



Quality to Outcomes Project Summary

In 2013, Youth Development Executives of King County (YDEKC) and School's Out Washington (SOWA) partnered with the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality on a project intended to solidify a shared theory of change by pairing youth outcome data with data on program quality in out-of-school-time settings.

Purpose of the Project

Quality to Outcomes is a national initiative of the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. It is an extension of the Center's work on the Youth Program Quality Initiative, a quality improvement system aimed at out-of-school-time programs for youth. Quality to Outcomes examines the relationship between program quality and youth-level outcomes. The project is guided by the theory of change shown in **figure 1**:

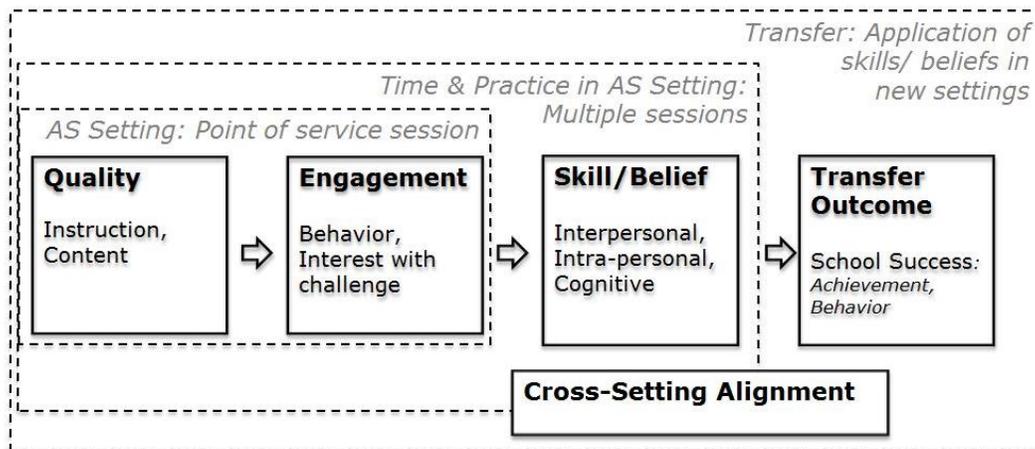


Figure 1: QuEST (Quality – Engagement – Skills – Transfer) Theory of Change¹

In this model, quality instruction at the point of service leads to youth engagement, which leads to the development of proximal skills and beliefs. These skills and beliefs – qualities like grit and self-efficacy – lead to improvements in academic and other life outcomes. The primary questions guiding the Quality to Outcomes work are:

1. Does high-quality instruction lead to youth engagement?
2. Does high-quality instruction lead to the development of youth-level skills and beliefs?
3. Do youth who participate in high-quality programs show improved transfer outcomes?

¹Smith C., Hallman, S., Hillaker, B., Sugar, S., McGovern, G., & Devaney, E. (2012). *Development and early validation evidence for an observational measure of high quality instructional practice for science, technology, engineering and mathematics in out-of-school time settings: The STEM supplement to the Youth Program Quality Assessment*. Forum for Youth Investment. Washington DC.



King County Involvement in Quality to Outcomes

Youth Development Executives of King County (YDEKC) and School's Out Washington (SOWA) joined Quality to Outcomes in 2013 to investigate the second question posed above; specifically, what is the relationship between high-quality practice and youth skills and beliefs? A secondary question that emerged was: is it possible to measure youth skills and beliefs in a valid, reliable way that is meaningful for program improvement and evaluation?

The strategy of the King County Quality to Outcomes effort has been twofold: to adapt a youth survey developed by YDEKC to out-of-school-time program settings, and to investigate the linkages between youth outcomes, as measured by the survey, and program quality, as measured by the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA). School's Out Washington leads the Youth Program Quality Initiative (YPQI) in King County and across Washington State.

Youth Development Executives of King County (YDEKC)

YDEKC is a member-based nonprofit organization located in Seattle, Washington. YDEKC has 86 member organizations throughout King County. YDEKC is fiscally responsible to School's Out Washington.

School's Out Washington (SOWA)

Founded in 1987, SOWA is a statewide intermediary agency which provides services and guidance for organizations to ensure all young people have safe places to learn and grow when not in school.

