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community driven approach and solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a culture that nourishes partnerships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Quality Programming with Mission Integration

It is imperative to have a clear understanding of the program’s objectives and mission as this shapes the direction of the organization. For both organizations, soft skills education is an integral part of their programming, explaining why both organizations operationalize their own definitions of soft skills and how they intend to reinforce them in program participants.

Citizen Schools mission is to “expand a middle school’s learning day by connecting a team of adults to provide relevant learning experiences that give students the skills, access,
and beliefs they need to succeed in school, college, and careers” (About: Model). There are seven main elements to the Citizen Schools’ model: planning, leadership, leveraging student data, training and professional development, family and community engagement, partnerships between Citizen Schools and schools, and Citizen Schools core program model (Rulf Founta, et al., 2014). Through this model, Citizen Schools is teaching and soft skills in participants. Citizen Schools selected 4 soft skills to teach program participants, which are named 21st century skills, they are: collaboration, communication, innovation, and problem solving skills (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015).

Boston After School & Beyond (BASB) is a public-private partnership that strives to ensure each Bostonian child has the opportunity to develop their full potential (About BASB, 2015). BASB’s role is to expand learning and skill development opportunities for students. BASB operationalizes the definition of soft skills as skills students need to succeed in school and beyond, which they have divided into their Achieve-Connect-Thrive (ACT) Skills Framework (Achieve-Connect, 2015).

The ACT Skills Framework is divided into three categories of the skills youth need to achieve in school, connect or have necessary strong relationships, and thrive which are more introspective and self-regulatory in nature (D. Kim, personal communication, 2015). Within each category, there are specific skills BASB supports their 117 programs to teach and evaluate their program participants on. For the complete list, see the graphic created by BASB in table 3 (Achieve-Connect, 2015).
4.3 Staff Training

One of the consistent findings in this review is the value both organizations placed on appropriately trained staff to carry out their mission and effective programming. To ensure youth are equipped with soft skills, or 21st century skills, Citizen Schools staff participate in a number of professional development opportunities throughout their tenure. Staff members receive a 1-2-week comprehensive training over the summer and receive a follow up training in October (C. Wright, personal communication, December 3, 2015). Weekly staff members receive newsletters highlighting current research and trends related to soft skills education, and have staff meetings which provide supplementary training opportunities for staff (C. Wright, personal communication, December 3, 2015). Staff also have access to an online library of resources that include training videos on numerous topics (C. Wright, personal communication, December 3, 2015).
Staff training is a cornerstone of the BASB model. BASB has a suite of measurement tools they use to do external evaluations on all aspects of partnered programs through their partnerships with Harvard University and Wellesley College, (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). Once the information in collected and analyzed BASB provides monthly training to partner OST programs about the trends found in collected data, which includes how to better implement soft skills education (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015).

4.4 Supportive Environment

Due to the personal, yet vital nature of soft skills, it is necessary that these skills are taught in a supportive environment. Both organizations offer opportunities for remedial soft skills education for program participants. For Citizen Schools, participants have the ability to choose supplementary apprenticeships that reinforce the same 21st century skills should they not attain mastery level for the skill taught in the initial apprenticeship (C. Wright, personal communication, December 3, 2015). For BASB, they provide training to organizations that require information with the intent of increasing the level of mastery of those skills (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). BASB provides training opportunities by partnering an organization that research indicates can concretely demonstrate a concept with those that do not execute the concept as well. It is however, up to the organizations to determine if the direct partnership would be helpful or pose a conflict of interest.

4.5 Youth-Adult Partnerships
Youth-adult partnerships are only formally present with Citizen Schools as BASB does not work directly with youth. Through Aspire, Invest, Make the Grade, (AIM) Citizen Schools staff develop personal relationships with youth, by assisting students with homework, reinforcing math and reading skills, and setting clear expectations of success in high school and beyond (C. Wright, personal communication, December 3, 2015). Citizen Schools staff members teach the last class of the day and then transition into snack, recess, and study hall or apprenticeship, depending on daily schedule (C. Wright, personal communication, December 3, 2015). During this time, youth develop trusting relationships with Citizen Schools staff members and Citizen Teachers or volunteers, which facilitate deeper personal exploration for youth as they develop soft skills and staff reinforce them.

