Supporting Latino/a Youth Development beyond the School Day: A process evaluation of Studio R.O.C.K.S

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Executive Summary

This report describes the first phase of an evaluation of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. (Reading, Outdoors, Creativity, Knowledge, and Self-Discovery) after-school program. CentroNía, a community-based organization located in the Columbia Heights neighborhood of Washington, D.C., developed and implemented this bilingual after-school program. Before creating the after-school program, CentroNía established the DC Bilingual Public Charter School, a Pre-K to 5th-grade charter school housed within the headquarters of the founding organization, as is Studio R.O.C.K.S.

Purpose of the Evaluation: The purpose of this formative or process evaluation was to document and analyze how the program was implemented, what were the approaches or practices used, and what factors influenced practices and implementation. A related purpose of formative or process evaluation was to explore, from the perspective of program staff (both educators and management), the desired program outcomes, as well as indicators of effectiveness or successful impacts on children.

Program Goals: Studio R.O.C.K.S. was initially established in 2009, but the program was revamped in September 2010, with new leadership and an increased emphasis on curriculum development and training for staff. The goals of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program are twofold: (1) to expand the academic learning and creative development opportunities available to DC Bilingual and CentroNía students and (2) to expand the professional and creative development opportunities available to DC and School Age teachers (CentroNía, 2010).

Program Implementation: The Studio R.O.C.K.S model consists of a project-based, creative and physical arts curriculum delivered in 8-week cycles. Each cycle culminates with a presentation to the parents and community at large in the school premises.

Overview of Findings

The results of this qualitative data analysis were organized according to the following thematic areas: 1) desired outcomes for children and indicators of success, 2) strengths of program implementation, and 3) challenges to implementation and success, and recommendations.

Desired outcomes for children and indicators of success. Program staff (i.e., educators and managers) described short-term and long-term goals of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program delivery. The short-term goals touched upon cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development. This reflected a range of areas, for example, exposure to new topics or experiences, learning about other countries and cultures, making connections between studio lessons and school day curriculum, building reading or writing skills, promoting confidence and self-esteem, self expression and creativity, building a sense of ethnic pride and a connection to their communities of origin, building a sense of social consciousness, developing teamwork and conflict resolution skills, healthful living habits, eating nutritious foods, and acquiring abilities in movement and coordination. The long-

term goals revealed a constellation of thoughts that amplified many staff members' aspirations for students which included higher education, successful careers, showing openness to new ideas, and charity toward others.

The *indicators of success* from the point of view of program staff included that children 1) repeat back or perform things they learned in the studio, 2) give spontaneous positive feedback (to the teacher or to others outside of the studio classroom), 3) re-enroll in a studio, 4) ask parents to wait until they finish a studio activity.

Strengths of program implementation is reflected by five factors that seemed to enhance the program's development and implementation potential: 1) richness of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. curriculum, 2) dedication of staff, 3) resourcefulness of staff, 4) effectiveness of behavior management strategies, and 5) connection between staff and Studio R.O.C.K.S. participants. Each of these factors amplifies the richness and diversity of this arts- and cultural-based program model. The strength of human capital among the staff is manifested in high staff motivation, capacity to secure and leverage resources, effective behavior management, and strong interactions with students.

Challenges to implementation and success. The evaluation revealed five areas that posed challenges for effective implementation of the program and successful achievement of its goals. The challenges fell under the following broad categories:

1. Organization of studio schedules -- The current schedule involves multiple studios during a week, and many changes in studios offered over the course of the year. Additionally, the schedule is not being implemented in a way that gives educators sufficient time to plan their studios.

2. Participant attendance -- Inconsistent attendance of Studio R.O.C.K.S. participants seemed to be explained by two factors: a) parents early pick-up, b) concurrent enrollment in tutoring or another studio.

3. Parental engagement – The level of parental engagement or involvement seems low based on the prevalence of behaviors that show a disposition to remove children early from studios and/or a lack of appreciation for children's participation in those studios. Communication between parents and educators has been hard to establish.