Project Highlights

Kickoff Event

Quality to Outcomes officially kicked off in the spring of 2013, with a convening of 30 King County organizations that were involved with the YPQI and interested in measuring youth skills and beliefs. During this kickoff event, participants reviewed the youth outcome framework created by YDEKC in 2011-2012, and identified the following as key youth skills and beliefs to further develop measures for:

- **Academic Behaviors:** Going to class; organizing materials and managing time; doing homework
- **Future Orientation:** Setting short and long term goals and monitoring progress towards them; hope and optimism regarding one's future potential, goals and choices
- **Self-Management:** Assessing and regulating one's feelings, emotions and behaviors; staying focused
- **Positive Mindsets:** Belief in one's own capabilities and capacity to learn; belief that intelligence and ability can increase through effort; belief in

Uses for Youth Skills Data:

- **Community Positioning:** Identify common skill domains related to community-level goals for youth
- **Performance Improvement:** Support adult learning and quality improvement
- **Proof of Effectiveness:** Provide evidence of program effectiveness in moving youth toward desired outcomes

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importance of learning and that what one is doing is relevant to achieving personal goals

- **Sense of Belonging:** Perception of acceptance and support in a learning community; establishing and maintaining healthy relationships with adults and peers; recognizing and using family, school, and community resources; asking for help; understanding one's own culture, values and interests
- **Interpersonal Skills:** Learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, effectively communicating; preventing, managing and resolving interpersonal conflict
- **Social and Civic Values:** Taking the perspective of and empathizing with others; belief in contributing to the safety and well-being of others in one's community; belief in the value of promoting equity and reducing suffering; standing up for beliefs and acting on convictions
- **Creativity:** Using a wide range of idea creation techniques, such as brainstorming; acting on creative ideas to make a tangible and useful contribution
- **Critical Thinking:** Ability to reflect on one's assumptions and thinking, and adjust behavior in response to challenges; ability to generate and select from appropriate alternatives based on desired outcomes
- **Health Motivation and Awareness:** Motivation to make healthy choices: belief that it is important to avoid high risk behaviors; restraint; recognizing health needs

The group then spent time looking at the Student Engagement and Motivation Survey (SEMS) that YDEKC previously developed for use in local schools, to provide feedback on changes that would be needed to adapt the survey to youth program contexts. After the kickoff, 15 of the participating organizations signed on to the first phase of the project by agreeing to administer a youth survey in their programs and evaluate the results alongside their YPQA scores.

Spring 2013 Survey Pilot

In April and May of 2013, program staff administered revised Youth Skills and Beliefs surveys to 345 participants in grades 6 through 12. Both online and paper versions were used. During the same period, sites underwent both self and external assessments using the YPQA. After all surveys were completed, the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality analyzed the results, and produced reports for all participating programs showing their program averages alongside averages for the network as a whole.

Planning with Data

In June of 2013, pilot sites participated in a half-day Planning with Data session using their results reports. The session used an inquiry approach to interpret the data provided by the youth survey and YPQ assessments. In general, pilot participants felt that defining and measuring youth skills and beliefs could be very validating for the youth development field, and appreciated having a common language to talk about skills that matter to youth success. Some participants observed that while YPQA scores were mixed, youth skill measures were uniformly high. Others found it difficult to draw relevant conclusions from the skills data as the questions asked youth about their skills generally, and not in the context of the program.



Follow-Up Meeting

Pilot participants came together again in November of 2013 to advise on project next steps. The findings from the technical report on the pilot survey tool were reviewed, and several alternative approaches were considered:

- A **pre-/post- design** that measures changes in youth skills over time. This would require identifiable data and approval by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). It may also be subject to response shift bias, which results when increases in knowledge and exposure lower respondents' self-assessments.
- A **retrospective pre-/post- design** that asks youth to reflect on their skill growth upon program completion. This would not require the collection of identifiable data, but its validity as a true measure of youth skills is uncertain.
- A **snapshot** approach using an abbreviated set of subscales and questions of increasing difficulty.

Substantive and Technical Findings from the Pilot

The Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality analyzed the results of the youth survey from both a psychometric perspective, and in terms of its potential usefulness for a range of purposes. Their major findings can be summarized as follows:

- The Skills and Beliefs Survey in its current form may be useful for **positioning**.
- All scales are skewed to the left, and have substantial ceiling effects, which makes it difficult to use the data for **performance improvement** or **proof of effectiveness**.
- Low-skill youth are evenly distributed across programs, which makes the snapshot approach inappropriate for program evaluation (i.e. **proof of effectiveness**).
- Scales are highly correlated with one another; since they do not identify distinct, independent concepts, interpretation is challenging.

As with the school-based Student Engagement and Motivation Survey that YDEKC piloted in 2012, the pilot survey showed positive relationships between self-reported skills and self-reported grades. Program quality was related to responses on items related to program fit, but the relationship was only marginally significant.

Looking Ahead to Project Next Steps

YDEKC hopes to continue work on the Quality to Outcomes Project into 2014, with the dual goals of improving and expanding the youth survey tool, and growing a local learning community focused on the use of program quality and youth outcome data for performance improvement. To this end, we will be working with Washington State's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the American Institutes of Research (AIR) on a revised version of the survey, to be piloted in 21st-Century Community Learning Centers and select other sites in Spring 2014. We will also convene a committed cohort of programs beginning in December 2014 to move this work forward.