BASB is an intermediary that coordinates support for and evaluation of OST programs in the Boston area. As an intermediary, BASB partners with a wide range of OST programs to evaluate their programs and analyze trends within the OST field (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). BASB staff, train staff from partner organizations on how to cultivate these quality relationships to enhance youth’s growth. These relationships provide the framework for youth to develop their soft skills in a safe, encouraging environment.

4.6 Opportunities to Develop Soft Skills

Citizen Schools and BASB support youth practicing and honing soft skills. For Citizen Schools this is done through apprenticeships focused on closing the opportunity gap and developing soft skills. Students engage in 10-week apprenticeships, during which they learn about a career related topic and a soft or 21st century skill related to that field (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015). In this process, students are partnered
with college educated adult volunteers, called Citizen Teachers, who teach the apprenticeship curriculum and refine the soft skill in program participants. The culmination of the apprenticeship is the WOW! or final student presentation to share what they learned and how it was developed (Apprenticeships, 2015).

Each apprenticeship exposes youth to a career or element of the community they might not otherwise know about. Apprenticeships address all 21st century skills to some extent, but identifies one skill that will be formally taught and evaluated. For example, the Mock Trial apprenticeship focuses on youth exploring various components of the legal system led namely by lawyers, judges or bailiffs, while teaching and practicing the 21st century skill of communication (Mock Trial). Students spend the first few weeks understanding courtroom proceedings, then practice communication skills by participating in a mock trial, analyzing a case, selecting roles to play, and having a trial (Mock Trial). During the mock trial students are responsible for meeting very specific communication benchmarks such as: making eye contact, using proper pronunciation, expressing ideas clearly, making logical arguments, understanding the audience, creating effective presentations, evaluating peers, providing constructive criticism, and more. The culmination of the apprenticeship is when students transition to the role of teacher, demonstrating their growth with communication, as they present their findings at the WOW! and share insight on the legal system (Mock Trial).

Research indicates, as a result of the mock trial and similar apprenticeships, students are more likely to be engaged in the legal system, voting when age appropriate and having conversations about politics in their personal lives (What: Apprenticeships, 2015). Contrasted with peers who did not participate in a Citizen Schools program, apprentice
participants are four times more likely to be involved with work on community issues (What: Apprenticeships, 2015). They also display greater confidence in public speaking abilities and communication, especially communicating with elected public officials. One Citizen Schools alumni shared that while shy in middle school, her apprenticeship with a lawyer helped her develop new skills, (Cabral, 2006). After defending her client, she said, “I was surprised-but mostly pleased and proud—at the booming, attention-grabbing voice that came from me” (Cabral, 2006, p. 159).

At the culmination of the apprenticeship, Citizen Schools teachers evaluate students based on a rubric in which students are rated on the measured soft skill from the apprenticeship on a scale of 0 – non-performance, to 4 – advanced (C. Wright, personal communication, December 3, 2015). Approximately, 70% of the 5,700 students achieve a three or above on the evaluation after each apprenticeship. As students participate in multiple apprenticeships they receive concentrated exposure to the 21st century skills. One student reported, “I strongly feel that the best way to learn is to practice” (Cabral, 2006, p. 158). The student went on to cite increased confidence and a sense of preparedness as a result of the opportunity to practice her new skills.

As a part of the program, students are also exposed to additional education opportunities through field trips (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015). Additionally, students have heightened awareness of community resources as a result of coaching through team building activities (Model). For 8th grade students, there is a capstone program that provides youth with opportunities to gain skills they need to successfully navigate high school and college (8th Grade, 2015). Citizen Schools’ participants are twice as likely to matriculate to college than non-Citizen Schools counterparts (8th Grade, 2015).
Research supports, students that make educated decisions about their course load in high school are more likely to have equal opportunities for employment than low income students (College).