4. Teaching strategies and curriculum development – Although very rich curriculum content has been generated through multiple studios and lessons over the first year of implementation by creative educators who draw on their strengths and program guidelines, it was observed that most of this new content has not been systematically documented for successful replication and training in the future.

Similarly, a set of behavior management strategies seems available to all educators through training, but they may not have the same level of training

support regarding teaching strategies that deal with four specific issues: a) what to do when kids are not grasping the material, b) how to adapt activities to age or skill level, c) how to explore creativity, and d) how to use play in learning activities.

5. Valuing of staff -- There is variance in the degree to which staff members feel listened to, appreciated, and respected as part of the Studio ROCKS team.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are aimed at addressing, on the one hand, the challenges listed above, but also at highlighting the identified strengths of the current program model. The recommendations included here underscore the belief that sustaining such practices is important for continued program success.

1. **Scheduling**:
    o   Implement the current schedule with greater advance notice and consistency
    o   Consider adopting a simpler studio schedule.
    o   Minimize/eliminate conflict between studios and other CentroNía activities (i.e. tutoring).
    o   Enroll children with inconsistent attendance in non project-based studios.
    o   Consider shortening the active studio time to 45 minutes.
    o   As a last resort, modify curriculum to accommodate inconsistent attendance.

2. **Parental/Caregiver Engagement**:
    o   Establish systematic ways of soliciting input and feedback from parents.
    o   Find ways to communicate to parents the value and intent of enrichment activities.

3. **Curriculum & Programming**:
    o   Establish systems for documenting curriculum as it is developed.
    o   Provide greater support for curriculum development that builds on educator strengths.
    o   Continue to expand the curriculum by soliciting input about innovations from various interest groups (e.g., educators, children, and parents).
    o   Keep offering studios that tap into multiple areas of child development and interests, such as arts, cognition, and movement.
    o   Continue developing curriculum that connects to children's lives and contexts.
    o   Help teachers continue developing strategies to change activities or lesson plans at the last minute if the need arises, but that are still in line with the larger curricular plans set for the studio.

- Continue the use of positive discipline strategies and positive reinforcement.
- Expand the practice of making distinctions between moments and spaces with children that require different levels of behavior management.
- Keep an atmosphere where children feel loved and respected.
- Keep promoting an environment in which commitment to children is a shared value and an intrinsic motivating force.

4. **Staff**
   - Establish more ways of showing mutual appreciation among staff.
   - Expand opportunities for more open communication among staff.
   - Work to increase staff compensation over time.
   - Continue fostering diversity of the staff in terms of their background, experiences, and skills
   - Keep promoting an environment in which commitment to children is a shared value and an intrinsic motivating force.
   - Continue creating an environment that values the skills and expertise that educators bring to the program.
   - Keep promoting an environment that values initiative and resourcefulness among staff
   - Continue to facilitate the cooperation between educators in a studio for lesson development
   - Continue fostering a sense of awareness among staff of the ways in which their background and experiences relate and connect to the children they serve.
   - Convey the significance that staff-child connections have for the organization and to achieve program goals

Conclusion

Overall, this report conveys a compelling narrative of a program that offers dynamic and enriching opportunities for children, drawing on the talents and capacities of a committed group of staff. As researchers, we are inspired by both the accomplishments of this young program, and the potential of Studio R.O.C.K.S. The CentroNía after-school program has undergone significant change over the past year, demonstrating the organization's capacity to adjust its strategic decision making and programming to meet the needs of the children and families served. This ability to adapt and innovate will help the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program continues to grow and develop.

