After-School Pursuits:
An Examination of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative

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School of Education
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A Publication by Public/Private Ventures
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A Publication by Public/Private Ventures
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Executive Summary

Over the past 10 years, federal and local governments have dramatically expanded funding for school-based after-school programs. This expansion, particularly for free or low-cost programs in poor communities, has been driven by two major policy concerns—improving young people’s educational outcomes and reducing crime in the after-school hours.

Despite broad enthusiasm for these programs, evaluation findings have been mixed, and there is much discussion about why they are not more positive. The evaluation of the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers indicates that positive impacts on grades and test scores are modest and are observed only for the academically neediest youth. Other evaluations show that positive academic outcomes are achievable primarily for young people who attend programs frequently and over several years.

It has been difficult to interpret these mixed findings because there are serious gaps in our knowledge about after-school programs. Evaluations that focus on programs’ impacts on young people have little information on program content—information that might help to explain why impacts were (or were not) achieved. And evaluations that focus on program implementation have little information about outcomes. People who fund and implement after-school programs are thus left with important, and unanswered, questions. Are the programs showing lackluster impacts because they are of mixed quality? Or is the actual content of programs unlikely to produce desired outcomes (however high the program quality)?

The evaluation of one citywide effort to create a specific type of after-school program, the San Francisco Beacon Initiative (SFBI), begins to address the gaps. SFBI founders began with very explicit ideas about why they thought the initiative could achieve desired outcomes, and they structured both initiative and evaluation activities to test those ideas. In an interim report we examined the initiative’s early progress in meeting its goals. This final report addresses the following questions:

- How did the Beacon centers foster high-quality activities and participation among young people?
- If young people participate in high-quality after-school programs, do they report positive developmental experiences such as a sense of belonging and positive peer and adult support?
- If young people report increases in these positive developmental experiences, do they also exhibit improved well-being and academic performance?

The San Francisco Beacon Initiative

In 1994, a broad-based group of San Francisco leaders set out to transform public schools in low-income neighborhoods into youth and family centers; these centers were intended to become beacons of activity for their communities before, during and after school, and during school vacations. Inspired by the New York City Beacon centers, and concerned about low-income youth’s poor outcomes, the initiative’s founders wanted to offer young people a broad range of enrichment opportunities in five core
programming areas: education, career development, arts and recreation, leadership and health. In providing these opportunities, the leaders hoped to improve young people’s competencies, and their social well-being and academic achievement. Individuals from public and private institutions worked together to raise funds and coordinate planning for the centers. As a result of their efforts, eight Beacon centers are now located in public schools,* providing a rich array of programs designed to help youth become responsible and productive adults.

The Initiative’s Theory of Change

Aware that high-quality programs increase the chances of success—and equally aware that ensuring quality across several centers would be challenging—the initiative leaders decided to build quality-assurance mechanisms into the initiative’s early plans. Thus, two key decisions were made. First, private funders agreed to pay for an intermediary, the Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD), which would provide the centers with training in youth development, organizational support and other services. Second, the initiative leaders developed a “theory of change”—a set of assumptions about the resources and activities necessary to achieve the initiative’s long-term goals. The theory of change would be used to guide initiative activities and ensure quality.

Working with a consulting firm, The Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE), early leaders of the SFBI relied on research about the relationships between developmental experiences and young people’s social and academic outcomes to develop their theory. It incorporated practitioners’ knowledge about how to provide opportunities for young people so that they could have such experiences at the centers.

In essence, the theory stated that if Beacon centers provided safe and welcoming settings that had high-quality activities, young people would participate. In turn, youth who participated would have positive developmental experiences. These experiences would, in turn, contribute to their social well-being and productivity. The initiative’s leaders were cautious in assuming that participation in the centers would lead to changes in academic outcomes such as grades, school attendance and test scores. However, they wanted to examine the relationships between young people’s participation and those academic outcomes.

The Evaluation

In 1998, Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) began to collect data for the evaluation, which focused on the first five Beacon centers that opened between Fall 1996 and Fall 1998 (three more opened in January 1999). Three of the five centers were located in middle schools, one was in an elementary school and one was in a high school.

We collected data from multiple sources. A Web-based management information system (MIS) implemented by the initiative permitted us to describe who used the centers, for how long and how often. The data were collected for the period September 1999 through June 2001. In-school surveys of 854 students in the three middle schools administered in Fall 1999 and Spring 2001 provided information about young people’s experiences and social well-being. We collected information on academic performance and student characteristics through school records. Together, the MIS, surveys and school records permitted us to assess whether or not improvements in young people’s experiences and outcomes could be linked to participation in the Beacon centers.

To gather data on the quality of Beacon center activities, trained researchers assessed a total of 112 activities in the five Beacon centers through observations. They also collected feedback forms from participating youth in 59 of the observed activities. Staff surveys were conducted with 134 staff members across the five centers to gather information about their background and education. We linked this information to information about activity quality, participation and youths’ experiences to examine what, if any, staff characteristics were linked to high-quality activities.

* The eight schools involved in the initiative are Community Bridges Beacon Center at Everett Middle School; Chinatown Beacon Center at Jean Parker Elementary School; Sunset Neighborhood Beacon Center at A.P. Gianinni Middle School; Richmond Village Beacon Center at George Washington High School; Visitacion Valley Community Beacon Center at Visitacion Valley Middle School; Bayview-Hunter’s Point Community Beacon Center at Gloria R. Davis Middle School; OMI/Excelsior Neighborhood Beacon Center at James Denman Middle School; and Western Addition Beacon Center at Benjamin Franklin Middle School.
Finally, interviews were conducted with a broad cross-section of staff to understand how the Beacon centers operated, and focus groups and interviews were conducted with participating Beacon youth to understand the role that Beacon participation played in their lives.

Below we summarize key findings from the full report.

The Beacon Centers were well supported, well staffed and well implemented.

Each of the five Beacon centers involved in the evaluation was run by a community-based organization that hired key staff and provided fiscal and other administrative support. Each had a core annual operational budget of about $300,000, which the center staff supplemented with additional funds and in-kind services. Each center also shared a common staff configuration, which included a full-time director and program coordinators who scheduled and planned activities in key program areas (such as educational activities or leadership development). Often, program coordinators worked directly with the young people, although they also hired many part-time staff members who ran specific activities. In addition, other community-based organizations ran activities at the centers.

The centers provided a broad range of enrichment opportunities in education, health, career development, arts/recreation and leadership, and implemented them well. About half of the observed activities provided high levels of developmental opportunities, such as warm and caring adults and peers, opportunities for youth to work together, leadership and decision-making. Another third provided average levels. In particular, observers rated activities strong in adult and peer warmth. Activities also tended to be well organized, material was presented clearly, and staff members were generally good at managing young people’s behaviors and interactions.

Many young social programs face uneven implementation, and in a community-wide initiative one can expect to see considerable variation across institutions. The relatively small degree of variation across the San Francisco Beacon centers’ broad array of activities was therefore impressive.

| Baseline Academic Performance Indicators for Youth |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                                  | Beacon  | Non-    |
|                                  | participants | participants |
| Initial average math score*     | 57.8    | 69.2    |
| Initial average reading score*  | 50.5    | 59.3    |
| Percent eligible for free or    | 50%     | 28%     |
| reduced-price lunch             |         |         |

*Stanford 9 test scores based on 99 point scale.

It appeared to be due to the initiative’s theory of change and the intermediary’s efforts to help sites develop and implement high-quality activities.

The Beacon centers recruited many young people, including the academically needy.

The Beacon centers were designed to serve approximately 500 people per year, including adults, and they exceeded these expectations. During the first six months of 2001, each of the five centers in the evaluation served between 350 and 720 young people, from 10 to 17 years old.

The after-school field has faced some criticism that it does not attract the neediest young people—neither the academically neediest, nor the poorest, nor those who are most in need of supervision during the after-school hours. The San Francisco Beacon centers, however, successfully reached a needy population. As the table indicates, the average standardized math and reading test scores for young people entering a Beacon center were significantly lower than for those who did not enroll. Also, almost twice as many youth who entered the Beacon centers were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch compared to youth who never went.

In addition, the centers had funds to hire case managers to serve youth referred by schools for poor behavior or by the juvenile justice system. Beacon centers reached at-risk youth by forming strong relationships with staff at the host schools and encouraging them to refer young people to the centers.
Young people attended the centers between one and three times a week.

Youth people’s attendance averaged about once a week in three centers and almost three days a week in two others. The highest participation rates were at an elementary school and in one of the middle schools. These participation rates are in line with those found in other evaluations of after-school programs.iii

Fifty-seven percent of the young people who attended the centers at least once attended for two “sessions” or longer (each session lasted between two and four months, depending on the time of year).

Youth had positive experiences at the Beacon centers; staff practices that contributed to positive experiences were identified.

A majority of the young people at the Beacon centers reported that they benefited from participation. Specifically, 80 percent felt a strong sense of belonging; 90 percent felt a sense of peer and adult support within activities; and 70 percent thought the activities offered something new and interesting. Staff practices that contributed to young people’s experiences in the centers included:

- Cooperative and positive peer interactions. When adults encouraged young people to work together, the youth felt more positively about the adults.

- The overall number of youth present. Young people in activities with fewer youth reported feeling higher levels of support from the staff than those in activities with more youth.

- Number of staff per youth. Having more staff per youth in activities was positively related to youths’ experiences of positive peer and adult support. One center was able to offer high staff-to-youth ratios by relying heavily on teen leaders and other volunteers.

Youth who participated over time and in a variety of activities, including educational and other enrichment activities, showed increased levels of adult support and leadership experiences.

Previous research has indicated that both how long young people participate in after-school activities and whether they participate in a variety of activities influence experiences.viii The current study provides further support for the importance of long-term participation and variety. Youth who attended the centers for two sessions or more, and who participated in educational development and other types of activities, showed increases in adult support and leadership experiences compared to their lower- or nonparticipating peers.

Participation in the Beacon centers appeared to play a protective role for young people, deterring a typical decline among middle-school youth in self-efficacy and the effort they put into school.

Beacon participation was related both to young people’s feelings of competence and self-efficacy (their ability to take on new challenges) and to the effort they exerted in school.

- Young people who participated in the Beacon centers for a year or more were 33 percent less likely to exhibit falling self-efficacy in the 18-month follow-up period compared with youth in their schools who either did not participate or who participated for less time.

Early adolescence is a vulnerable period academically—a time when many youth put less effort into school. They pay less attention in class, come to class unprepared and do not work on their homework. Ultimately, these behaviors can have a deleterious effect on grades.

- Compared to their peers, students who participated in one of the Beacon centers for a year or more were about 61 percent less likely to go from a high to a low level of effort.

The protective effect on school effort was particularly evident among the young people who participated in educational activities, where they often did homework. Especially during middle-school years, when the tendency is for youth to decline in self-efficacy and school effort, these findings are important.
Despite the centers being well planned, well supported, well staffed, and well implemented, and despite young people’s positive experiences at the centers, Beacon participants did not fare better academically than their non-Beacon peers.

Learning is a developmental process, and when young people begin to fall behind, the chances of catching up without a strong intervention are slim. Students become discouraged, and overcoming learning deficits may be an overwhelming task. By helping youth to maintain school effort and self-efficacy, we thought that Beacon participation might play an important role in supporting academic achievement.

However, the benefits of Beacon participation did not translate into better grades, test scores or fewer absences from school over the course of the 18-month evaluation. Our investigation into why there were no relationships between Beacon participation and grades, test scores or school absences suggests two possible explanations. First, the academic content of the educational activities was not sufficiently rigorous to enhance young people’s knowledge. Although the academic support activities were generally well structured and managed, they tended to consist of homework help or tutoring. Second, even though young people attended regularly over time, the average number of days youth attended each week was low. Our research, and that of others, indicates that in order to see positive academic effects among young people who face serious academic deficits, the content of after-school programs needs to be more focused and young people’s attendance needs to be higher. In a recent investigation, Robert Halpern finds that promising literacy activities in after-school programs are material-rich, with sufficient books and careful attention paid to how books are displayed and organized. They also focus on strengthening young people’s motivation to read and write through several means, including linking reading and writing with explorations of identity and self; integrating literacy activities with other activities, such as cooking and field trips to the theater; and by fostering a sense of playfulness about reading and writing.

There is some possibility, not tested in this study, that the SFBI’s overall positive effect on young people’s level of school effort could slow academic declines in the long run. Many young people fall behind as they progress through middle and high school. Because learning is a developmental process, effort put into school at one point in time may support academic achievement much later on.

Summary

The San Francisco Beacon Initiative is an impressive example of a citywide after-school effort that has accomplished many of the tasks it set for itself. Taken together, the findings from the evaluation suggest that after-school programs can attract and serve large numbers of ethnically diverse and academically needy youth, with a broad range of high-quality activities. Starting with a common vision and well-thought-out plan, initiative staff from funding agencies, the intermediary and the organizations that operated the centers worked together to create Beacon centers with a solid funding base, highly skilled staff, a wide range of opportunities available to youth and high-quality developmental activities. These, in turn, led to positive experiences among the participating youth.

Although strong implementation of a range of enrichment activities and positive experiences did not lead to improvements in grades and standardized test scores, the Beacon centers played a positive role in young people’s lives. The findings indicate that if those who plan and fund after-school programs have a primary interest in improving academic achievement, they need a sharper focus on academic study than was typically seen in the SFBI. However, the SFBI provides rich information about how to implement strong programs providing opportunities that contribute to positive social development, which may be especially important to youth who cannot otherwise access such opportunities.
Notes


ii See Karen E. Walker and Amy J.-A. Arbreton. *Working Together to Build Beacon Centers in San Francisco: Evaluation Findings from 1998–2000.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2002. The report examines the centers’ early progress in creating safe, welcoming, visible and accessible centers, the collaborations that were necessary to do so and how the initiative successfully managed a complex set of partnerships to achieve its early goals. It also presents information on young people’s participation and experiences during the early years of the initiative.

iii In the Wallace-Readers’ Digest Fund’s Extended Service Schools, for example, elementary-school students participated about 2 times/week, and middle school students about 1.5 times/week. In the first-year evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, the evaluation also found similar participation rates. The After School Corporation’s New York programs, however, showed higher rates of attendance.

iv See Michelle A. Gambone and Amy J.A. Arbreton *Safe Havens: The Contributions of Youth Organizations to Healthy Adolescent Success.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1997; and Huang et al., *A Decade of Results: The Impacts of the LA’s BEST After School Enrichment Program on Subsequent Student Achievement and Performance.*

I talk to people. I trust a lot of people here [in Girls’ Poetry and at the Community Bridges Beacon]. I’m learning all of these different things that I didn’t even know. Like, I could be using a technique, and I wouldn’t even know about it until [the teacher] told me, “Oh, you’re using this technique and blah, blah, blah.” And I’d say, “I didn’t even know that!” [It makes me] feel happy. It’s like I’m smarter than I think. (Middle-school youth)

Young people require a range of supports and opportunities to thrive, both in the present and the future. Researchers have long shown that young people who fare best socially and academically are those who have supportive relationships with adults and peers, feel a sense of belonging and being valued, and who have opportunities to do things that matter in their communities.1

Recent studies, however, have indicated that a substantial proportion of adolescents—approximately 15 to 25 percent—report limited experiences in some of these areas.2 For example, youth who are disengaged from school may find teachers and other adults at school inaccessible or unsupportive. They may also find the schoolwork boring, confusing or irrelevant. In some families, young people are discouraged from participating in the decision-making process. In poor communities, there may be few organizations available to young people, and low-income youth may not have the resources to belong to those community organizations that do exist. Adolescents, who are quite naturally interested in forming relationships and engaging in activities outside the family and school, may find that opportunities for doing so are limited.

Recognizing that some young people lack enriching opportunities that lead to important developmental outcomes—and out of a deep concern for young people’s educational performance—federal, state and private foundations have dramatically expanded funding for school-based after-school programs in the past several years. At the federal level, proposed funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers for fiscal year 2004 is $1 billion. States have also allocated funds for programs; one example is California’s Before and After School Learning and Safe Neighborhood Partnerships Program. And cities such as New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Los Angeles have contributed city funds to support these efforts.

Although a number of efforts were originally initiated because funders and program operators wanted to provide broad enrichment activities, many have become more focused on educational activities. Since the late 1990s, public pressure on schools to improve students’ academic outcomes has intensified. As a partial response to this pressure, the expansion of public funding brought with it expectations that young people’s academic outcomes would improve through participation in after-school programs. Evaluations for some of the programs have indicated that impacts are mixed: One of the most rigorously designed evaluations, that of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, reported that positive impacts on grades and test scores are modest and are observed only for the academically neediest youth. Advocates of a broad youth development approach, concerned by the findings, have noted that the evaluation measured impacts only after the first year of funding. For some school sites in the evaluation, the first year of funding was also the first year of program operation, when the quality of programming may have been uneven. The evaluation has also been criticized because it did not assess many important social effects that the program may have had. Other evaluations have indicated that positive academic outcomes are achievable primarily for young people who go to the programs frequently and over several years.3
The San Francisco Beacon Initiative

In this environment of national concern over academic outcomes and an ensuing discussion of evaluation findings, we present findings from an evaluation of one citywide effort, the San Francisco Beacon Initiative (SFBI). In 1994 a broad-based group of San Francisco leaders set out to transform public schools in low-income neighborhoods into youth and family centers that would become beacons of activity for their communities before, during and after school, and during school vacations. Inspired by the New York City Beacon centers, the initiative’s founders wanted to offer a broad range of enriching opportunities to young people in the areas of education, career development, arts and recreation, leadership and health. The result—the SFBI—provides a rich array of programs aimed at helping youth become responsible and productive adults. Although it aims to serve school-aged youth from 5 to 18, as well as their families, it focuses particularly on the middle-school years, when young people’s risks begin to rise. Of the eight Beacon centers in San Francisco, six are located in middle schools, one in an elementary school and one in a high school. Although the centers are located in schools, they serve both youth who go to the host schools and those who live in the neighborhoods but do not attend the schools.

From the beginning, the initiative founders wanted to ensure that all eight Beacon centers provided high-quality activities, and they knew that multi-site initiatives often exhibit considerable variation in quality across sites. Therefore, instead of simply providing funds to the community-based organizations that operated each of the eight centers and letting the agencies plan each center’s activities independently, the leaders chose to create an initiative-wide work plan. Working collaboratively with a consulting firm, the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE), they created a type of plan called a theory of change to guide their work. The theory of change consisted of a set of goals (or long-term outcomes) that the initiative planned to achieve, and the steps necessary to achieve them (short- and intermediate-term outcomes). It drew explicitly on research about the relationships between developmental supports and opportunities and young people’s social and academic outcomes. It also incorporated practitioners’ knowledge about how to provide such developmental opportunities, and assigned responsibility for action to three sets of institutions: 1) the sites; 2) the intermediary, Community Network for Youth Development, which provided technical assistance and operational management; and 3) the funders on the steering committee.

In a nutshell, the theory of change says that when Beacon centers provide safe and welcoming settings for young people, high-quality activities and a variety of opportunities, youth will participate. When youth participate, they will have positive experiences (intermediate-term outcomes). These in turn will eventually contribute to their social well-being and productivity (in this case, school performance).

Specifically, initiative leaders hoped to ensure that there were supportive adults and peers at the centers with whom young people could form positive relationships and share positive experiences. They also wanted young people to have opportunities to make decisions and take on leadership roles, which would help them feel involved in meaningful activities. The founders hoped that the young people who had these opportunities and experiences would feel more effective in general, respond more positively to social challenges, put more effort into school and exhibit better academic outcomes. However, the leaders were cautious in their assumptions about academic impacts, and identified academic outcomes as “exploratory.” They did not want to define their success solely by such measures as grades and test scores, because young people who went to the centers were free to choose from many activities, including those that did not include an educational component, and thus may not have been exposed to sufficient instruction to improve their academic skills. Nonetheless, given the increasing national concern about low-income urban youths’ academic achievement, the founders wanted to examine whether or not academic outcomes were better for the young people who went to the Beacon centers.

The Report

This report relies on the initiative’s theory of change to assess its progress. In particular, it asks:

- Did the initiative create community centers that were welcoming, safe, accessible and well staffed?
Introduction

• Did the initiative offer high-quality programming in core areas?

• How did young people participate in the centers—who came and how often, and what did they do there?

• Did young people who participated in the centers have rich developmental experiences?

• Did young people experience positive changes in their social well-being and success in school?

The report, however, examines not just these intended outcomes, but also how the initiative set out to achieve them. To examine why and how things happened, we tested the links between early, intermediate and long-term outcomes in the theory of change. In reporting the results of those tests, the report focuses on the following related questions:

• What organizational and staff practices contributed to high-quality activities?

• To what extent can young people’s participation in the centers be linked to the quality of the activities?

• To what extent can we link young people’s developmental experiences to their participation in the Beacon centers?

• To what extent can long-term outcomes be linked to the developmental experiences that young people had in the centers?

The evaluation of the SFBI was unusual because it was designed around the theory of change. Although strong program operators always have some underlying assumptions about why an intervention is effective, and strong evaluators test those assumptions, few evaluations have been so explicit in their use of the theory of change. Therefore, this report not only examines what happened to the young people who attended the Beacon centers, it also considers the opportunities and challenges presented by the explicit articulation and use of the theory of change.

Summary of Major Findings

As the report describes in detail, the San Francisco Beacon Initiative established an ambitious agenda. Indeed, one of the key successes of the SFBI is that, despite the difficulty most out-of-school programs have in recruiting academically high-risk youth and teens, the centers reached an academically needy population of adolescents and kept many involved for a year or more. Importantly, pre- and post-surveys show that young people from the host schools had positive developmental experiences at the centers and derived a number of benefits from their participation over the course of 18 months, including improved social well-being and a more positive orientation toward school than their nonparticipating peers. This second finding was particularly important for the middle school students we observed, because early adolescence is a vulnerable time when disengagement from school rises steadily.

The report also provides information about the kinds of activities and programming that led to positive experiences. Observations indicated that programs dedicated to leadership development, the arts and recreation tended to be rich in developmental opportunities and positive experiences. Educational programming tended to be less rich in developmental opportunities—such as opportunities to work cooperatively or make decisions—than other types of programming. Participation in the centers did, however, increase young people’s school effort, an important developmental outcome. As we show, the young people who participated in both educational and other types of activities tended to have the most positive experiences and benefits.

The definitiveness of the evaluation is limited by the nature of the comparison group, which consisted of young people who did not go to a Beacon center but who were students in a host school. As we shall see in a later chapter, the young people who went to a Beacon center varied from those who did not. In particular, they were at greater academic risk than their nonparticipating peers, which may have resulted in the evaluation underestimating the possible effects of the Beacon centers.

Finally, we note that the theory of change helped enormously in the initiative’s management. Its use kept initiative stakeholders focused, and we ascribe the consistency in quality that we saw across the
Beacon centers to the fact that everyone understood the initiative’s goals. On the other hand, we note that rearranging the sequencing of some events in the theory of change might have produced better outcomes. For example, the initiative’s early focus was getting programs off the ground and raising participation rates, with a later focus on improving the quality of activities. This was largely due to a belief that gaining early visibility in the communities and developing strong participation rates would be necessary to generate the support that centers needed. The thought was that support would increase and stabilize funding, and once that happened, there would be time to focus on activity quality. However, the information in this report suggests that placing a greater emphasis on program quality from the start of the initiative might have been more effective in ensuring long-term participation among young people.

The theory of change also did not specify how much participation was optimal—in part because when the first centers opened in 1996 there was little available information. In the years since, however, a number of published evaluations of after-school programs have pointed to the importance of participation levels—both frequency and duration—in fostering positive outcomes. This evaluation provides further evidence that duration and frequency of attendance matter.

Research Methods and Goals

In Fall 1998, Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) began an independent evaluation of the SFBI. The study included five centers (located in one high school, one elementary school and three middle schools), which opened between Fall 1996 and Fall 1998. Three additional centers—all in middle schools—opened in 1999, when the study was already underway. The goals of the study were to examine the initiative’s achievement of the early, intermediate and long-term goals identified by the theory of change (each of which is described more specifically in Chapter 2). Information for the current report was collected through a variety of rich qualitative and quantitative data sources. The data sources are listed here. More detail about each data source is described in Appendix A.

In examining the initiative’s progress on early outcomes, we rely on information from Beacon staff surveys that were conducted in Summer and Fall 2001 to collect information about staff experience, education and training. We also rely on interview data from twice-yearly visits that were made to each center to interview Beacon staff, activity providers, community members, school staff and other stakeholders, including public and private funders, steering committee members, intermediary staff, school district personnel and administrators from city agencies. We also conducted document reviews of progress reports, budgets, training materials and other information supplied by the initiative.

Trained observers assessed the quality of the Beacon activities through observations of the developmental opportunities provided to youth in the activities at the centers.

To examine young people’s participation in the centers, the evaluation used information from a Web-based management information system (MIS) that permits all centers to enter enrollment and attendance data for the youth and adults who attend center activities.

Information used to examine young people’s developmental experiences and outcomes came from several sources. These include surveys of all youth in the three middle schools that are part of the evaluation; these surveys were administered to participants and nonparticipants to measure how they spent their out-of-school time and to document developmental outcomes related to well-being. School records were collected from the San Francisco Unified School District on gender, ethnicity, grade-point averages, standardized test scores and attendance. Feedback forms from a subset of activities observed across the five centers were gathered during activity time at the Beacons to assess elementary-, middle- and high-school youth experiences and relate them to the observed qualities of the activities.

Finally, Milbrey McLaughlin and a group of graduate students at Stanford University School of Education conducted a qualitative study called Youth Voices to understand the role the Beacons play in youths’ lives and what participation means to them. For the study, the Youth Voices research team conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with young people who participated in the Beacon initiative and worked with 18 youth ethnographers who provided their insights on the community and the neighborhood, and the role of the Beacon centers. Some of the data and analyses from that
study are included in this report. (Complete findings from the Youth Voices study are reported in a separate document that will be published by the Community Network for Youth Development.)

**Terminology and Definitions Used in the Report**

As we worked with the theory of change in designing the evaluation, we specified what was meant by some of the broad categories mentioned in the theory. Each of the following chapters identifies the section of the theory of change it will consider, along with the specific measures we used. There are three terms, however, that are important to mention here.

First, one of the intermediate—or mid-term—outcomes is “high-quality developmental supports and opportunities.” There has been considerable confusion in the youth development field over what the phrase “supports and opportunities” means. In some cases, the term “supports and opportunities” has been used to refer to the opportunities provided to young people. In other cases, authors have discussed “supports and opportunities” as experiences that young people have.

To minimize confusion, in this report we use the term “developmental opportunities” to describe the quality of the activities in terms of what the Beacon centers (and other arenas of young people’s lives) offer to young people. In other words, developmental opportunities are provided to young people by others. For example, young people can have opportunities to form positive relationships with adults who treat youth in respectful and caring ways. That does not necessarily mean, however, that they will do so. When we talk about what young people actually experience and do, we use the term “developmental experiences.” Finally, when we discuss how young people fare in school or in social life, we use the term “developmental outcomes”—or “long-term outcomes,” which is how they are categorized in the theory of change.

**Structure of the Report**

To a large extent, the report is structured according to the theory of change. The interim report examined the SFBI’s progress for all three organizational levels—the intermediary (CNYD), the initiative (the steering committee of funders) and the sites (the Beacon centers). This final evaluation report focuses on the centers and what happened to the young people. Chapter 2 describes the theory of change in more detail. Chapter 3 describes the initiative as a whole, and Chapter 4 describes the centers and asks whether or not they achieved key early outcomes.

Chapters 5 through 8 are the heart of this report. Chapter 5 examines the quality of the programing at the centers and the organizational and staff practices that contributed to high-quality programs. Chapter 6 analyzes youth participation at the centers. It also examines center and programmatic characteristics that might be linked to participation. In Chapters 7 and 8, we look at young people’s outcomes. Chapter 7 examines the developmental experiences that young people had at the centers and whether or not those experiences can be linked to participation. Chapter 8 examines long-term outcomes—competency development, social well-being and school success.

Chapter 9, the conclusion, reflects on the implications that the findings have for the after-school field.
I definitely believe in the youth development model and the theory of change. I believe that...by creating safe places for children to be, by creating a rich environment of academic, recreational, cultural activities, [and by] having people work together in leadership, that the community can be strengthened. When the community can identify what its needs are and institutions can respond authentically, together we will be stronger. (CNYD staff member)

From the beginning, the SFBI intended to create much more than high-quality after-school programs. Stakeholders envisioned Beacon centers as hubs of activity for young people and their families. The centers were intended to be places where community programs and groups could come together with local residents and young people from the host schools to provide educational and cultural activities. The initiative’s founders hoped to touch a broad range of people and be resources for all. Ultimately, the initiative leaders hoped that the Beacon centers would become neighborhood institutions that improved the lives of all neighborhood young people and strengthened the web of supports available within the communities. In short, even though it focused on youth development, the SFBI had many of the elements of an initiative aimed at changing a community.

Community initiatives are challenging to implement. They require the work and engagement of many people and organizations and are designed to respond to a broad range of local conditions. In short, each community initiative is expected to be implemented in a unique, context-specific way.

In practice, manifold challenges accompany such ambitious undertakings. The multiple community members and organizations crucial to the project’s planning inevitably voice different opinions about the community’s needs and strengths. Such diverse ideas generate creative thinking and interesting collaborations but must also be organized so that they contribute to coherent planning. People ultimately must agree on how things will be done and who will do them. Without such accountability, it is challenging to ensure that things get done. Yet in community initiatives, where the task is complicated by the kind of multiple-group negotiations described above, getting organizations to agree on who will do what and when can be especially arduous.

The task of evaluation—deciding whether and how goals have been met—is also complicated in community initiatives. When one of the goals of the initiative is to affect the lives of everyone in the community, random-assignment impact studies to evaluate how individuals have benefited are not possible. Finding comparison communities is challenging because researchers do not yet know enough about how to measure community-level variables to make identification of such communities possible. Also, demands on comparison communities to collect data can be a considerable burden, and there is often little incentive to participate in such studies. And finally, a considerable number of resources are needed to ensure that researchers understand events in both treatment and comparison communities that might affect the findings.

SFBI planning-group members recognized these multiple challenges and addressed them through the theory of change process. The following sections help the reader understand how the project was envisioned by its planners, the resulting theory of change and the evaluation that was designed around it.

Over the course of one year, during 1996 and 1997, Community Network for Youth Development, the intermediary, brought in the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE) to develop a guiding theory that would reflect the assumptions of the
SFBI stakeholders. A researcher from IRRE who was experienced in the theory of change process and an expert in adolescent development conducted interviews with stakeholders from the Beacon centers and with the funders.

Regular meetings among key stakeholders—funders, intermediary staff and Beacon center directors—were held to identify important long-term outcomes that the Beacon centers hoped to achieve through their efforts. Meetings were also held at the centers with staff, community residents, representatives from partner organizations, and students involved in the centers to discuss the goals of the initiative.

The group hoped that the Beacon centers would be able to improve the lives of youth and their families. The group also aimed to create centers that would become institutions within their neighborhoods and schools so the work would continue into the future.

Once it had identified key long-term outcomes, the group set about constructing a model, or theory, of how the outcomes would be achieved. The group’s members identified the early- and intermediate-term outcomes that tied to desired long-term outcomes. They expected the initiative to achieve early outcomes, which focused on getting high-quality programs off the ground within the first two years of operations. Intermediate outcomes, which focused on ensuring that youth participated at high enough levels to make a difference and that they had high-quality experiences, were expected by the end of the fourth year. Initiative leaders did not expect to achieve long-term outcomes until year five and beyond.

The initiative’s stakeholders based their assumptions about which early and intermediate outcomes needed to be achieved on both broad programmatic experience and a large body of research that has examined the links between young people’s experiences and their outcomes (see Appendix B for a review of some of the literature).

The resulting theory of change integrated practitioners’ knowledge about the attributes of good youth programs and what it takes to get a new project off the ground with researchers’ knowledge about child and adolescent development. It not only made explicit assumptions about how to improve the lives of youth and their neighborhoods, it also identified the organizational levels at which changes (i.e., outcomes) must occur.

The initiative leaders also decided that the initiative would be held accountable for achieving all early and intermediate outcomes. As we show below, however, some long-term outcomes were defined as exploratory because the leaders were not convinced that they could be achieved in the specified time frame.

Below, we present the desired outcomes for each level as outlined in the theory of change.

As we noted in the introduction, the initiative is administered on three levels: the site level, the intermediary level and the initiative level. Each level plays a specific role and has specific responsibilities for ensuring that designated outcomes are achieved, which we describe in some detail in the rest of this chapter.

Key organizations at the site level are the community-based organizations that manage day-to-day operations at each center (the lead agencies) and the host schools. At the intermediary level is CNYD, which provides technical assistance to the centers and facilitates communications among all partners. At the initiative level is the steering committee, which consists of funders and their representatives and is responsible for policy and funding. The levels, however, cannot and do not operate independently of one another: They are tied together by the interconnected nature of the initiative. Thus, although this report focuses on outcomes at the site level, we present each of the three levels in our descriptions.

The Site Level

The site level consists of the Beacon centers, their lead agencies, their host schools and their local communities and agencies. It is the initiative’s most visible level; the tasks for which the Beacon center staff is responsible include creating the Beacon centers themselves, staffing them, engaging the community, coordinating programs and ensuring that the programs are of high quality.