BASB, utilizes three key steps to develop soft skills for youth. These steps are derived from the ACT Skills Framework instruction: building understanding, setting personal goals, and strengthening skills (Harland, 2012). The partnership with the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) illustrates how BASB uses this framework (Harland, 2012). To build understanding of soft skills in youth, DSNI introduced each specific skill and worked with youth to personalize the skills. Youth were encouraged to use language and illustrations they personally connected with, describing both the behavior of someone who possessed and lacked these skills (Harland, 2012).

The next step was to work with youth to examine their strengths and weaknesses in relation to each soft skill (Harland, 2012). To evaluate their skills, DSNI partnered with Program in Education, After-School and Resiliency (PEAR) to use their Holistic Student Assessment Tool (Harland, 2012). Youth were then asked to complete a self-reflective questionnaire to ascertain the extent to which they possessed soft skills from the ACT skills framework in various social, emotional, and development arenas of their lives. The responses to the questionnaire were shared with the youth and used to determine specific instructional content for each youth as well as provide a clear assessment of group needs. Harland (2012) found after reviewing the results of their assessment, youth conferred with their advisor and selected a soft skill they decided to refine during the program. Youth partnered with their supervisors and program leaders to develop a clear action plan to strengthen the specified soft skill (Harland, 2012).
From this partnership, youth gained greater insight into their personality and possession of soft skills (Harland, 2012). Some participants were skeptical of the accuracy of the assessment, but were surprised when exposed to greater self-awareness. Through this process, youth also had access to resources, guidance, and wisdom of their supervisors and leaders to achieve greater efficiency, organization, and prioritizing skills, among others (Harland, 2012).

While BASB partnered with DSNI for this ACT Skills Framework assessment, they are largely concerned about the implications for OST programs across Boston (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). From this partnership BASB learned students lacked experience with quality soft skills development, including information about soft skills, specifically, the vocabulary to describe and develop soft skills, and the support as they explore and work towards personal soft skills mastery (Harland, 2012). Additionally, some soft skills are easier to comprehend and create a plan for development e.g. communication skills; they determined special attention is required to ensure development of more challenging to develop soft skills (Harland, 2012). BASB also concretely established skill building activities can be paired with youth serving programs to develop soft skills (Harland, 2012).

4.7 Clearly Defined Roles

Citizen Schools ensures each member of their team understands and feels comfortable in their role within the organization. For example, apprenticeships are taught by college educated professionals called Citizen Teachers (J. Ellington, personal communication, December 8, 2015). Each Citizen Teacher is provided with a Citizen Schools crafted curriculum or can develop a new apprenticeship curriculum with a Citizen Schools staff
member to address broadened interests of students (J. Ellington, personal communication, December 8, 2015). The curriculum for apprenticeships is very detail oriented with goals, specific objectives, teaching techniques, activities, timelines, and more, yet, still allows room for Citizen Teachers to infuse their experience and insight into the lessons (Mock Trial). Citizen Teachers commit to leading 90 minute sessions with students for 10 weeks (J. Ellington, personal communication, December 8, 2015). Citizen Teachers do not evaluate students on level of mastery of soft skills or serve as a liaison between the program, the school and/or parents; these are the responsibility of Citizen Schools staff, Citizen Teachers are simply required to teach apprenticeships (C. Wright, personal communication, December 3, 2015).

Similarly, BASB has clearly defined roles for each of their partners. As an intermediary, the organization coordinates support from all stakeholders, from OST programs to large businesses, and even the mayor’s office. Each partner has to have a clear understanding and mutual respect for the other partners. BASB is also careful, not to overstep the organizations’ primary functions which are to report on the state of OST programs, provide training and feedback about the field, and work to elevate the OST standard in the city (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). With the information from the third party evaluation, it would be easy to provide advice specific organizations, but that is not protocol. For example, if during the course of an evaluation, one organization ranks particularly low on a measure, BASB will connect them with a well ranked organization for one-on-one training (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). BASB understands the relationships between these organizations can be complex,
even in direct competition with one another, so they do not require organizations share information (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015).