I. Introduction

Much of the current research on the well being of low-income children of color has focused on ways to mediate and support learning and social development (Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan, 2010), particularly beyond the school day (Granger, 2010). Many children of color, especially Latino youth, in urban school environments encounter a constellation of risk factors that impede learning and development. Most of the recent literature on out of school time (OST) programs has been focused on examining the link between program quality and the amelioration of youth risk factors. In fact, researchers have shifted their focus from *if* to *why* programs positively impact participants (Granger, 2010). Although there is compelling evidence that program inputs positively affect youth outcomes (Shernoff, 2010), one key challenge for future research is to define what high quality programs look like and to better understand how to improve program quality (Granger, Durlak, Yohalem, & Reisner, 2007).

Program Description

Studio R.O.C.K.S. (Reading, Outdoors, Creativity, Knowledge, and Self-Discovery) is a bilingual after-school program developed and implemented by CentroNía, a community based organization, located in the Columbia Heights neighborhood of Washington, D.C. The organization has 25 years of history as a service delivery organization primarily serving the needs of the Latino community. Since 2004, CentroNía's services include the DC Bilingual Public Charter School. The PreK to 5th-grade charter school is housed within the headquarters of the founding organization, as is Studio R.O.C.K.S.

The program Studio R.O.C.K.S. was established in 2009. During its first year, the program resembled typical models of after-school programs that offer interest clubs and academic support through tutoring and homework completion. The program was significantly restructured beginning in September 2010, with new leadership and increasing emphasis on curriculum development and training for staff.

The purpose of Studio R.O.C.K.S. is two-fold: to expand the academic learning and creative development opportunities available to DC Bilingual and CentroNía students and to expand the professional and creative development opportunities available to DC and School Age teachers (CentroNía, 2010). During its second year of operation, Studio R.O.C.K.S was transformed into a project-based, creative and physical arts curriculum delivered in 8-week cycles. Each cycle culminates with a presentation to the parents and community at large.

Each 8-week cycle is infused with a different theme, but the underlying link across them is the focus on the cultural strengths of the community. The curriculum emphasizes knowledge of the history of the local community, arts, and social justice. Studio R.O.C.K.S.' participants tend to reflect the demographic characteristics of the Columbia Heights neighborhood; approximately, 70% of participants are Hispanic, and many are native Spanish speakers. The other 30% of participants are also of diverse racial and

ethnic backgrounds. The program currently serves approximately 280 children between the ages of 5 and 12.

Program Context

The Studio R.O.C.K.S. program is embedded in the context of efforts developed in communities around the country to reach children during out-of-school time. Such efforts reflect a myriad of approaches to create programs that can have a positive impact on children's development. The Studio R.O.C.K.S. program is rooted in a particular approach to supporting learning and development based on culture, creative arts, and movement. The program is addressing the need to harness the capacity of after-school spaces to tackle challenges facing urban children, particularly the growing Latino school-aged population.

There is a mounting body of literature on what has been described as "the Latino education crisis." Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group, and it is predicted that they will comprise 25% of the school-age population within the next fifteen years. Yet, for the past three decades, Latino youth have lagged significantly behind their non-Latino white peers in overall school performance, as measured by attendance records, grades, test scores, and graduation rates, and this gap does not seem to be narrowing as Latino student populations expand. This national trend can also be observed at the local level in the Washington, D.C. area where Studio R.O.C.K.S. takes place.

Meanwhile, over the past decade, there has been considerable research on the role out-of-school time programs play in bolstering learning and social development beyond the school. There is compelling evidence that program inputs positively affect child outcomes (Shernoff, 2010). But surprisingly, little of the emerging scholarly work on this topic has focused on the impact of out-of-school time programs on Latino children's learning and development (Hirsch, Mekinda, & Stawicki, 2010). This research is sorely needed because of its important implications for programming and policy.

Furthermore, although work is still needed to determine the impact of programs for Latino children, there is a great challenge among those involved in this area to determine what the approaches or practices are that positively impact participants (Granger, 2010). In other words, there is a need to describe the qualitative aspects of after-school programs and how to improve them (Granger, Durlak, Yohalem, & Reisner, 2007). Researchers suggest that this reorientation reflects efforts to unpack the "Black Box" of community-level youth programs (Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010).