In Table 2.1 on the following page, we present the outcomes that were defined for the site level in the theory of change. Overall, the table indicates that the initiative leaders hoped to achieve positive
outcomes not only for young people but also for their families and communities. In the long run, they hoped that young people would show increased competencies in the five core program areas (arts and recreation, career development, education, health and leadership development). These were expected outcomes, to which the initiative held itself accountable. It also hoped that young people would exhibit increased well-being and success in school, but initiative leaders realized that such outcomes are influenced by many factors. For example, success in school is strongly influenced by familial support, the quality of the schools that youth attend and, importantly, previous performance. Therefore, the Beacon stakeholders could not guarantee that participation would improve academic achievement within the five-year time frame of the evaluation.

**Intermediary Level**

Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD), a nonprofit organization, became the intermediary in 1995. CNYD provided support for both the initiative and the site levels, and was responsible for a broad range of tasks and outcomes. Early outcomes for which it was responsible included strengthening the centers’ understanding of, and commitment to, the theory of change and providing youth development training. It also identified some organizational weaknesses that posed barriers to successful implementation of the centers and provided the necessary technical assistance to help the centers overcome those barriers.

Throughout the initiative, CNYD was responsible for facilitating communications among stakeholders and with the community. It provided support to steering committee and other meetings, it identified and communicated operational challenges facing the sites to the steering committee, and it managed a public support campaign for the initiative. One of its most important roles was in facilitating partnerships among the many organizations involved in the initiative, particularly among the Beacon centers and other youth-serving organizations.

Table 2.2, on the following page, presents the intermediary-level outcomes.

### Table 2.1
**Site-Level Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Early</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Encouragement of community engagement and leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Beacon centers that are visible, accessible, safe and welcoming to all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Beacon programs that support long-term outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Beacon staff who are well trained, diverse and responsive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participation of youth and families in a range of activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Intermediate**

**For youth:**
- Increased productive use of discretionary time
- High-quality developmental supports and opportunities, including supportive relationships, interesting learning experiences, involvement and membership

**For adults/families:**
- Increased connections with others
- Broader and deeper participation in family activities

**For youth and adults/families:**
- Growing participation in the Beacon centers
- Reported benefits of Beacon participation

**For communities:**
- Reported positive impact
- Involvement in Beacon decision-making
- Leverage of resources into the community

**For schools:**
- Increased school–Beacon integration
- Increased school–community interaction

**Long-Term**

**For youth:**
- Increased competencies in core areas*
- Well-being*
- Success in school*

**For adults/families:**
- Increased competencies in core areas*
- Increased family supports for education*
- Positive school connections*

**For communities:**
- Community ownership of the Beacon*
- Increased leveraging of resources*
- Greater community support for youth*

**For schools:**
- Shared sense of purpose between Beacon and school*
- Broader and deeper school–Beacon integration*
- Broader and deeper school–community collaboration*

* Expected outcomes
+ Exploratory outcomes
The Initiative's Theory of Change

Table 2.2
Intermediary-Level Outcomes

Early
In support of the site-level outcomes:
- Build positive and cooperative relationships among Beacon site stakeholders
- Strengthen sites' commitment to theory of change
- Provide needed implementation resources and effective supports that build site capacity to establish a Beacon center
- Build Beacon centers' understanding of and commitment to youth development practices

In support of the initiative-level outcomes:
- Build positive and cooperative relationships among initiative stakeholders
- Support and advocate for systems accommodations to Beacon centers
- Initiate and manage the development of evaluation strategies
- Facilitate development and effective management of public-support campaigns
- Initiate development of a core funding strategy and cultivation of donors

Intermediate
In support of the site-level outcomes:
- Build teamwork and shared responsibility among Beacon site stakeholders
- Strengthen implementation of youth development best practices that enhance quality in Beacon programs
- Aid sites' meaningful use of the theory of change to guide programming, resource allocation and dissemination

In support of the initiative-level outcomes:
- Facilitate negotiations with service systems
- Manage communication and public-support campaigns
- Manage evaluation, resulting in information that is useful, compelling, clear, accessible and meaningful to all stakeholders

Long-Term
In support of the site-level outcomes:
- Institutionalize the theory of change process at Beacon sites
- Promote greater diversity and agency use of best practices at Beacon sites

In support of the initiative-level outcomes:
- Facilitate establishment of long-term partnerships between service systems and Beacon centers
- Support the ongoing use of evaluation findings by Beacon stakeholders and broader dissemination of evaluation findings
- Promote broad-based public support for the Beacon initiative, ensuring commitment of funding

Table 2.3
Initiative-Level Outcomes

Early
- Systems accommodations in support of Beacon sites
- Public support from the mayor, school superintendent and private funders for the SFBI
- Core funds raised through partnership of city, school district and private funders
- Evaluation designed, funded and launched
- Public-support campaign for Beacon centers designed, funded and launched

Intermediate
- More diverse and deeper partnerships between youth service systems and Beacon centers
- Systems resources redirected to support Beacons
- Strategy in place for committed long-term funding

Long-Term
- Neighborhood institutionalizing of successful Beacon centers
- Secured, sustainable and diverse funding sources to support core site funding
- Citywide departments and youth development agencies committed to the Beacon centers as an effective delivery platform

Initiative Level
The tasks of the third level, the initiative level, centered on developing funding streams and working toward the long-term sustainability of the Beacon centers. At this level, the Beacon steering committee was primarily accountable for ensuring that tasks were completed. In addition, however, the sustainability committee—which consisted of people from the steering committee, the intermediary and the Beacon centers—became involved in some of the work. Table 2.3, above, presents the outcomes that were defined for the initiative level through the theory of change process.

How the Levels Fit Together
The theory of change specified not only the paths necessary to move from early to intermediate to long-term outcomes, but also the directional paths of responsibility from one level of the initiative to the next. It postulated, for example, that support from the mayor, school superintendent and private funders was required before the Beacon centers could achieve their early outcomes.
**Figure 2.1**
Early and Intermediate Outcomes at the Site Level That Lead to Long-Term Outcomes for Young People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Outcomes</th>
<th>Intermediate Outcomes</th>
<th>Long-Term Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Site Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon centers that are visible, accessible, safe and welcoming to all</td>
<td>High-quality developmental opportunities, including:</td>
<td>Increased competencies in core areas*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon programs that support long-term outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Well-being*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon staff that are well trained, diverse and responsive</td>
<td>Opportunities for supportive relationships</td>
<td>Success in school†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation of youth and families in a range of activities</td>
<td>Opportunities for interesting learning experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunities for involvement and membership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Growing participation in the Beacon centers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intermediate Level</strong></td>
<td>Reported benefits of Beacon participation (i.e., developmental experiences):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive relationships with peers and adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and decision-making experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased productive use of discretionary time (reading, homework, organized sports, church activities; less watching TV and hanging out)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Expected outcomes
† Exploratory outcomes
These paths, however, did not simply go in one direction, from the initiative and intermediary levels to the site level; they also moved from the site level to the initiative level, indicating that achieving outcomes at the site level was necessary to achieve later outcomes at the initiative level. (See Appendix B for the full theory of change diagram with links included.) The modified theory of change, therefore, postulated that implementing centers in which youth and families participate in a range of activities was a necessary precursor to having systems resources directed to support the Beacon projects. The assumption makes sense: Funders are more likely to allocate their resources to a given program if they have some indication that the program is used.

The theory of change was also used to design the evaluation: Early, intermediate and long-term outcomes were measured for each level as the initiative progressed. The interim report examined the initiative’s progress on early and intermediate outcomes at all three levels. This report examines the SFBI’s progress in achieving long-term outcomes at the site level and whether or not early and intermediate outcomes can be linked to those outcomes. Figure 2.1, on page 10, is a simplified illustration of the theory of change that delineates the outcomes—early, intermediate and long-term—that are the focus of this report. (A full diagram of the theory of change, which includes outcomes at all three levels, is included in Appendix B.)

In the following chapter, we provide some contextual information about the SFBI; in Chapter 4, we discuss the early outcomes that are highlighted in the first box in the site-level theory of change (Figure 2.1). In Chapters 5 through 7, we examine the outcomes highlighted in the intermediate-level outcome box, and in Chapter 8 we examine the outcomes listed in the long-term outcome box.

The Initiative’s Theory of Change

The Initiative’s Theory of Change, Management and the Evaluation

The SFBI stakeholders not only used the theory of change to set their course at the beginning of the initiative, they used it throughout the initiative’s development to reflect on their progress and to plan further implementation strategies. CNYD, in particular, took the lead in using the theory of change as a management tool and as a method to ensure that newcomers to the initiative understood what the SFBI hoped to accomplish and how.

To manage the initiative effectively, CNYD and members of the steering committee took stock of the initiative’s progress on early and intermediate outcomes. For example, when an analysis of participation data indicated that youth did not participate as frequently in the centers as stakeholders would have liked, the intermediary and steering committees encouraged sites to increase the frequency of participation. When funds became available through the state of California for after-school programming, the steering committee directed sites to apply for the funds as part of their efforts toward sustainability. And when observations of programs indicated that there was room for improvement, the intermediary and steering committee initiated discussions about the standards of quality they would like to see.
The Initiative’s History and Operations

Community Bridges Beacon center is located in a middle school in the heart of a bustling, low-income, primarily Latino community in San Francisco. As school ends for the day, young people drift into classrooms for a reading period that is run by the Beacon center and staffed primarily by teachers from the school. Approximately 250 students of the school’s 560 attend the program. Afterward some go home, but a large number stay for other activities. In the gymnasium a group of students is practicing Afro-Brazilian dancing and drumming: They practice steps choreographed by the young instructor from the community, while the drummers sit in a tight circle and jam together, changing their rhythms at the direction of drumming instructors. In a classroom down the hall, young people work individually on arts and crafts: Some are beading bags and others are painting self-portraits. Young people in a kitchen listen to music, cut vegetables, sauté meat and make empanadas while talking in a group about academic, personal and social issues. And in yet another room, a tightly knit group of young people continues to work on a long-term mural project: Today they paint the tiles that they had formed the previous week. They have been working together on this project for many months and talk freely among themselves and with Beacon staff about their lives both in and out of school. Down the hall is the Beacon center office, which is divided into three sections: The back houses staff members in cubicles; the middle contains long tables for meetings and other activities; and the front contains sofas and chairs. Young people hang out in the front, laughing and talking with adult staff. (Notes, Spring 2001)

In some ways, the Community Bridges Beacon center was typical of the other Beacon centers in San Francisco: It was well attended, offered a broad range of activities from educational to cultural arts, and included activities in which young people worked both individually and in groups. If one walked into another center, Sunset Neighborhood Beacon, similar leadership, cooking and crafts activities would be taking place.

In other ways, the Community Bridges Beacon was unique. The large Beacon center office provided a place for young people to congregate and talk informally with adults. In contrast, at the Sunset Neighborhood Beacon, a utility closet, used as an office, was the only dedicated space available to the center. For security reasons, young people at Sunset Neighborhood were discouraged from congregating in the school hallways and, after the snack period that took place immediately after the regular school day ended, they were urged to get to their specific activities as soon as possible.

Although both centers were part of a citywide initiative, each had its own character. Throughout this report we examine the activities young people engaged in at their local center and how they responded to its programs. But to understand the context in which the centers were working, which sometimes influenced what happened within them, we describe the initiative as a whole: its centers, the schools and the citywide supports that enabled the initiative to thrive in San Francisco.11

The Beacon Centers and Their Host Schools

Between 1996 and 1998, the five Beacon centers that are the focus of this evaluation began to operate in host schools across San Francisco.
Each Beacon center was run by a different agency, selected primarily on the basis of its ties and commitment to the local community. As Table 3.1 indicates, the lead agencies, which provided financial and administrative oversight, varied considerably with respect to their mission. Among the lead agencies selected, one provided child-care services, two had youth development programs (one was a neighborhood center), one was a large foster-care agency and one was a settlement house.

In choosing the host schools, initiative planners hoped that each center would draw young people from both the surrounding community and the host schools; they therefore focused their efforts in middle schools because they have many of the physical facilities necessary for serving a large age range (gymnasiums, all-purpose rooms, and chairs, tables, sinks and toilets large enough for adults). In addition, the planners expected that parents would have fewer concerns sending young children to middle schools than they would sending them to high schools for activities. Thus, three of the five centers were in middle schools (see Table 3.2).

A number of criteria were used for site selection. Three criteria—support from the school district, the school and the community—were crucial. A Beacon center could not be located in a school that did not show at least formal support. Strong support in any of the three crucial areas influenced the decision to place a Beacon center in a particular school or neighborhood. The school district, for example, supported all sites, but its support was especially strong in Visitacion Valley and Community Bridges. In Visitacion Valley, the middle school had recently been reconstituted: After some years of poor academic performance among the student population, the entire staff was reassigned to other schools in the district and an entirely new staff brought in. The school district hoped that a Beacon center would strengthen the school’s attractiveness to the local community. In other neighborhoods, the interest of the local community drove site selection. Sunset Neighborhood, Chinatown and Richmond Village all had strong community groups that lobbied hard for the Beacon center.

The schools’ facilities and neighborhoods varied quite dramatically and influenced both the feel of the centers and their programming. Only three of the five centers—Community Bridges, Richmond Village and Visitacion Valley—had dedicated space that was large enough to use for youth programming, an asset that helped create a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere at the Beacon centers. Many programs at Chinatown Beacon center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center Name</th>
<th>Type of Lead Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>Child-care agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Bridges</td>
<td>Youth development agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond Village</td>
<td>Neighborhood center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset Neighborhood</td>
<td>Foster-care agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley</td>
<td>Settlement house</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection Criteria</th>
<th>Chinatown</th>
<th>Community Bridges</th>
<th>Richmond Village</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School level</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment zone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large number of low-income youth in community</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate school facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong school district support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong school support</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead agency identified</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Chinatown Beacon Center

The Chinatown Beacon center has been operating since Fall 1997 in an elementary school in a poor community with a large Asian population primarily of Chinese descent, many of whom are recent immigrants. Although a number of social-service providers are located in the community, most of them serve either young children or youth who need intervention services. Youth development opportunities for school-aged children such as those provided by the Beacon center were lacking before the center’s arrival in the community. An agency that provides child care in the community took on that role.

Although the school is located in a community that is populated largely by Asians, about 40 percent of the school population is Latino, bused in from another part of the city. The school is small both with respect to the building’s size and to its student population, which is about 360. A high proportion of students do not speak English, and most (87%) are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

A strong relationship with a supportive principal considerably eased early implementation. Teachers were expected to make their classrooms available to the Beacon center, which therefore did not have to struggle to find classroom space. Nonetheless, the center’s location in an elementary school presents limitations, such as not having furniture large enough for adults and older youth.

From its inception, the programming at Chinatown Beacon center reflected not only the youth development focus of the Beacon model but also the concerns and needs of the local community. More than any other center, Chinatown had an early focus on academic supports, which were requested by the community. Providing day care was also strongly emphasized—probably because the center is located in an elementary school and because the lead agency is a major provider of child care. Most of the center’s activities are targeted toward elementary school students and adults, but there are also activities for older youth. Providing an opportunity to learn English is a crucial service for the immigrant population, and the emphasis on teaching English is seen throughout the center’s programs.

Community Bridges Beacon Center

In 1996, the Community Bridges Beacon center was opened in a neighborhood that is predominantly Latino but also includes whites, African Americans and a growing number of Southeast Asians. The community has extensive social services and is undergoing gentrification.

The school population of about 550 sixth- through eighth-graders is 45 percent Latino, 20 percent African American and 20 percent Asian. About 60 percent of the youth are eligible for free lunch, and almost half have limited English proficiency.

The school has designated space for the Beacon center. The center is located on the first floor of the middle school, in what was once a double classroom. The space is large and houses staff from different programs. The front of the center is set up with sofas and comfortable chairs in which youth can sit and chat. There is also a sign-in desk manned by a member of the safety and support team or by a participating older youth. In addition to its dedicated office-meeting space, the Beacon has access to classrooms, the gym and other areas of the school.

The lead agency has a long history of working in the school, where it provided a range of youth development programs prior to the center’s inception. Unlike at some centers, lead agency staff were very involved in the center’s early development. Beacon staff, who were numerous from the beginning, drove programming and administrative growth at the lead agency, which is the smallest organization managing a Beacon center.

The Community Bridges Beacon center has extensive programming throughout the school year and during the summer. Its programs tend to run in academic-year, summer or yearlong cycles. There is a strong focus on cultural arts and academics. The center provides several activities that promote youth leadership development and a limited number of activities offering youth career development. Among the agencies that provide services under the Beacon center’s umbrella, one provider has its administrative office at the Beacon center and runs a number of programs there. The school site is the recipient of federal funds for a 21st Century Community Learning Center, and the Beacon center manages the resulting academic programs.
Richmond Village Beacon Center

In 1998 Richmond Village Beacon center opened its doors in the only high school to host a Beacon. In addition to operating programs at the high school, the center also provides programs at a nearby middle school. The schools are located in a fairly affluent neighborhood, but despite the relatively high income level of residents, the area’s population of poor and non–English-speaking residents, including Chinese and Russian, increased in the 1990s. In addition, the neighborhood has few youth services.

Originally, the center had two lead agencies. The smaller of the two agencies provided planning and staff supervision, while the larger agency provided fiscal support. However, in an effort to scale down overhead and as a result of increased organizational capacity, the smaller agency took over all lead agency functions in Summer 2000. That agency focuses broadly on the needs of the local community and has strong ties to community groups.

With a student population of about 2,350, the high school is the largest school in the initiative. The student population is more than 50 percent Asian—primarily of Chinese descent—and 20 percent white. African American, Latino and other non-white students make up the rest of the population.

Overall, the relationships between Beacon and school staff are beneficial. When the Beacon center began operations, it was given access to two portable classrooms. Later on, space within the school building itself was also provided.

The Beacon center provides a range of recreational, health-related and academic opportunities. The health-related activities are supplied by Healthy Start, a state-funded initiative that provides enhanced services in schools, while the recreational and academic enrichment activities are either funded or coordinated by the Beacon. In the middle school, academic programs are supported by state after-school learning funds. The high school site places greater emphasis on leadership development and life skills activities than does the middle school site. Also, the high school uses one of the portable classrooms as a drop-in teen center.

Sunset Neighborhood Beacon Center

The Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center is located in a middle school in a neighborhood undergoing a demographic transformation toward poorer immigrant residents from a largely working-class population. The neighborhood is predominantly Asian, but also includes whites, African Americans and Latinos. As with so many San Francisco neighborhoods, residents are being affected by rising housing costs. Many families cannot afford the high rents and are moving out of San Francisco altogether. Because the neighborhood has a long history of being a bedroom community, it is relatively “service poor”; the hope is that the Beacon center will offer more services to the community.

The Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center grew out of a nonprofit agency that began in 1993 to work with youth in the neighborhood. The agency did not have the capacity to meet the fiscal demands of government funding, so a statewide agency that provides both mental health services and foster care managed the center’s finances. Ultimately, the second agency took on all aspects of the center’s management, bringing important financial and organizational resources to the center.

The center is located in a large, overcrowded middle school that has approximately 1,250 students from sixth through eighth grades. It has a diverse population; its largest ethnic groups are Asian (48%), white (22%), African American (10%) and other nonwhite students (14%).

Since the school is so overcrowded, there is no dedicated space for activities, and staff use a room in the school that was once a storage closet for administrative tasks. Staff indicated there is no opportunity for a drop-in center at the school. Also, tension exists between the program and some teachers who do not have their own dedicated classroom. The teachers feel the program infringes on their use of what little free space exists.

The center compensates for the lack of space by running some programs off-site, using space near the school to house its administrative staff and run some programs. Most programs are scheduled for eight-week sessions, with the exception of the summer programs, which are six weeks long.
Visitacion Valley Beacon Center

Located in a middle school in a community that is among the poorest in the city, the Visitacion Valley Beacon center opened in Fall 1996. The lead agency, a settlement house, is a longtime community organization that provides a range of social services for everyone from children to senior citizens.

The school has the smallest population of the three Beacon middle schools included in the evaluation, partly because until the mid-1990s it had a poor reputation in the community. In 1994, all the schools’ teachers and administrators were reassigned because student performance was so low.

Visitacion Valley is as diverse as the other schools; its largest ethnic population among the students is Asian, accounting for about 45 percent of the total school population. African American students make up another 25 percent. There are also sizable Latino and Filipino populations in the school. Historically, the center has had a very positive relationship with the school. The principal is a strong supporter of the Beacon and hires teachers who also support it.

In its first few years, the Visitacion Valley Beacon center had considerable turnover among its staff, which finally stabilized around 2000.

Programs at the Visitacion Valley Beacon center cover four of the initiative’s core areas: health (in the form of mental health services), academic enrichment, leadership, and arts and recreation. The school is relatively underpopulated given its physical size, which means that the Beacon center has sufficient space for activities. It has both dedicated space as well as access to many facilities. Because space is available, the center is able to run an open recreation program.

The school is the recipient of federal funds for a 21st Century Community Learning Center and state funds from the Healthy Start initiative and the After-School Learning Act. The funds contribute to the provision of mental health and academic enrichment activities. The Beacon center and the school work together closely to ensure that the additional funds address the needs of the school population.

Programmatic Focus

Over the course of the evaluation, the youth programming shifted from a broad youth development agenda, equally incorporating a range of educational, arts and recreational, career and leadership development, and health-related activities, to one that had a strong focus on educational programming but still provided other opportunities. This shift is a result of the increased national and local attention on school accountability and student performance.

First, funding for after-school educational programs increased substantially, while funds for other types of activities remained stable. In Fall 1999, the Beacon centers began to use funds from the state of California’s Safe Neighborhood and After-School Partnerships Act, which provides funds for after-school programs and has an emphasis on academic enrichment. The federal government’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative also provided funds for after-school programs at two schools (Visitacion Valley and Community Bridges).

Second, principals in the host schools and administrators from the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) encouraged Beacon centers to provide more academic supports. The principals were under pressure to show academic improvements, and some saw the Beacon centers as an opportunity to increase young people’s time in academic activities.

Although the pressure to focus on academics was particularly acute in Community Bridges Beacon center, where only about one-quarter of the students scored at or above the national average on standardized math and reading tests, no center was immune to this pressure. By the end of the evaluation, all centers were running educational support programs at least four days per week.
Staffing at the Centers

Each center had a director who was responsible to both the lead agency and the steering committee. Beacon directors were responsible for hiring and supervising staff and for ensuring that staff received professional development and understood the initiative’s theory of change. They were also responsible for program oversight, fund-raising and center management.

In addition to the director, several centers also had site managers who were responsible for day-to-day operations. Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center was the first to have a site manager, in part because space was at such a premium that programs were being run both within the school and in a nearby building, requiring multiple managers. The staffing configuration worked well, however, and other sites followed suit. Having a site manager permitted the director to focus on fund-raising and forging relationships with other people in the community.

Staff who provided services directly to young people and families included people employed directly by the Beacon centers as full-time or part-time employees, staff who worked for other community-based organizations that ran programs in the Beacon center (both those that the Beacon center paid for and those that it did not) and individual consultants.

Finally, four centers had safety and support personnel—men and women who provided some security at the centers. They oversaw the security of the buildings, which reassured school personnel that the property was being cared for, and ensured that the young people within the Beacon center were safe. The fifth center was in an elementary school with a gate that provided the only access to the school. Given the age of most of the young people in the center and the single entry point, Beacon staff at the center decided that safety and support personnel were unnecessary.

Centers varied with respect to the number of staff present during its regular operating hours, with a range between 7 and 53.

relationships with Schools

Numerous strategies to improve communication between center and school staff were put in place to foster good relationships, which were uneven in the initiative’s early years. Initially, relationships with the host schools ranged from excellent to rocky: One Beacon center, Visitacion Valley, maintained strong, positive relationships with school staff throughout the initiative. For the Beacon center staff, helping the school address some of its students’ educational or behavioral deficits was a fundamental task. At the other end of the spectrum, the Community Bridges Beacon and Sunset Neighborhood Beacon centers had strained relationships with their host schools. In Community Bridges, tensions grew dramatically mid-initiative as the school principal put pressure on the center to provide more academics—pressure that was strongly resisted by the Beacon director. Ultimately this tension diminished when the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF) stepped in to negotiate a compromise.

Beacon and school staff reported that they made efforts to reach out to one another and address previous difficulties. Beacon staff at two centers invited school staff to Beacon center retreats to discuss future directions. School staff invited Beacon center staff to sit in on school meetings, and both Beacon and school staff provided services to each other: Beacon staff worked as teachers’ aides and school staff worked in the Beacon centers after school.

The relationships were also improved by the development of a Memorandum of Understanding between the school district and the Beacon centers. Years in development, the memorandum spelled out expectations between the schools and the Beacon centers and provided staff in some of the Beacon centers with feelings of stability.

The Intermediary

When the initiative began, the intermediary, Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD), was a young nonprofit organization whose mission was to improve the quality of youth development programs in the San Francisco Bay Area. Among its projects was a youth development training institute that brought youth workers together from all over the city to receive training on effective youth worker practices. An early partner in the initiative, CNYD visited the New York City Beacon centers in 1994 with private funders from San Francisco and talked with the intermediary, the Fund for the City of New York, to understand its mission. In 1995, CNYD was officially hired as the SFBI’s intermediary. It had multiple responsibilities and played several roles over time.
Communications
One of CNYD’s most crucial roles was to facilitate communication: It provided staff support for the steering and sustainability committees, called Beacon directors together for monthly meetings and identified early challenges for stakeholders to address.

Technical Assistance
Early in the initiative CNYD provided organizational assistance. Originally there were two lead agencies for the Richmond Village Beacon center. The first, a neighborhood center that was crucial to the center’s development, was very small and lacked the fiscal capacity to manage such a large grant. The second, based in an adjacent community, provided financial management. From the outset, the two agencies saw their partnership as temporary until the smaller neighborhood center was able to manage the grant for the Beacon center effectively. CNYD provided technical assistance that enhanced the neighborhood center’s fiscal capacity, permitting it to take over as the sole lead agency.

Along with organizational assistance, CNYD provided technical assistance and training in program development. Many of the staff members at the Beacon centers went through CNYD’s youth development training—either because they were employed by the Beacon or because they were employed by agencies that enrolled in CNYD’s training. CNYD also sat down individually with staff members at the centers to discuss programming and hired consultants to speak with staff at the sites.

Development of an Initiative-Wide Management Information System
As the organization that oversaw the administration of the evaluation grant, CNYD was also responsible for the development of a system that sites could use to document youth participation. Ultimately, CNYD contracted with what is now Cityspan Technologies to build a Web-based database that was used to store demographic information on participants and staff, individual attendance rates and activity schedules. In addition to being used by the evaluators, the system was used by the initiative to monitor site progress.

The Public-Support Campaign
A crucial part of sustaining the initiative was building public support. Therefore, the initiative included plans for a public-support campaign, funded primarily by the California Wellness Foundation. The campaign was multi-pronged, and the intermediary had primary responsibility for the effort, although all three levels participated.

Throughout the campaign, intermediary staff members ensured that the initiative was represented at important city events, hearings and conferences. In 2001, CNYD was active in the campaign to reenact the Children’s Amendment—which allotted 3 cents per $100 of assessed property from city taxes to pay for youth and children’s programs. Intermediary staff also spearheaded the creation of public-support materials summarizing the initiative’s work, which were distributed to funders, agencies and politicians throughout the city. Among the materials were brochures—written in English, Spanish and Chinese—that emphasized the youth development focus of the initiative.

Intermediary staff also supported the Beacon centers’ efforts to advertise their presence. Those efforts ranged from a citywide Beacon celebration in February 2000 to celebrations sponsored by individual Beacon centers when the DCYF organized an event to introduce the SFUSD’s new superintendent to the initiative in 2001. CNYD ensured that members of the San Francisco City and County Board of Supervisors were invited to events and kept informed of the initiative’s progress, and participated in efforts to inform state-level legislators of the Beacon centers. They also provided staff support for events.

The Steering Committee
Staff from the school district, the city’s DCYF and Juvenile Probation, another city department, plus a representative from the private foundations that provided support for the Beacon centers, constituted the steering committee. Initially, its responsibilities were to garner support from city and school district leaders—both financial and other. It also was responsible for bringing about systems accommodations that would support the Beacon centers. For example, an early systems accommodation was an agreement among private foundations to contribute to a pool of money that would be distributed to the Beacon centers based on a formula. Another
After-School Pursuits: An Examination of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative

The Initiative’s History and Operations

Early accommodation was an agreement among partners to accept a common reporting form.

Although designated as early outcomes, the steering committee continued to work on both systems accommodations and garnering public support throughout the initiative. For example, the memorandum with the school district was seen as a systems accommodation that spelled out specific rights and responsibilities of the Beacon centers and the schools. Steering committee members worked with the intermediary and the sites to craft an understanding that was acceptable to the schools, the centers and the school district. The steering committee also worked to secure long-term funding and redirect resources to support the Beacon centers.

The steering committee was heavily involved in developing strategies for ensuring committed long-term funding of the Beacon centers. When state after-school funds became available, it directed the sites to apply for it. In response to concerns among the Beacon directors that the funding would require a level of staffing that they did not have, the steering committee permitted several sites to delay their application to the state. Staff from the DCYF, which chaired the committee, also worked with state legislators to alter the funding.

In the interim report produced in 2001, we describe in detail the funding sources and contributions that the sites, the intermediary and the initiative-level steering committee parties had made toward long-term sustainability at that time. Here we briefly discuss the cost of the centers.

### The Cost of Running the Centers

As Table 3.3 illustrates, the total cost per center (operating about five days per week year-round) averaged $1,009,990 for one year. The costs for core support provided by the initiative funders (the city of San Francisco and private foundations) averaged $311,838 per year. Impressively, however, the centers leveraged substantial amounts of funds and in-kind support from other sources: At the least they matched their core funds, and Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center raised almost three times its core support for the 2000–2001 school year.

The cost per day for an individual slot averaged $27, although the variation was significant, as displayed in Table 3.4, on the following page. Although higher than estimates derived in other national evaluations, where the average cost per slot was $15, the range of services provided in the San Francisco Beacons was very extensive: Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center had a total of 86 young people in case management and counseling, where they received individualized attention, and for the 2000–2001 school year Community Bridges Beacon center ran a four-days-a-week reading program that served half the youth in the school. It is also important to point out that San Francisco has a very high cost-of-living rate, and salaries of youth workers were higher there than for Beacons and after-school programs in other cities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center</th>
<th>Actual</th>
<th>Leveraged and In-Kind</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>$320,449</td>
<td>$329,500</td>
<td>$649,949</td>
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<td>Community Bridges</td>
<td>$350,000</td>
<td>$760,953</td>
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<td>Richmond Village</td>
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<td>Sunset Neighborhood</td>
<td>$387,599</td>
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<td>$1,492,909</td>
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<td>Visitacion Valley</td>
<td>$152,399</td>
<td>$539,000</td>
<td>$691,399</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>$3,490,763</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,049,951</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>$311,838</strong></td>
<td><strong>$698,153</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,009,990</strong></td>
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Source: Sites’ year-end financial reports

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### Table 3.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual, Leveraged and In-Kind Costs for Each Beacon Center (7/1/2000–6/30/2001)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown</td>
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<td>Community Bridges</td>
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<td>Visitacion Valley</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
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Initiative Finances and Oversight

We started off with a small group, and we went into a dialogue about what this would look like. We had very strong interest in seeing that this happened in a way that would have long-term sustainability.

(SFBI funder)
Table 3.4
Cost Profile (7/1/2000–6/30/2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center</th>
<th>Number of Weeks</th>
<th>Number of Days per Week of Programming</th>
<th>Number of Persons Served Daily</th>
<th>Total Cost per Day of One-Person Slot</th>
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<tr>
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<td>5.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Bridges</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>$21</td>
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<td>$41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunset Neighborhood</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>$41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>$23</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>141</strong></td>
<td><strong>$27</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sites’ year-end financial reports and MIS data

### Funding Sources
The SFBI has been funded through several means. The Children’s Amendment, which was originally passed in 1991 and reenacted in 2000 by San Francisco voters, provides a tax set-aside of 3 cents per $100 of assessed real property value. During the evaluation, 85 percent of the Beacon centers’ core funds came from this tax, which was distributed by the DCYF in the city of San Francisco. Another 15 percent came from a private funders’ collaborative. The rest of the money (above core funding levels) came from other public after-school funds, the Juvenile Probation Department and other private funders.

### Sustainability
Organizations involved in the SFBI have been able to leverage more resources together than exclusively public or private entities would have been able to secure alone.

Members of the steering committee take pride that the SFBI has been able to sustain itself to this point. They mentioned that the initiative’s dual neighborhood-specific and centralized approach developed public support and attracted resources to the centers.

However, sustaining the initiative is a long-term undertaking. Although significant portions of the Beacon centers’ budgets are funded through public sources, steering committee members made concerted efforts to attract and maintain funding from private foundations. The SFBI funding strategy required foundations to deviate from traditional patterns of giving, as foundations were encouraged to make long-term contributions to core funding rather than time-limited donations designated for a particular program. To help foundations embrace this new philosophy of giving, members of the steering committee held meetings during which the merits of funding a collaborative effort were highlighted. The Haas Jr. Fund took a lead role in convincing other private foundations to continue their support through the next stage of the initiative. Perhaps as a result of its persuasion, two foundations actually increased their level of support.

As the evaluation came to an end, more responsibility for sustainability was put on the centers and their lead agencies. Centers responded by strengthening partnerships with community-based organizations that provided programming through the centers. In part a response to increased responsibility for sustaining their centers, Beacon directors also took on more responsibility for initiative oversight.