4.8 Effective Communication

Throughout the course of the program, Citizen Schools partners with various community members to ensure success in middle school and beyond for program participants. Citizen Schools staff members connect with student’s teachers and family on a regular basis to keep all parties informed about the progress of the student (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015). Staff members communicate with the traditional school day teachers about their academics, including homework, upcoming tests, quizzes, extra credit opportunities, and any missing assignments (Academic Support, 2015). This information is addressed during the Citizen Schools program, but is also shared with parents. The goal is to help bridge any gaps in communication or support for each student. Citizen Schools Team Leaders are required to connect with the families of their students on a bi-weekly basis to keep families engaged in their child’s progress and upcoming events (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015). This elaborate system of communication ensures students are not lost in the system.

It is imperative to have a common language that spans school and various OST programs. In defining soft skills, BASB found their definition needed to meet three main criteria; it needed to be 1) identifiable, 2) measurable, and 3) developed (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). This definition and common language was created by youth development, afterschool, education, and developmental psychology professionals (Harland, 2012). Youth professionals and community members needed to be able to see evidence of the attainment of each program’s designated soft skills within the youth. The
skills needed to be relatively easy to describe and with planning could be developed through activities and experiences (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015).

4.9 Consistent Expectations and Standards

As a result of additional academic support that Citizen Schools staff can provide and the relationships between Citizen Schools teachers and traditional school day teachers, Citizen Schools and school sites have strong bonds (Schwarz & McCann, 2011). Citizen Schools found, schools in which administration and staff were actively engaged in planning and implementation of the Citizen Schools program, there were less challenges launching the program than schools that did not take an active role (Rulf Fountain, et al., 2014). Essential to this process was clear communication and having the same leadership and staff throughout the implementation process. Schools partnered with Citizen Schools experienced gains in proficiency two to three times the average and surpassed The Department of Educations’ standard for school turnaround (Our Results, 2015). In one Boston school site, Citizen Schools was credited with transforming one of the lowest performing schools into one of Boston’s top performing schools in only 4 years (Our Results, 2015). Citizen Schools staff can often be seen as part of the school community, not just as relief teachers (Schwarz & McCann, 2011).

BASB has the responsibility of setting the standard for OST programs within the city of Boston. The organization must maintain excellent evaluation methods and training techniques to provide both OST programs and community partners with current and relevant information about the trends in OST programs (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). Based on the research from BASB, the mayor’s office, large organizations, foundations, and other funders and supporters, leverage their resources to propel OST
programs forward with various forms of required support, i.e. financial support or additional volunteers (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015).

4.10 Community Driven Approach and Solutions

While specific demographic information of program participants varies among campuses, Citizen Schools typically works with low-income, high-minority population schools (C. Wright, personal communication, December 1, 2015). For example, in the Charlotte schools, participants are predominately African American, in California, largely Asian, and in Texas, mostly Hispanic (C. Wright, personal communication, December 1, 2015).

Citizen Schools reported the impact of disparities between middle and upper income families, compared to low income families. The data indicated by 6th grade, students from higher income families have potentially received more than 6,000 additional hours of education and approximately $8,000 more of enrichment activities annually than lower income peers (Our Approach, 2015). Citizen Schools has redefined the achievement gap as an opportunities gap and is working diligently to supplement both of these disparities for low income students with the expanded learning day (Model, 2015). Specifically, they marry academic enrichment with apprenticeships to close the opportunity gap.

Understanding the demographics and needs of their population, each Citizen Schools site, has options of allowing students to opt into the program or mandating the entire school participate in the program (C. Wright, personal communication, December 3, 2015). For entire schools partnered with Citizen Schools, the last portion of the school day is an elective taught by Citizen Schools staff. If the entire school participates in the program, students will
essentially have a class added to their schedule, which equates to about three months of additional learning to the school year. If Citizen Schools is not a school wide initiative, the academic enrichment is supplemented with additional field trips and recess to incentivize students to participate in the program. In 2015, Citizen Schools piloted a new version of their program in a handful of schools nationally with an apprenticeship only model (J. Ellington, personal communication, December 8, 2015). With this model, students participate in community and career exploration for a portion of the week and Citizen Schools partners with the school site’s current afterschool program for enrichment the remainder of the week (J. Ellington, personal communication, December 8, 2015).

