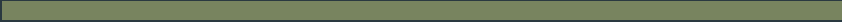# Increasing Opportunities for Alexandria City Youth

A Community Report
Executive Summary

DECEMBER 2023

Executive Summary

High-quality out-of-school time (OST) programs promote positive youth development and offer a safe space where youth can explore their potential. OST programs are viewed as a valuable resource by community members in the City of Alexandria (City), and this holds true across all populations and grades. However, less than 35 percent of students/families reported being engaged in OST activities in the past twelve months. An opportunity exists to re-imagine how programs are delivered in the City: right-sizing and growing offerings so that all youth in the City have equitable access and engagement in meaningful OST programs and community-based activities.

What is This Study?

The Youth Support Network - ACT for Alexandria, with financial support from the City of Alexandria and Frank & Betty Wright Foundation, in collaboration with a multitude of stakeholders, commissioned Weber Moore Partners, LLC to conduct a community-wide study.

The study...

1

Documents and maps the current state of OST and community programming for K-12 students in the City.

2

Identifies the hopes, needs, and barriers experienced by youth, families and providers related to OST time activities with a focus on middle and high-school students.

3

Develops recommendations to inform the continued development of the Youth Support Network and serve as a community-wide call to action about the value and importance of expanded learning programs for children and youth.

This study builds on the commitment of the Alexandria community to prioritize OST activities and the findings of the Alexandria Out-of-School Time—A 2017 Community Report which highlighted a drop off in participation rates as youth entered middle school. This study was conducted over the course of 18 months, utilizing a mix of qualitative and quantitative techniques securing insights from 5,785 community members.

Parents and youth identified having fun as the top desired outcome from participating in OST programs, and there is a broad range of desired activities. They are looking for programs that value diversity, cultural sensitivity and meet youth where they are in both interests and location. Providers identified multiple areas where additional support is desired, with a centralized program locator, support coordinating with schools, opportunities for networking, and professional development topping the list.

Study Key Findings

1. Many youth do not participate in OST programming. This is an untapped market and opportunity.

2. A culture shift in how we design opportunities and communicate about them is needed to make youth-informed programming a priority.

3. One size does not fit all – families and youth want inclusive, accessible, diverse and age-appropriate programming.

4. A potentially inequitable geographic distribution of OST activities needs to be further explored.

5. A coordinated, community-based approach is needed to support a robust OST environment.

6. Better communication and promotion of programs is a must. How activities are described needs to match audience needs and wants.

7. Professional development/training and technical assistance would support providers in program delivery that meets consumer needs and demands.

Six Implementation Priorities

1 Create a way to capture and share information.

2 Advance robust professional development/training opportunities for OST staff.

3 Develop a comprehensive communication plan.

4 Grow diversity of programs and activities.

5 Expand community-based partnerships.

6 Implement supportive policies.