### Oversight
Over the years, responsibility for the initiative’s oversight shifted. The theory of change did not specify that there would be an initiative-wide governance body, a role that the steering committee ultimately took on. Early—and sometimes frequent—staffing changes on the steering committee (particularly in the school district and city positions) meant that neither the school district nor the city (which was the major funder) provided much stability. The private funders’ representative from the Haas Jr. Fund was reluctant to take on the leadership role, primarily because the foundation
hoped that the public sector would ultimately lead the initiative.

As a result of the dynamics and changes on the steering committee, CNYD became responsible for operational oversight, especially in the early years. Three years after the first Beacon center opened, leadership in the DCYF stabilized and DCYF assumed initiative oversight.

As the evaluation came to an end, many early, intermediate and long-term goals had been met. The Beacon centers had become neighborhood institutions with long-term funding, and many city departments perceived the centers as effective delivery platforms for youth and family services. With this success and stability came calls from the Beacon centers for a greater voice on the steering committee and calls from the private foundations for less responsibility for the initiative. In addition, the public and private funders encouraged the Beacon centers to take on a larger role in sustaining the initiative. Thus, initiative governance shifted again and the Beacon directors were able to appoint a representative to the steering committee.

Summary

This chapter has provided a broad picture of how the SFBI operated as a whole and the complexity of the efforts that have gone into developing and sustaining the initiative. From its early implementation, there was recognition of the importance of identifying school sites that met specific criteria, developing relationships with those school sites, building public support for the initiative, and getting funding and buy-in from the multiple players. Overall, the initiative met with significant success in achieving these important outcomes. It was particularly successful in building public support and leveraging funding to provide programs that offered a rich array of activities, which we will examine in more depth in the following chapter. The initiative was somewhat less successful in managing relationships with the host schools: Although relationships were strong in three centers, there were significant tensions in another two. However, when tensions emerged, the initiative leaders moved quickly to alleviate them, and in the last year of the evaluation, relationships with the host schools were stable.

Several of the issues we described in this chapter—staffing, lead agencies and dedicated space available (or not available) at the schools—are ones to which we will return later in the report to help understand the findings of the evaluation. In the next chapter, we turn our attention from overall initiative operations to focus on center operations.
After-School Pursuits: An Examination of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative

The Beacon Centers

I feel safe there... You are around people you know constantly... You don’t have to worry about getting beat up or getting hurt or something.
(Middle-school youth)

At the beginning of the initiative, each Beacon center strove to establish a visible, accessible, safe and welcoming place for host-school and neighborhood youth, adults and families. The Beacon centers also sought to maintain a range of activities provided by a well-trained, diverse and responsive staff that promote short- and long-term positive outcomes for youth and adults. This chapter examines the centers’ accomplishment of early outcomes, which were assumed in the theory of change to be necessary for establishing a fully operational Beacon center and for supporting participation and the long-term outcomes of families, schools and communities. In particular, the chapter addresses the following questions:

- Are the Beacon centers visible, accessible, safe and welcoming to all?
- Are staffs well trained, diverse and responsive?
- Is there a range of activities within or across the core-competence areas that could be expected to support long-term outcomes?

This chapter is primarily descriptive and sets the stage for subsequent chapters, which will rely heavily on the findings presented here to explain variations in Beacon participation, activity quality and youth developmental experiences.

In this chapter, we rely on 1) survey data gathered in Spring 2001 from 838 seventh- and eighth-grade middle school students at three middle schools hosting the Beacon centers (Community Bridges, Sunset Neighborhood and Visitacion Valley); 2) surveys of Beacon staff at all five Beacon centers, completed either in Summer or Fall of 2001; 3) 660 feedback forms gathered at all five Beacon Centers during 60 activities that took place between Summer 2000 and Spring 2001; 4) focus groups and case study interviews with youth and 5) observations of 112 activities. The instruments, samples and methods are described more fully in Appendix E.

Are Beacon centers visible, accessible, safe and welcoming to all?

Over the years, staff members at each Beacon made significant efforts to create and maintain visible, safe and accessible centers that were welcoming to all community children, adolescents and families. They did so through their staffing patterns and by altering the physical spaces available to them. Some strategies were implemented in all or most of the centers, while others were site-specific and emerged out of local concerns or conditions.

Visible and Welcoming to All

Signs and banners advertising the presence of the Beacon centers were placed in highly visible locations both in and outside the schools. Flyers listing the Beacon center offerings by season were printed and distributed in the schools and neighborhoods. The Beacon staffs also undertook extensive recruitment efforts. They attended meetings of school staff, and encouraged school personnel to refer youth to the centers. At the Community Bridges Beacon center, staff members distributed information about their programs in the cafeteria during lunch. Similarly, at the Richmond Village Beacon center, staff made announcements over the school’s public address system. In the Chinatown Beacon center, staff maintained a database with all the students’ names and addresses and mailed out flyers as new programs were developed.

One measure of visibility is the proportion of students who were aware that a Beacon center existed
in their school, whether or not they chose to attend. Findings from the Spring 2001 survey of middle school seventh- and eighth-graders show that almost all the youth (94%) in each of the three schools said they had heard of the Beacon center in their school, and almost as many knew where it was.\textsuperscript{18}

To ensure that the centers would be welcoming to the diverse ethnic populations of the schools and surrounding neighborhoods, schedules of activities and flyers were printed in several languages, among them Russian, Spanish, Cantonese and Tagalog. The centers also advertised in several languages on the radio and in community newspapers.

The centers made themselves welcoming to parents and community adults by hiring staff members who spoke languages spoken in the community. Each Beacon center had at least some students whose primary language was not English, and each center hired staff who spoke the languages spoken by the students. Between 29 and 69 percent of the staff reported that they used a language other than English with the young people at least part of the time (see Appendix C, Table C.1, for a more detailed table on language).

\textbf{Accessible}

The Beacon centers made efforts ranging from simple (scheduling activities at convenient times) to complex (addressing physical barriers) to make their programs accessible to the communities they serve. Center activities, events and programs were free to ensure that low-income youth and adults could participate, and Beacon centers offered programs in the early morning, during the day and in the evening to accommodate the schedules of youth and their families. Centers also increased accessibility by being open almost every day of the week and 52 weeks of the year.

To be accessible, Beacon centers also needed to be located in places that youth could get to and from. Obstacles that staff had to consider included busy roads that young children could not cross on their own or activities that ended after dark. Transportation also posed a challenge to adolescents and children who attended the host school but did not live in the immediate neighborhood.

In response to questions posed on feedback forms administered during activities at the Beacon, 61 percent of the youth reported that they missed a scheduled activity at least once (with a high of 77% at Visitacion Valley and a low of 41% at Chinatown).\textsuperscript{19} A significant minority (20%) of those youth who had missed activities identified problems getting home after the activity as a barrier. Youth at the Visitacion Valley Beacon were more likely than others to identify this barrier, and it is likely that a lack of access to public transportation was a factor. (See Appendix C, Tables C.2 and C.3, for tables displaying barriers by site.)

Overall, Beacons made themselves accessible by providing free programming along with frequent and convenient operating hours. Transportation, however—an obstacle to participation that has been found in other after-school programs\textsuperscript{20}—was a barrier for some children. This barrier and its effect on participation will be explored in Chapter 6.

\textbf{Safe}

Having a safe place where youth can engage in activities with other youth and stay off the streets and out of trouble is a constant concern for parents and community members. Thus, an early goal of the Beacon centers was to provide safe places for youth and adults so that they can turn their attention to learning and interacting with others. Indeed, research has found that when young people are given safe places and healthy activities in which to participate during critical gap periods, they are less likely to participate in the high-risk, unhealthy activities that can delay or derail positive development.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Youth felt safe at the Beacon centers.} In interviews and focus groups, young people spoke of the Beacon centers as physically as well as emotionally safe spaces.

\textit{The kids, they come and feel safe here…Like me, I used to get scared of the bigger kids when I was in sixth grade, but then when I came, like [Safety and Support staff] and everybody, they were all, “We won’t let anybody hurt you,” and so I feel safe and I came more.}

\textit{(High-school youth)}

\textit{It’s like one big ol’ family. And like, you could, like, say something and then they keep it within the group and stuff.}

\textit{(High-school youth)}
The majority of the youth completing the feedback forms reported feeling as safe or safer at the Beacons than at other places where they spend time (see Table 4.1). The large proportion of youth who viewed the Beacon centers as safe is noteworthy, especially given that the centers are located in large urban schools in low-income communities, where youth often do not feel safe.

What made youth feel safe at the centers?

Youth repeatedly pointed to adults as the number-one factor affecting their sense of safety at the Beacons. When asked why they felt safe at the Beacon, nearly all the youth in a focus group at Community Bridges joined in energetically to list the names of Beacon staff members, including “all of safety support (staff members who monitored the halls and entries to the centers).” Youth also mentioned that program staff and facilitators of leadership programs helped them feel safe. There was almost a formula that came out of youths’ explanations: more adults + fewer youth = safety. A youth at Sunset Neighborhood made the connection between physical safety and number of adults, noticing that this particular Beacon felt less safe because there were fewer adults to “check around if anything was wrong.”

Youth linked adults to safety for several reasons. First, they provided physical safety by keeping potentially dangerous strangers out of the centers, and ensured that problems among youth were resolved peacefully. A youth at Visitacion Valley explained that one staff member in particular was the single reason why drugs and guns were not present at the Beacon. Another middle-school youth described the important role of adults in creating a safe place by mediating youths’ interactions.

Like, some of [the kids at the Beacon] make fun of each other and talk about people…But I don’t think there was [sic] any fights, though. I’m not sure. ’Cause the people in Beacon always are there in case something happens.

Youth also described the ways in which adults fostered a climate of emotional safety. Adults were identified as problem-solvers, listening to youth and helping them work through problems rather than punishing them. They were people youth could talk to who had more experience and therefore “know what they’re talking about.”

At Visitacion Valley, Community Bridges and Chinatown Beacon centers, young people noted that the adults had backgrounds and experiences similar to those of the youth and therefore could help them to navigate otherwise dangerous settings.

Youth reported that they felt safer and more comfortable because their friends were around them. At Chinatown, Visitacion Valley and Community Bridges, “having my friends around me” was given as an explicit reason for feeling safe. This sentiment was expressed by youth across sites and age-groups.

Table 4.1
Youths’ Reports of Beacon Center Safety Compared to Other Places Where They Spend Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less Safe</th>
<th>As Safe</th>
<th>A Lot More Safe*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown (n=88)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Bridges (n=85)</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond Village (n=60)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset Neighborhood (n=167)</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley (n=82)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on feedback forms in 60 activities across all five sites.
Are staff members well trained, diverse and responsive?

The theory of change states that the people who staff the centers should be well trained, diverse and responsive to the youth and families who participate in center activities. Initiative leaders considered well-trained staff a prerequisite to implementing high-quality activities. And they thought that it was critical to have staff who reflected the diversity of San Francisco’s neighborhoods, understood the cultural climate from which youth and families come, and spoke diverse languages. The theory of change also assumes that staff must be responsive to the participants who attend their centers for two reasons. First, responsive staff are more likely to attract and retain participants. Second, forming supportive relationships with both adults and youth is a crucial mainstay of youth development, and responsive staff are more likely to forge such relationships. The following sections explore the Beacon centers’ achievements of these goals. In some cases we go into more detail than others because these factors help to explain, in later chapters, variation in both the quality of activities offered and youths’ experiences in those activities.

Staff Training and Experience

Youth workers in this country, including the Beacon staff and other Beacon providers, rarely have formal education in youth work. Through surveys and interviews with Beacon staff, we learned about their training and experience.

Results summarizing the amount and type of training that staff received while employed at the Beacon centers are reported in Table 4.2, on the following page. Staff members at Community Bridges reported receiving the highest mean levels of training while employed by the center, at 3.9 training sessions. Staff members at Richmond Village reported the lowest, at 1.3 sessions. Although similar proportions of Community Bridges staff received training in child and adolescent development and skills development compared to staff at other sites, a significantly higher proportion received training in health and safety, management, and in particular, managing interpersonal relationships.

Table 4.3, on the next page, displays the type of work experience of staff at each Beacon. The major difference this table reveals is the high proportion of staff at Community Bridges and Richmond Village with prior job experience in a youth development setting. This is probably because both centers have lead agencies with strong youth development missions.

In terms of education, a relatively large proportion of staff across all Beacon centers (about half or more) had at least a bachelor’s degree. Proportionately fewer staff at Visitacion Valley and Community Bridges, however, held bachelor’s degrees or higher compared to staff at the other three sites (see Table 4.4, on the following page).

Staff Diversity

As Table 4.5 (page 27) indicates, although the staff ethnicity reflected proportionately more white staff than found in the youth population at the centers, the Beacon staffs are very diverse, an accomplishment that has proven challenging for many youth organizations. Also, the centers have done a fairly good job of hiring staff who reflect the diversity of the surrounding communities.

Additionally, a third or more of staff at each site reported living in the Beacon center community and thus was likely to be familiar with community issues and concerns.

Staff Responsiveness

For the most part, youth described their relationships with adults at the Beacons as respectful and reciprocal. As discussed in the section about safety, interviews and focus groups with youth confirmed that youth perceived Beacon staff as responsive. Adults were also described as fun and playful, cool and hip. At several sites, youth specifically mentioned the way that adults’ joking made them feel comfortable. Youths’ experiences of adult support at the Beacons are examined in greater depth in Chapter 7, in which we revisit this concept as an intermediate outcome identified in the theory of change.
### Table 4.2
**Average Number of Trainings Attended and Type of Training by Site**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Training</th>
<th>Chinatown (n=18)</th>
<th>Community Bridges (n=32)</th>
<th>Richmond Village (n=20)</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood (n=38)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=36)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff's average number of trainings attended while employed by the Beacon</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and safety</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child and adolescent development</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills development</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing interpersonal relations</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See Appendix C, Table C.5, for a list of training topics in each major training area.

Source: Beacon staff survey

### Table 4.3
**Prior Work Experience of Key Staff**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host School Level</th>
<th>Chinatown (n=7)</th>
<th>Community Bridges (n=20)</th>
<th>Richmond Village (n=8)</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood (n=14)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth development</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public schools</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organizing</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case management</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmeriCorps</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interviews with staff

### Table 4.4
**Educational Levels of Beacon Staff**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host School Level</th>
<th>Chinatown (n=18)</th>
<th>Community Bridges (n=32)</th>
<th>Richmond Village (n=19)</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood (n=39)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=33)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Beacon staff survey
After-School Pursuits: An Examination of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative

Are centers well staffed?

Even though how Beacon managers should staff their programs was not explicitly defined in the theory of change, we will find later that staff-to-youth ratios and the number of hours that staff work each week appear relevant to explaining differences in activity quality and youth experiences. Thus, we have included a description of these staffing configurations below. In addition, staff tenure came up in interviews with youth as important for developing relationships, so we describe longevity of staff in this section as well.

Setting the length of staff members’ weekly schedules is an organizational practice that affects responsiveness. As Table 4.6 on the next page shows, although each site had a core group of staff (from about 25% at Visitacion Valley to 45% at Richmond Village and Chinatown) who worked full-time, the majority of those working at the centers were part-time instructors who helped run activities. Although only 26 percent of Community Bridges staff worked 10 or fewer hours per week, significant numbers of staff worked 10 or fewer hours per week at the other four sites (from 40% at Richmond Village to 57% at Visitacion Valley).

The number of youth in each activity and the staff-to-youth ratio also reflect organizational practices that can influence staff responsiveness. When activities have large enrollments or when there are few staff for the number of youth present, staff may be limited in the extent to which they can interact with and be responsive to youth. Staff who coordinated and managed activities at the Beacon centers had different ideas about what constituted an appropriate staff-to-youth ratio. Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center set the maximum number of young people who could sign up for a class at 20 for every one staff member, and the site manager reported that he thought they could have permitted more youth to enroll, since fewer youth actually came to the activities. In Richmond Village Beacon center, however, the director worried that the overall staff-to-youth ratio was too low at one staff member to 10 to 15 youth. As a result, he reported that it was difficult to provide youth with one-on-one services, such as counseling. For him, reducing the ratio by hiring more staff was a priority.

Table 4.7, on the following page, shows variation across sites in the staff-to-youth ratio at the low (1:3 or less) and high (1:10 or more) ends, with Richmond Village and Community Bridges having a greater proportion of activities that had fewer youth per staff. The number of youth who attended the activities was similar across sites, however. In later chapters, we will show that variation in these two variables is related to activity quality and youth experiences.

Employment continuity provides opportunities for staff to develop relationships with youth who attend. In general, all sites experienced high rates of staff turnover, similar to many other youth-serving organizations. Visitacion Valley staff displayed the longest average tenure, at 29 months. Average staff tenure at other sites was about a year.

Interestingly, in comparing Table 4.8 and Table 4.4 (staff educational level), it appears that centers

### Table 4.5
Ethnicity and Community of Residence of Beacon Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinatown (n=18)</th>
<th>Community Bridges (n=32)</th>
<th>Richmond Village (n=20)</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood (n=38)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=36)</th>
<th>Totals (n=144)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in Beacon community</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Beacon staff survey
Table 4. 6
Hours Worked per Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinatown (n=18)</th>
<th>Community Bridges (n=31)</th>
<th>Richmond Village (n=20)</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood (n=34)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=35)</th>
<th>Totals (n=138)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average hours per week</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of staff members who works x hours per week</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10 hours</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20 hours</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-34 hours</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35+ hours</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Staff surveys.

Table 4.7
Activity Size and Staff-to-Youth Ratios by Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinatown (n=15)**</th>
<th>Community Bridges (n=29)</th>
<th>Richmond Village (n=13)</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood (n=31)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=23)</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average number of youth in activity</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff-to-youth ratio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:3 or less</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:4 to 1:9</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:10 to 1:20</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>1:1 to 1:14</td>
<td>1:1 to 1:9</td>
<td>1:1 to 1:7</td>
<td>1:2 to 1:20</td>
<td>1:1 to 1:9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Summary scores from three observations per activity conducted by P/IPV staff.
** N represents the number of activities observed at each site.

Table 4.8
Staff Tenure by Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinatown (n=18)</th>
<th>Community Bridges (n=32)</th>
<th>Richmond Village (n=20)</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood (n=38)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=36)</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average number of months worked at Beacon</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of staff at Beacon for one year or less</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Beacon staff survey
Is there a range of activities within or across the core-competency areas that can be expected to support long-term outcomes?

The Beacon centers organized a wide range of programs that were implemented by a diverse array of providers. In this section we explore the range of activities within and across core areas.

The number of activities and services provided by the centers during Spring 2001 (listed in Table 4.9, on the following page) ranged from 20 (at Richmond Village) to 36 (at Sunset Neighborhood) youth activities in distinct content areas (some activities had two or more sections—they are not counted separately). Activities were scheduled during lunch, after school, in the evenings and during the summer, and ranged from daily and weekly programs to single-time events.

The intention behind the initiative, however, was not simply to provide “busy work” for youth and adults in their communities, but to provide a range of experiences that would challenge youth and adults and enrich their lives. Therefore, the planning group identified five core-competence program areas assumed to contribute to positive youth outcomes. They referred to these areas as: educational development, career development, health, leadership and arts and recreation. Each Beacon center was responsible for implementing activities that covered each of the five areas.

Centers were especially strong in providing activities in the arts and recreation and educational support areas, but had fewer activities in leadership, career development and health. (See Table 4.9.) Although the sites classified each activity as covering only one core area of competency, any given activity might have actually covered two or more core areas. For example, leadership may play a role within a range of activities as well as be a key component of certain group activities. Likewise, a career-development activity may work to enhance writing skills, while a recreational activity may focus on mental or physical health and well-being. Further, computer classes could fall under career development or education (sites differed in where they placed these activities). Nonetheless, even ignoring the restrictions in classification, leadership, career development and health-related activities were more limited than were the other activities.

Looking at how Beacon center programs covered the core-competency areas provides perspective on the initiative’s breadth of programming; looking at the range of activities within the arts and recreation and educational core areas provides another. Within these two areas, the sites showed considerable breadth and diversity in programming. For example, arts activities at Chinatown included Chinese lion dancing, sign language, Chinese water painting, Chinese fan dancing, creative expressions, and arts and crafts.

In general, educational activities at the centers could be divided into two categories: 1) academic support, such as tutoring or homework help, and 2) educational enrichment, which incorporated reading, math, science or social studies into projects covering gardening, poetry, cooking, nutrition, etc.

Almost all the centers had a mix of structured and unstructured programming, thereby providing youth with challenging activities as well as with opportunities to socialize with peers in a safe environment. However, the centers’ access to space—both dedicated and shared with the school day staff—influenced the degree to which they could provide unstructured programming. For example, the Chinatown and Sunset Neighborhood Beacon centers, both of which faced severe space restrictions in their host schools, could not provide much unstructured programming, although unstructured activities took place in a separate building near the community in which the Beacon was located.

The Beacon Centers

The kids keep me here… I make it my business to go to the detention room and talk to the kids. My two girls go here [so] I know a lot of these kids and their mothers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Area</th>
<th>Chinatown (n=22)</th>
<th>Community Bridges (n=34)</th>
<th>Richmond Village (n=20)</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood (n=36)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career Development</strong></td>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>ASLA Academic Mentors/Volunteers GEP Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Past JVS Computer Intro</td>
<td>Computers for Kids Improv at the Beacons Web-Page Design</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>Middle School Club HYPE Lunch Bunch: Hot Spots Lunch Bunch: Astro and Constellations Tutorial and Interactive Peer Support READ</td>
<td>ASLA—Photography ASLA—Martial Arts ASLA—Cooking ASLA—Poetry ASLA—Study Hall ASLA—Algebra ASLA—Tutoring Help with Reading Talking Circle/Zine</td>
<td>Tutoring Web Design and Production Mighty Panthers Middle School Club Flash Animation SAT Workshop Revolutionary Minds</td>
<td>Read Aloud Program ASLC Tutoring Inclusion Paras Write On Beacon Beach Clean-Up and Beach Day Explore the Internet After-School Learning Center ASLP Social Studies Youth Council Explore the Internet</td>
<td>Cooking/Nutrition Kids in the Park Tutoring Morning Learning Center Open Computer Lab E.R. Taylor Bridge Program Merry Computer Class El Dorado After-School Program Visitacion Valley Elementary Program Computer Lab/ Tutorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
<td>Juvenile Justice Case Management Talking Circle Girls Take Charge Capoeira Class Eskrima</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Juvenile Justice Case Management Family Counseling Services Yoga</td>
<td>General Counseling Keeping It Real</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After-School Pursuits: An Examination of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative

The Beacon Centers

structured programs, however—those that aimed to accomplish specific goals within a given period—were diverse with respect to activity content.

Visitacion Valley, Community Bridges and Richmond Village offered substantial unstructured and structured programs: Each had either open recreation or a teen drop-in center for youth.

Summary of Achievement of Early Outcomes

The Beacon centers were successful at creating environments that were visible, accessible, safe and welcoming to all. They did this by using advertising and referral strategies, by hiring staff who spoke the languages of the participants, by hiring safety and support personnel and by creating an environment where youth felt that they were known and responded to by staff.

The Beacon centers also hired ethnically diverse staff reflective of the communities in which the Beacons were located. Staffs were well trained through a variety of training activities; in addition, a large proportion across all sites had formal educational degrees.

Finally, the sites offered a broad variety of activities across the five core content areas, although three content areas—leadership, health and career development—had fewer activities than did arts and recreation and educational support.

There were several ways in which the Community Bridges Beacon center tended to differ from other sites. We summarize those here, as they will be explored throughout the remainder of this report in explaining site differences in activity quality and youth experiences.

First, although a smaller proportion of Community Bridges staff had formal education than staff at other sites, they received more training overall—and specifically more training in interpersonal relationships (such as diversity training, conflict resolution, team-building and violence prevention)—than staff at other Beacons. Proportionately more Community Bridges staff also tended to have had prior jobs that were youth development-focused compared to staff at all other sites but Richmond Village. Community Bridges also had the highest proportion of staff who reported residing in the Beacon center community. Finally, compared to other sites, the smallest proportion of staff at Community Bridges reported working 10 or fewer hours per week, and the greatest proportion of Community Bridges' activities had relatively more staff per youth. As we explore differences in the quality of activities and youth experiences at Beacons in later chapters, these factors will emerge as significant.
The Quality of Activities at the Beacon Centers

“Youth Power” is designed to enhance young people’s decision-making and leadership skills. Youth gain experience in public speaking, decision-making and negotiating with others. They also discuss current events. At first glance, the activity lacks the “fun factor” of an arts or enrichment program. But a visitor is struck by the positive atmosphere in the room: The young people seem to like one another and appear engaged in the activity.

“Hip-Hop Dance” is designed to teach youth hip-hop dance steps and choreography. A visitor walking into the activity notices several negative interactions: Youth call one another names and tease one another. Several try to pick fights with others. In addition, participants’ interest in the activity waxes and wanes.

“Help with Elementary Reading” is designed to improve reading skills for Latino youth with limited English proficiency. The first thing youth do when they arrive in the afternoon is complete their homework. They then participate in a period of games, in both large and small groups. In a slight departure from a typical homework help program, however, youth and adults spend time reading to each other after the game period.

The many activities at each Beacon center are run by several different types of staff: full- and part-time Beacon center employees; employees from other youth-serving agencies; independent contractors, including community residents; and teachers from the host schools. Given the large number of activities and the inherent difficulties of assuring quality when providers come from so many places, one might expect that the quality of the activities would vary—and it does, as the vignettes above indicate.

The theory of change articulates the importance of high-quality activities as an intermediate outcome. In particular, it notes that the Beacon centers would be responsible for implementing “high-quality supports and opportunities for 1) supportive relationships; 2) interesting learning experiences; 3) involvement and membership.”

This chapter examines the extent to which the Beacon centers met that outcome. Examining quality solely from the perspective of trained adult observers, it addresses two main questions:

- What was the quality of the activities at the Beacon centers with respect to the developmental opportunities provided?
- What organizational and staff practices contributed to high-quality activities?

Evaluating the Quality of Activities

In order to evaluate the quality of the activities in the Beacon centers, P/PV began systematic observations of activities in Fall 1999; observations continued through Spring 2001. During that period, we collected information on 112 activities. We worked with Beacon center staff to select activities across the five core-competency areas, of varying quality and with reasonable enrollments. We also focused more heavily on the middle schools than on the elementary or high school. Because only one health activity was observed, the rest of this report omits that category from discussions. Table 5.1, on the next page, shows the distribution of activities observed.

The Dimensions of Activities Observed

This evaluation measured two out of three of the developmental opportunities listed in the theory of change: supportive relationships and involvement and membership. Opportunities for supportive relationships were measured through the extent to which activities at the Beacon centers fostered warm adult-youth and peer-to-peer interactions.
Peer cooperation, decision-making and leadership all refer to observed qualities of “involvement and membership.” The evaluation also measured the structure and management of activities, which incorporates other aspects of activity quality, such as how well the adults managed young people’s behavior and the degree to which they included all youth in the activity. Although we did not measure the extent to which activities provided interesting and challenging learning opportunities, we saw in Chapter 3 that the centers provided a very diverse range of learning opportunities.

The text box on the following page describes the adults’ actions in fostering these developmental opportunities. Trained researchers observed each activity two or three times over the course of a session. An observational tool was developed for the project that permitted the researchers to assign numerical scores of one through five to specific dimensions designed to measure opportunities for supportive relationships, interesting and challenging learning experiences, and involvement and membership, all of which were identified as intermediate outcomes in the theory of change.

It is important to note that the activity quality measured through our observations did not include assessments of the quality of skills instruction. We assessed the clarity with which adults presented material, and analyzed whether the adults were sensitive to the rates at which young people were learning the material and whether they adjusted their teaching accordingly (referred to as structure and management). That, however, does not indicate whether or not the staff members were using good instructional practices within specific skill areas, such as how well they taught math or reading skills.

Activities were scored high, medium or low on each of the six dimensions of quality, as described in Table 5.2. For adult-youth interactions, peer interactions, and structure and management, high scores meant the presence of positive elements and the absence of negative elements (see Appendix D for more information).

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**Table 5.1**
Number and Type of Activities Observed Across the Beacon Centers Between Fall 1999 and Spring 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Type</th>
<th>Chinatown</th>
<th>Community Bridges</th>
<th>Richmond Village</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley</th>
<th>Totals by Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts and recreation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career development</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals by site</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.2**
How Activities Were Assessed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of quality</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult-youth interactions</td>
<td>Negative behaviors or interactions observed</td>
<td>No negative observed</td>
<td>Very positive interactions observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-to-peer interactions</td>
<td>No very positive interactions observed</td>
<td>No very positive interactions observed</td>
<td>Very positive interactions observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure and management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making Leadership</td>
<td>Less than 20 percent of youth had opportunity during observation</td>
<td>20–39 percent of youth had opportunity during observation</td>
<td>Over 40 percent of youth had opportunity during observation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What We Observed in Activities

Six dimensions of quality were observed, related to the extent to which activities fostered developmental opportunities for supportive relationships, involvement and membership, and the extent to which the activity was highly structured and managed.

Opportunities for Supportive Relationships

Adult-youth interactions. Did adults treat young people well? Did they know and call the young people by name? On the negative side, we also observed whether the adults were discouraging of young people’s questions or efforts, used sarcasm or anger, or interacted with young people in an unfriendly way.

Peer-to-peer interactions. Adults can set the tone for how young people interact with one another. Did the adults in the Beacon activities foster opportunities for young people to talk together? Did they encourage positive and fun interactions among the youth? Or, on the negative side, did they tolerate teasing, bullying or social exclusion of youth toward one another?

Opportunities for Involvement and Membership

Peer cooperation. Did adults encourage young people to share ideas or to help one another? Did the structure of the activities require teamwork or group problem-solving? Alternatively, did the adults discourage the young people from helping or teaching one another? Did they foster negative competition among the youth?

Leadership opportunities. Both informal and formal leadership opportunities were observed—along with the proportion of young people who had opportunities to take on leadership roles. For example, did adults permit the young people to help with tasks? Did they give youth opportunities to be group leaders or team captains or to tutor others? Were the opportunities available to many youth or just a few? Did adults discourage peer tutoring or ignore young people’s requests to help with tasks or organize activities?

Decision-making opportunities. Did young people have age-appropriate opportunities to participate in decision-making? Did they have opportunities to choose activities or decide how to approach them? Did the adults ask for youths’ ideas and suggestions in designing activities or give youth opportunities to solve problems? Alternatively, did the adults disparage young people’s ideas or force them to stick with the adults’ plans for the activities, even if the young people presented reasonable alternatives?

Degree of structure and management. Activity structure and management included a range of actions that adults could take, from presenting material to handling conflict among young people to ensuring that all youth had opportunities to participate. For example, did the adults arrive on time for the activity? Did they present substantive material clearly and check to see whether or not the young people understood how to do things? Did the adults set high expectations for how the young people should treat one another?

For example, when an activity was high on a dimension, such as adult-youth interactions, it meant that adults treated youth warmly and with respect, and that the adults did not behave negatively toward the young people. A low score meant that negative interactions on the part of the adults were observed. For decision-making, however, a low score meant that adults did not offer young people opportunities to make even fairly restricted decisions about what they were doing in an activity. And for leadership, low scores meant that less than 20 percent of the young people had such opportunities; medium scores meant that between 20 and 39 percent did; and high scores meant that 40 or more percent had opportunities.

Criteria were also set for deciding the overall strength of activities, combined across all six of the dimensions of quality observed. Key thresholds included the number of high and low scores assigned to each activity:

- A very strong activity had at least four out of six high scores.
- A strong activity had at least three high and two or fewer low scores.
- An adequate activity had two or fewer low scores and less than three high scores.
- A weak activity had three or more low scores.
The Quality of Beacon Center Activities

The overall quality of half the activities was strong or very strong, and that of a significant proportion (36%) was adequate. Only 14 percent of the activities appeared to be weak. Table 5.3 describes the overall strength of activities across the Beacon centers. Fifty percent of the activities were rated as strong. Of that proportion, 29 percent appeared to be very strong overall and received positive scores on the following three dimensions of quality: how well adults fostered positive interactions between themselves and the young people; how well they fostered positive interactions among young people; and the activities’ structure and management. In contrast, only 14 percent of the observed activities were weak, and about one third of the activities were of adequate quality.

Activities were high in some dimensions of quality but not in others. Although the overall quality of the activities was strong, activities across the centers tended to have higher scores along some dimensions of quality than others, as Table 5.4 on the next page indicates.

In more than 50 percent of the activities, observers rated activity quality high on such important dimensions as how well adults fostered positive interactions and structured and managed the activities. Few activities received low scores on adult-youth interactions, peer interactions or management and structure. Occasionally, young people engaged in some mean teasing or bullying of one another in activities. However, activities only received low scores if the adults ignored or permitted the negative behavior.

In general, limited opportunities to take leadership roles and make decisions in activities were observed. By definition, leadership is restricted to a few people, and in any given situation, everyone cannot take a leadership role. However, we used a broad definition that included not only formal positions of authority such as being team leaders but also informal activities such as helping staff with tasks. Given that definition, staff in many of the activities could have provided youth with opportunities for informal leadership—but they did not. In only 21 percent of the activities did 40 or more percent of the young people have these opportunities.

Table 5.3
Overall Strength of Activities Across Beacon Centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of Activities</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very strong</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kid Power: An Example of a Strong Decision-Making Activity

Kid Power is a leadership and community service activity for middle-school students in the host school at Community Bridges. In one meeting, youth began to design a tour of the school for rising fifth-graders who would attend the school in the coming year. During a session, the young people decided on a date and time for the tour and created a list of possible sites and information to include in the tour. They were quick to come up with many creative suggestions for sharing information about rules, appropriate behavior, etc., that would help new students be successful at the school. The Beacon center was mentioned many times as a place that should be emphasized for newcomers.