Ninety percent of BASB participants are racial minorities, 80% live at or below the poverty line, 20% are English language learners, and 11-12% are students with a disability (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). To close Boston’s opportunity gap among youth, BASB has taken a four-part strategic approach to address the gap (Boston learns, 2015). The four strategies include accessing summer learning for all youth, teaching soft skills, creative approaches to learning and working for teenagers, and engaging the community (Boston learns, 2015). These strategies are focused on coordinating Boston resources to provide low income families with comparable exposure to OST programs that higher income families regularly have access to (Boston learns, 2015).

4.11 Develop a Culture that Nourishes Partnerships

Both organizations have clear, specific, tangible agreements with their partners. Citizen Schools has an agreement with any school they partner with (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015). First, participation for students is either optional or there is school wide participation. Secondly, the school agrees to provide space for Citizen
Schools teachers, permit the campus director to actively serve on the school’s leadership team, and allow access to school resources, including transportation for students (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015). For BASB, organizations opt in or volunteer to become a part of the network (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). Which requires evaluation by a third party in exchange for quality feedback, training, and support from BASB addressing trending needs across all programs in the city (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015).

Largely responsible for the success of Citizen Schools programs are the partnerships. In addition to Citizen Teachers or volunteers, and the strong partnerships with parents and teachers, as well as Citizen Schools and schools, Citizen Schools has local, regional, and national partnerships with community members (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015). Corporate partners reap benefits on multiple levels, first they play a key role in molding and preparing the next generation of employees, and serve in education and OST program reform (Investors). Employees that participate with Citizen Schools, not only make a lasting impact in the lives of the students they work with, but also develop their professional skills and loyalty to the company. Corporations also have the opportunity to brand themselves as community leaders committed to innovation and quality OST programming. Generally, corporate partners provide money and/or time to support the organization (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015). A large majority of local partners are Citizen Teachers who donate time to teach apprenticeships and other partners donate funds that keep the organization operational (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015). Partners at the local or national level serve in the same
capacity; however, national partners have increased the scale of their giving to support Citizen Schools in all the regions they have a corporate presence, rather than one local office.

Citizen Teachers also reported developing their soft skills, specifically in the areas of communication, teamwork, and leadership (Our Results, 2015). One volunteer shared “being a Citizen Teacher was a great outlet…to use my knowledge and be able to communicate it to kids who were as curious and excited about the subject as I was as that age” (Our Results, 2015). Another volunteer reported, “There’s nothing like running a class of 6th graders to develop management skills” (Our Results, 2015).

In addition to Citizen Schools being one of the organizations BASB partners with, they have partnered on a couple of initiatives to support youth. Currently, they are working on BoSTEM and BASB will soon be launching the digital badges program at Citizen Schools sites (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015).

BoSTEM is a citywide collective to advocate for and educate about STEM projects in Boston because research has indicated during middle school a child’s interest in STEM fields wanes (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). This charge is a collaboration between Citizen Schools, BASB, and the United Way to connect all middle school students to STEM projects. This partnership was selected as one of the pioneers in the STEM learning Ecosystems Initiative with a commitment to increase hands-on STEM education for youth. BoSTEM has set the goal of closing this STEM opportunity gap for all middle school students by 2020 (Kim, 2015). These three organizations are partnering with other environments in which youth learn to create an effective system to expose youth to quality STEM experiences with the shared hope that these experiences will spark curiosity and interest in these subject areas and potentially pursue careers in these fields (Kim, 2015).
Digital Badges strives to unify the fragmented learning ecosystem for youth by tracking their acquisition of soft skills largely in the OST field (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). Youth will be evaluated in five areas, communication, critical thinking, engagement in learning, perseverance, and teamwork and will be rated for overall achievement with an opportunity to be recognized for meaningful growth (Digital Badges, 2015). BASB launched this system summer of 2015 in a handful of OST programs within their network and are currently working with Citizen Schools to launch the program in their sites in the near future (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). Long term, the vision is for these badges to be recognized by higher education systems and employers so youth can be evaluated holistically (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015).

BASB discovered early in their processes, a lot of money was not going to change the climate of OST programs, but unique perspectives and partnerships were essential (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). Today the organization continues to thrive because of the strong, diverse partnerships from different sectors. BASB has truly harnessed the power of the collective community to ensure success for youth in Boston (Harland, 2012). This includes former mayor Menino, who’s early and strong leadership and continued support of BASB and the citywide approach to OST programs has been integral to its success (Wallace Foundation, 2008).