To begin exploring these issues, CentroNía partnered with American University's Center for Latin American and Latino Studies (CLALS) and American University's Collaborative for Urban Education, Research and Development (Collaborative) to conduct an evaluation study of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program that will help answer some of these questions.

Formative/Process Evaluation of Studio R.O.C.K.S.

The initial phase of the partnership between CentroNía and the American University (AU) research team began at the end of 2010. Members of the management staff of Studio R.O.C.K.S. met with the AU research team on several occasions to delineate the scope of the work. To make the research process more participatory, a number of stakeholders were involved, specifically CentroNía staff members (both managers and educators). They became part of a Steering Committee that helped make decisions about evaluation goals, questions, data collection procedures, and timeline. The staff at large was also consulted in a meeting before the actual evaluation began. The participatory nature of the evaluation was intended to enhance the utility of the study and its results for the organization.

In addition to holding meetings with stakeholders, during the planning phase, the AU research team conducted a comprehensive literature review around the dual themes of out-of-school programs and Latino youth. Based on these sources of information, the AU research team proposed that the first phase of the evaluation focused on describing the qualitative aspects of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program. That is, the team would conduct a formative or process evaluation of the program. The goals of the formative/process evaluation are discussed next.

Evaluation Purpose

The main objective of the formative or process evaluation was threefold: document and analyze how the program was implemented, what were the approaches or practices used, and what factors influenced practices and implementation. This included attention to factors such as organization and structure, staff and participant characteristics, content and activities, group characteristics, and program climate (Durlak, Mahoney, Bohnert, & Perente, 2007). Inherent in this approach was an interest in lesson plans and their modification. The evaluation also sought to document "point-of-service" interactions between stakeholders, such as educators and children or parents. This goal of the evaluation will serve to identify areas of strength and weakness in how the program is implemented and has tried to achieve its stated goals.

Another goal of this phase of the evaluation study was to explore, from the perspective of program staff (both educators and management), desired program outcomes as well as indicators of effectiveness or successful impacts on children.

Evaluation Questions

The key questions guiding the formative/process evaluation included the following:
1. How do staff (educators and management) describe (a) the short- and long-term goals of their classes or the program, (b) the way they or the program try to achieve those goals, and (c) indicators of success?
2. What are some of the strengths, challenges, and weaknesses of the program?
3. What kinds of supports do educators need and have available to them?

4. What are parents' expectations for the program and what level of involvement or engagement do they have with the program?

Methodology

In approaching these questions, the AU research team relied on a qualitative methodology that involved repeated observations of Studio R.O.C.K.S. "studios" or classes, semi-structured interviews with educators and management staff, and focus groups with educators. Data collection took place over a three-month period, from mid March 2011 through mid June 2011. This overlapped with two different eight-week studio "cycles." Researchers and Studio R.O.C.K.S. management selected a sample of 14 studios to observe that represented both a diversity of themes within the Studio R.O.C.K.S. curriculum, as well as the range of ages of participants.

Studios Observed in 1st Cycle		Studios Observed in 2nd Cycle	
Studio	Grade	Studio	Grade
Poetry	3rd-5th	1A/Int'l Focus	1st
Yoga	3rd-5th	1C/Around the World	1st
Boys on the Run	3rd-5th	1C/Visual Arts	1st
Drumming	3rd-5th	1D/Hip Hop	1st
Choir	3rd-5th	1D/IT Minis	1st
Robotics	3rd-5th	Literature Eats	KGN A
Sculpture	2nd		
Visual Arts	2nd		

Each studio was observed on three different occasions to ensure a broader understanding of classroom activities and dynamics. The AU research team paid particular attention to the interactions between students and teachers over the course of a studio cycle and not just on any given day. Following the third observation, educators were invited to take part in a "post-class reflection" conversation with researchers to talk about their perceptions of how the lesson went and to clarify any questions the researcher might have about what was observed. The AU research team also attended two community presentations over the course of the study.