Twenty-nine percent of the activities offered young people significant opportunities for decision-making, while 44 percent of the activities had very limited opportunities for youth to make decisions about what would happen in the activity. The example of Kid Power in the text box above illustrates that activities that offered significant decision-making opportunities gave young people options to define the content of the activity and the process by which they carried it out. In activities that rated poorly, young people could choose from among a range of options presented by staff, but none required that youth make actual decisions about the activity. For example, young people might be given opportunities to play one of several board games, but not the opportunity to organize a tournament and establish rules for it.

Opportunities for young people to work together were limited. Only one third of all activities scored high on the extent to which adults fostered peer cooperation, while 22 percent had low scores.
After-School Pursuits: An Examination of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative

The Quality of Activities at the Beacon Centers

There are many reasons why the quality of activities varies. An activity can have an extraordinarily talented youth worker—or an extraordinarily bad one. Milbrey McLaughlin and her colleagues have identified some of the personal characteristics of youth development workers who provide enriching opportunities to young people in urban communities—workers she refers to as “wizards.” Among the characteristics she identifies are a commitment to young people and sense that one can make a difference in adolescents’ lives by focusing on the positive contributions that youth can make to others, both in the present and in the future. Hiring such people is crucial in youth organizations, but it is not sufficient. In addition to hiring, organizations must also structure activities in ways that will enhance skilled youth workers’ qualities.

Table 5.4
Proportion of Activities Scoring High, Medium or Low on Observed Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How well adults foster positive adult-youth interactions</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well adults foster positive peer interactions</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The extent to which adults foster peer cooperation</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for leadership</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for decision-making</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure and management</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5
Factors Associated with the Developmental Quality of Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Dimensions of Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The more young people present...</td>
<td>...the poorer the observed quality of adult-youth interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...the lower the quality of structure and management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fewer staff to youth...</td>
<td>...the more peer cooperation observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...the more opportunities for leadership observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults in educational activities...</td>
<td>...did not foster strong peer cooperation compared to leadership activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...provided more restricted opportunities for youth decision-making compared to all other types of activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults in leadership development activities...</td>
<td>...provided more opportunities for leadership and decision-making compared to all other types of activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factors that Contribute to the Quality of Activities

In the rest of this chapter, we explore factors that might contribute to differences in activity quality, and those factors include not only hiring practices but also the number of young people present in activities, the staff-to-youth ratio and the type of activities being offered. Table 5.5 summarizes which of these factors we found to be related to the developmental dimensions and opportunities observed (see Appendix D for a description of the research).

The number of young people in activities contributes to quality. There was tremendous variation in the number of young people present in activities. At the low end, some activities occasionally had only one or two young people present. At the high end, 100 students attended a drop-in recreational activity.

Although it did not appear that there was an optimum size for activities, the fewer youth present, the warmer and more responsive adults generally were.
Help with Elementary Reading

**What it is:** A three-hour after-school reading program at Community Bridges Beacon for children ages 9 to 11 years, serving primarily Latino youth with varying degrees of English proficiency. Children receive help with their homework followed by a range of other activities: snack, silent reading and game playing.

**Why it is being highlighted:** The structure and content of this program typifies many academic after-school programs. Overall, participating youth and an adult observer rated the activity as high on multiple dimensions of quality. Youth gave the activity high marks for being challenging and interesting, and for providing positive adult support. The observer noted warm adult-youth relationships and strong structure and management. But, typical of many educational activities, there were few opportunities for youth decision-making.

**Why it works:** The activity is staffed by both adults and adolescents, and the staff-to-youth ratio was almost one to one. Several of the adult staff were older adults who were recruited, trained and supervised by Experience Corps, a program that seeks to connect older adult volunteers with children in schools, providing tutoring and other academic support services. Youth received a great deal of one-on-one attention from the staff, who maintained strongly positive relationships with the youth. Group word games, dramatic readings by staff and storytelling all contributed to youth engagement. In addition, the adults used a mixture of English and Spanish to explain concepts and explore the readings with the young people, some of whom had limited English skills.

**Why there were not opportunities for decision-making:** The activities were adult-designed and -led. Youth had multiple opportunities for engagement in group games, but received no opportunities to make decisions about how they would spend their time in the activity. There were also no leadership opportunities.

This may have to do with the time that adults had to spend engaging with young people on an individual basis.

It is important to note that few activities averaged more than 20 young people, and thus our analyses do not tell us much about very large activities, which may be difficult for adults to manage.

**The staff-to-youth ratio contributes to the quality of activities.** Although size and the staff-to-youth ratio of activities are often related (a large activity may have few staff to manage many youth), they are not the same thing. An activity can have a large enrollment (25–30) but have many staff for the youth present. For example, some tutoring activities use volunteers as staff, and the staff-to-youth ratio can be one staff person for every two or three young people. Alternatively, an activity can be relatively small (10) but with only one staff member present (for a 1:10 ratio).

In practice, most of the observed activities had a relatively high staff-to-youth ratio, once all adult and teen staff and volunteers were included. About half the activities had one staff person per four to nine youth (and from a quarter to half the activities averaged one staff person to three or fewer youth), and no activity averaged fewer than one staff person to 20.27 Not surprisingly, as the number of staff per youth rose in an activity, there tended to be fewer opportunities for young people to cooperate with one another and take on leadership roles. If adults are working closely with small groups of young people—or even one-on-one, as they did in some of the educational activities—then the focus is often on the relationship between the adult and the young people, not on enhancing how young people get along or on providing leadership opportunities.

Even though we can explain some of the differences in quality among activities by looking at the number of youth in the activity or the ratio of staff to youth, we cannot explain all of those differences.

**Different types of activities provide different kinds of opportunities.** Differences in the opportunities provided by activities varied from fairly large to relatively small, depending on the dimension being observed, as Figure 5.1 suggests. Scores for the activities’ structure and management and for the warmth of interactions between adults and youth and among peers were fairly similar across the activities. Over two thirds of the leadership activities had high scores in these three areas, with half or more of other activities receiving high scores. One exception was the relatively small proportion of career development activities that had high scores on peer warmth.
Far fewer activities had high scores on decision-making or leadership than on adult warmth and structure and management. Even in leadership development activities, less than half (47%) had extensive decision-making opportunities and only a little over a quarter (27%) had extensive leadership opportunities. (However, as we show in Chapter 7, young people experienced higher levels of leadership and decision-making than we would have expected from the observations reported in this chapter.)

Very large differences existed across different types of activities with respect to how well adults fostered peer cooperation: 80 percent of the leadership activities exhibited high levels of peer cooperation, whereas only 29 percent of the educational activities did.

Figure 5.1 indicates that different types of activities are providing different types of opportunities, with leadership development activities appearing the richest overall with respect to the developmental opportunities offered within the activities.

Given the different nature of the educational activities—the educational enrichment activities were often hands-on or project-based, while the homework help and tutoring classes were focused on individual students’ needs—we also examined whether the quality of those two different kinds of activities varied. As Table 5.6 on the following page indicates, the enrichment activities tended to be of either higher or lower quality than the tutoring/homework help programs. This may be because enrichment activities are more creative than homework help activities and, as a result, they may be very good—or very bad.

It is also instructive to examine whether or not different types of activities systematically scored low on developmental dimensions. As Figure 5.2 indicates, for three dimensions—adult-peer interactions, peer interactions, and structure and management—relatively modest differences among different types of activities existed, and no more than 18 percent of activities had low scores on those dimensions. However, considerable variation existed among peer cooperation, leadership and decision-making—the three dimensions for which we saw large differences earlier.
Half or more of the educational activities received low scores for leadership and decision-making opportunities. Almost a third of the educational activities had limited opportunities for youth to work together. In looking at such dimensions as peer cooperation, leadership and decision-making, we observe relatively large differences between activities. Not surprisingly, given their content and goals, only a small proportion of the leadership development activities had low scores on any of these three dimensions. Other types of activities, however, had significantly fewer opportunities for leadership, decision-making or peer cooperation.

The educational activities scored particularly low: 53 percent had limited leadership opportunities and 63 percent had limited decision-making opportunities.

One reason for the low scores on peer cooperation and youth input into decision-making may be related to how such activities are implemented. Often, the educational activities included much one-on-one interaction between adults and youth, but few opportunities for the young people to work together. In addition, the extent of the decision-making in some of the activities was to decide what academic subject matter to receive help with on a given day. Help with Elementary Reading, described in the text box on page 37, was a high-scoring educational activity. The activity appeared fun, and the young people rated it above average for adult support, peer support, challenge and interest. But decision-making opportunities were very limited and youth worked primarily on their own.
The Quality of Activities at the Beacon Centers

Modest differences in activity quality existed across the Beacon centers. As Figure 5.3 on the next page indicates, there were modest differences in the quality of activities across the sites. At all sites, over 50 percent of the activities had high scores for structure and management, and between 43 and 60 percent of the activities across the sites had high scores for adult support. On other dimensions of quality, the variation among the sites was more substantial: For example, about 30 percent more activities scored high on peer warmth and cooperation in the Community Bridges compared to the Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center. It is noteworthy, however, that none of the centers had very many activities with high scores on decision-making and leadership.

To some degree, the differences among the sites can be explained by differences in the age of the young people served by the centers or the staff-to-youth ratio. To explain why this might be, the rest of this chapter examines some of the organizational features of the Beacon centers themselves that may contribute to the quality of activities within the centers.

Organizational features may contribute to the quality of activities at the Beacon centers. The theory of change assumes that certain organizational and staff practices contribute to the quality of the activities. Even though we see above that center differences were modest, in the section below we use those modest differences to explore the potential relationships between the qualities observed in the activities and staff tenure, education, training and experience—all components of having a well-trained staff (see Appendix D for the analysis).

The findings below are by no means conclusive, in large part because the number of centers across which we can compare is small and because in some cases the differences among the sites are small. Nonetheless, they suggest some predictable—and some not so predictable—relationships among organizational practices and youth development activities. If these findings are verified by other research, they will have implications for after-school programs similar to the Beacon centers.

The higher the proportion of full-time staff and the proportion of staff with previous experience in a nonprofit youth development agency, the more adults fostered peer cooperation, positive adult interactions, and good structure and management in the Beacon centers. Compared to the other Beacon centers, Sunset Neighborhood tended to score low on peer cooperation, and Community Bridges and Richmond Village tended to score high. This may be related to the youth development background of the staff and to how many hours a week they worked. Although speculative, it is possible that a center that has more full-time staff has more opportunities to supervise them and communicate the importance of fostering positive peer relationships and cooperation.

Second, staff members who work full-time may develop greater skill and comfort in interacting with young people compared to staff members who work fewer hours a week.

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How Adults Facilitated Cooperative and Positive Peer Interaction in One Beacon Program

**Program name:** YTDES

**What it is:** A leadership program for middle-school youth at Sunset Neighborhood Beacon that encourages youth to develop group facilitation, public speaking and debating skills. The young people in the program get involved in community service activities. In one session the participants staged a debate; in another they reviewed their progress on a research project on graffiti.

**How the facilitator fosters peer cooperation:** In this activity, the facilitator engages in a broad range of practices to encourage the young people to work together and support one another.

- In the beginning of the activity she offers a formal opportunity for the participants to share information about their days, families, and dreams and concerns. She creates an environment in which young people respect and feel comfortable with one another.
- She emphasizes the importance of working together. In one session she leads an exercise that is “an effort to get everyone used to supporting one another.”
- She stages debates among the youth with a formal feedback session afterward, during which she is explicit about the importance of helping one another become more effective and convincing debaters and public speakers.
And third, adults who work in youth development organizations such as Boys & Girls Clubs or community youth centers must learn how to manage young people’s relationships with one another in the context of voluntary activities in which youth are often working in groups. Both Beacons with the greatest number of staff with youth development backgrounds had lead agencies with a youth development focus (as noted in Chapter 3). We cannot say, however, which is more important—having more full-time staff or more staff with previous experience in nonprofit youth development agencies.

No relationships were observed between organizational practices and the extent to which adults fostered positive relationships with the young people, good structure and management, and decision-making opportunities. These findings do not mean that relationships do not exist, but rather that we have no evidence to support or refute the hypotheses that they do exist. The degree to which adults fostered positive relationships and the structure and management of the activities was, overall, very strong—and the site differences were negligible (see Appendix D).

The mission of the lead agency and the experience of the Beacon director are related to hiring practices. As we noted in Chapter 3, the mission of the lead agencies for each of the five Beacon centers varied dramatically. Two of the lead agencies, those of Richmond Village and Community Bridges Beacon centers, already ran youth development programs. The executive directors hired founding Beacon directors with youth development experience and who fostered strong youth development cultures, which may partially explain why these two centers appeared to have activities of slightly higher quality than the others.
After-School Pursuits: An Examination of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative

Summary

In this chapter we have seen that the overall quality of activities in the Beacon centers was adequate to high in terms of the opportunities they provided for supportive relationships, involvement and membership. The theory of change specifies that the Beacon centers would create high-quality supports and opportunities for young people—and about half the activities met a high level of quality, with most of the rest appearing adequate. Because few initiatives have examined the quality of youth development practices in such detail, it is difficult to say whether the Beacon center activities were better or worse than those of similar initiatives.

There were very modest differences among the centers with respect to the observed quality of the activities; we saw more variation in quality within the centers—which depended on the type of activities or their size—than across them. One factor that may account for the relatively small cross-center variation was the existence of the intermediary and the steering committee, both of which placed a large premium on activity quality. The intermediary provided youth development training to many people who worked with young people in the Beacon centers.

Further investigation of the activities and the factors that contributed to their quality led to the following findings. Regardless of content, activities tended to be strong in adult and peer warmth and structure and management. The theory of change—and the youth development framework in general—tends to place a high premium on supportive relationships. Adherence to the theory of change, therefore, may have ensured that activities tended to be strong in these areas.

Not surprisingly, leadership development activities had the highest scores on decision-making and leadership compared to all other types of activities, but even their scores tended to be low on these two dimensions. Less than half of the leadership activities provided high levels of these opportunities. Educational activities tended to have the lowest scores on these dimensions.

Because leadership development activities often include group decision-making and action, almost all (80%) such activities provided many opportunities for young people to work together. In contrast, fewer than one third of the educational activities were strong in this area.

Implications for Practice

The findings in this chapter suggest that practitioners in after-school programs can enrich their programs in several ways:

Activities can be enriched by providing developmental opportunities in peer cooperation, leadership and decision-making. Project-based work in which young people work together to plan and implement activities also provides opportunities for all three dimensions. In educational activities, adding a peer tutoring component would enhance opportunities for peer cooperation and, to some degree, leadership. Enriching educational activities is particularly important because many young people participate in them.

Programs should provide a broad range of activities, as the Beacon centers do, to enhance the possibility that they will offer multiple developmental opportunities for youth. In some activities—such as open recreation—the nature of the program makes it difficult for adults to foster opportunities for decision-making or peer cooperation. If programs have such activities, they should balance them with activities that do provide multiple developmental opportunities.

Programs should implement a mix of activities of different sizes and staffing levels. Although small activities tend to provide the richest developmental opportunities, funding considerations and political concerns may push programs to provide activities that serve many youth. Funding, activity goals and politics need to be balanced against one another.

Level of full-time employment and type of experience are important considerations for staffing and hiring. Whenever possible, hire full-time staff and those who have previous experience in youth development agencies, especially directors who have worked in youth development agencies.
The low scores for educational activities in leadership, decision-making and peer cooperation should be interpreted cautiously. Having such low scores does not mean that the activities are not good or worthwhile: Educational activities may be providing crucial skills development for young people who fare poorly in school. Aside from measuring the clarity with which adults presented material and whether they ensured that students were learning it before moving on to new material, the observations did not account for how well the staff members were teaching academic material.

The staff-to-youth ratio also made a difference. A greater number of leadership opportunities and opportunities for young people to cooperate with one another were present in activities with fewer staff per youth. Both these findings make sense given our observations: In the activities with fewer adults per youth, adults sometimes relied on young people to help them implement the activities. Also, when there were many staff members to youth present, staff tended to work one-on-one with young people—which may provide young people with needed attention, particularly in content areas such as education. But it did inhibit peer cooperation.

Activities with fewer youth in attendance tended to foster more opportunities for adults to interact positively with young people and tended to be more highly structured and managed. There appeared to be no optimal size below which adult-youth interactions improved rapidly; instead, it appeared that incremental reductions in the number of young people present in the activities led to incremental improvements in positive adult-youth interactions and structure and management. However, Beacon directors experienced pressure from the schools to serve as many young people as possible. In addition, the funding stream from the state of California for after-school programs provided low levels of reimbursement, and it was more cost-effective to enroll larger groups of young people.

Although the conclusions are tentative and deserve further study, we observed relationships between hiring practices and the strength of the activities: First, the two centers that had the most quality activities, Community Bridges and Richmond Village, had founding directors who had worked in youth development agencies. Not only did they understand the concepts underlying developmental programming, they also hired higher numbers of staff members who had previous experience in youth development agencies. In turn, centers with a higher (relative to other centers) proportion of staff members from youth development agencies were stronger in fostering decision-making and cooperation among youth. In centers that had more full-time staff, staff members were, on average, better able to foster warm interactions with youth and among young people.

As a final note to this chapter, it is crucial to point out that the centers are more than just a collection of activities—each one has a specific ambience, which is partly a function of the space available in the host school, partly a function of the center culture created by the director and other management, and partly a function of the young people who go to it. Therefore, as we continue through the report, we are conscious that there may be influences on young people’s experiences that are center-related but not necessarily related to the developmental qualities of the activities at the centers.
Attendance at Beacon centers is voluntary. Thus, the number of families and youth who attend rests on the visibility, accessibility and appeal of the centers. As we saw in Chapters 4 and 5, the Beacon centers developed strategies to ensure that they were visible, accessible and safe, with well-trained staff and high-quality activities, in order to attract large numbers of youth and adults. The ultimate test of the centers’ appeal, however, rests on their ability to support frequent and repeated participation in center activities. Thus, this chapter explores participation and factors that affect it. Specifically, this chapter addresses:

- How many youth and adults attend the Beacon centers?
- Who goes to the Beacon centers, how often and for how long?
- How do the youth who go to the centers differ from those who do not?
- Do youth participate in a range of activities at the Beacon centers?
- Can differences in organizational and staffing practices be linked to variations in youths’ participation patterns?

How many youth and adults attend the Beacons?

The Beacon centers used a Web-based management information system (MIS) to track daily attendance. Fully operational by September 1999, the system permitted the sites to record information about the activities provided, schedules, young people’s daily participation, and demographic information about staff and youth.

Early in the initiative, the stakeholders set a goal that each center would provide services and activities to approximately 150 to 200 people per day, and between 500 and 1,000 people a year, with 75 percent (or 375 to 750) of the participants between the ages of 10 and 17. These numbers corresponded to the capacity of the space available and to the allocated funding, taking into consideration the SFBI’s intention to provide high-quality services to those who attended Beacon programs.

In the last year of the evaluation (July 1, 2000, to June 30, 2001), the number of youth served by each center surpassed the original goal (see Table 6.1). As Table 6.2 displays, by their fourth year of operation, during one semester alone (Spring 2001) the centers served almost their yearly goal, reaching between 356 (Chinatown) and 722 (Sunset Neighborhood). In addition, center attendance averaged more than 100 youth per day (see Table 6.3).

All the Beacon centers also devoted considerable resources and effort toward serving the adult participants with a diverse set of activities and community events. The number of adults attracted to the Beacon centers displays the success they have had in appealing to these community members. Although adults are important constituents of the Beacon centers, this report focuses on youth who attend the centers, the activities they engage in and the resources provided to them. The remainder of this chapter describes the youth participants.
After-School Pursuits: An Examination of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative

Participation at the Beacon Centers

### Table 6.1
Number of Youth and Adults Served Between 7/1/2000 and 6/30/2001 by Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Bridges</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond Village</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset Neighborhood</td>
<td>1,337</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sites’ MIS data

### Table 6.2
Number of Youth Served Between 1/1/2001 and 6/30/2001 by Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Bridges</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond Village</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset Neighborhood</td>
<td>1,337</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sites’ MIS data

### Table 6.3
Daily Average Number of Youth and Adults Present in Each Center Between 7/1/2000 and 6/30/2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Bridges</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond Village</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset Neighborhood</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sites’ MIS data

Who goes to the Beacon centers?

Descriptions of the youths’ age, ethnicity and gender are reported in Table 6.4, on the following page. As hoped for by the initiative’s planners, a diverse mix of youth participated in the Beacon centers.

Age

Beacon centers were designed to serve a broad range of community youth and adults before, during and after school. Three of the five Beacons selected for the evaluation were located in middle schools, on the assumption that centers in middle schools would draw youth of all ages. Initiative planners thought that parents of young children would feel comfortable sending their children to middle schools, and that high-school students would prefer to attend a middle school over an elementary school.

In the interim report, we showed that assumption to be true: In Fall 1999, the participants in the Beacon centers located in the middle schools were more evenly distributed by age than were those attending the Beacon centers in the elementary or high schools. Approximately 50 percent of the young people who went to the Beacon centers in the middle schools were of middle-school age.

Participation data collected 18 months later, however, show a somewhat different picture. The number of participants from the local community who were younger or older than the host school age-range decreased at three of the five centers, and the number of young people within the host school age-range (and from the host school) increased significantly. As a result, 63 percent or more of the youth who attended the Beacon centers in Spring 2001 were in the age-range served by the host schools (with the exception of Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center, where 45% of the youth were of middle-school age).

Although high-school students might be more likely to attend Beacon centers located in middle schools than in elementary schools, some older adolescents still expressed reluctance. “High-school students don’t want to be here with kids, like, way younger than us,” noted one. Older students also perceived that the centers focused their programming primarily on middle-school students.

Ethnicity

In general, the ethnic breakdown of youth served by the Beacon centers mirrored that of the host schools. One exception was the Chinatown Beacon center, where almost all the youth who attended were Asian, even though a significant number of Latino youth (38%) were bused in from other
Table 6.4  
Ethnic Characteristics, Grade Level and Gender of Beacon Center Youth Participants from 1/1/2001 to 6/30/2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Chinatown</th>
<th>Community Bridges</th>
<th>Richmond Village</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial/other</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Chinatown</th>
<th>Community Bridges</th>
<th>Richmond Village</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

neighborhoods to attend the host elementary school. Transportation issues and their young age (predominantly elementary) made it a challenge for these youth to attend activities after school. Of note, 57 percent of the youth across the five centers were identified as Asian/Pacific Islander. Although this is very high—much higher than in the United States population in general, 40 percent of the students in the San Francisco Unified School District are Asian or Pacific Islander.

Gender
The gender breakdown indicates that approximately equal numbers of males and females were attending three of the five Beacon centers. However, at Visitacion Valley and Richmond Village, about two thirds of the participants were male. This likely reflects the skewed proportion of males (58%) who attend the middle school hosting Visitacion Valley.

Proportion of Beacon Participants from the Host Schools
The Beacon centers were designed to serve a diversity of young people. Along with serving young people from the host schools, they also hoped to include other youth from the neighborhood. In three Beacon centers—Visitacion Valley, Community Bridges and Richmond Village—60 percent or more of the youth who attended were from the host school (see Table 6.5, next page). These figures represent significant increases from Fall 1999, when closer to one quarter were from the host schools. In contrast, at two Beacon centers—Chinatown and Sunset Neighborhood—a majority of the youth were from the community rather than from the host school (although they were still generally within the host school grade range).

Multiple factors probably account for the increases in the number of participants drawn from the host schools. From Fall 1999 to Spring 2001, the principals of Community Bridges and Visitacion Valley middle schools were strong advocates of having the centers serve more students from the schools. In the Visitacion Valley Beacon center, the number of Visitacion Valley Middle School students referred to the center increased as the center and host school staff solidified their strong working relationships. The Beacon centers also received state and federal after-school funds designated for students in the host schools, expanding the centers’ capacity.
Several factors also account for why proportionately fewer participants at Chinatown and Sunset Neighborhood Beacon centers were from the host schools. In both centers, space for activities was much more limited than in the other three centers. Neither center had much dedicated space within the host school for programming or administration, and so the centers sought alternative locations for both functions. Chinatown, which not only had no dedicated space at the host school but also had very little space for programming period, provided programming at other schools. Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center provided activities at a nearby satellite building that was not on school grounds. Both centers also used their computer technology centers (CTCs) to attract youth who did not go to the host school: The Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center had a computer lab in its satellite building in addition to the one it had at the school. Although the Chinatown Beacon center had its CTC in the host school, they used it in collaboration with other programs in the community that serve high-school youth.

How do youth who attend the Beacons differ from those who do not?

The Beacon centers strive to welcome all youth. To examine their success in doing so, we drew on data gathered during the school day and from school records for youth from the three middle schools in the evaluation that hosted Beacon Centers. The data were gathered from all middle-school youth at the host school, whether they were Beacon participants or not. These data allowed us to compare host school students who attended the centers with host school students who did not. In particular, we examined information from 1999–2000 school records (GPA, free or reduced-price lunch eligibility, attendance and standardized test scores) and from youth surveys (self-efficacy, level of family and peer support, reaction to difficult situations, school effort and support from non-family adults) for sixth- and seventh-graders who attended the Community Bridges, Sunset Neighborhood and Visitacion Valley middle schools. (Specific questions and measures from the middle-school youth surveys are presented in Appendix E.) Table 6.6, on the following page, provides means and frequencies for the variables we examined. A limitation of these data is that we do not have true baseline information because youth may have already been attending the Beacon. Thus, where there are differences between participants and nonparticipants, some of the distinctions (in particular, in non-family support) may be explained by their previous participation in the Beacons, and we are unable to capture this effect.

A comparison of demographic characteristics indicates youth were similar on gender and grade level. The middle-school centers attracted proportionately more Latino and African American students and fewer Asian students than is reflected in those three schools’ population. Differences in how youth fared in school show that Beacon youth had lower grade-point averages and math and reading test scores compared to their peers who did not attend the Beacon centers. Beacon youth also tended to be of lower socioeconomic status, as reflected by the greater proportion of youth who received free or reduced-price lunch at school.

Beacon and non-Beacon youth were very similar in measures of well-being (i.e., positive and passive reaction to problems, and self-efficacy) and school effort. In measures of developmental experiences, however, those who attend Beacons report lower levels of peer support and a smaller proportion of their time spent in productive activities. On the other hand, they report higher levels of non-family and family adult support. Both groups reported similar numbers of leadership experiences.

In sum, these findings show support for the Beacons as welcoming places for both boys and girls of different ethnic backgrounds. They also attract youth who may not be able to afford other after-school programs. The data on differences in academic achievement also provide some indication that the Beacon centers are reaching the youth who stand to benefit most from academic enrichment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.5</th>
<th>Proportion of 7/1/2000 to 6/30/2001 Participants Enrolled in the Center’s Host School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Bridges</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond Village</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset Neighborhood</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.6
Comparison of Beacon Participants vs. Nonparticipants at Three Host Middle Schools in Fall 1999\(^a\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Beacon Youth from Host School (n=392)</th>
<th>Non-Beacon Youth from Host School (n=446)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced-price lunch recipient</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>28%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity(^b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade-point average (1 to 4)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.2**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math NCE (1 to 99, 99 is high)</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>69.2***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading NCE (1 to 99)</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>59.3***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of school days missed(^c)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School effort(^d) (1 to 4, 4 is high-level effort)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive response to problems or arguments(^e)</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 to 4, 4 is most positive)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive response to problems or arguments(^e)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 to 4, 4 is most passive)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy(^f)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 to 4, 4 is high level of self-efficacy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># peer supports</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.6(^+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># family supports(^g)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.5(^*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># non-family adult supports(^g)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.5(^***)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% time in productive leisure activities</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># leadership experiences</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) The number of youth responding is different from the number of middle-school youth reported in an earlier table because these data are from a subsample of middle-school youth who also attend the host school.

\(^b\) Ethnicity distributions were significantly different at p<.0001.

\(^c\) Of note, the survey was administered during the school day; therefore, the proportion of youth with absences likely under-represents what the schoolwide proportion would be.

\(^d\) School effort example: “I pay attention in class.”

\(^e\) Positive response to challenge: “When I have a problem or argument with someone, I make sure it gets fixed.” Passive response: “When I have a problem or argument with someone, I don’t talk to them.”

\(^f\) Self-efficacy: “I can depend on myself.”

\(^g\) Number of supports who: “Pay attention, I can go to for help or advice.”

Source: Middle-school youth survey, Fall 1999, and SFUSD school records database for 1999–2000 school year. All data are for youth who completed a baseline and follow-up survey.
After-School Pursuits: An Examination of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative

Participation at the Beacon Centers

The Duration of Youth Participation

Many people sign up for or try out an organization but do not become fully engaged in it; they therefore may not participate with enough regularity for their involvement to make a difference in their lives. Knowing the overall number of individuals who are “touched” by the Beacon centers is informative for determining their effect on the community but is less helpful for determining their effect on the individual. Therefore, we examined the Beacon centers’ attendance and membership records more closely to gather information about the duration and intensity of youth participation—factors that should be related to the role the centers play in youths’ lives and the centers’ potential to have a positive influence on youth development.

Are youth participating over an extended period of time?

To examine participation over time, we separated the years into three “sessions” each. One session ran during the summer, starting in mid-June and running through the first two weeks of August. Another began around September 1 and ended on December 31, while the third began on January 1 and ended in mid-June. These sessions basically corresponded to activity schedules at the Beacon centers. Between 18 percent (at Sunset Neighborhood) and 32 percent (at Chinatown) of all Beacon kids participated for three or more sessions (see Table 6.7).

Table 6.7
Number of Sessions in Which Individual Youth Participated Between 9/1/1999 and 6/30/2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown (n=596)</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Bridges (n=910)</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond Village (n=813)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset Neighborhood (n=1,790)</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley (n=1,076)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (n=5185)</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.8
Average Daily and Monthly Attendance for Spring 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinatown</th>
<th>Community Bridges</th>
<th>Richmond Village</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average days per month</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average days per week</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Intensity of Youth Participation

Further, youth attended an average of about six times a month, or between one and two visits per week (see Table 6.8). These data suggest that youth were making participation in Beacon activities a regular part of their weekly routine. Community Bridges Beacon youth attended most frequently—in part because the school and Beacon center instituted a Beacon program that was considered an eighth period. Although technically voluntary, Beacon staff reported that the young people who attended thought attendance was mandatory—and attendance rates for enrolled youth were over 90 percent. Chinatown Beacon center youth attended almost as often; its attendance figures may have been heavily influenced by the fact that 81 percent of the participants were elementary-school students. After-school evaluations have consistently observed that elementary-school children participate more frequently than middle- and high-school youth.
After-School Pursuits: An Examination of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative

Are youth participating in a range of activities?
As described earlier, one goal for the Beacon centers is for adults and youth to participate in a range of activities. Previous studies have found that participation in a variety of types of activities is associated with positive benefits for youth. In order to examine both variety of activity participation and the potential role of academic enrichment, we sorted young people’s participation into three categories: 1) youth who participated in educational support activities only; 2) those who did not participate in any educational support activities; and 3) those who participated in educational support activities plus activities in other core areas. We chose these categories as a way of examining not only whether participating in a variety of activities contributed to young people’s outcomes, but also whether there was value added to participating in educational activities—especially on academic outcomes. During the SFBI evaluation period, there was some question both nationally and within the initiative itself about the role that academic enrichment should play in an after-school program’s curriculum. For example, in Community Bridges Beacon center, the principal advocated for a much stronger role for academic enrichment. Students in the host school were not doing well, and she saw the Beacon as an opportunity to give them more time on their academics. Beacon staff, in contrast, did not want to cut some of the leadership and arts and recreation programs.

Between September 1999 and June 2001, as Table 6.9 displays, more than half (53%) of all Beacon youth attended educational support activities of some type. Of those, about half participated only in educational activities, whereas the other half participated in educational activities plus other types of activities. Just under half of the young people (46%) did no educational support activities. In Chapters 7 and 8, we will discuss further the benefits that youth derived from participating in different types of activities.

Factors that Affect Participation
To better understand why youth came to the Beacons and where there were differences in participation, the following sections examine the links between early outcomes and youth participation. In some cases, we are able to conduct statistical tests to link variation in one factor with variation in another. In other cases, however, our data are qualitative in nature and we are not able to conduct statistical tests, or multiple factors appear to relate to participation and we cannot tease out the single most important factor. We do, nevertheless, point to trends and patterns that we believe make a difference in explaining participation.

Accessible
Locating Beacon centers in schools has both benefits and drawbacks. Young people appreciated the convenience—the accessibility—of attending a Beacon located on or near the campus of their own school, especially if that site was also a part of the neighborhood in which they lived. Many liked the fact that they could access a Beacon and its activities without having to take a bus or arrange for other transportation. One elementary-age youth preferred to remain at the Beacon after school rather than participate in another activity elsewhere “because we have to walk [to the site of the other activity].” A middle-school youth spent time at the Beacon rather than at a local recreation center “ ’cause, like, it’s just here right after school. It’s, like, pretty much the same thing, but it’s here.”

Table 6.9
Proportion of Beacon Youth (Ages 5 to 17) Participating in Educational Support Activities, No Educational Support Activities or Education Plus Other Core-Area Activities Between 9/1/1999 and 6/30/2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinatown (n=596)</th>
<th>Community Bridges Village (n=910)</th>
<th>Richmond Neighborhood (n=813)</th>
<th>Sunset Valley (n=1,790)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=1,076)</th>
<th>Overall (n=5,185)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No education</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only education</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education-plus</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although familiarity with a school’s layout and facilities helped make most youth feel safe and at home at the Beacon, a few wished that activities could be held somewhere other than the site at which they had already spent most of their day. One youth who worked on a Beacon project at an office several blocks away from the program’s main space on the grounds of her middle school said: “Last year most of the time I was at the school Beacon… I like it better here because you spend your whole day at school; you don’t want to stay there more.”