As part of their commitment to research and greater understanding of the OST field, BASB is a member of a national coalition of OST intermediaries, Every Hour Counts. Currently, the organizations are sister organizations and do not directly work together but
collectively work to elevate the OST field nationwide (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015).
CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

Citizen Schools & Boston After School & Beyond (BASB) operate in the out of school time (OST) field with a commitment to providing the youth they serve the best quality OST programming possible. They have made a commitment to understanding the needs of youth and specifically their participants to bring this to fruition.

Citizen Schools and BASB are not only both organized to develop quality OST programming, but are both dedicated to closing the opportunities gap that exists within the OST environment. They recognize those in the greatest need of these services are youth from low income families (C. Wright, personal communication, December 2, 2015; D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). Both organizations have subsequently identified the soft skills gap within youth, operationalized program specific definitions, and developed procedures to equip youth with these missing skills (Achieve-Connect, 2015). For each young person, the designated course of action is to examine the extent to which they possess soft skills and tailor programming or an action plan to improve a skill. It is noteworthy, while they teach several soft skills, Citizen Schools & BASB recognize the importance of selecting one skill at a time to develop within a system of accountability, constructive criticism, and support.

Citizen Schools and BASB are committed to changing the landscape of OST programs as evidenced by their partnerships with other OST programs and the research and findings they share with others. For example, Citizen Schools partners with BASB in Boston and learns from the experiences of all of the partnering OST programs in the area (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). BASB, not only facilitates a partnership council between OST programs in Boston, but is also a member of a national coalition of
OST intermediaries, Every Hour Counts (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). While the intermediaries do not directly work together, they do share information that can inform the landscape of intermediaries and the OST field.

These organizations partner with one another in Boston with the shared goal of empowering youth and equipping them with soft skills education and real life experiences in the process of developing into successful adults (D. Kim, personal communication, November 24, 2015). They are focused on short term improvements in youth while truly considering long term implications. Not only do they want to see youth improve through their organizations they are focused on the overall impact of this goal being realized nationally. Citizen Schools & BASB are transparent in their practices and freely share research findings and resources. This includes research they have gathered as an organization but also research from third parties.

BASB has the resources to make decisions based on information from a number of organizations to better inform stakeholders about the overall climate of OST programs and implement change in one city. Logistically, it is easier to maintain standards, to communicate, implement and monitor the impact of the program. Comparatively, Citizen Schools is spread around the country and has many more communities and cultures to navigate. The program has to be relevant in each city and site, which means national objectives but different site specific implementation. For example, Citizen Schools in Charlotte is the full program with academic enrichment and then apprenticeship but in Durham they are piloting the afterschool apprenticeship portion of the program. The differences in the scope and the capacities these programs serve, both with sustained success
in the field, emphasizes the need for a multi-faceted approach to teaching soft skills and community engagement integration in the OST field.

Evidenced by Citizen Schools recruiting Citizen Teachers and BASB leveraging citywide support and third party evaluation services from local universities, community engagement is not just about asking for financial support from the community. It is easy to define an organization’s needs in financial terms, however, defining the object the organization actually needs, volunteers, space to operate in, etc. allows greater community support. Requesting financial support can be so limiting for community partners, especially in low-income areas. Navigating the OST field as any stakeholder can be difficult. As a result of this research a checklist, Appendix B, has been created to help stakeholders evaluate programs on measures of soft skill and community engagement integration.

5.1 Limitations

The research for this paper was compiled from third party sources and not the personal findings of the researcher. While it reduces the amount of the researcher’s personal bias included in this study, it does not necessarily allow for insights that could have been gleaned from the researcher. The researcher was limited to interview questions based on the information presented in published materials and informed from the researcher’s personal experience within the OST field. In both published research and interviews, great emphasis was placed on what elements were present to contribute to the positive outcomes of each program. However, success of an organization can also be created to what elements are absent and could be an opportunity for future study.
Another limitation with this study is the ability to generalize the findings. While the two organizations are very different and represent findings from many sites within Citizen Schools and many other organizations with BASB, the sample size for this paper is two. The findings from this study would be incredibly difficult to generalize the results to all other OST programs. Additionally, the programs examined are present in large cities around the country. This study does not examine innovative, soft skills and community integrating OST programs in smaller and/or rural cities or towns where OST programs would have different dynamics to navigate.