Twenty-three interviews ranging from 30 minutes to one-hour were conducted with the educators observed and four management staff members. Finally, the AU research team conducted two focus groups with educators. There were four participants in the first focus group and five in the second. Six of the nine educators participating in the focus groups were also interviewed.

To analyze the data, the research team used a system of coding to identify themes and issues. In reporting findings, researchers have made every effort to preserve

confidentiality. Any names referenced are pseudonyms. The term "staff" is used throughout the document to refer to both educators and management. The findings reported below summarize recurring themes and topics that were noted in multiple observations or mentioned by multiple informants.

II. Staff Goals and Desired Outcomes for Children

A primary focus of this study was to capture multiple perspectives on what the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program aims to accomplish. In interviews and focus groups, staff members were asked to articulate their goals for the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program in general, and for the studios that they teach in particular. In some cases, these goals were also manifested in activities or teaching strategies observed in different classrooms. These goals can be divided into two categories: short-term and long-term. The short-term goals reflect staff members' thoughts and actions related to the day-to-day delivery of Studio R.O.C.K.S. In contrast, the long-term goals refer to the ways in which staff members envision the program would influence children over a period of ten or more years. Overall, staff tended to see the overarching goal of Studio R.O.C.K.S. as providing children with opportunities they would not otherwise have.

Short-Term Goals

The short-term goals identified centered on three specific areas of participant development and well-being: a) cognitive and academic development, b) socio-emotional development, and c) physical development.

Cognitive/academic development

In talking about their goals for Studio R.O.C.K.S., staff members often mentioned their desire for children to acquire specific skills or knowledge sets related to the studio themes taught. Both in classroom observations and in interviews, staff manifested their intent to help children acquire new capacities in a given discipline or activity, ranging from playing a rhythm from a particular musical genre to understanding how a motor works. Staff particularly emphasized exposing program participants to new topic areas or experiences to which children might not otherwise have access, such as yoga, sculpture, visual arts, or computer programming. One thread that appears to cut across studios is promoting learning about other countries and other cultures. Some researchers argue that culturally-based, arts centered, after-school programs support youth development (Wright, 2007), largely because they promote adaptive functioning (e.g. self-esteem, social skills, and leadership competencies) and lower behavioral problems (Mason & Chuang, 2001).

In some cases, educators used the theme of their studio as a medium for expanding children's knowledge about other more general topics, such as history or geography. As one educator related, "I have a very high standard for [the kids]. I know they are very young, but I feel like they need to know more about history. I always focus my lesson plan on learning something about history and practicing it."

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Some staff members also recognized Studio R.O.C.K.S. as a space for reinforcing academic learning that takes place during the regular school day. In some cases, staff described this goal in terms of developing direct connections between Studio R.O.C.K.S. lessons and school day curriculum. Others felt that Studio R.O.C.K.S. should serve more generally to help children build basic academic skills such as reading or writing:

> "I think we want to get to a point where there is a ton of communication that is happening from the Studio R.O.C.K.S. educators and the teachers of the students in those studios or classroom. So that, there is an understanding of how the students are doing in a classroom and how the [Studio R.O.C.K.S.] teacher can kind of help in some way. We try to think of it as extended learning time around the school time program, so that there is an actual building of skills that will help the child academically."

A number of staff members mentioned the importance of helping children with their homework during the after-school time program. As one staff member noted, "My suggestion would be to have more time to do homework. Because I know how important it is to have their art classes, and their PE or something, but helping them with their homework is very important for them, too." It is worth noting that staff often mentioned academic reinforcement and homework completion as the primary goal of many parents who enroll their children in Studio R.O.C.K.S.:

> "I feel that [parents] are more concerned about homework. I have some parents that have been asking me, 'Please help them to do homework because when we come home, we just have dinner, a time to shower, and then go to bed, and I don't have time to help them.' And many of them don't speak English or even Spanish the right way. So, they say, 'Please help me because I don't have time or I don't know how to help him or her with their homework.'"