Problems getting home from Beacon center activities appeared to limit participation. As noted in Chapter 4, getting home after activities was one of the least-cited reasons for why youth missed activities. Nevertheless, data linking responses on the Fall 1999 middle-school youth survey to future participation (measured by MIS attendance data) indicate that those youth who did experience problems getting home from the Beacon were less likely to continue participation in Beacon activities over time compared to youth who did not experience problems.

Even when transportation was available, the timing of the transportation and the scheduling of activities did not always allow youth to participate as they might have liked. For example, we heard from youth at Sunset Neighborhood that relying on an after-school late bus was one factor that kept them from participating in core-area activities other than educational enrichment. They attended the educational support activities that took place directly after school, but needed to leave to take the bus prior to when the other core-area enrichment activities began. This factor may explain why youth at Sunset Neighborhood were the least likely to fall into the Education-Plus activity participant group.

Feeling safe increased participation. Our analyses confirm that how safe youth felt at the Beacons predicted how long they would stay involved there. Youth who, on our Fall 1999 survey, reported feeling the most safe at the Beacon after school were more likely than those who felt less safe to continue to attend the Beacon over time (see regression coefficients in Appendix F. Table F.1). However, youths’ reports of feeling safe are highly correlated with whether or not they find supportive adults at the Beacon center. When we look at both safety and adult support together, feeling safe is less important than whether a youth has found supportive, responsive adults at the center (who ultimately help to provide that feeling of safety for them).

Welcoming
Having dedicated space where young people and adults could socialize informally increased youths’ desire to participate. Young people reported that it was very important to have a place to hang out and talk with their friends and Beacon staff—in some instances they reported that they preferred hanging out to going to the Beacon activities. In order to create such a place, however, the Beacon centers depended on the host schools to provide them with sufficient space, and only three of the five centers in the evaluation had enough space to provide this opportunity to youth. Two centers (Sunset Neighborhood and Chinatown) were unable to provide such a place because the host schools could offer only limited space, which was shared with teachers during the school day.

When there was little dedicated space, Beacon centers took steps to create a sense of community in other ways. One center (Sunset Neighborhood) that did not have much “hang out” space, for example, created a way to provide community time. Prior to attending their specific activities, youth would congregate for 15 or so minutes in the school cafeteria with peers and staff. This allowed time for interaction and community building before the cafeteria was needed for one of the activities. However, because this practice was put in place at the end of the evaluation period (Fall 2001), we cannot determine whether participation increased as a result.

Despite the lack of dedicated space, the Chinatown Beacon had the highest retention rate of all five centers. In contrast, proportionately fewer youth at Sunset Neighborhood Beacon tended to participate for more than one session compared to youth at other centers. Therefore, it is difficult to establish with any degree of certainty whether or not dedicated space actually made a difference. But given the consistent comments by young people at the middle schools about the importance of space, we cannot reject the importance of having areas to hang out in. It is likely that Chinatown’s primarily elementary-school-age population (81% of its participants) minimized the potential effects that lack of community space may have, given that these younger youth are probably less concerned about hanging out than the middle-school youth are.
Table 6.10
Retention and Participation Rates Paired with Staff Training and Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host school level</th>
<th>Chinatown</th>
<th>Community Bridges</th>
<th>Richmond Village</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of youth retained for three or more sessions</td>
<td>Elementary: 33%</td>
<td>Middle: 20%</td>
<td>High: 18%</td>
<td>Middle: 17%</td>
<td>Middle: 23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average days per week youth attend</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of staff with experience in youth development agency</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average staff tenure in months</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number trainings received by staff since beginning work at Beacon center</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of hours per week worked by staff</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staff Training and Experience

Table 6.10 summarizes some of the main findings from Chapter 4 in conjunction with the retention rates for youth at each of the centers.

As we noted in Chapter 4, Community Bridges Beacon had a high proportion of staff whose previous experience was in nonprofit youth-serving agencies, and had the highest average number of trainings, especially in facilitating interactions among youth. It also had the highest average weekly attendance, but that seemed due primarily to the existence of its eighth-period program. Chinatown also had a high level of attendance, and its core staff tended to be inexperienced in youth development.

Staff training and experience also did not appear to be related to high rates of retention over time. Although Community Bridges had the highest number of staff trainings, this site did not have the highest proportion of youth who attended three or more semesters.

The high rates of retention at the Visitacion Valley Beacon center may be partially explained by the relatively longer tenure of staff at that site; however, at Chinatown, retention rates were also high but staff tenure was no better than at other sites.

In sum, although our results are preliminary and deserve more investigation, staff training and experience do not appear to explain the variation in participation among centers.

Staff Responsiveness

Creating ways to help youth connect with adults at the Beacons is critical to increasing retention. As we will see in Chapter 7, participation over multiple sessions at the Beacon centers in educational plus other core-area activities was fundamental to increasing supportive relationships with non-family adults. However, it was also the case that young people who were able to identify supportive Beacon staff early in their tenure at the Beacon center were more likely to continue to participate than those youth who did not find a supportive adult as easily.32

The number of supportive adults that participants found early on at the Beacon was the most significant factor in predicting retention over time for youth, even when we take into account how safe they felt, whether they had problems getting home from the Beacon, and how new and interesting they found the Beacon center activities to be (along with controlling for age, gender and site). Regression coefficients are presented in Appendix F, Table F.1. The number of supportive adults they found at the Beacon center (as of Fall 1999) was also the only factor that differentiated youth who participated three sessions or more in educational plus other activities from youth with other participation patterns.33

Across the three middle-school sites, a higher proportion of youth at Community Bridges and Visitacion Valley Beacon Centers found at least one supportive adult early on in their time at the Beacon centers compared to youth at Sunset...
Neighborhood. This difference may partially account for why a smaller proportion of youth at Sunset Neighborhood attended three or more sessions compared to youth at the other two centers.

Although the number of adults the youth found to be supportive at the Beacon as a whole was a significant predictor of the number of sessions that youth attended and whether they would engage in educational plus other core-area activities, we found no relationship between the observed quality of the adult-youth interactions within an activity and attendance rates within that specific activity.

A Range of High-Quality Activities

The range of activities offered by the Beacon centers influenced young people’s decisions to go to the centers and attend regularly. According to interviews with youth, some chose to participate in programs that helped them with their homework so they could have more time to play. Other youth chose to participate in programs that would expand their competencies in areas that were personally meaningful, such as drawing, music, poetry or dance. Thus, whether students came to the Beacons to hang out, have a safe place to talk openly with peers or “try on” different identities, or whether they came to improve their grades by going to tutoring, gain leadership skills or learn skills they couldn’t obtain elsewhere (such as how to DJ), one of the keys to providing interesting learning environments and attracting youth to participate in the Beacons—according to them—seemed to be the choice in activities offered.

Middle-school survey data confirm a strong relationship between youth who rated the activities at the Beacon as providing variety and interest and those who were most likely to continue their participation over a number of sessions. Even when we take into account the youths’ sense of safety and adult supportiveness (factors that are related to youths’ reports about variety and interest), the degree of variety and interest the youth find in the Beacon activities remains a predictor of their long-term participation.

Well-structured and -managed activities had higher attendance rates than those with poorer structure and management. Relying on experience, many after-school program operators note that kids “vote with their feet” and drop out or do not attend if activities are of poor quality. As described in Chapter 5, the evaluation team systematically observed the quality of more than 100 different activities in the Beacon centers. One of the dimensions of quality that we observed was how highly structured and managed activities were. In particular, we asked if the adult and teen staff present material clearly, organize daily sessions well and manage the behavior of the young people in the activity with skill. We found a strong relationship between an activity’s structure and management and attendance in that activity. The more highly structured and managed an activity, the more often enrolled participants actually went to the activity.

Other developmental qualities were not related to attendance rates within an activity. We examined whether opportunities for peer cooperation, adult-youth and peer interactions, decision-making or leadership provided by adult staff were related to attendance in activities. The only factor related to attendance was the extent to which activities were highly structured and managed, as reported above.

Educational activities (both enrichment and tutoring types) tended to have lower rates of attendance than did arts and recreation and leadership activities. The attendance rates in activities—measured as the average proportion of days youth attended out of the total number of possible days youth could attend—varied tremendously. On average, however, attendance in educational activities was about 11 percent lower than attendance in arts and recreation activities and about 24 percent lower than attendance in leadership activities. Educational enrichment activities tended to have even lower participation rates than did tutoring-type educational activities, perhaps because tutoring was frequently structured in a more “mandatory” way, with teachers and Beacon staff following up on whether or not youth showed up.

Interviews with the young people suggest why educational activities may be more poorly attended. The amount of autonomy youth had at the Beacons seemed important to their interest in an activity or in the Beacon in general. For example, many youth noted how much they liked having a place to just hang out with friends, and some bemoaned the inflexibility of certain activities, such as tutoring. They tended to want to be able to talk more with friends or do other activities once finished with their homework.
Even though the attendance rates in educational activities lagged behind the rates in other types of activities, the educational activities tended to be scheduled frequently. Many met three or four times a week. In contrast, the leadership activities often met only once a week. What this meant, therefore, was that young people spent more time overall in the educational activities than in the leadership activities, in spite of the fact that they tended to miss a greater proportion of the educational activities.

**Peers**

Although not specified in the theory of change, one factor that attracted youth to the Beacon centers was whether or not their friends went. Interviews and focus groups with youth revealed that, for many, friendships are a primary motivation for spending time at the Beacon. For example, one middle-school student remarked, “For me, it's a place where a lot of my friends are at and a place to hang out, and then, it's just fun.” In contrast, lack of the right age of peers could serve as a deterrent to participation.

In general, youth participants regarded going to the Beacons as an opportunity to be with same-age peers:

> I think the reason we go to Beacon and not some recreation park is 'cause we know the kind of people that's gonna be there. If you go to a place that you don't go to often, you don't know what's gonna go on, you don't know what kind of people are gonna be there. But when you go to the Beacon you know most of the people are gonna be from [name of high school], and you know they're gonna be around your grade level, so you have many things in common with them, instead of meeting kids that's half your size, half your age, and you share no interests with these little kids.

*(High-school student, Richmond Village)*

Members of a focus group from the middle school that hosted the Community Bridges Beacon center described their lack of interest in a certain program because it was also open to middle-school students.

> For most high-schoolers, they feel like there is a really big age difference and so...they don’t really want to be around the middle-school atmosphere anymore, so I guess that, you know, we should try to get different age-groups in here...

High-school students don’t want to be here with the kids, like, way younger than us. It is like when you get to high school you get more mature and stuff, and then when you come back to the middle school and the kids still like Pokémon and all that other stuff...You want somebody your own age and stuff.

In addition to these qualitative data, youths’ reports on feedback forms further document the role friends play in influencing youths’ decision to go—or not go—to the Beacon. On average, a little over a third of the youth who missed an activity indicated they had done so because their friends were not going.

**Summary**

In this chapter we have seen that the Beacons have exceeded their goals for reaching youth at their centers, with hundreds of youth participating each year. We have also seen that youth tended to participate regularly, averaging about once a week in three centers and almost three days a week in two others.

We found that Beacons tended to attract youth from the host school with slightly different characteristics from those who did not attend. Beacon youth were more likely to have shown poorer academic performance, to receive free or reduced-price lunch and to be African American or Latino.

Many after-school programs struggle with youth recruitment and retention, and the San Francisco Beacon centers tended to do slightly better than others in this regard. Investigation of the factors that contributed to participation patterns has suggested a number of strategies that others might consider. Overall, our data support the hypothesized links in the theory of change—and provide a few additional insights.

Young people were more likely to continue their participation in centers over time when they found an adult early in their participation with whom they formed a relationship. This was, in fact, one of the strongest predictors of ongoing participation.

Locating Beacon centers in schools attracted some young people and deterred others from participating. Although the Beacon centers that used off-campus sites for activities did so because school space...
was limited, doing so appeared to benefit the centers by attracting young people who did not want to stay on school grounds.

The array of activities at the centers and the quality of their management also fostered participation among young people, just as the theory of change hypothesized. When young people noted that the centers had a variety of programs from which to choose, they were more likely to participate over time. One of the defining characteristics of the Beacon centers in San Francisco—in contrast to a number of other after-school programs—was their strong focus on providing a wide variety of activities.

Although the theory of change did not predict that providing opportunities for friends to get together would foster participation, young people made it very clear that it did. They reported that the Beacon centers were places where they could see their friends, and also that they missed scheduled activities because their friends were not going. This is not surprising given the importance of a social life to adolescents’ development.

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**Fostering Participation: Implications for Practice Based on the Research Findings**

To foster long-term participation, after-school programs should ensure that they have responsive staff members with whom young people can connect and feel comfortable. It is important that youth be able to connect with these responsive adults easily and early on in their time at the program.

By providing a mix of school- and community-based after-school location options, sites are likely to be able to draw more young people in total than school- or community-based centers alone.

Providing opportunities that allow young people to congregate and hang out together can foster attendance at after-school programs.
They’re [kids and adults] all, like, friends with me, so if I have a problem, I can talk to everybody.  
(Middle-school youth)

I can’t really think of a day when I didn’t feel like coming, because even if I did have a problem, I would come in…and talk to [staff member].  
(High-school youth)

The SFBI planners based their theory of change on a youth development framework, which is often described in terms of its contrast with approaches that try to fix youths’ existing, immediate problems. Used alone, problem-oriented interventions have shown limited results in achieving long-term positive outcomes. In contrast, advocates of a youth development framework propose that youth programs should increase young people’s access to positive developmental opportunities and experiences to give them a better chance at being productive adults. Key principles include giving youth input into decisions, providing opportunities for meaningful involvement, engaging youth in challenging activities, and building a range of skills and competencies.

Based on previous research (reviewed in Appendix B), the Beacon planners emphasized the need for the centers to provide places where youth would experience:

- supportive adults and peers;
- meaningful involvement in leadership roles and decision-making responsibilities, and a sense of membership/belonging; and
- a variety of high-quality, interesting and challenging activities.

In Chapter 5, we reported on program quality in terms of the opportunities provided youth based on observations of Beacon activities. In this chapter, we turn to youths’ experiences of these same opportunities and look at the following three questions:

- Are youth who participate in Beacon centers receiving positive developmental experiences? Do they perceive these experiences differently from other places where they spend their time?
- Do youth involved in Beacon activities receive more positive developmental experiences than their non-Beacon peers?
- Do some youth report higher levels of developmental experiences? If so, what contributes to the differences?

The findings reported in this chapter rely on data gathered from a variety of methods including 1) 838 surveys administered in Spring 2001 to seventh- and eighth-grade youth—both participants and nonparticipants—who attended the three middle schools that hosted Beacon centers; 2) 666 feedback forms administered to elementary-, middle- and high-school–aged Beacon participants at all five Beacon centers during a total of 60 activities that took place in the Summer 2000, Fall 2000 or Spring 2001 sessions; 3) interviews with youth and reports from ethnographers at each of the five Beacon centers gathered between March 2000 and August 2001 and; 4) daily attendance records from each site spanning Fall 1999 to Spring 2001. The methods and samples are described more fully in Appendix E. Of note, the middle-school youth survey was conducted during the school day, therefore the survey sample comprises a broader range of Beacon participation levels than do the samples of youth who filled out feedback forms or participated in interviews. The feedback form and interview respondents tended to be those who had participated over a longer period of time at the Beacons and were engaged in a greater variety of activities.
Youths’ Developmental Experiences at the Beacon Centers

A summary of youths’ perceived developmental experiences received at the Beacons, based on the quantitative data gathered from feedback forms and surveys, is reported in Table 7.1 on the following page. In the next sections of this chapter, we discuss each developmental experience along with what we learned from the qualitative interviews.

Supportive Relationships: Adults

Having adults in one’s life on when one can rely and turn to for advice and support plays an important role in youths’ resilience and success. For example, one-on-one mentoring programs that are well structured provide adult support in a way that affects youths’ outcomes.

Data from feedback forms administered during Beacon activities and that asked about leaders within specific activities indicated that most youth found supportive adults at the Beacons. On this measure, which asked youth whether the staff person leading the activity cared about them and spent time talking with them, from 84 percent (at Sunset Neighborhood) to 91 percent (at Community Bridges) agreed that they did either “a little” or “a lot” (see Appendix E for a list of items that comprised this measure). From 20 percent (at Sunset Neighborhood) to 30 percent (at Community Bridges) agreed “a lot.”

Interviews and focus group discussions with Beacon youth suggested that adults at the Beacons played a powerful role in shaping young people’s experiences. Indeed, in these interviews, adults at the Beacon centers were reported to top the list of things youth would miss if the centers were not there.

In addition to the crucial role adults played in creating a climate of safety for youth in the Beacons (described in Chapter 4), youth described adults as motivators, mentors, mediators, teachers, supporters and friends. Further, youths’ interpretation of the role adults at the Beacons played for them appears to be qualitatively different from the role other adults in their lives may play. Youth emphasized that the relationships they had at the Beacons were different from those they had in other settings, including the neighborhood and school contexts.

Beacon adults provided emotional support. They worked to create a space for youth to express their feelings, which is something youth seemed to value.

If I just want to feel sad, [Beacon staff member] would be like, “OK, well, go sit down and just cool off for a while.” And people in school, like, they really want you to, like, ’cause [name of teacher], she’s, like, “Oh, it’s OK. Just forget about it and do your work.” And sometimes I don’t want to do that. I just want to sit down for a while.

(Middle-school youth)

All of the Beacon staff are nice, and if I need help or something, if I needed somebody to talk to, I could talk to them.

(Middle-school youth)

Youth repeatedly described adults at the Beacons as being like friends or family and teaching in a way that they could relate to. They spoke of the importance of having people “know who I am” in comparison to the anonymity of school that they described (especially high school). The following exchange between high-school youth during a focus group is representative of the feelings of many young people.

First youth: [At the Beacon] people have a close relationship—that is not a staff-student.

Second youth: Yeah, it still could be more than friends, too, like me. I can say that a few members are like family and stuff.

At the Beacon, young people described their relationships with adults as more equal than those with adults in other places, such as school or work. For example, as the youth pointed out, teachers give grades. As many youth across sites and age-groups mentioned, teachers control such things as movement, determining when and where you are allowed to go, and even making decisions over whether youth can go to the bathroom (this particular example came out a surprising number of times). Naming practices, as the youth below described, also showed differences in “status” between youth and adults.
### Table 7.1
Youths' Perceived Developmental Experiences by Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinatown (n=107)</th>
<th>Community Bridges (n=111)</th>
<th>Richmond Village (n=65)</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood (n=168)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=122)</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activity leader is supportive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(feedback forms)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>30%</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<td>28%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes or Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Yes or Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Yes or Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Yes or Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Yes or Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
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<td>54%</td>
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<td>67%</td>
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</tr>
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<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Involvement and Membership</strong></td>
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<td>33%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>33%</td>
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</tr>
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<td>34%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</tr>
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<td>No</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>29%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>67%</td>
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<td>59%</td>
<td>53%</td>
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<td>53%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<td>27%</td>
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<td><strong>Interesting and Challenging Learning Experiences</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Interesting activity</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>38%</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>6%</td>
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<td>51%</td>
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<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of new and different activities at the Beacon generally (S)</td>
<td>Agree or Strongly Agree</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Most measures are from feedback forms from 60 activities across all five sites. Those with an (S) are from the youth survey, administered only at the three middle-school centers. The n’s for the survey measures are 111, 168 and 122 for Community Bridges, Sunset Neighborhood and Visitacion Valley, respectively.

The belonging scale is averaged across multiple feedback forms when youth completed more than one, because it asks about the Beacon as a whole; all other scales ask about the specific activity the youth is attending. Similarly, “At least one available adult” and “Variety” are taken from the youth survey conducted only at the three middle schools hosting Beacons. Youth were asked about the Beacon as a whole.

Note: Specific items that comprise each scale are reported in Appendix E.

*The decision-making and leadership response sets here are based on counts of the number of decision-making and leadership experiences youth responded “yes” to on the feedback forms. For decision-making: 0 or 1=No; 2 to 3=A little; 4 to 5=A lot. For leadership: 0 or 1=No; 2 to 5=A little; 6 to 10=A lot.
It seems like the Beacon staff is, like, more of a closer friend to you than the teachers are, because, like, everybody at the Beacon calls them by their first name.

(Middle-school youth)

A final measure of youths’ experiences of adult supportiveness at the Beacon centers was derived from the Spring 2001 survey of middle-school youth that took place during the school day. On this measure of adult support, youth were asked about the number of adults at the Beacon generally (that is, they were not asked about their relationship with one specific activity leader) on whom they could rely for different kinds of support (e.g., could go to for help or advice; see Appendix E for items included in this measure). According to these data, a little over half (54%) of the Beacon participants surveyed indicated that there was at least one adult at the Beacon center on whom they could rely for support.

Young people who were interviewed were generally more positive about adult support than those who responded to the surveys. The difference is probably due to differences in the samples. As we noted earlier, the survey was conducted during the school day, and included youth who participated at low and high levels. Young people who filled out feedback forms and participated in interviews tended to participate at relatively high levels. As we shall see later in this chapter, high participators experienced higher levels of adult support than those who participated less often.

Interestingly, the level of adult support that youth experienced in the Beacon centers was not as high as that reported by young people in other youth-serving organizations. As we describe later, higher levels of adult supportiveness may be related to the availability of dedicated space and staff time for hanging out, both of which tended to be more prevalent at the other youth-serving organizations studied. Nevertheless, many youth appreciated and turned to the adults at the Beacon centers, and those who did reported that the Beacon staff played a role in their lives that they did not find elsewhere.

Supportive Relationships: Peers

In addition to the importance of forming relationships with adults, peer relationships become increasingly important as youth enter and experience adolescence. As many researchers have remarked, friendships provide a safe space for youth development, especially in adolescence, as teenagers begin to develop new identities distinct from their childhood attachments.

As noted in Chapter 6, young people said that an important reason why they chose to go to the Beacon was that their friends went. They also indicated that the Beacons provided time and a good space to interact with their peers.

Quantitative data gathered from youth feedback forms indicate that a large majority of youth across all the Beacon centers (ranging from 89% at Sunset Neighborhood and Visitacion Valley to 92% at Richmond Village) agreed they experienced “a little” or “a lot” of support from their peers in activities (i.e., reported peers feel comfortable talking to and helping each other). And from 15 percent (at Richmond Village) to 30 percent (at Community Bridges) agreed “a lot” with positive statements about the peers in their activities.

By examining youths’ descriptions and interpretations of their peer relationships in different settings (Beacons and schools), we gained a deeper understanding of the significance of the Beacons in youths’ lives and how they contributed to youths’ positive and negative experiences with peers. For example, on the positive side, youth felt that the older youth with whom they were able to interact at the Beacons offered an important source of support, either through formal academic mentoring programs offered by the Beacon or just by showing middle-school youth the ropes when they got to high school. In contrast, some middle-school youth expressed concerns about peers of older age-groups. In one Community Bridges focus group, for example, youth complained that they were sometimes teased by high-school students for their music choices, or criticized for making too much noise in the community room.
Regardless of whether they experienced positive or negative interactions with youth of different age-groups, many youth in interviews and focus groups discussed positive peer relationships at the Beacons as those that promote cooperative work and learning. For example, youth in several of the Beacons’ leadership programs described how they tried out a new kind of peer relationship. By learning to interact with peers in a manner that was respectful and cooperative, youth practiced nurturing relationships that will be common as they continue school and enter the workplace.

Although we noted in Chapter 5 that adults did not foster peer cooperation as much as they fostered other opportunities, young people in the activities valued the opportunities that were offered. For example, high-school youth in Sunset Neighborhood’s BAMboozled!, a Web-based youth magazine, articulated the different ways they negotiated deadlines, responsibilities and decision-making with one another. Although they were not all friends, they engaged in close communication and discussion in order to get work done:

“There’s also the teamwork element that you don’t really get at school [agreement from other students]…It’s just hearing opinions and to keep in mind, like, “I statements” and saying, “This is my opinion,” not how it is. It’s great to see…how many different opinions you can get on [an issue]…it’s good to keep…in mind those different perspectives from different parts of people.”

(High-school youth, Sunset Neighborhood)

At the same time, however, youth occasionally mentioned activities that discouraged peer cooperation and interaction. For example, youth in one after-school tutoring program reported a very regimented environment in which peer interaction was not allowed. This seemed to lead to poor morale and motivation among participants.

In terms of peer relationships in general (and not just friendships), youth from three centers tended to describe them in more positive terms at the Beacons than in school. Table 7.2 presents examples of contrasts drawn by youth.

At two Beacons, however, Chinatown and Sunset Neighborhood, youth did not make these contrasts and tended to report that youth treat each other “pretty much the same” at school and the Beacon.

### Table 7.2
Positive Contrasts in Peer Relationships at Beacon and School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Beacon...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is less cliquey (Richmond Village, Sunset Neighborhood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is less anonymous (Richmond Village)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is more like family (Sunset Neighborhood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is a more respectful place (Community Bridges)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is safer, fewer fights (Visitacion Valley, Sunset Neighborhood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has better ways of dealing with peer conflicts (Chinatown, Visitacion Valley, Community Bridges)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allows you to voice opinion (Richmond Village)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has fewer students (Sunset Neighborhood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is friendlier, more caring (Sunset Neighborhood, Richmond Village)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Focus groups with youth

Granting these exceptions, there was a general trend in the quantitative feedback forms and from qualitative interviews indicating that Beacon youth perceived peer relationships at Beacons as primarily positive. Beacon youth reported that peer relationships at the centers helped them learn about cooperation and working together with youth of different ages, and they generally perceived their relationships at the Beacon centers as better than the peer relationships they had at school.

### Involvement and Membership

Although providing opportunities for youth to forge supportive relationships is central to the SFBI’s mission, the Beacon centers were also created as places where youth would have real involvement in decision-making and opportunities to take on meaningful leadership roles. Beacon centers also hoped to create environments where youth would feel a sense of membership and belonging.

Based on information from feedback forms across the five sites, a large proportion of youth (from 76 percent at Sunset Neighborhood to 89 percent at Community Bridges) reported they felt a sense of belonging (i.e., that they were listened to and their ideas mattered) at the centers either “a little” or “a lot.” And between 12 percent (at Chinatown) and 43 percent (at Richmond Village) of the youth responded “a lot” to a series of questions measuring their sense of belonging.
Youth described the Beacons as a place where they could be themselves around both adults and peers that they trust. Interviews indicated that the Beacon centers were important in helping young people think about their developing identities:

*It was easier to express myself [at the Beacon]. Like, I didn’t always have to be the funny one. I could be, like, really serious and I’d go that day, like, I’d be really sad and…people would understand that.*  
(Middle-school youth)

*At the Beacon it’s different [than] at school. At school if you are popular everyone thinks you are all that and stuff like that…it doesn’t matter at the Beacon. They actually accept you for who you are.*  
(High-school youth)

Based on feedback forms administered within activities across all Beacon centers, two thirds or more of the youth (from 68% at Sunset Neighborhood and Richmond Village to 88% at Community Bridges) agreed that the activity provided them with 2 or more leadership experiences out of a possible 10; of those, from 30 percent at Sunset Neighborhood to 50 percent at Visitacion Valley reported between 6 and 10.

From 70 percent (at Visitacion Valley) to 84 percent (at Chinatown) also agreed that the activities provided them with the chance to provide input and make decisions on three to five of the five potential decision-making experiences asked about on the form. Thirty percent (at Sunset Neighborhood) to 52 percent (at Community Bridges) reported having four or five of the five potential experiences.

The relatively high numbers of young people who reported they had leadership and decision-making experiences contrast with the findings in Chapter 5 that described a modest number of high-quality leadership and decision-making opportunities observed. A methodological issue may have played a role in the discrepancy. Observations were done only periodically, and observers may have missed observing on particular days when activities offered these opportunities. Also, when we observed activities, we assessed the proportion of young people who took on leadership roles during the observation period. If different young people had those opportunities on different days, then more young people would have leadership experiences than our observations suggested.

In general, the qualitative interviews suggest that when youth were provided with leadership experiences, these experiences were highly valued. For example, students involved in the youth coalition community outreach program at Sunset Neighborhood described their mission, going to meetings in their neighborhood and in the city to represent youths’ voices. In BAMboozaled!, students helped develop a Web site to “find truth in youth.” During a focus group discussion, students described what was involved:

*There are a lot of stereotypes about young people from the media or whatever, and we’re kind of out to break that partially to adults. We’re kind of also a forum for expression, like, through the media, and so basically there’s the tech component, the writing/journalistic component, [with] some overlap…*

Another student added that they were experimenting with music, audio, video and television in addition to several literary venues, such as fiction, nonfiction and poetry.

*It’s totally youth-run and totally based on keeping with ourselves—that we write it, we design the site, we publish, we market the site, do the PR, all sorts of things.*

Decision-making and belonging were described as central to retaining youth at the Beacons and differentiating the centers from other places where youth spent time. A member of Community Bridges’ Youth Council program described her experience as giving youth a voice, not just in the Beacon, but also in the broader community. During one focus group at Sunset Neighborhood, a group of high-school youth had an in-depth discussion about why being involved in making decisions at the Beacons was important to them and making the Beacons a better place:

*Student 1: You know, if you really do have a part in making it theirs and they really are an actual part of the forming of it, the creating of it, the maintaining of it, then they’ll be there, they’ll make it a priority…The only way kids are going to come is if it’s important to them. I mean, some kids get involved in after-school things [because] it’s something to put on their résumé or because it’s a cheap stipend.*
Student 2: I think the program has to be something that a youth is really into, they feel for it... I got involved in it because I felt that they depend on youth voice in the Sunset Neighborhood. I saw a lot of my friends being harassed as if they had no rights at all, and that got me really upset.

Student 3: Just really make it part of them. Like, I was personally involved. You’ve got teen magazines that are telling you how to be a teenager, but there’s very little out there about real life, and this is our chance to show other people and to be advice for each other... Here’s our chance to sort of have an audience and to say this is how it really is.

Youth compared their experiences of leadership and decision-making at the Beacons favorably in contrast to school because of the respectful, collegial way they were treated and because of the autonomy they were given at the Beacons. Several youth pointed out that Beacon adults were not like teachers because they did not necessarily tell them what to do. One youth said she enjoyed learning more at the Beacon because it was based on what youth want to do.

They’ll ask you, “Do you want to do this today?” They won’t just tell you, “You have to do this today!” They’ll be like, “What do you want to do today?”

(Middle-school youth)

In contrast, youth tended to characterize school in terms of following rules and not being respected by their teachers. For example, a student at Richmond Village compared her experiences in the school debate club vs. the Beacon Revolutionary Minds and Team Council programs: “I thought that since the Beacon Team Council is smaller, my opinions would matter more and I would be able to represent a smaller number of students, like, I wouldn’t have to worry that I am pleasing everybody, you know?” She continued to explain that she preferred the Beacon’s Team Council to the school student government for these reasons. She also felt a responsibility to try to design programs that would keep youth coming back to the Beacon.

In sum, although leadership roles may not be available in all activities, youth reported they were getting leadership experiences at the Beacons and a chance to make decisions that were important to them and reflected their investment in the centers. They also felt that these experiences differed in important ways from those they got at school.

A Variety of Interesting and Challenging Learning Experiences

As a result of concerns that youth do not have access to high-quality, challenging activities in which to spend their out-of-school time, the SFBI aimed to develop an array of productive activities to meet this need. Research has shown that when youth do not find activities of interest, they are more likely to spend time hanging out unsupervised with peers and engaging in risky behaviors.

Youth agreed that Beacon activities were new, different, interesting and challenging. We asked Beacon youth in the middle-school survey sample about the variety of activities offered by the Beacons and the extent to which the Beacon activities were new and different from the typical activities to which they were exposed. Seventy percent agreed or strongly agreed that they were. Although we noted above that adult support was lower in the Beacon centers than in other youth-serving organizations, the degree to which Beacon youth felt the center activities were new, interesting and varied was higher. Given the broad array of diverse activities offered across and within centers that we documented in Chapter 4, this result is not surprising.

Most youth across all sites also agreed (combining “a little” and “a lot”) with statements that specific activities within the Beacons were challenging (e.g., teaches them new things that are useful) and interesting (e.g., they enjoy it and it keeps their attention) (from 77% at Richmond Village to 94% at Community Bridges for challenge and over 91% at all sites for interesting). Those agreeing “a lot” ranged from 38 percent (at Richmond Village) to 58 percent (at Community Bridge) for interesting and from 12 percent (at Richmond Village) to 42 percent (at Community Bridges and Chinatown) for challenging.

Youth indicated that the things they learned in the centers were relevant to their lives, and they contrasted this with what they were learning at school. For example, one high-school student described:

It’s about [the influence of media, society and culture on people], something different than I learn in school. I mean, me and my friends, we
Youth reported that if they were not at the Beacon centers they would be bored and, possibly, out getting into trouble. Interviews and focus groups confirmed youths’ beliefs that their neighborhoods and the neighborhoods surrounding the Beacon centers were particularly lacking in interesting things for them to do. Thus, they valued the experiences the Beacon center provided.

In sum, finding a wide variety of interesting and challenging activities in which to engage is a critical experience for youth, and one that most youth found at the Beacon centers. Youth consistently described the activities as valuable, particularly in contrast to what they believed was lacking for them in their neighborhoods and schools.

Do youth involved in Beacon activities receive more positive developmental experiences compared with their non-Beacon peers?