5.2 Implications

The needs that gave rise to out of school time (OST) programs have not diminished, the converse is true with all of the demands on families and changes within the education system. There are over 19 million children not engaged in life enriching OST programs (NSCH, 2012). Additional space within existing OST programs and/or new programs need to be developed to accommodate all youth. Based on feedback from employers, supplementary soft skills instruction is required. This coupled with the other known benefits of OST programs, more youth should be afforded the opportunity to attend OST programs and continue their growth and soft skills development in a safe space.

There are many complicated, interrelated factors to balance in the pursuit of infusing soft skills education into the OST field and utilizing community partners to further this effort. Ultimately, there need to be more conversations about the importance of teaching soft skills to raise awareness about their value and support for quality teaching and programs that integrate soft skills (Schulz, 2008) into the education of today’s youth.
The larger goal for OST programs is sustainability and creating opportunities for the over 19 million children not currently engaged in OST programs (Wallace Foundation, 2008). This study highlights opportunities for greater partnerships within the OST field to support the success of present day youth in the next phase of their life. OST programs are often close to or already lacking resources, this could be quality staff, facilities, equipment or educational material, or even snack. More awareness of the impact of OST programs needs to be raised. Without additional support and commitments to consistent funding for programs, all of the hard work establishing the quality of programs and intermediaries is in peril (Wallace Foundation, 2008). This study encourages youth professionals to critically examine their needs and seek relationships and partnerships that can also help to address those needs, not simply an additional funding source.

The goal is to work towards holistic growth by focusing on soft skill development in youth; communities need to share this responsibility. Not only are the benefits to youth invaluable in the present, community partners have the opportunity to truly shape the future generation, molding prospective employees for their field. Additionally, the benefits for community partners are plentiful both on an individual and corporate level. A community united around soft skills would not only help to close the soft skills gap and empower youth, it would revolutionize communities socially and economically.

5.3 Future Research Recommendations

More research needs to be done on how to teach, model, measure, and reinforce soft skills in youth. There is still much work to be done in this arena, especially as it comes to measuring soft skills. With better methods of measuring soft skills, greater recognition for
their potential and impact could be realized and gain greater credibility for their teaching and training in not only OST programs but in all youth centered forums.

With greater understanding of and research based findings for soft skills and the impact they have on the quality of life for youth and young adults, research should be conducted to determine if this increases the likelihood of community engagement. Insight into how increased findings can be used to leverage additional community engagement would also be valuable to this field. Further knowledge can be gained about defining the roles of community members, i.e. parent, volunteer, and/or advocate, collaborating with stakeholders to provide all members of each group with tools to be most effective in their role(s), and creating action items and/or access points for community members to be engaged.

This paper examines two different models for soft skills education and community engagement in the OST field. There are numerous other organizations in the OST field that youth professionals and engaged community members can continue to learn from. Seeking continued networking and shared support, akin to the intermediary format would be recommended. Additional research into how to activate other cities to form intermediaries or OST support and resource centers would be incredibly beneficial to the field. While there are wonderful organizations working to decrease the soft skills deficit, there are not enough programs to meet the needs of all youth. Research into converting or strengthening existing OST programs with soft skills integration into the mission and curriculum of the program would be invaluable. There are a lot of people who are passionate about helping youth but just need the proper information and tools to do so.
VI. CONCLUSION

Increased awareness of the requirements for youth’s holistic growth and greater support of this growth needs to be cultivated throughout society. This begins with understanding youth’s needs, especially focused attention on soft skills education. The culture around OST programs and youth education needs to change. Youth need to be provided with additional opportunities to participate in various programs that will expose them to the complex world and help to prepare them to be contributing members of society. Geoffrey Canada said it well,

“The education field has to change, it’s the last industry to change…We have to work on getting people to invest in ensuring our future, that our kids are equipped to be leaders and productive citizens” (Canada, 2013).