One of the most basic assumptions of the theory of change is that participation in a Beacon center will promote positive developmental experiences for youth. In the previous section, we saw that many of the youth who attended the Beacons were getting the intended benefits. But would they also be able to get those same experiences outside of the Beacon Centers?

To begin to address this question, we examined how youths’ levels of developmental experiences changed over an 18-month period compared to a group of youth who did not participate. More specifically, we examined whether participation in the centers led to changes in young people’s developmental experiences over time. We did this by taking into account where youth started and where they ended up 18 months later. (See Appendix G for a detailed description of regression analyses used to detect change in developmental experiences for Beacon and nonparticipants). Recall from Table 6.4 that, when we surveyed them in Fall 1999, Beacon participants had greater numbers of non-family adult supports but lower academic achievement levels and were more likely to receive free or reduced-price lunch. Table 7.3, on the following page, summarizes the mean levels at Fall 1999 and the 18-month follow-up (Spring 2001) on each of the four key developmental experiences for which we have measures on the survey for both Beacon and non-Beacon participants.

We found no differences between the Beacon participants and nonparticipants in terms of how much their levels of developmental experiences changed over a period of 18 months. That is, Table 7.3, on the next page, shows that although there were differences between the groups at both points in time, both groups generally either rose or fell in a similar pattern. Table 7.4 shows the proportion of Beacon participants and nonparticipants who increased or decreased in their levels of developmental experiences.

Although the observed differences between participants and nonparticipants were not significant, several evaluations of after-school programs have indicated that how much or how long young people attend makes a difference in whether youth experience the intended benefits of that program.43 In addition, several years ago, P/PV noted in a study of youth-serving organizations that young people who participated in a variety of types of activities (for example, art and education) reported higher levels of developmental experiences than those who participated in only one type of activity. We therefore began to explore whether duration and variety of participation was related to young people’s experiences.

As we saw in Chapter 4, Beacon youth varied in terms of the number of sessions in which they participated. They also varied in terms of the types of activities they did while at the Beacon. In particular, given the increasing national focus on educational activities, we were interested in the importance of participating in educational activities versus other types of activities. Therefore, we refined our analyses to take into account how long the youth had been participating at the Beacon center (one, two or three or more sessions) in combination with the types of activities in which the youth had participated while there (education only, no education or educational plus other core-area activities).
Table 7.3
Comparison of Beacon Participants vs. Nonparticipants at Three Host Middle Schools on Developmental Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 1999</th>
<th>Spring 2001</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-family adult supports</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonparticipant (n=446)</td>
<td>3.5*</td>
<td>3.0***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon participant (n=392)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Peer supports</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonparticipant (n=446)</td>
<td>3.6*</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon participant (n=392)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership experiences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonparticipant (n=445)</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon participant (n=391)</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% Time in productive leisure activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonparticipant (n=235)</td>
<td>14%**</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon participant (n=210)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Beacon participants differed significantly from nonparticipants at that given time.
** p<.01
*** p<.001
+ p<.10

Source: Youth surveys at three middle schools that host Beacon centers. Sample consists of youth surveyed in the fall of their sixth- and seventh-grade years and again in the spring of their seventh- and eighth-grade years.

Table 7.4
Proportion of Participants and Nonparticipants Who Exhibited Increases or Decreases in Developmental Experiences Between Fall 1999 and Spring 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Who Increased</th>
<th>% Who Decreased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-family adult supports</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonparticipant (n=446)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon participant (n=392)</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonparticipant (n=446)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon participant (n=392)</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership experiences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonparticipant (n=445)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon participant (n=391)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spend time out of school in productive activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonparticipant (n=235)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beacon participant (n=210)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of sessions attended in combination with the types of activities youth participated in was related to change in developmental experiences. We found that participating in a greater number of sessions in and of itself was not related to positive change in developmental experiences. However, youth who participated in Beacons for longer periods of time (at least two sessions) and in a wider range of activities (educational and other types as well) experienced more gains in non-family adult supports and leadership than either nonparticipants or other less engaged Beacon participants. Neither peer support nor time spent in challenging activities seemed to increase in relation to participation at the Beacons. Figures 7.1 and 7.2, on the following page, display the percentages of youth who showed...
After-School Pursuits: An Examination of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative

Youths’ Developmental Experiences at the Beacon Centers

Figure 7.1
Proportion of Youth Who Increase Number of Non-Family Adult Supports Over Time by Duration and Type of Participation

Figure 7.2
Proportion of Youth Who Increase Leadership Over Time by Duration and Type of Participation

In sum, although Beacon youth received positive developmental experiences at the Beacon centers, their experiences overall were similar to those youth who did not participate in the Beacons. However, when middle-school Beacon youth participated over time (two or three sessions) and in educational plus other core-area activities, they were more likely to benefit from increased levels

an increase over time in their experiences of non-family adult support and leadership by the duration and type of their participation. Notably, 40 percent of the middle-school Beacon youth participated for three or more sessions in educational plus other activities, and an additional 12 percent participated for two sessions in educational plus other activities; thus, over half (52%) benefited accordingly.44
of leadership experiences and non-family adult supports compared to their non-Beacon peers. We cannot say, however, if this same pattern would be present for high-school or elementary youth.

What Accounts for Observed Differences in Young People’s Experiences?

In the previous section, we saw that participation duration and type contributed to explaining differences in youths’ experiences. In this section, we continue to explore factors that contribute to developmental experiences at the Beacon Centers.

First, we examine the relationship between activity size characteristics (staffing ratios, number of youth in an activity) and youth experiences. Second, we explore the relationship between activity type (core area) and youth experiences. Third, we look at the relationship between program quality (observations of developmental opportunities, structure and management) and youth experiences. To examine these links, we conducted regression analyses based on the quantitative data gathered using the activity observations and the feedback forms. The specific regression analyses and coefficients are reported in Appendix G. Note that the previous section linked Beacon participation to middle-school youth survey data measuring developmental experiences youth have across all realms of their life, including the Beacon centers, school and home. In this section, activity level data are used to link observations of activities to feedback forms youth completed about a specific activity that took place at the Beacon center.

In addition to these quantitative analyses, we also rely on the data from youth interviews to examine the role that staff turnover plays in young people’s experiences at the centers. Finally, we describe differences between sites and discuss staff and center characteristics and practices that may contribute to differences in youth experiences that varied by site.

### Table 7.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Staff-to-youth ratio</th>
<th>Number of youth who attend the activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supportive adult in the activity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive peers in the activity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership roles in the activity</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making in the activity</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting activity</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging activity</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant positive relationship

– Statistically significant negative relationship

NS Not significant

Source: Youths’ experiences are from feedback forms; staff-to-youth ratio and number of youth attending are averaged across the three observations of corresponding activities.
The more staff to youth in an activity, the better young people’s experiences of adult and peer support in the Beacon activities. Interviews with young people supported this finding; they commented on the importance of the number of staff compared to the number of youth. Staff consisted of youth leaders, staff leaders and volunteer leaders.

The more young people present in an activity, the worse young people’s peer relationships (regardless of how many staff there were), but the better their experience of challenge in the activity. Although young people’s experience of adult support did not vary with the number of youth attending the activity, their experiences with their peers tended to be more negative in activities with large numbers of young people compared to those with smaller numbers of young people, even after taking into account activity core area (the educational activities tended to have fewer opportunities for peer interactions, so our analyses controlled for activity type). However, they were more likely have challenging experiences (i.e., have chances to do new things).

Relationship Between Activity Type and Youths’ Experiences

Figure 7.3 displays the proportion of young people who reported receiving high-level positive developmental experiences by activity type.45

Youth report more positive developmental experiences in the leadership and arts and recreation activities than in the educational ones. For some developmental experiences, such as how challenging or interesting an activity was, the arts and recreation activities had higher ratings. Experiences of leadership, decision-making and peer support were higher in leadership development activities. Consistently, however, fewer young people in the educational activities reported high-level experiences compared to the other activities. These findings are consistent with the observational findings in Chapter 5 on the provision of developmental opportunities.
In Chapter 5 we examined the qualities of the activities offered at the Beacon centers and noted variation with respect to the developmental opportunities provided in the activities. Table 7.6 summarizes the relationship between the observed opportunities provided by those activities and youths’ reported developmental experiences in them.

Although inconclusive—in part because the number of activities observed was small—the table indicates several expected relationships between the opportunities observed and youths’ reported developmental experiences in them.

- Observations of warm adult-youth interactions were related to youths’ experience of a supportive adult in the activity;
- Observed peer cooperation was related to youths’ experience of supportive peers in the activity and
- The proportion of youth observed to be given opportunities for leadership was related to youths’ reported experience of leadership roles in the activity.

Some relationships were unexpected, but not surprising. Observations of warm adult-youth interactions were related to youths’ experience of challenge in the activity. We speculate that this may be because young people engage more fully in activities in which the adults are supportive, and thus find greater challenge. Another interesting finding is that the more opportunities for peer cooperation that are provided, the better young people’s experiences with adults in the activity. It is difficult to determine causality with this finding—are more skilled adults more likely to provide opportunities for peers to cooperate and better at getting youth to respond to them? Or do the opportunities for peer cooperation produce better experiences with adults in the activity? The possibility that the latter may play a role is intriguing because it has implications for practice.

Although we saw in Chapter 6 that activities that were more highly structured and managed had better attendance rates, they also tended to have fewer youth who experienced supportive adults and peers, leadership, decision-making and interest in the activity. One hypothesis we tested was whether some activities might be overly structured and managed and others too loosely structured, and that the optimal level might be in the middle. We found no support for this hypothesis, however, and the finding is curious. It is possible that the range of activities that fell at either end was too narrow to detect the curvilinear relationship we hypothesized.
Relationship Between Staff Turnover at the Beacons and Youths’ Experiences

Young people had much to say about how staff turnover affected their experiences there. In this section, we turn to the data gathered from qualitative interviews with youth.

Staff tenure posed a challenge to the ability of young people to form positive relationships with adults. As studies of mentoring programs have shown, building positive relationships between adults and youth who are not related takes time.46 For this reason, staff turnover can pose a challenge to relationship development. Staff turnover was high in all the Beacon centers. About two thirds of all staff members in four centers reported that they had worked or volunteered for the Beacon for one year or less. In the fifth center, Visitacion Valley Beacon center, just over a quarter had been there a year or less.

Adults played critical roles in encouraging youth to participate, to do new things and to get involved. Youth valued their support and motivation, which made it all the more difficult for them when adults left. Youth described feeling “abandoned,” “sad” and as if they were “losing something” when staff left. One youth noted that it was hard to open up and trust staff members if they were going to leave after one year. A middle-school youth spoke poignantly about the losses experienced when staff members left:

Like, people you really care about, they’re talking about [how] they’re going to have to set a good example and you always have to be good and all that stuff. But if you’re good, then how come [they have to leave]?

In response to the question, “Are there people you can go to if something’s bothering you?” one middle-school youth simply began to list all of the adults he missed who were no longer there. Another, older youth discussed the challenge of being understanding about adults leaving:

It’s hard to be mature about people leaving…I felt abandoned in a way. I got really, really close to her and then suddenly she announced, “I got to work on this [other] thing”…And then there’s this tendency not to get that attached next time, you know?

(High-school youth)

The close relationships that youth developed with adults were a fundamental part of their experience at the Beacons. As such, it became all the more difficult to work through having to say good-bye to staff members whom they counted as their friends or their “second” family. Staff turnover is an issue at many youth-serving organizations, and staff leave for a host of reasons (among them, as we learned from our staff survey, to return to school, to start a family, to explore other job opportunities, to move to another position within the organization), but it is helpful to recognize that youth notice and are affected when staff leave.

Relationships Between Center Characteristics and Practices and Youths’ Experiences

Many differences in youths’ experiences can be explained by factors, such as activity quality, that varied from activity to activity. However, organizational differences across the centers also may have helped explain some of the site differences that we saw in Table 7.1. Based on an examination of data from the youth feedback forms and surveys, Community Bridges Beacon center tended to provide more youth with high-level positive experiences (in the dimensions of adult and peer support, and challenging and interesting activities) compared to other sites (see Appendix G, Tables G.3 and G.4 for regression coefficients). In this section, we describe how some of the site differences in staffing, staff training, staff-to-youth ratios and space for activities may help explain differences in youths’ experiences.

Interpersonal relationship skills training and youth development background experience may have contributed to Community Bridges’ success in providing a greater proportion of its youth with positive developmental experiences. As reported in Chapter 4, staff at Community Bridges tended to have attended a greater number of trainings than staff at other centers. The fact that the staff were likely to have received more training and in particular training in interpersonal skills could help explain their ability to promote more positive adult and peer supports for youth than staff at other centers. The greater number of trainings and the staff’s background experience in working in youth development settings may also have contributed to Community Bridges’ ability to provide interesting and challenging activities to more youth compared to other centers. Although Richmond Village Beacon center also had a relatively high proportion of staff with youth development experience, it was comparatively low
in providing youth with challenging experiences. One explanation may be that the greater number of trainings attended by Community Bridges staff was more important than their background in youth development: Richmond Village staff had attended the fewest number of trainings.

Greater staff-to-youth ratios in combination with fewer staff who worked very few hours and a much smaller overall number of youth served at Community Bridges may also explain differences in the center’s ability to provide positive developmental experiences to youth, particularly positive adult support. The smallest proportion of staff who worked 10 or fewer hours was at Community Bridges (26%). Community Bridges was also one of two sites with the lowest overall staff-to-youth ratios across activities (ranging from 1:1 to 1:9). In contrast, the highest overall staff-to-youth ratio was at Sunset Neighborhood (ranging from 1:2 to 1:20), and a significant proportion of staff worked 10 or fewer hours (47%). Finally, Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center served far more youth than any other center in the last year of the evaluation (500 more than Visitacion Valley and 650 more than Community Bridges). These factors may have made it a challenge for Sunset Neighborhood to provide a greater proportion of its youth with high levels of adult support.47

Young people’s comments suggest that the issue of physical space is connected to broader notions like emotional space, safety and autonomy at the Beacon. Interviews with youth suggest that youths’ time spent interacting with adults varied from site to site. At some sites, such as Community Bridges, Chinatown and Richmond Village, youth described adults as being “around,” and adults were often portrayed as spending time talking, working, joking and hanging out with youth. Both Community Bridges and Richmond Village had space that facilitated such interactions.

Although in some cases a Beacon center may actually occupy a relatively small area, youth tended to judge that space according to the ways in which they were allowed to move and exist within it. Another young person observed that it was important to have the ability to make choices not only as to what to do, but also as to where to be and whom to be with:

> It’s just, like, it’s okay for you to walk around everywhere, okay? So long as you don’t bug anyone else…If you were at school you’d have to have permission, and you would have to ask all the teachers, and you’d have to go in teams and stuff, and sometimes you just want to be by yourself.

Above all, youths’ comments make clear that the use of space is a key part of creating an environment in which positive learning experiences and personal interactions with adults and peers can take place.

A dearth of space at Sunset Neighborhood limited opportunities for youth to interact with adults and peers outside of activities, which may explain why youths’ experiences of adult support at Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center were lower than in other centers. As noted earlier, staff at the center took steps to create more general hanging-out/interaction time by convening youth in the cafeteria for 15 minutes prior to the start of activities, but this procedure was implemented too late in the evaluation to determine its effectiveness.

**Summary**

Youth who went to the Beacon centers typically reported receiving developmental experiences there, as the SFBI planners had hoped. Using data from quantitative measures (feedback forms and the youth survey), we found that most youth—at least 70 percent—reported at least some degree (“a little” or “a lot”) of positive developmental experiences on the areas measured: adult and peer support, sense of belonging, challenging and interesting activities, leadership and decision-making. Additionally, in interviews and focus groups, youth spoke of the positive nature of the Beacons and the experiences they had there, particularly when they compared these experiences to other realms of their life, such as their neighborhoods and school.

Although Beacons were providing these developmental experiences for their participants, our analyses comparing those middle-school youth who go to the Beacon centers with other middle-school youth who do not attend the Beacons indicated that both groups reported similar levels on the four dimensions we were able to compare (leadership, adult
Increasing the Likelihood that Youth Will Have Positive Developmental Experiences: Implications for Practice Based on the Research Findings

In addition to ensuring that adults are interacting positively with youth, which many youth development programs strive to do, peer cooperation and leadership opportunities also have the potential to enhance youths’ developmental experiences.

Providing a balance of activities with large and small enrollments will help ensure that youth are getting the opportunities and experiences provided by both. Within larger activities, it may be beneficial to have small group activities part of the time, to the extent that staffing permits.

Finding ways to provide more staff in an activity to enhance adult and peer supportiveness would enrich youths’ experiences. However, because doing so leads to fewer leadership opportunities, steps should be taken to ensure that leadership opportunities are not suppressed (see Chapter 5).

Educational activities could be enhanced (perhaps by providing more opportunities for peer cooperation) to provide more youth with positive developmental experiences. Doing so also might contribute positively to long-term outcomes.

Training staff in interpersonal relationships (such as conflict resolution and diversity training) is potentially beneficial to providing more youth with positive developmental experiences.

Ensuring that youth have time and a comfortable place to interact with peers and adults and to generally hang out is important. Lack of this type of space and time can preclude more youth from having positive developmental experiences.

Incorporated more opportunities for peer cooperation and leadership and had more positive adult-youth interactions, more youth were likely to report positive experiences of peer and adult supportiveness, challenge and leadership.

Although not conclusive, our exploration of the organizational and staff practices and characteristics suggest that training (particularly in the area of interpersonal skills), high staff-to-youth ratios, dedicated space and hiring staff with experience in community-based youth-serving organizations all play a role in contributing to positive developmental experiences.
One of the main things [I learned] was responsibility. Like, you’re given a role, kind of like a job description, and as a team member you work with other youth, and there are tasks that have to be done, and you have to take the initiative to work with your team. And if something is not done, it’s your responsibility to do it. So that’s something that I really got from this, you know? (High-school youth)

I mean, it helped me out. Like, I made the basketball team in the eighth grade, and it got me into sports more. (Middle-school youth)

Throughout this report we have seen that the SFBI was able to achieve many of its planned early and intermediate outcomes at the Beacon centers. The centers had diverse and generally responsive staff. A broad array of activities was offered to youth across the five core areas. And even though many activities had limited leadership and decision-making opportunities, the vast majority were well structured, effectively managed and offered opportunities for warm adult-youth and peer interactions. Significant numbers of young people came to the Beacon centers, and 20 to 30 percent participated for three or more sessions. Finally, young people who attended the Beacon centers for multiple sessions reported increased levels of non-familial adult support and more leadership opportunities over time compared to their non-Beacon peers.

According to the theory of change, the qualities of the Beacon centers described in Chapter 3, 4 and 5 should lead youth to participate. Participation, in turn, would lead youth to have developmental experiences that would ultimately lead to improved long-term outcomes. The initiative identified three types of long-term outcomes for young people: improved competencies in the core programming areas, improved social well-being and academic success.

In this chapter, we examine two of those three types of outcomes—improved social well-being and academic success, both of which the initiative planners identified as “exploratory.” By defining these outcomes as exploratory, the stakeholders acknowledged that there might be so many influences on these aspects of young people’s lives that expecting an after-school program to make a difference might be unrealistic. At the same time, however, they did not want to relinquish the opportunity to examine whether achieving these outcomes was possible through an initiative that rested upon a youth development model. Also, these outcomes became more crucial as the national interest in improving academic outcomes has increased, and pressure on school principals and teachers to improve their students’ performance on standardized tests has grown. The San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) participated in this trend, and as the initiative progressed, the question of whether grades and test scores for SFUSD students improved among those attending the Beacon centers became increasingly important to local decision-makers.

Importantly to the Beacon planners, the way by which they planned to affect well-being and academic performance was by providing developmental experiences to the youth they served. Thus, our assessment of whether and how they achieved these long-term outcomes follows this progression of the theory of change.

Prior to examining whether Beacon participation affects these long-term outcomes, however, we address a more basic question (using the survey data we have from all youth at the middle schools) to check whether it is reasonable to expect changes in developmental experiences to be related to improvements in well-being and academic success. There is considerable evidence in the research literature that having positive developmental experiences is related to having positive social and academic outcomes.
After-School Pursuits: An Examination of Outcomes in the San Francisco Beacon Initiative

Long-Term Benefits of Participating in the Beacon Centers

(see NRC and Gambone for review). However, there is little evidence that changes in developmental experiences can contribute to positive changes in social and academic outcomes (the one major exception here is the literature on mentoring). Thus, our first question asks:

• To what extent can changes in long-term outcomes be linked to changes in developmental experiences for all youth at the middle-school level, regardless of Beacon status?

Once we establish that there are links among changes in developmental experiences and long-term outcomes (for all youth), we turn to examining whether there is a relationship between Beacon participation and long-term outcomes that follows this same progression, addressing the next question:

• Was participation in the Beacon centers related to change in social well-being and academic success, and were increased levels of developmental experiences a factor in long-term social and academic outcomes?

Because, as we shall see, the relationships between participation in the Beacon centers and some of the long-term outcomes are limited, the last question this chapter addresses is:

• What factors might account for the limited relationships found between Beacon participation and some long-term outcomes?

Below, we turn our attention to the first question.

Therefore, we examined whether changes in young people’s developmental experiences contribute to long-term outcomes. Information for the analysis that follows comes from the survey that was administered to all students at the three middle schools that had Beacon centers. Because we are testing the underlying model of youth development instead of examining whether or not Beacon participation appears to contribute to long-term outcomes (we examine this latter question in the next section), we have included all the middle-school students for whom we have a Fall 1999 and a Spring 2001 survey.

Figure 8.1, on the next page, shows the statistically significant links between changes in developmental experiences and outcomes (see Appendix G, Figure G.1 and Table G.1 for more information on the analysis). In brief, the model indicates that:

Increases in non-family adult support are related positively to changes in self-efficacy and negatively to math scores. The theory of change hypothesizes that increases in non-family adult support leads to increases in self-efficacy, and our analysis provides support for this link in the theory. Unexpected, however, was the direct, negative link between non-family adult support and standardized math test scores. As non-family support increases, math scores go down. Further analysis indicated that this result was driven by a small group of young people in the sample whose non-family adult support rose to very high levels (10 or more supportive adults in their lives). It is likely that these young people are a selective group of troubled youth who are the subject of much concern on the part of adults.

Changes in leadership opportunities are not related to any of the long-term outcomes measured. Although the theory of change indicated that involvement and membership should contribute to long-term outcomes, we found that changes in our measure of involvement and membership (which we call leadership, but which includes a range of leadership and decision-making opportunities, see Appendix G) were not related to any of the long-term outcomes. One implication is that such opportunities may provide positive experiences for young people—in themselves good things—but do not necessarily lead to the outcomes desired by the initiative’s planners. This does not mean, however, that other measures of involvement and membership would not lead to those outcomes.
Increases in peer support and the amount of time that young people spend in challenging and interesting learning experiences contribute positively both to self-efficacy and to young people’s positive response to social challenges. In examining social well-being, we looked at two measures: self-efficacy and young people’s positive response to social challenge. Here again, the analysis supported the theory of change.

In general, therefore, positive changes in developmental experiences among the middle-school students—regardless of where they received those experiences—contribute to positive changes in social well-being. Thus, the analysis provides support for one important link in the theory of change. The fact that the young people are in middle school merits further discussion of the importance of this finding: Middle school is a vulnerable age for youth, and they frequently experience decreases in their social well-being. While many later recover higher levels of well-being, there is a substantial minority who engage in behaviors (such as fighting) that may have negative consequences. Identifying experiences that may avert some of these behaviors has important implications for social programs.

Changes in self-efficacy and positive response to social challenges are positively related to school effort. Although the theory of change did not explicitly link changes in social well-being to school effort, previous research has indicated that a sense of self-efficacy is related to the effort that individuals put into tasks such as homework. In addition, given the broad nature of the developmental experiences under consideration, it seemed to us that if they were related to the effort young people put into school, there needed to be some mechanism through which this occurred, and we hypothesized that our measures of social well-being might be some of those mechanisms. Therefore, our model tested the link between changes in self-efficacy and positive response to social challenge and school outcomes. As indicated in Figure 8.1, changes both in self-efficacy and positive response to social challenge are related to positive changes in school effort.
Increases in school effort are positively related to changes in grade point average. The analysis provided evidence that the effort that young people expend in school is related to positive change in grades as predicted.

Increases in school effort are not related to reading test scores and are negatively related to school absences. There was no support in the model for a link between increases in school effort and reading test scores. This result is not surprising, since research has indicated that reading test scores are heavily dependent on socioeconomic characteristics and are not as responsive to changes in school curricula as math scores are. If it is difficult to achieve change in reading scores during the academic day, one would expect it to be even more difficult to do so during an after-school program that young people attended two times a week.

As school effort rises, youths’ absences from school also rise. It is very unlikely that increases in school effort caused absences, which highlights the difficulty of attributing causality in such a model. We do not know why this relationship exists.

It is important to note that although we see relationships that are consistent with the theory of change, the size of the relationship between developmental experiences and grades is modest (see Appendix G).

Given that there do appear to be relationships between changes in developmental experiences and some long-term outcomes, we examined whether Beacon participation—as an intervention—was related to change in any of the dimensions of the model that would influence improved social well-being and academic performance.

Is participation in Beacon centers related to changes in social well-being and academic performance?

To address this question, we used the same model described above but also took into account whether or not the youth had attended the Beacon center, for how long and in what activities (see Appendix G, Table G.2 for the detailed analysis). Overall, we found that young people who went to the Beacon centers for three sessions and participated in education plus other activities were:

- More likely to experience increases in leadership and non-family adult support (which we showed in Chapter 7);
- More likely to feel greater self-efficacy;
- More likely to report that they put effort into school; but
- Not more likely to have more positive response to social challenges or better academic performance.

In addition, young people who participated in the Beacon centers for three or more sessions in only educational activities reported increased school effort between Fall 1999 and Spring 2001. For this group of young people, the result appears to be a function of spending time in educational activities themselves, where many youth complete their homework, and not a result of increased developmental experiences, such as non-family adult support. As a group, these young people did not experience a rise in such support (see Table G.2 Appendix G).

What was the size of the benefits that Beacon centers conferred on young people in the two areas affected by Beacon participation?

In general—and in keeping with previous research that has shown early adolescence to be a particularly vulnerable time—many youth lose ground over the middle-school years. When the middle-school youth, both those who were Beacon participants and those who were not, were surveyed in Fall 1999, more than 75 percent reported a sense of efficacy. Eighteen months later, however, only 63 percent reported that they felt effective. A decrease in self-efficacy is typical for early adolescence and, for some young people, can contribute to negative outcomes later on.

Beacon participants who came to three or more sessions and did educational plus other activities were substantially less likely to experience a drop in self-efficacy than their peers (see Appendix G, Table G.4). One in five of the high-participating Beacon youth exhibited a drop on this measure of well-being compared to one in three of their lower-participating peers. Put another way, Beacon participants who had attended the centers for three or more sessions were 33 percent less likely than their
nonparticipating or lower-participating peers to experience a fall in self-efficacy.

Results were similar for school effort. Of the sixth- and seventh-graders surveyed in Fall 1999, the vast majority (89%) reported that they put effort into school most or almost all of the time. By Spring 2001, that number had dropped to about 71 percent, meaning that almost 3 in 10 students were putting little effort into school—they were not coming to class prepared, putting effort into homework or class work, or paying attention in class. Such behaviors can pose a serious problem for learning. Indeed, data gathered for this evaluation showed that, irrespective of Beacon participation, young people who exhibited decreases in school effort over time also exhibited a 6 percent drop in grades.

As we found for self-efficacy, fewer Beacon participants experienced a drop in school effort than non-Beacon participants. Specifically, at the follow-up survey, 13 percent of the young people who participated in the Beacon centers for three or more sessions reported that they put less effort into school than previously. This compares favorably to the 20 percent drop among young people who did not participate, or who participated for a shorter time period.54

**What factors might account for the limited relationships observed between Beacon participation and some long-term outcomes?**

The limited relationships between Beacon participation and academic performance are similar to findings of other major after-school evaluations. In L.A.’s BEST, evaluators found that four years elapsed before they began to see improvements in test scores, although absences decreased in the second and third year of the evaluation.55 The evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Center initiative found that the after-school centers improved attendance and classroom effort among middle-school students, but had only modest impacts on math grades for minority youth and no impacts on other academic outcomes after one year of participation, although it is important to note that the 21st CCLC evaluation examined relatively young programs. The evaluation of the Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund’s Extended-Service Schools initiative found that young people who went to the programs more often than other participating peers reported better self-efficacy and school effort.56 There are several reasons why the relationships between participation and outcomes were limited in the Beacon initiative.

First, it is possible that the differences between the young people who went to the Beacon centers and those who did not make it impossible for our analytical techniques to measure relationships that really exist. The analysis assumes that the groups are equivalent once we take into account differences in grade-point averages, demographics, where students go to school and other factors. But what if there are other differences that we did not measure and that affect the analysis? For example, what if the young people who go to the Beacon centers and stay for several sessions are not just poorer-performing students (which we accounted for), but that the gap between them and the non-Beacon youth would be
getting bigger if the students were not going to the Beacons? This might happen if these academically weaker students were falling farther and farther behind over time. If going to the Beacon center helped prevent youth from falling behind as quickly, then one might conclude that there is a positive effect of participation. Our data, however, do not allow us to investigate this question.

Second, our analyses compare participating youth at various levels and those who do not participate in the Beacon center. What they do not take into consideration is what the nonparticipants or low participators are doing in the after-school hours. We know those young people are getting positive experiences, and it is likely that many are getting them in other after-school activities. For example, school staff reported that many of the Chinese students went to Chinese school in the after-school hours. And an assistant principal at the host school for Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center indicated that one of the benefits of the Beacon center was that it attracted the young people who were not otherwise engaged. Therefore, an important question is what the Beacon youth would be doing if they were not going to the Beacon center. Since they were economically more disadvantaged than the non-Beacon youth, it is possible that they would have fewer opportunities for other kinds of activities and therefore have fewer positive developmental experiences.

Third, many of the educational activities consisted of tutoring or homework help. Therefore they were not necessarily designed to increase youths’ knowledge in specific academic areas, but to support what they were learning during the school day. For young people with serious academic problems—and many of those who went to the Beacon centers appeared to have such problems—these activities may not be sufficiently intense to improve grades or math scores.

Fourth, because it was not apparent that Beacon participation increased young people’s peer supports or the percentage of time they spent in challenging and interesting learning experiences compared to those who did not participate (two factors we found in the general developmental model to be predictive of change in long-term outcomes), the developmental opportunities may not have been rich enough to contribute to grades. Therefore, the evidence suggests that neither the developmental opportunities provided in Beacon activities in general nor the intensity of the skills development within the educational activities was sufficient to produce significant change in academic outcomes—at least in the time period measured.

Although it seems that the evidence regarding academic findings is at odds with findings in other chapters that it is important for youth to participate in both educational and other types of activities in order to receive the most positive benefits, there are reasons why we might have found this to be the case, in spite of the lower quality of many of the educational activities. The educational activities helped young people complete their homework: Interviews with youth indicated that even though they did not always like the activities, they did appreciate the opportunity to finish their assignments. As one elementary student said, “My parents is [sic] Chinese and they don’t understand my homework, and people from the Beacon can help me to do homework, can teach me.” In fact, when we looked at the potential effects of going only to educational activities for three sessions, we found a positive relationship with school effort. If nothing else, the educational activities provided a space where young people could receive help on their homework. And given the neediness of many Beacon youth, this opportunity was probably not insignificant.

Fourth, it is possible that more time was needed to see the effects of the changes in school effort and self-efficacy on GPA and test scores. Two pieces of evidence suggest that there may be positive outcomes down the road for Beacon participants. First, when we tested the youth development model, we found that the effort that young people put into school in Fall 1999 was positively related to their grade-point average in Spring 2001. That might mean that young people who went to the Beacon centers might have looked better than non- or low-participators with respect to their academic performance after more time had elapsed. Other evaluations have certainly suggested that this might be the case. The evaluations of L.A.’s BEST initiative have indicated a positive relationship between long-term involvement (at least four years) and academic outcomes.
Summary

The findings that youth who went to the Beacon centers for three or more sessions were less likely to exhibit decreased school effort and self-efficacy than those attended for shorter periods of time or did not participate at all are consistent with the idea that Beacon participation exerts a protective effect on young people at a vulnerable period of their lives. Participating in the Beacon centers appears to improve the chances that young people will maintain high levels of self-efficacy and school effort, potentially supporting long-term outcomes. After accounting for some of the differences between the Beacon youth and the nonparticipants, the likelihood that a young person would go from high to low on self-efficacy was 33 percent less for young people who went to the Beacon centers for at least two sessions. They were even less likely to show drops in reported school effort: The probability that an average young person would go from high to low on school effort was 68 percent less for the Beacon youth than for the nonparticipants.

Participation in the Beacon centers, therefore, may have a protective effect on young people at a time, early adolescence, when they are vulnerable to losing ground both academically and psychologically. Drops in self-efficacy may be temporary and may rise again in later adolescence. But low self-efficacy can lead to behaviors that might have long-term consequences. For example, a young person who does not feel competent to take on new challenges might not feel capable of resisting negative behavior in a group of peers. However, this evaluation did not measure the extent to which young people engaged in such behaviors. Drops in academic performance in the middle-school years can be even more serious: Because learning is a developmental experience, decreases in the effort young people put into school and poor performance in one year can lead to gaps in knowledge from which young people may find it difficult to recover.

However, when we compare the Beacon youth to the non-Beacon youth, participation did not appear to affect grades, reading and math scores, or absences from school. There appear to be multiple reasons for this: First, the Beacon center activities we observed provided fairly limited opportunities for young people to work cooperatively. This is unfortunate, since our findings suggest that such opportunities are related to the formation of supportive relationships with both peers and adults.

In turn, we found that increased levels of peer supports and non-family adult supports can lead, albeit indirectly, to academic outcomes. These links between what happens in activities, young people’s subsequent experiences and their long-term outcomes suggest that practitioners should ensure that they provide a rich set of developmental opportunities within a variety of activities. Much of the youth development literature has focused on the importance of caring adults in young people’s lives—and they do provide important supports. But a broader focus, one that recognizes the crucial importance of peer relationships in young people’s lives and the role that adults can play in fostering relationships, may be called for.

The data also suggest that attention should be placed on improving the overall quality of educational activities—with respect both to their developmental qualities and to their content. Particularly if reading test scores are of interest, specific curriculum and instructional goals may be necessary to effect change.

Finally, the findings here echo other studies that have concluded that duration and frequency of participation matter. The 40 percent of the middle-school youth who have gone to the Beacon centers for the longest periods of time have benefited the most.
In the late 1990s, with increasing federal, state and local support, after-school programs proliferated across the country. The San Francisco Beacon Initiative is unusual both in the size and breadth of programming offered in Beacon centers and in its use of a theory of change to guide its agenda. In designing the initiative, the planners recognized that such a large-scale, multicomponent effort would take concerted planning and adherence to a common and shared agenda by the many players involved.

On many levels the initiative has been a success. The evaluation, which was designed to test the initiative’s progress on the theory of change, traces the accomplishments the SFBI made in establishing visible, welcoming, safe and accessible centers, which offered high-quality developmental programming, and attracted large numbers of adults and youth to participate on a regular basis. The evaluation also found that the centers were able to provide important developmental experiences for youth and that participation in the centers was related to keeping youth from declining in self-efficacy and school effort over the middle-school years.

Based on the findings from the evaluation, this final chapter identifies some important lessons about after-school programs for policy-makers and practitioners.

1. **After-school programs can successfully recruit and retain both middle-school and academically needy youth.**

   Other evaluations have found that participation in after-school programs can be low, thus reducing their potential benefit to young people.57 In particular, getting middle school or older students to participate requires considerable effort. But successful attempts to reach adolescents are important, given that research has found adolescence a vulnerable period in a young person’s life, when such factors as self-efficacy, well-being and grades tend to decline and when opportunities to engage in developmental activities that might be beneficial are typically less available and attractive.

   Beacon centers were very successful in fostering participation among youth up to 14 years old. Demand for Beacon center activities was high, and centers served approximately twice as many young people a year as they initially expected to reach, with between 600 and 1,400 young people attending each of the five centers in the evaluation.

   Average daily attendance was also high: Centers served from 80 to 180 young people a day, and they did so five or more days a week. Although middle-school youth attended, on average, between one and two days a week, their persistence in the programs was good: Fifty-seven percent of the young people who attended at least once participated for two or more sessions (sessions ranged from two to four months, depending on the time of year).

   Critics of after-school programs have questioned whether such programs serve young people with the greatest needs. Not only did the San Francisco Beacon centers serve many adolescents, they also recruited young people who were worse off academically than their non-Beacon peers.

   Although the Beacon centers were based on a model that encouraged the development of young people’s assets instead of focusing on their deficits, they also recognized that academically needy young people needed additional supports. Reaching such youth was facilitated by good relationships with school personnel. Beacon staff members formed strong relationships with staff at the host schools and encouraged school teachers and other staff to refer young people to the centers. The centers agreed to work with young people who were struggling academically in school and make sure they were enrolled in academic support activities.
2. **Staffing practices, such as hiring and staff-to-youth ratios, are important in determining the quality of activities and young people’s experiences in after-school programs.**

Staffing practices emerged as a crucial component of both the opportunities that centers provided to young people and the experiences that young people had at the Beacon centers.

It has long been noted in the academic and evaluation literature and is accepted as common wisdom in the youth development field that adult support is fundamental and contributes to young people’s outcomes. The Beacon centers’ staff members engaged in a number of practices to foster supportive relationships. First, the centers hired an ethnically and racially diverse staff, and young people reported that they liked the fact that some of the staff members were similar to them. Over half the staff members also used languages other than English to work with the young people, critical in a city like San Francisco, which is so diverse.

Having more staff per youth in activities was positively related to youths’ experiences of positive peer and adult support. We found that the center that had the greatest proportion of activities with many staff per youth (Community Bridges) provided positive developmental experiences to a greater proportion of its participants than did the center that had more activities with few staff per youth (Sunset Neighborhood). One of the ways that Community Bridges was able to offer high staff-to-youth ratios was by relying heavily on teen leaders and volunteer staff.

4. **The diversity and quality of after-school activities contribute to young people’s participation and experiences in them.**

The Beacon centers provided diverse programming in five core areas: arts and recreation, education, career development, health and leadership development. The centers provided a broad array of activities within and across these activity types, and youth reported that they experienced high levels of interest and challenge in them. Youth’s level of interest in the activities compares favorably to other studies of after-school programs. High levels of youth interest across the centers were probably due both to the diversity of activities offered by the Beacon centers within and across core areas and to the Beacons’ success at providing activities attuned to the youths’ culture (e.g., hip-hop, dancing and drumming, Web-page design).

Attention to developmental opportunities provided by the range of activities was also important. About half of the many activities provided high levels of developmental opportunities, with another third providing average levels. The overall quality of the programming was important in fostering participation. Youth attended activities more regularly if the adult staff managed and structured them well. Presenting material clearly, ensuring that all young people in the group met with some success in their efforts, and responding firmly, but constructively, to misbehavior among youth were all important to keeping youth involved.
More youth reported high-level developmental experiences when adults interacted positively with them in the activities and fostered opportunities for peer cooperation and leadership. Interestingly, more peer cooperation was related both to more experiences with peers (which is not surprising) and to more positive experiences with the adults in an activity. Given the importance of peer relationships in adolescence, it is possible that when adults provide positive opportunities for young people to work cooperatively with one another, young people feel more positively about the adults.

The theory of change underlying the initiative assumed that high-quality activities were those that were rich in developmental opportunities. Although the quality of activities compared favorably to those of other after-school programs, the evaluation found that some types provided a richer set of developmental opportunities than others. Adult instructors across the different core-area types fostered positive adult-youth and peer-to-peer interactions and managed the activities well, but opportunities for peers to work together, take on leadership roles and make decisions were more prevalent in leadership activities than in the educational activities. From the perspective of the theory of change, educational activities were not very strong overall. The structure of the programs explains much of this difference. Many of the educational activities were structured so that young people would work individually or one-on-one with adults, which limited peer cooperation and leadership.

5. Adults are important in fostering positive relationships among youth, which in turn contributes to young people’s positive relationships with adults.

In many Beacon activities, adults fostered positive peer relationships and cooperation, which in turn contributed to young people’s overall positive experiences. Peer relationships are a major focus in adolescents’ lives, and they can contribute both negatively and positively to their development. In the Beacon centers, when adults fostered opportunities for positive peer interactions, young people felt more positively about the adults. Therefore, not only can adults provide opportunities that help young people derive positive benefits from their peer relationships, but they can also strengthen young people’s attachments to the adults themselves. This, in turn, provides young people with important adult support and increases their attachment to prosocial activities.

6. After-school programs must balance the potentially competing objectives of ensuring high quality and serving large numbers of youth.

Providing high-quality developmental opportunities is a goal that many after-school programs share, but it is also one that they struggle to achieve. Our findings illuminate both the tensions inherent in providing a diverse array of high-quality activities to large numbers of youth and some of the strategies that programs can use to manage the tensions.

Although keeping activities small (10 to 15 youth) would be useful for after-school programs, financial considerations exert pressure on programs to serve as many young people as possible. In the current environment, funders, schools, and policy-makers also have an interest in providing educational support activities to as many people as possible.

Finally, as we have seen in other studies, demands to serve large numbers of youth can often compete with demands to provide all those youth with high-quality developmental experiences. The Beacon center that served the most young people also provided fewer of them with positive developmental experiences. In order to accommodate as many youth as they did with a rich variety of activities, the centers’ activities tended to have fewer staff per youth. Many of the centers’ instructors also worked very few hours. These practices likely led to less time for the staff to interact informally with youth both during activities and outside of activity time.

Programs can respond to pressures to serve large numbers of young people and still offer highly enriching opportunities by providing a mix of large and small group activities and encouraging young people to go to multiple activities.

To make educational activities more enriching, programs can also provide project-based learning, which tends to offer opportunities for cooperation, and peer tutoring.
After-school programs based on a youth development model provide young people with important developmental experiences and social skills. They may also increase young people’s effort in school.

Stakeholders identified several intermediate outcomes pertaining to the benefits that young people would receive from participation, including supportive relationships and involvement. They also identified three areas of long-term outcomes: improved competencies in the five core program areas (arts and recreation, leadership, career development, health and education), social well-being and success in school.

A majority of the young people at the Beacon centers reported that the adults and peers were supportive, they took on leadership positions and played decision-making roles, they felt a sense of belonging, and they felt the activities at the Beacon offered something new and different and were interesting and challenging to them.

Youth who found supportive adults at the Beacon were very positive about the relationships they developed with staff and contrasted these with the relationships they had at school or in their neighborhood. They felt that the Beacon staff with whom they had formed relationships were more apt to be available to them no matter what their needs or how they were feeling, and that the relationships were more reciprocal than some of the other supports they had in their lives. Beacon participants described how important it was that the staff be “like them.” Youth also generally described the supportive relationships they had with peers at the Beacon more positively than those they had with peers at school.

Participation in the Beacon centers for two or more sessions in educational plus other types of activities was related to increased levels of leadership and non-family adult supports, which were key intermediate outcomes. In addition, young people also appeared to develop skills in core program areas, and reported that they learned important skills such as group facilitation, negotiation, and how to plan and carry out projects. They also reported that they learned how to organize their schoolwork more effectively.

In order to substantially improve young people’s educational deficits, programs must place a strong focus on providing high-quality educational instruction.

Although initiative leaders were fairly confident that the Beacon centers would be able to improve young people’s experiences and enhance their competencies in core program areas, they were less sure that the Beacon centers would be able to improve young people’s social well-being and academic performance. They noted that there are many influences in young people’s lives, and the activities of the Beacon centers might not be focused enough to change important areas of youths’ lives.

Nevertheless, Beacon participation was related to two of these long-term outcomes: the extent to which young people felt competent and able to take on new challenges (self-efficacy), and school effort. Particularly during middle-school years, when the tendency is for youth to decline in self-efficacy and school effort, these findings are important.

Young people who participated in the Beacon centers for three or more sessions were 33 percent less likely to exhibit falling self-efficacy in the 18-month follow-up period than youth in their schools who either did not participate or participated for less time. The fact that participation kept self-efficacy high instead of raising it is probably due to the fact that early adolescence is a period when self-efficacy tends to fall.

Early adolescence is also a vulnerable period for young people academically. Many youth put less effort into school. They pay less attention in class, come to class unprepared and do not work on their homework. Ultimately, these behaviors can have a deleterious effect on grades. Compared to the young people who did not go to the Beacon centers, we estimate that participating in one of the Beacon centers for three sessions decreased by about 61 percent the Beacon youths’ probability of going from a high to a low level of effort.

Learning is a developmental process, and when young people begin to fall behind, their chances of catching up are not very good. Students become discouraged, and overcoming their learning deficits may be an overwhelming task without added
supports. Therefore, by helping youth to maintain school effort and self-efficacy, after-school programs may play an important role in supporting long-run academic achievement among middle-school students.

Despite the original consensus among the stakeholders that the initiative would not hold itself accountable for academic outcomes, increased public focus on academic outcomes and accountability made it increasingly difficult for the stakeholders to downplay the initiative’s role in supporting youths’ academic work. During the evaluation, public funding for after-school programs increased substantially in both the state of California and the nation as a whole as legislators became concerned about many young people’s academic failures. New funding streams required that programs implement academic support activities, and the Beacon centers responded by adding programs and allocating more time to existing academic support programs.

This apparent benefit of Beacon participation did not translate into better grades or test scores or fewer absences from school. Our investigation into why there were no relationships between Beacon participation and grades, test scores or school absences suggests two reasons. First, although the academic support activities were generally well structured and managed, they tended to consist of homework help or tutoring, and it is not clear that the content was sufficiently rigorous to enhance young people’s knowledge.

Second, when we tested the basic youth development model underlying the SFBI’s theory of change, we found little evidence that the model itself contributes substantially to improvements in academic outcomes for middle school students. The model says that when youth have positive developmental experiences, these in turn will contribute to their social well-being and productivity, including academic success. Our data indicated that there are statistically significant—but substantively modest—relationships between developmental experiences and academic outcomes for middle-school youth.

The theory of change process is a useful strategy for initiative management and evaluation because it can provide coherence—particularly for broad-based community initiatives with multiple stakeholders and complex, multilevel goals.

Although good programs and evaluations rely on underlying theoretical assumptions based on practical experience and research, the SFBI was unusual in its approach—articulating those assumptions, ensuring that they were broadly shared among stakeholders and using them to structure the evaluation. Once the theory of change had been developed, it became an important tool in managing the initiative and its evaluation. The intermediary educated center representatives on the theory of change, and we designed the evaluation to test the links in the theory.

Overall, the theory of change was useful in creating consensus around the SFBI’s goals and the responsibilities of the many organizations involved in the initiative. It identified the tasks that had to be completed in order for outcomes to be achieved, the timeline for achieving the outcomes and the organizations that would be held accountable at each stage. Throughout the initiative, it served a useful purpose in keeping multiple stakeholders on track. The theory of change, with its clear operational focus, helped partners organize their work.

The process used by the SFBI and its resulting theory were also advantageous because both the evaluators and initiative leaders understood what was going to be evaluated and shared hypotheses about how the initiative might “work.” Evaluating the initiative based on its articulated theory of change helped draw lessons for program improvement and identify issues for replication.

However, designing and using the theory of change provided some challenges to the initiative. Beacon center staff members who contributed to the theory’s creation over the course of a yearlong discussion complained that the process was burdensome. Also, new staff members at the Beacon centers sometimes found the theory difficult to understand and noted that its language was abstract. As the initiative matured, however, center employees came to understand the theory
better—and intermediary staff became accustomed to providing an appropriate orientation to new employees. These challenges suggest two recommendations to others who would like to benefit from the coherence and direction that a theory of change can bring. First, as the intermediary discovered, high turnover among staff means that training to explain the theory and the reasons for it must be ongoing. Second, the language used in a theory of change should be as clear as possible.

A more difficult challenge for any theory of change is deciding how to sequence early and intermediate outcomes—which has implications for initiative operations. We suspect that outcomes might have been better if the activity quality outcomes had been pushed for earlier in the initiative—as a short-term outcome. Instead, in the early years the initiative focused more on participation than quality because initiative leaders saw early participation among community members as important in stabilizing public support. As a result, it was not until the last two years of the evaluation that the intermediary and steering committee began to focus on the quality of the activities at the centers.

Our data indicate, however, that the quality of activities may have been linked to participation in the centers. It was certainly linked to attendance: The better structured and managed activities were, the higher the attendance. In hindsight, therefore, it might make more sense to focus on quality earlier, with the understanding that high-quality activities and programs should lead to strong participation.

Finally, however strong the theory of change, it will almost inevitably omit important tasks that need to be done and outcomes that should be achieved. To be understood and used by many people, it should be fairly general so that it is not overly cumbersome. The SFBI theory of change was general enough that people could understand and work with it. However, such generality means that management staff must assess not only whether the initiative is on track toward achieving its outcomes but also whether other tasks must be done that do not show up in the theory of change. In the SFBI, the intermediary, the Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD), ensured that the theory of change was understood and used to monitor progress and guide upcoming work.

Final Thoughts
As the after-school program field moves forward, important questions are being raised about what the ultimate outcomes for these programs should be and the extent to which public investment in such initiatives is worthwhile. The evaluation of the SFBI has yielded important information about how after-school programs can build stakeholder buy-in, attract community members, work with schools and provide significant proportions of youth with positive developmental experiences that are protective in keeping them engaged in school. The findings in this report underscore the important role of the Beacon centers in the lives of the youth who attended. They also emphasize the ability of the centers to potentially deter youth from suffering the declines in self-efficacy and school effort typical of the middle-school years.
Endnotes

1 Clark, 1983; Werner and Smith, 1982; Tierney and Grossman, 1995; Gambone et al., 2002.
3 Huang et al., 1999; Reisner et al., 2002.
4 Warren, Constancia, with Feist and Negarez, 2002.
5 Health was broadly defined and included physical health activities such as Girls' Self-Defense and mental health activities such as one-on-one case management and counseling.
6 Huang et al., 1999; Grossman et al., 2001; Reisner et al, 2002.
8 Since the evaluation ended, the initiative has continued to mature and the organizations involved in each level, along with the responsibilities of each, have shifted. In particular, a representative of the Beacon centers now sits on the steering committee and CNYD has become less involved in initiative communications and operations.
9 The interim report, Working Together to Build Beacon Centers in San Francisco: Evaluation Findings from 1998–2000, examines the operations of all three levels in some detail.
10 ibid, 2001.
11 In large part, this chapter summarizes material presented in more depth in the interim report, ibid, 2001.
12 One of the youth development agencies initially lacked the fiscal capacity to manage such a large grant, and a larger agency that served a nearby Japanese community became its fiscal agent.
13 Initially, the foster care agency provided fiscal management to a much smaller community agency, but that arrangement was short-lived. The foster care agency hired the Beacon director and took over all oversight for the Beacon center.
15 Calculated as total cost divided by (number of weeks times number of days per week times average number of persons served daily).
17 We examine the achievement of these outcomes as of June 2001. Although technically past the early-outcome stage of the initiative, we examine them as outcomes that are proposed to affect other aspects delineated in the theory of change and thus important to document.
18 The differences between the students in the three schools who knew where the Beacon centers were were significant, but substantively small. Ninety-four percent of the students in the school that hosted Community Bridges knew where the Beacon was, and 86 percent of the students in the schools that hosted the Sunset Neighborhood and Visitacion Valley Beacons reported that they knew. Each of the three Beacon centers has prominent signs on the outside of the school and posts fliers throughout the school. We speculate that the differences in student awareness of the centers may have to do with the fact that Community Bridges’ main office is a large room just off the main entrance to the school building. In contrast, Sunset Neighborhood has a small office, and Visitacion Valley’s offices are a bit removed from the main office of the school building (and toward the back of the school).
19 Note that these barriers are for youth who actually attend the Beacon centers. We had no measure of whether or not young people who did not go to the centers did so because they could not get there or could not get home.
22 There were no statistically significant differences among sites in how safe youth felt. See Appendix C, Table C.4 for regression coefficients.
23 We were unable to observe some activities more than once for a variety of reasons—the illness of one of the observers; miscommunication with sites about activities’ start and end dates; and the cancellation of activities because not enough students showed up. Because we lacked important information that was typically collected in our last observation of an activity, we excluded single observations from our analysis.
24 Assessing the quality of skills instruction is crucial. There are two reasons why we did not do these kinds of assessments in this evaluation. First, the theory of change focused very heavily on how developmental experiences would affect young people’s outcomes, and therefore so did the evaluation. Second, the sheer number and range of activities in each center presented a challenge to assessing skills instruction. In hindsight, however, assessments of skills instruction is crucial, particularly in the educational activities, because there is so much focus on after-school programs’ potential educational benefits. One way to meet the challenge of assessing the variety of activities would be to focus quite specifically on a particular age-group (e.g., middle-school students) and fairly narrow subject areas.
26 Although we surveyed staff at each of the centers, we do not have a matching staff survey for each activity that we observed. As a result, we could not examine some of the characteristics of staff that contribute to the quality of activities.

27 The observations probably included activities that had higher staff-to-youth ratios than the overall set of activities in the centers. Activities were selected in part because they had fairly large enrollments compared to other activities.

28 The correspondence between the centers’ schedules and the sessions we designated was not complete: In Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center, many activities ran for four nine-week cycles during the school year—or two cycles for each one of our defined sessions. Community Bridges Beacon center ran a number of school-year or even calendar-year-long programs.


31 These results are from regression analyses predicting the number of sessions a youth attended between Fall 1999 and Spring 2001 based on Fall 1999 reports of problems getting home, adult support at the Beacon, feeling safe at the Beacon and perceiving that the Beacon offers a variety of interesting activities, holding constant the youth’s age, gender, ethnicity and the site. Regression coefficients are presented in Appendix F, Table F.1.

32 In this section of the report, we use youths’ reports of the number of supportive adults at the Beacon as of Fall 1999 as a predictor of future attendance (number of sessions attended between Fall 1999 and Spring 2001). In Chapter 7 we examine participation over time as a factor that affects changes in the number of non-family adult supports youth have.

33 We also looked at whether safe youth felt, problems getting home, youths’ perceptions of the variety of activities offered at the Beacons, self-efficacy or school effort predicted whether youth ended up participating for three sessions in education plus other activities. None of these factors was related.

34 We conducted these analyses controlling for activity type and site. We performed additional analyses that removed educational activities in case these activities, some of which were mandatory, were masking a relationship between quality and attendance. The results of the analyses were similar, however.


37 Pittman and Wright, 1991; Quinn, 1999.

38 National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2002. Also see Furstenburg et al., 1999.


43 Reisner et al., 2002; Huang et al., 1999; Grossman et al., 2002.

44 This proportion differs slightly from that reported in Chapter 3 because it refers only to the middle-school participants, not to the entire range of youth participants.

45 In Chapter 5, we included activities that fell under the career development core area because we observed a total of 11 activities. We received feedback forms from too few youth, however (from only two activities predominantly), to include career developmental as a separate core area in these analyses.


47 However, certainly with regard to sheer numbers of youth who reported positive experiences, Sunset Neighborhood and the other sites are more comparable.

48 We do not examine increases in youth competencies in this chapter. Originally, the evaluation design intended to obtain systematic quantitative measures of youth competencies in each of the core program areas. Given the range of programs across the centers, P/PV, the National Advisory Group for the evaluation and CNYD, the intermediary, agreed that it did not make sense for P/PV to develop standardized assessments that would be administered across the activities. Instead, CNYD began a year-long process with center staff in three of the core program areas where Beacon activities were concentrated (education; arts and recreation; and leadership development) to identify common goals in each area. They then designed surveys to administer to young people in the activities to assess whether or not youths’ skills improved. The surveys were to be administered once at the beginning of the activity session and again at the end to measure change in youth responses. The effort was more time-consuming and labor-intensive than expected, and the resulting surveys were administered only once—and in a very small sample of activities. In addition, because arts and recreation covers so many possible activities (performing arts, visual arts, sports, cultural enrichment), standardized forms could not be developed. For example, the Urban Music Club taught youth to create music using records and turntables. Among the competencies defined for the activity were “scratch with cross fader” and “beat juggle.” In contrast, the competencies developed for a visual arts activity including learning about lines, color and texture. Given
the small number of activities and youth within them, we do not present the results. Given the small number of responses, we do not include the information in this chapter.

49 The rest of this chapter relies on the data from young people who attended the three Beacon centers located in middle schools because we only have information on developmental experiences and social outcomes for those youth.

50 Bandura, 1994; Ryan and Deci, 2000.

51 Kane and Staiger, 2002.

52 The model is as follows: grades, test scores and absences are a function of T1 measures on all variables (demographic, developmental experiences and long-term outcomes) + T2-T1(developmental experiences, self-efficacy, school effort, and positive and passive response to social challenges). In order to estimate the model with sufficient power, we aggregated data from the three middle-school Beacon sites. We controlled for site but found no differences among the sites in developmental experiences, except in the case of family support, which was slightly higher at Community Bridges than at Visitacion Valley or Sunset Neighborhood. The site did make a difference for school effort and academic outcomes, which we ascribe to differences in the climate and quality of the schools (not the Beacon centers).

53 Eccles, 1999; Furstenberg et al., 1999; Larson, 2000; National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2002.

54 Because the groups of young people differed, we calculated the probabilities by controlling for age, gender, race, school attended, reduced-price lunch, the previous year’s grades and average test scores, and grade level.

55 Huang et al., 1999.


58 See, for example, Werner and Smith, 1982; Tierney and Grossman, 1995; Gambone and Arbreton, 1997.


60 Herrera and Arbreton, 2003.
Anderman, Eric, and Martin L. Maehr  

Bandura, Albert  

Benson, Peter L.  

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development  

Clark, Reginald M.  

Connell, J.P., M.B. Spencer and J.L. Aber  

Connell, James P., Michelle Alberti Gambone and Thomas J. Smith  

Conrad, Don, and Diane Hedin  

Dryfoos, Joy G.  

Eccles, Jacquelynne S.  

Eccles, Jacquelynne S., and Bonnie Barber  

Eccles, Jacquelynne S., Carol Midgley, Allan Wigfield, Christy Miller Buchanan, David Reuman, Constance Flanagan and Douglas Maclver  

Epstein, Joyce L.  

Erikson, Erik H.  

Finn, Jeremy D.  

Fox, James Alan, and Sanford A. Newman  

Furstenberg, Jr., Frank F., Thomas D. Cook, Jacquelynne S. Eccles, Glen H. Elder, Jr., and Arnold Sameroff  

Gambone, M., A. Klem and J. Connell  

Gambone, Michelle A., and Amy J. A. Arbreton  

Grossman, Jean Baldwin, Karen E. Walker and Rebecca Raley  

Grossman, Jean Baldwin, Marilyn L. Price, Veronica Fellerath, Linda Z. Jucovy, Lauren J. Kotloff, Rebecca Raley and Karen E. Walker  

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Larson, Reed W.

Lerner, R. M.

Mahoney, J. L.

Mahoney, J. L., and R. B. Cairns


McLaughlin, Milbrey W., Melita A. Irby and Juliet Langman

McNeal, R. B.

Medrich, Elliot A.

Midgley, Carol, H. Feldlaufer and J. Eccles

Midgley, Carol, and Harriet Feldlaufer

Morrow, Pristine V., and Melanie B. Styles

National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine

Olsen, Darby

Panel on High-Risk Youth, National Research Council

Pittman, Karen J., and Michele Cahill

Pittman, Karen Johnson, with Marlene Wright
Quinn, Jane

Reisner, Elizabeth R., Christina A. Russell, Megan E. Welsh, Jennifer Birmingham and Richard N. White

Roberts, G. C., and D. C. Treasure

Roberts, G. C., D. C. Treasure and M. Kavussanu

Rutter, Michael

Ryan, Richard M. and Edward L. Deci

Scales, Peter C.

Schinke, Steven P., Mario A. Orlandi and Kristin C. Cole

Sipe, Cynthia L., and Patricia Ma

Tierney, Joseph P., and Jean Baldwin Grossman, with Nancy Resch

Walker, Gary, and Frances Vilella-Velez

Walker, Karen E., and Amy J. A. Arbreton

Walker, Karen E., Bernardine Watson and Linda Z. Jucovy

Walker, Karen E., Jean Grossman, Rebecca Raley, Veronica Fellerath and Glee Holton

Warren, Constancia, with Michelle Feist and Nancy Nevarez

Way, N.

Werner, E. E., and R. S. Smith

Zaslow, Martha J., and Ruby Takanishi
Appendix A:
Methodology: Data Sources

Information for the current report was collected through a variety of rich qualitative and quantitative data sources. The data sources are listed here.

- **CNYD** oversaw the development of a Web-based management information system (MIS) that permits all centers to enter enrollment and attendance data for the youth and adults who attend center activities. Using the system, centers collected information about activities, including their schedules; who administered them (the Beacon center or a collaborating agency); and the core area each encompassed. Information about individual staff was also entered into the MIS. The MIS data have been used throughout the evaluation to examine enrollment and attendance by individual youth. These data provide valuable demographic information on all youth.

- **Surveys** were administered to all youth in the three middle schools that were part of the evaluation to measure developmental experiences, school effort and self-efficacy. The surveys were administered three times: Fall 1998; academic year 1999–2000; and Spring 2001. This report relies on surveys of 854 young people who were in the sixth or seventh grade during academic year 1999–2000 and who were also surveyed in Spring 2001. Among other uses, we have used the surveys in conjunction with the attendance data from the MIS to examine whether the youth who participated in the Beacon center programs had different developmental experiences than those who did not attend the centers did. Throughout the report we refer to these as “the middle-school survey” or just “the survey.”

- **School records** for the academic years 1998–1999, 1999–2000 and 2000–2001 were collected from the SFUSD on gender, ethnicity, free or reduced-price lunch status, grade-point average, standardized test scores in math and reading, suspensions and attendance. When integrated with information from the surveys, the school records have allowed us to compare the academic performance of the Beacon center youth with that of the nonparticipants and examine change over time.

- **Periodic observations to assess the developmental opportunities provided in Beacon youth activities were also carried out. Beginning in Summer 1999 and concluding in Spring 2001, observers examined 112 activities sponsored by the centers, looking particularly at such key developmental dimensions as adult-youth interactions, peer interactions and opportunities for decision-making and leadership. We have used these assessments to examine the overall quality of activities and whether or not quality is linked to youths’ own perceptions of their particular experiences.

- **Feedback surveys** were administered to youth during 60 Beacon activities—a subset of the 112 activities observed—across all five centers to compare youths’ developmental experiences to the observed quality of the activities. The study included information from 666 youth feedback surveys. In this report, the feedback surveys are referred to as “feedback forms” to diminish confusion.

- **Beacon staff surveys** were conducted in Summer and Fall 2001 to collect information about staff experience, education and training. A total of 134 staff from five centers completed surveys. We have used these surveys to examine whether and how hiring and staffing practices at the Beacon centers contributed to the quality of activities and youth experiences.

- **Twice-yearly visits** were made to each center to conduct interviews with Beacon staff, activity providers, community members and school staff about how the centers were run. Approximately 80 staff and community members were interviewed during each site visit.

During site visits, P/PV evaluators also interviewed approximately 35 stakeholders (many of them several times) in institutions that provided crucial support for the initiative. (Stakeholders included public and private funders, steering committee members, intermediary staff, school district personnel and administrators from city agencies.)

- **Reviews of documents** were conducted. Documents were supplied by the initiative and included training and outreach materials, progress reports, budgets and other information.
In addition to quantitative data collected through surveys and school records, Milbrey McLaughlin and her students at Stanford University conducted a qualitative study called Youth Voices to understand the role the Beacons play in youths’ lives. For the study, McLaughlin and her students conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with young people who participated in the initiative. They also worked with youth ethnographers who provided their insights on the community, neighborhood and role of the Beacons. Focus groups encompassed 120 youth across the five centers. Eighteen youth, most of whom were drawn from the focus group sample, participated as “case studies,” for which they were interviewed two or three times.
Appendix B: Overview of the Relationships Between Developmental Experiences and Youth Outcomes

Much previous research has documented the link between the developmental experiences that the Beacons were designed to provide (supportive adults and peers, involvement and membership, opportunities to use out-of-school time in productive ways) and longer-term academic and social outcomes for youth.

Research has shown that having supportive adults who know and care about what young people do and who can provide guidance, emotional support and instrumental assistance is critical to youths’ successful navigation of multiple developmental changes and transitions and to their avoidance of high-risk behaviors that limit life options (Eccles et al., 1993; Erikson, 1986; Furstenberg et al., 1999; Rutter, 1987; Tierney and Grossman, 1995; Werner and Smith, 1982).

In addition to supportive adults, supportive peers take on an especially important role as adolescents begin to spend more time with people outside the family and to rely on peers extensively for support and guidance (Hendry et al., 1992; Blyth et al., 1982). Peers are also critical to youth programs because youth tend to be attracted to programs in which their peers participate.

Several studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s related the amount of discretionary time youth have in their out-of-school hours to the risks (for engaging in delinquent behaviors) and opportunities (for engaging in multifaceted enrichment activities) this leisure time has the potential to produce (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992). Using leisure time in productive ways—such as getting involved in extracurricular activities—is positively related to increases in grade-point average and school engagement, particularly when the activities include leadership roles (Eccles and Barber, 1999). In contrast, youth who do not engage in positive extracurricular activities feel less attached to school and community and are more likely to drop out of school (Mahoney and Cairns, 1997; McNeal, 1995) and get into trouble (Mahoney, 1997).

Researchers have also found that giving youth the opportunity to engage in their choice of a variety of interesting and challenging learning activities complements young people’s need to fashion an expanded sense of competence (Epstein, 1988; Eccles, 1999). Young people are more likely to participate in activities they perceive to be attractive, given their ages and interests; that are easily accessible and affordable; and that involve peers whom they value (Hultsman, 1992; Medrich, 1991). Consequently, they are less likely to get involved in vandalism, drug use and other high-risk behaviors (Schinke, Orlandi and Cole, 1992).