The paradigm around OST programs must shift to embrace and push the limits of their potential. Collectively, communities have the ability to empower youth and the OST programs that serve them by requiring and actively supporting quality, soft skills focused, holistic growth minded, OST programs. This needs to become the norm and not the exception, limited to a few programs in a handful of cities, but available to all youth nationwide.
REFERENCES


http://bostonbeyond.org/initiatives/digital-badges/

Child Development, 909-925.


https://www.ted.com/talks/geoffrey_canada_our_failing_schools_enough_is_enough


http://www.citizenschools.org/about/model/8th-grade-academy/

http://www.citizenschools.org/about/model/
http://www.citizenschools.org/about/model/academic-support/

http://www.citizenschools.org/about/model/apprenticeships/

http://www.citizenschools.org/about/growth-strategy/

http://www.citizenschools.org/investors/corporate-engagement/

http://www.citizenschools.org/about/locations/

http://www.citizenschools.org/curriculum/mock-trial/


http://www.citizenschools.org/what-we-do/apprenticeships/

Citizen Schools. (2015). What We Do: Our Results Retrieved from
http://www.citizenschools.org/what-we-do/results/


Headlee, C. (2015, Apr). Transcript of “10 ways to have a better conversation.” Retrieved February 4, 2016, from [http://www.ted.com/talks/celeste_headlee_10_ways_to_have_a_better_conversation/transcript?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/celeste_headlee_10_ways_to_have_a_better_conversation/transcript?language=en)


APPENDIX
Appendix A - Citizen Schools and Boston After School & Beyond Interview Questions

Program Overview

- What made the current location(s) a viable option for this type of organization? How was this determined?
- What are the key elements that have led to the success of your organization?
- Describe what an average day is like for a youth in the Citizen Schools program? *(Citizen Schools specific question)*

Demographic information

- Can you provide demographic information about your participants?
- How do you choose locations to implement the program? Is the organization looking to expand?
  - *(For Boston After School & Beyond)* What made Boston a viable option for the intermediary?

Staff

- On the website, there are a limited number of staff members listed. Can you explain a little more about the staff and/or volunteer organizational structure and how they implement various elements of the programs?
- How do you ensure that your staff/volunteers are equipped to teach youth soft skills and embrace the community engagement model?
- How are the responsibilities for community engagement distributed among the staff and/or volunteers?
- How did you instill in all employees high quality program standards? *(For Citizen Schools)* especially across multiple cities across the country?

Partnerships

- Please describe the nature of your partnerships.
  - *(For Citizen Schools)* Can you please describe the difference between local or regional partners and national partners?
- How do you recruit partners to be actively engaged with the youth?
- Can you offer any specifics about the partnership with Citizen Schools and Boston After School & Beyond in Boston?
- Can you please explain how the intermediary system works for uniting a large number of Boston’s OST providers? *(Boston After School & Beyond specific question)*
- Can you please describe how the partnerships with the schools that the programs are located in works? *(Citizen Schools specific question)*

Research

- Are there any additional resources or research about the work that your organization is doing that you can share with me or direct me to?
Appendix B – Checklist to Evaluate OST Programs Teaching Soft Skills and Engaging the Community to Further these Efforts

**Soft Skills**

- Clearly defined, program specific definition of soft skills
- Curriculum and programs structured to provide youth with soft skill education opportunities
- Nurturing environment for youth to explore soft skills
- Create opportunities for youth to practice and refine soft skills
- Partnerships with youth to identify and explore their voice
- Staff/volunteers are trained to evaluate youth on soft skills and provide constructive criticism to encourage their continued growth and development

**Community Engagement**

- Well-defined roles and consistent expectations of each community partner
- Determine and invite all pertinent stakeholders to join partnership
- Early comprehensive planning
- Staff or volunteer structure to manage and develop the community partnerships
- Ensure leadership and staff of all involved organizations are prepared to embrace this new model
- Partners must be willing to collect data to measure the impact of the program
- Open communication about problems or concerns as they arise and a commitment to address the issue together
- Community-driven, sustainable approach to empowering youth