Finally, the planners of the Beacon initiative were aware that youth in general, and teens in particular, benefit from opportunities for involvement and membership (Eccles and Barber, 1999). Taking on leadership roles is one way that youth can participate in a meaningful way; having decision-making opportunities in how activities are structured and run is another. Providing youth with these types of opportunities allows them to practice roles and build competencies relevant to future jobs and careers (Scales, 1991). Further, as youth take on leadership responsibilities, they learn to take others into account and develop a greater sense of responsibility (Conrad and Hedin, 1982).
San Francisco Beacon Initiative Theory of Change

Early Outcomes

**Beacon Sites**
Encourage community engagement and leadership
Beacon centers that are visible, accessible, safe, welcoming to all
Beacon programs that support long-term outcomes
Beacon staff that are well-trained, diverse and responsive
Youth and families participate in a range of activities

**TA Intermediary**
Build positive and cooperative relationships among Beacon site stakeholders
Strengthen commitments by sites to the theory of change
Provide needed implementation resources and effective supports that build site capacity
Build understanding and commitment to youth development

Intermediate Outcomes

**Beacon Sites**
For Youth:
Increased productive use of discretionary time
High-quality supports and opportunities for:
- supportive relationships
- interesting learning experiences
- involvement and membership

For Adults/Families
Increased connections with others
Broader and deeper participation in family activities

For Youth and Adults/Families:
Participation growing
Report benefits of Beacon participation

For communities
Report positive impact
Involvement in Beacon decision-making
Leveraging of resources into community

For schools
Increased school/Beacon integration

**TA Intermediary**
Build teamwork and shared responsibility among Beacon site stakeholders
Strengthen implementation of youth development best practices that enhance quality in all Beacons programs through:
- staff development
- cross-site exchange
- individual site consultation
Aid sites’ meaningful use of the theory of change to guide programming, resource allocation and dissemination

**Initiative**
Systems accommodations made in support of Beacons
Support from the mayor, school superintendent, private funders for the Beacons initiative
Core funds raised through partnerships of city, schools and private funders
Evaluation and public support campaign for Beacon centers

**TA Intermediary**
Facilitate negotiations with service systems for the commitment of resources for the Beacon centers
Manage the communications and public support campaigns
Manage the evaluation resulting in information that is clear, meaningful, useful and compelling to stakeholders

**Initiative**
More diverse and deeper partnerships among youth service systems and Beacons
Systems resources are redirected to support Beacons Strategy in place for committed long-term funding
Long-Term Outcomes

**TA Intermediary**
Institutionalization of theory of change process by Beacon sites
Greater diversity and prevalence of agency use of best practices at Beacon

**Beacon Sites**

For Youth
- Increased competencies in core areas
- Contributes to well-being
- Success in school

For Family Members and Other Adults
- Increased competencies in core areas
- Increased family support for education
- Contributes to positive school connections

For Communities
- Community ownership of the Beacon
- Increased leverage of resources
- Contributes to greater community support for youth

For Schools
- Shared sense of purpose between Beacon and school
- Broader and deeper school/Beacon integration
- Broader and deeper school/community collaboration

**TA Intermediary**
Facilitate establishment of long-term partnerships between service systems and Beacon centers
Support for ongoing use of evaluation findings by Beacon stakeholders and broader dissemination of evaluation findings
Promote broad-based public support for Beacons, ensuring commitment of funding

**Initiative**
Neighborhood institutionalization of successful Beacons
Secured sustainable and diverse funding sources to support site core funding
City-wide departments and strengthened youth development agencies across the city are committed to Beacon centers as an effective delivery platform
Appendix C:
More Detailed Tables of Explanation to Accompany Findings Reported in Chapter 4

Table C.1
Main Languages Spoken at the Beacon Centers and the Proportion of Staff Who Speak Main Languages Other Than English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Primary Languages*</th>
<th>Proportion of Staff Who Speak Main Languages Other Than English</th>
<th>Proportion of Staff Who Teach in Languages Other Than English Some or Most of the Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown Cantonese 88%</td>
<td>Cantonese 39%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Bridges English 44% Spanish 44%</td>
<td>Spanish 47%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond Village English 47% Cantonese 21%</td>
<td>Cantonese 10%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset Neighborhood English 75% Cantonese 16%</td>
<td>Cantonese 3%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley English 62% Cantonese 18%</td>
<td>Cantonese 3 %</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes only languages where more than 10 percent reported language as primary.

Source: Sites’ MIS data for participants; staff survey for staff

Table C.2
Proportion of Participants Who Missed Activities at the Beacons Because of Difficulty Getting to or from the Centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinatown (n=112)</th>
<th>Community Bridges (n=121)</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood (n=173)</th>
<th>Richmond Village (n=75)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=148)</th>
<th>Overall (n=629)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missed any scheduled days?*</td>
<td>41% LOW (n=37)</td>
<td>63% (n=70)</td>
<td>59% (n=91)</td>
<td>60% (n=40)</td>
<td>77% HIGH (n=108)</td>
<td>61% (n=346)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons why for those who missed:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not get there</td>
<td>16% LOW (n=37)</td>
<td>26% (n=70)</td>
<td>25% (n=91)</td>
<td>23% (n=40)</td>
<td>29% (n=108)</td>
<td>25% (n=346)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not get home*</td>
<td>14% LOW (n=37)</td>
<td>15% (n=70)</td>
<td>25% (n=91)</td>
<td>8% (n=40)</td>
<td>25% HIGH (n=108)</td>
<td>20% (n=346)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates significant site differences were found, controlling for age and gender of participants.

"HIGH" indicates high in comparison to other sites; "LOW" indicates low in comparison to other sites.

Source: Feedback forms from Summer 2000, Fall 2000 and Spring 2001
### Table C.3
Proportion of Beacon Participants Who Missed Activities for Various Reasons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Chinatown (n=112)</th>
<th>Community Bridges (n=121)</th>
<th>Richmond Village (n=75)</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood (n=173)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=148)</th>
<th>Overall (n=629)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missed any scheduled days?*</td>
<td>41% LOW</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>77% HIGH</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons why for those</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who missed:</td>
<td>(n=37)</td>
<td>(n=70)</td>
<td>(n=40)</td>
<td>(n=91)</td>
<td>(n=108)</td>
<td>(n=346)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not get there</td>
<td>16% LOW</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not get home*</td>
<td>14% LOW</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25% HIGH</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends were not going*</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>50% HIGH</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought it would be boring*</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>44% HIGH</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32% HIGH</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff did not show up*</td>
<td>3% LOW</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to do other things</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt like doing other things*</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>58% HIGH</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>50% HIGH</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not feel safe*</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26% HIGH</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates significant site differences were found, controlling for age and gender of participants.

“HIGH” indicates high in comparison to other sites; “LOW” indicates low in comparison to other sites.

Source: Feedback forms from Summer 2000, Fall 2000, and Spring 2001
Table C.4
Site Differences in Youths’ Reports of Safety at the Beacon Center

| Adj. R sq. | .02 |
| Chinatown | .05 |
| Richmond Village | .06 |
| Sunset Neighborhood | -.13 |
| Visitacion Valley | .03 |
| Male | -.04 |
| Age | -.05 |
| African American | -.07 |
| Latino | .05 |
| White | .13* |
| Other Race/Ethnicity | .05 |

Standardized regression coefficients are presented. Regressions are based on reports from feedback forms. Community Bridges Beacon, females and Asians are the omitted categories.

+=p<.10
*=p<.05
**=p<.01

Table C.5
Training Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinatown (n=18)</th>
<th>Community Bridges (n=32)</th>
<th>Richmond Village (n=21)</th>
<th>Sunset Neighborhood (n=39)</th>
<th>Visitacion Valley (n=36)</th>
<th>Overall (n=146)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health and safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CPR/first aid, recognizing child abuse, suicide prevention)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child and adolescent development</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(youth development programming, writing skills, computer lab, tutorial training, game building, case management, ESL/EFL, project-based learning)</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(community collaboration, administration and management, crisis management, volunteer training, hiring processes, navigating the juvenile justice system, computer training supervision, mentoring preparation, leadership styles, general orientation, fund-raising)</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing interpersonal relations</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Staff Surveys
Appendix D: Analyses Conducted for Presentation in Chapter 5

Understanding Differences in Developmental Opportunities Provided by Activities

Trained researchers used an observation tool to assess the quality of activities. Almost all activities observed during the school year were assessed three times. Summer activities were assessed twice because the summer sessions averaged six weeks, and scheduling three observations for each activity proved challenging. Observers used a “check box form” that listed a wide variety of observable behaviors (see Table D.1) during their observations. After the observation, they then answered 22 items on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) and provided narrative descriptions of the activity. Cluster analysis indicated that there were four scales (adult warmth, peer cooperation, peer warmth, and structure and management). In addition, for leadership and decision-making the observers used one item each. For each activity, we created an average item score by adding the scores for each item across observations and dividing by the number of observations. We then generated scale scores for the activity by combining the average scores on items within the scales and dividing by the number of items in the scale.

In our analysis, we used the data in two ways. First, we took the numerical scores from 1 to 5 and translated them into low, medium and high scores. For the four scales—adult support, peer cooperation, peer warmth, and structure and management—we determined that scores under three were low and meant that some negative behaviors were observed during the activity. Scores from three to less than four were medium, and represented the absence of negative behaviors and the absence of very positive behaviors. Scores from four to five were high, and meant that there were no negative behaviors and some very strong positive behaviors observed.

We also used the numerical scores in regression analysis to predict the extent to which activities provided developmental opportunities to youth based on the following predictors: average number of youth attending the activity, staff-to-youth ratio in the activity, site (i.e., Beacon center) and activity type (i.e., arts and recreation, education, career and leadership). The analyses also controlled for or took into account differences between observed activities in the ages of youth attending the activity and the proportion of males in the activity. Results of the regression analyses are summarized in Table D.1. For the activity dummy variables, arts and recreation activities are excluded. For the site dummy variables, Community Bridges is the excluded category.

Analysis of Site Differences in Organizational Practices

Even though we observed only modest differences between the sites on dimensions of quality and most were statistically insignificant, we used the differences that existed to examine whether certain dimensions of quality were related to organizational practices, such as previous staff experience, tenure at the center, the average number of trainings staff had received since beginning work at the Beacon center and the proportion of full-time staff. First, we estimated each center’s mean score on each activity quality dimension by taking into consideration activity type, the number of youth present and the staff-to-youth ratio.

We then plotted activity dimensions for each site against organizational practices to identify patterns. The resulting charts are presented below. Each chart includes at least one organizational practice (indicated by the blue lines) and one quality dimension (indicated by the black lines). We observed several patterns that suggest relationships between organizational practices and the practices that staff members employ in specific youth activities. In reading the charts, the comparison is between the shape of the lines. Given the small sample size, these findings are preliminary and must be treated cautiously.

Although we mapped the average quality of the structure and management at the sites against the average number of trainings that staff members received (because sites that scored highest on one also scored highest on the other), the differences in the average scores for activity structure and management across the sites were so small as to be substantively (and statistically) negligible: They ranged from 4.0 to 4.1 on a 5-point scale. The figure below indicates the very small differences with a line that is almost flat for structure and management across the sites.
### Table D.1
Factors associated with the presence of developmental qualities within activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adult Warmth</th>
<th>Peer Cooperation</th>
<th>Peer Warmth (Model not Significant)</th>
<th>Decision-Making</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Structure and Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean for an arts and recreation program at Community Bridges</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R sq.</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of youth</td>
<td>-.03***</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.02***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean staff-to-youth ratio</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.26***</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>-.88*</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond Village</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>-.15</td>
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<td>-.1</td>
<td>.31</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.35</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.61*</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Standardized regression coefficients are presented.
* p<.10
** p<.05
*** p<.01
Figure D.2
Patterns Between Activity Structure and Management and the Average Number of Trainings that Staff Receive

Figure D.3
Patterns Between Positive Adult Interactions with Youth, Peer Cooperation and the Proportion of Full-Time Staff at the Beacon Center
As depicted in Figure D.3, there appear to be relationships between the proportion of staff who work full-time and the extent to which adults encourage positive peer relationships and cooperation. We also note a correspondence between the proportion of adults who have previous experience in a youth development organization and the extent to which adults nurture positive interactions among young people. We do not see, however, a relationship between any of the organizational dimensions under consideration and adult warmth.
Appendix E: 
Response Rates, Measures and Measure Development

Middle-School Survey
In November 1999, students in the sixth and seventh grades at each of the three middle schools hosting Beacon centers completed surveys during one class period. The survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete, with additional time for distributing and collecting the surveys. Students were surveyed again during class time in May 2001, when they were in the seventh and eighth grades.

Response Rates
In November 1999, response rates (out of the school population) were 55 percent and 51 percent for sixth- and seventh-grade youth at the school that hosts the Visitacion Valley Beacon center; 79 percent and 82 percent at the school that hosts the Sunset Neighborhood Beacon center; and 69 percent and 56 percent at the school that hosts the Community Bridges Beacon center. The total number of surveys completed in November 1999 was 1,042. In Spring 2001 (the 18-month follow-up point), 838 of those who had completed a survey in Fall 1999 completed a follow-up survey. These 838 youth were included in the sample to examine developmental experiences and change over time in social well-being, school effort and academic performance.

Measures
The youths’ survey responses provide measures of several different constructs. Each of the constructs referred to in this report and the items that comprise them are outlined below. First we describe the measures used to assess well-being and developmental experiences for Beacon participants and nonparticipants. Next we describe the measures used to assess youths’ developmental experiences at the Beacons.

Measures Gathered from Beacon and Non-Beacon Youth

School effort
[Youth respond on a 4-point scale from strongly agree (4) to strongly disagree (1).]
I don’t try very hard in school. (reverse coded)
I pay attention in class.
I often come to class unprepared. (reverse coded)
I work very hard on my schoolwork.

Self-efficacy
[Youth respond on a 4-point scale from strongly agree (4) to strongly disagree (1).]
If I can’t do a job the first time, I keep trying until I can.
I give up on things before finishing them. (reverse coded)
If something looks too hard, I will not even bother to try it. (reverse coded)
I handle unexpected problems very well.
Failure just makes me try harder.
I am unsure about my ability to do things. (reverse coded)
I can depend on myself.
I give up easily. (reverse coded)

Positive reaction to social challenge
[Youth respond on a 4-point scale from strongly agree (4) to strongly disagree (1).]
When I have a problem or argument with another student, a teacher or other adult:
I think about it afterward and try to figure out what went wrong.
I talk to the other student about it later and make sure to straighten it out.
I make sure it gets fixed.
Passive reaction to challenge
Youth respond on a 4-point scale from strongly agree (4) to strongly disagree (1).

When I have a problem or argument with another student, a teacher or other adult:
- I act like it doesn’t matter.
- I don’t talk to them.
- I figure it was the other student’s problem.

Leadership
Measure is a count of how many different leadership experiences youth have had.

In the last year (12 months), how often have you:
- Represented a group, team or club at an event or meeting?
- Helped plan activities or events for a group, team or club?
- Been in charge of supplies or equipment for a group, team or club?
- Been a peer counselor or tutor?
- Given a presentation to a group of people?
- Helped raise money for a group, team or club?
- Trained or supervised other youth?
- Helped set rules or procedures for a group, team or club?
- Prepared a snack or set up an activity for a group?
- Had administrative duties like taking attendance or notes during a meeting?
- Been a class officer or student council member or group or club leader?

Non-family adult support
Youth are asked this set of questions about school and Beacon adults and are asked to write in the actual numbers as a response. The measure combines the responses across schools and Beacons.

Adult support at school: How many adults at school do the following things:
- Let you know when you do something wrong or bad?
- Say something nice when you do something good?
- Pay attention to what’s going on in your life?
- Could you go to if you were really upset or mad?
- Could you go to for help in an emergency?
- Could you ask for advice about personal problems, like a problem with a friend?

Adult support at the Beacon center: How many adults at the Beacon center do the following things:
- Let you know when you do something wrong or bad?
- Say something nice when you do something good?
- Pay attention to what’s going on in your life?
- Could you go to if you were really upset or mad?
- Could you go to for help in an emergency?
- Could you ask for advice about personal problems, like a problem with a friend?

Peer support
Youth are asked this set of questions about school and Beacon adults and are asked to write in the actual numbers as a response. The measure combines the responses across schools and Beacons.

How many young people do the following things:
- Let you know when you do something wrong or bad?
- Say something nice when you do something good?
- Pay attention to what’s going on in your life?
- Could you go to if you were really upset or mad?
- Could you go to for help in an emergency?
- Could you ask for advice about personal problems, like a problem with a friend?

Percent time spent in challenging activities
Youth were asked to complete a grid indicating how much time they estimated they spent over the course of one week on a daily basis doing a variety of different activities. These activities were: watching television; homework or studying; hanging out with friends; reading other than schoolwork; art, music, dance or drama class or lesson; organized sports; after-school tutoring; parties, dances or trips planned by community programs or centers; religious activities; and community service or volunteer work. Youth were also asked to rate on a scale from 1
(not at all challenging) to 4 (very challenging) how challenging they found each activity. In order to create this variable, we added up all the time youth indicated they spent in out-of-school activities and then calculated the proportion of that time they reported spending engaged in activities they found challenging. For several activities (e.g., watching television and hanging out with friends), we automatically assigned that time as not challenging, even if youth rated it as such.

**Measures Gathered from Beacon Youth: Survey Constructs**

**Adult support at the Beacons**
How many adults at the Beacon center do the following things for you? When you think about how to answer, think about staff, security and volunteers at the Beacon center:

- Let you know when you do something wrong or bad?
- Say something nice when you do something good?
- Pay attention to what’s going on in your life?
- Could you go to if you were really upset or mad?
- Could you go to for help in an emergency?
- Could you ask for advice about personal problems, like a problem with a friend?

**Variety of interesting activities offered at the Beacon**
[Youth respond on a 4-point scale from strongly agree (4) to strongly disagree (1).]

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- Beacon staff give students a lot of choices about what they can do and how they can do it.
- The Beacon center has activities that we usually don’t have at this school.
- There are a lot of interesting activities to choose from at the Beacon center.
- I am not interested in any of the Beacon center activities. (reverse coded)

**Feedback Forms**
Across all five sites, 666 youth feedback forms were completed. The feedback forms were administered across 60 different activities over three sessions between Summer 2000 and Spring 2001. There were three different versions of the feedback forms; each subsequent form narrowed down the number of items used to assess each construct. The first version was completed by 96 youth, the second version by 227 youth, and the third version by 343 youth. Feedback forms were completed during the second, middle observation of an activity.

**Measures on the Feedback Forms**

**Adult support from activity leader**
*For youth using form 3, this scale is composed of three items, with a reliability of .59 (values are 0-2, where 2 is favorable).*

- Staff in this class care about me.
- Staff spend time talking with me.
- I could talk with staff if I was upset or mad about something.

*For youth using forms 1 and 2, this scale is composed of 10 items, with a reliability of .82 (values are 0-2, where 2 is favorable).*

- Staff show me how to do things.
- Staff make it okay to ask questions.
- Staff are fair to me.
- Staff in this class help me when I want to learn.
- Staff in this class really understand me.
- Staff say something nice to me when I do something good.
- Staff in class encourage participation in other activities.

**Peer support in activity**
*For youth using all forms, this scale is composed of three items, with a reliability of .59 (values are 0-2, where 2 is favorable).*

- Kids in this class help each other.
- Kids in this class know all names.
- Kids in this class feel comfortable talking to each other.
Challenging activity
For youth using form 3, this scale is composed of four items, with a reliability of .65 (values are 0-2, where 2 is favorable).

- I learn how to do new things in this class.
- I use things I learn in this class at school/home.
- I get to do things I don’t usually do.
- I get a chance to do a lot of new things.

For youth using form 2, this scale is composed of five items (the four above plus the one below), with a reliability of .675 (values are 0-2, where 2 is favorable).

- I have to listen and try hard to learn what staff teach.

For youth using form 1, this scale is composed of seven items (the five above plus the two below), with a reliability of .732 (values are 0-2, where 2 is favorable).

- I had to pay attention to learn what was taught.
- Activities pushed me to try my best.

Interesting activity
For all youth, this scale is composed of four items, with a reliability of .706 (values are 0-2, where 2 is favorable).

- I enjoy the things we do in this class/activity.
- The things we do in this class are really interesting.
- This class keeps my attention the whole time.
- I look forward to coming to this class.

Decision-making in the activity
For all youth, this is a count of how many decision-making activities the youth did while in the specific activity (0-5).

- Helped plan activities or events.
- Helped plan what you would do each day.
- Helped decide what you would learn about.
- Helped decide what the rules would be.
- Gave suggestions about how to do things.

Leadership in the activity
For all youth, this is a count of how many leadership activities the youth did while in the specific activity (0-10).

- Represented the group at an event or meeting.
- Been in charge of supplies or equipment.
- Been a peer counselor or tutor.
- Given a presentation to a group of people.
- Helped raise money for this or another group.
- Trained or supervised other youth.
- Prepared a snack or set up an activity for a group.
- Helped do things like taking attendance or notes or getting materials set up or put away.
- Been in a leadership role, like a president, treasurer or team captain.
- Been involved in community service or volunteer work or efforts to change your community.

Safety at the Beacon
For all youth, this is a single item on the form that asks how safe the youth feel at the Beacon compared to other places.

4=a lot more safe than other places
3=a little more safe
2=as safe
1=a little less safe
0=a lot less safe than other places

Belonging at the Beacon
For all youth, this scale is composed of six items, with a reliability of .855 (values are 0-2, where 2 is favorable).

- The Beacon center is a comfortable place to hang out.
- I feel like my ideas count at the Beacon center.
- People really listen to me at the Beacon center.
- I feel like I am successful at the Beacon center.
- I feel like I belong at the Beacon center.
- I can hang out at the Beacon center without any activity.
Table E.1
Youth Survey, Feedback Form and Interview Sample Demographics and Participation

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Feedback Forms Sample N=555</th>
<th>Interview Sample N=112</th>
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<td>53%</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>38%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<td>3%</td>
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<td>40%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>56%</td>
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Table 7.1 in Chapter 7 presents the proportion of youth who reported receiving no, a little or a lot of each developmental experience. We took the mean score across all items and then used the following cutoff points to create the scores and percentages presented in the table:

- High=>1.75 (on a scale averaged across several items where 0=no; 1=yes, a little; and 2=yes, a lot) for challenge, interest, peer support, adult support and belonging
  Low=0 to <1
- High=4 or 5 (out of five possible) yeses for decision-making examples
  Low=0 or 1
- High=>5 (out of 10 possible) yeses for leadership items
  Low=0 or 1

Measure Development
Most of the constructs used in this study have been used in other studies of youth organizations and community initiatives. Youths’ reaction to challenge and school effort are measures that were used in P/PV’s study of the Urban Corps Expansion Project (Connell et al., 1995). The constructs measuring self-efficacy as well as adult and peer support have been used in P/PV’s previous evaluations of a community change initiative (Sipe and Ma, 1998), nationally affiliated youth-serving organizations (Gambone and Arbreton, 1997) and the Urban Corps Expansion Project (Connell et al., 1995). The percent time in challenging activities measure was created to assess the proportion of time youth felt challenged in their out-of-school time.
Appendix F
Analysis for Chapter 6: Predicting Participation Based on Quantitative Data

Table F.1
Predicting Sessions of Attendance Based on Youths’ Fall 1999 Perceptions of: Beacon as Safe, Beacon Offers Variety of Interesting Activities, Supportive Adults at the Beacon, Trouble Getting Home After the Beacon (Accessible) and All of These Predictors Together

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Safe</th>
<th>Variety of Interesting Activities</th>
<th>Supportive Adults at the Beacon</th>
<th>Trouble Getting Home After Beacon</th>
<th>All predictors</th>
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<tr>
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<td>.17</td>
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<td>NA</td>
<td>.23***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trouble Getting Home from Beacon</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>.16***</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>-.17***</td>
<td>-16***</td>
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<td>-.07†</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td>.22***</td>
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<td>.17***</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>-.22***</td>
<td>-.21***</td>
<td>-.22***</td>
<td>-.21***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.01</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Standardized regression coefficients are presented.
+ p<.10
* p<.05
** p<.01
*** p<.001

Using the middle-school survey sample, we conducted a series of regression analyses to predict the total number of sessions (based on MIS data) a youth attended. First, we ran regressions with each predictor representing the theory of change early outcomes (of Beacon as safe, accessible, with a range of activities and responsive adults) separately. In the last regression analysis, we included all predictors to assess which predictor was the strongest, taking the others into account. In all regression analyses, we controlled for youth grade level, gender, ethnicity, standardized test scores and grade point average (GPA), and for the site which the youth attended. Results of the analyses are presented in Table F.1.
Appendix G:
Analysis Strategy for Examining Change in Developmental Experiences Presented in Chapter 7 and for the Path Models Presented in Chapter 8: Assessing the Youth Development Model and the Relationship of Beacon Participation to Long-Term Outcomes

Analyses for Findings Presented in Chapter 7
Below we describe 1) the regression analyses used to assess the extent to which site differences, activity type differences, number of youth involved in an activity, staff-to-youth ratios and activity quality dimensions (i.e., level of provision of different developmental opportunities) help to explain variation in youths’ developmental experiences in an activity, and 2) the regression analyses used to assess the extent to which site differences help to explain variation in youths’ developmental experiences of the Beacons as a whole (i.e., supportive adults at the Beacons generally, Beacon offers variety of new and different activities, and sense of belonging to the Beacon).

Site, Activity Size, Type and Quality Indicators as Explanatory Factors of Youths’ Developmental Experiences in an Activity
We used regression analysis to predict the extent to which youths’ developmental experiences varied within activities based on the following predictors: average number of youth attending the activity, the staff-to-youth ratio in the activity and the level of developmental opportunities provided by the activity. Results of the regression analyses are summarized in Table F.3. Model 1 presents the results of regressions that predict young people’s developmental experiences as a function of the Beacon center. Model 2 presents the results of regressions that predict young people’s development experiences as a function of the Beacon center, quality of activities, activity size and mean staff-to-youth ratio (averaged over two or three observations). The analyses also controlled for activity type (i.e., arts and recreation, education, career and leadership), age, gender and race. We included demographic variables in the analysis because we expected that young people’s experiences would be conditioned by personal characteristics. What a 10-year-old perceives as a leadership opportunity may be very different from the perceptions of a 15-year-old. Likewise, San Francisco is a highly diverse community, with young people from a variety of cultures who may experience the same event differently. For the activity dummy variables, arts and recreation activities are excluded. For the site dummy variables, Community Bridges is the excluded category. For the race dummy variables, Asian is the excluded category.

Site Differences in Youth’s Developmental Experiences of Belonging, Adult Support and Variety
We used regression analysis to predict the extent to which youths’ developmental experiences varied by site, taking into account site differences in age, gender and ethnicity of the youth. Results of the regression analyses are summarized in Table F.4.
## Table G.1
### Activity Qualities, Staffing, Size, Type and Site Predicting Developmental Experiences Within Activities

<table>
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<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
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<td>Model 2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.10</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.16**</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
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<td>-.06</td>
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<td>.07</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
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<td>Education</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.13**</td>
<td>-.12</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>.03</td>
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<td>.03</td>
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<td>—</td>
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</table>

Standardized regression coefficients are presented.

* p<.10  
*+ p<.05  
++ p<.01  
*** p<.001
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sense of Belonging to Beacon Center</th>
<th>Supportive Adults at the Beacon Center</th>
<th>Beacon Variety</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R sq.</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
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<td>NA</td>
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<td>Sunset Neighborhood</td>
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<td>-.09</td>
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<td>Richmond Village</td>
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<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth is male</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth age</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.24***</td>
<td>.15**</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other race</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.09*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: “Belonging” was measured on the youth feedback forms. “Supportive Adults” at the Beacon and Beacon Variety were measured on the middle-school youth survey; therefore, Richmond Village and Chinatown are not included in the regression analyses because no surveys were administered at these schools. Standardized regression coefficients are presented.

+ p<.10
* p<.05
** p<.01
*** p<.001
Analyses for Findings Presented in Chapter 8

A path analytic technique using a series of regression analyses was used to assess 1) how changes in a youth’s developmental experiences were related to the dependent variables representing measures of changes in well-being and academic performance, and 2) whether differences among youth who participated in the Beacon centers to varying degrees could be fully explained by changes in their developmental experiences.

In general, the multivariate model used to estimate these relationships took the following form:

\[ Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + \ldots + b_{15}X_{15} + e \]

where:
- \( Y \) = value of dependent variable
- \( X \) = value of explanatory variable
- \( a, b \) = coefficients
- \( e \) = a stochastic disturbance term with a mean of zero and a constant variance

The explanatory variables (X) included in the model were:

**Demographics of youth**
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Free or reduced-price lunch status
- Grade (sixth or seventh in Fall 1999)

**Other control variables**
- Site dummies

**“Baseline” academic performance variables**
- 1999–2000 GPA
- Average of standardized math and reading test scores for 1999–2000
- School absences for 1999–2000

“Baseline” developmental experiences and social well-being (from Fall 1999 survey)
- Peer support
- Non-family adult support
- Percent time in challenging activities
- Family support
- Leadership experiences
- Self-efficacy
- School effort
- Positive and passive reaction to challenge

**Beacon participation variable**
- Dummy variables for level of participation (none, one session no education, one session only education, one session education plus other core-area activities, two sessions no education, two sessions only education, two sessions education plus other core-area activities, three sessions no education, three sessions only education, three sessions education plus other core-area activities)

The developmental experience variables were examined as potential mediators of the association between the participation variables and the social well-being and academic performance outcome variables.

The first sets of dependent variables were for social well-being: self-efficacy and response to challenge reported by youth on the Spring 2001 survey. The second sets of dependent variables were academic performance for the 2000–2001 school year: math and reading standardized test scores, percent days absent and grade-point average. School effort as reported on the Spring 2001 survey was also included as a dependent variable.

A two-tailed t-test was used to assess whether each coefficient was statistically not equal to zero. Those estimates not equal to zero at a .10 or better level of significance are considered significant for the purposes of this report.

The model presented in Figure G.1 illustrates the significant path coefficients found using the path analytic technique described above.
**Figure G.1**
Significant links in the youth development model underlying the SFBI Theory of Change (see Table G.3 for data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes in Developmental Experiences</th>
<th>Lead to Changes in Important Social Outcomes</th>
<th>Which Lead to Changes in Academic Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Leadership</em></td>
<td><em>Self-Efficacy</em></td>
<td><em>Grades</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Non-Family Adult Support</em></td>
<td><em>Positive Response to Social Challenge</em></td>
<td><em>Math</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Peer Support</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Attendance</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Time Spent in Challenging and Interesting Learning Opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Reading</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Orange arrow represents a positive relationship
- Gray arrow represents a negative relationship

Different line widths represent different levels of significance. The thicker the line, the higher the significance level.

- **p<.10**
- **p<.05**
- **p<.01**
- **p<.001**
### Table G.3
Regression Analyses Predicting Change in Social Well-Being and Academic Performance Variables
(Does Not Consider Beacon Participation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Change in self-efficacy</th>
<th>Change in positive response to social challenge</th>
<th>Change in school effort</th>
<th>Change in grades</th>
<th>Change in math</th>
<th>Change in absences</th>
<th>Change in reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R sq.</td>
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<td>.49</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>11.16</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>10.26</td>
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**Controls**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Change in leadership</th>
<th>Change in non-family adult support</th>
<th>Change in family support</th>
<th>Change in percent of time spent in challenging activities</th>
<th>Change in peer support</th>
<th>Change in self-efficacy</th>
<th>Change in positive response to social challenge</th>
<th>Change in school effort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Baseline” GPA</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Baseline” average test scores</td>
<td></td>
<td>- .07</td>
<td>- .18***</td>
<td>.28***</td>
<td>- .48***</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>- .32***</td>
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<tr>
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<td>- .05</td>
<td>- .04</td>
<td>.11**</td>
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<td>.18**</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>- .09</td>
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<tr>
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<td>- .01</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td>- .03</td>
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<td>- .04</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>- .15**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>- .16**</td>
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**“Baseline” Controls**

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<th>Change in family support</th>
<th>Change in percent of time spent in challenging activities</th>
<th>Change in peer support</th>
<th>Change in self-efficacy</th>
<th>Change in positive response to social challenge</th>
<th>Change in school effort</th>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td>.25***</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive response to social challenge</td>
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<td>.25***</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>- .18***</td>
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**Predictors**

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<th>Change in family support</th>
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<th>Change in peer support</th>
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<th>Change in positive response to social challenge</th>
<th>Change in school effort</th>
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<td>-.1</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Change in percent of time spent in challenging activities</td>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.03</td>
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<td>-.06</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>.08</td>
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<td>Change in school effort</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.14*</td>
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</table>

* = p < .10
* = p < .05
** = p < .01
*** = p < .001
To discuss the size of the benefits that Beacon participation conferred on young people in two areas—self-efficacy and school effort—scale outcomes were converted into dichotomous variables indicating a positive response (1 if the scale was 3.0 or above, 0 if it was less than 3.0). Logistic regression analysis, using maximum likelihood estimates, was used to estimate the treatment effect by specifying a linear function for the logit (the logarithm of the odds) of having a positive response: \( \log(p/(1-p)) = a + b_1 \). The numbers reported in Chapter 8 are the predicted probabilities of falling on self-efficacy or school effort for an individual with the mean characteristic for every independent variable in the logit analysis, except for the number of Beacon sessions the youth attended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table G.4</th>
<th>Predicted Probabilities for Falling School Effort and Self-Efficacy: Going to the Beacon Three Sessions or More Compared to Less than Three Sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### School Effort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>School Effort Coefficients</th>
<th>3+ Sessions</th>
<th>Less than 3 Sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Bridges</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced-price/free lunch status</td>
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<td>-0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other race</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Grade 8 in 2000–2001 academic year</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Baseline” proportion of time absent</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-2.15</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Baseline” GPA</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>-0.86</td>
<td>-2.79</td>
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<tr>
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<td>61.39</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+ sessions</td>
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<td>-0.50</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+ sessions</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-1.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Self-Efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>School Effort Coefficients</th>
<th>3+ Sessions</th>
<th>Less than 3 Sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.19</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Bridges</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitacion Valley</td>
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Regression Analyses Predicting Change in Social Well-Being and Academic Performance Variables Considering Beacon Participation

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Standardized regression coefficients are presented.

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Lessons Learned

Working Together to Build Beacon Centers in San Francisco

March 2004

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