> "I think a lot of parents are very concerned about academics, and they want them to do something that is geared towards academic stuff."

The issue of parent perceptions and valuing of Studio R.O.C.K.S. is discussed in further detail in proceeding sections.

Socio-emotional development

Many OST programs were initially created to support and promote the personal and social growth of youth through a range of adult supervised activities (Durlak et al., 2010). In fact, much of the developmental research literature suggests that children who participate in OST programs exhibit more socially acceptable behaviors (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Larson & Brown, 2007), engage in fewer at-risk activities (Mason & Chuang, 2001), and tend to do better in school (Darling, 2005; Fredericks & Eccles, 2006; Mahoney, Lord, & Carryl, 2005).

Staff members believe Studio R.O.C.K.S. is a place to not only build skills and expand knowledge related to particular disciplines, but also for children to develop as people. They are invested both in promoting the personal development of children, as well as their interpersonal development. There is considerable focus and energy directed to improving the ways that kids think and feel about themselves and how they interact with others.

Staff often strived to promote children's confidence, self expression and creativity. In embracing CentroNía's arts-based approach, Studio R.O.C.K.S. educators and administrators endeavor to create opportunities for children to share their creative selves and build self-esteem. A few staff members reflect this perspective:

> "The idea is to get kids to be more free in their creative expression, so whether that is just sitting in front of somebody and being able to tell a story, whether they sing it, whether they are moving to it, whether they are beating a drum while they tell it. All of those things just kind of open up their creativity, that will subsequently lead to better performance across the wide spectrum."

> "I feel like every child needs an outlet, no matter whether you are urban, suburban, no matter what. We encourage them to perform and feel like it is safe and okay to be up there. There is a lot of hidden talent. So, I am looking to uncover a lot of that, allow it to shine, because that can boost people's self esteem and self worth."

As a part of advancing children's socio-emotional development, many Studio R.O.C.K.S. educators also noted how they strive to help children cultivate certain life skills, such as discipline and self-motivation. In some cases, staff members noted how they aim to serve as role models or mentors for Studio R.O.C.K.S. participants, modeling the kinds of values they hope to instill in children.

> "[I hope] they will just try their best at anything and push themselves beyond what they think they can't do. Because when [the kids] first started, that was the first thing they would say: 'I cannot do this.' And I always tell them, 'Don't worry about it. You have to push yourselves even you are tired.'"

> "With this program we are strengthening the children to become men and women with a better future. Studio R.O.C.K.S. gives the children the tools so that they know how life is. They have to know that it is hard. But as time passes and through learning here, they are going to go forward."

Staff also focused their efforts on using Studio R.O.C.K.S. time to help children build a sense of ethnic pride and a connection to their communities of origin. Rotherham-Borus and Wyche (1994) contend that ethnic identity is an important factor of Latino psychosocial development. Further, researchers suggest that OST programs provide a supportive context for Latino youth to explore their ethnic identities (Umana-Taylor and Fine, 2001). In the context of Studio R.O.C.K.S., the culturally-based curriculum

nurtured ethnic pride and identity by celebrating the diverse heritages of its participants and fostering connections with the Columbia Heights neighborhood. Some staff underscored this stating:

> "Sometimes people forget what older generations did for them. Like people with Latino background, many of their grandparents or their parents came here in order to give them a better future. And I feel like part of my job is to teach them the importance of this, to feel proud of their roots."

> "Some parents told me that they were making a collage of the family, and the girl is of two races. She is Hispanic and black and she never knew anything about her mother's family. So through that [collage project] the girl knew more about her mother's family, and where her mother came from and how her mother grew up. So now the girl's Spanish is getting better, and she is accepting more the family that is the Hispanic part of the mother."

Finally, staff articulated with somewhat less frequency a number of other goals related to children's socio-emotional development, including building in children a sense of social consciousness, or developing teamwork and conflict resolution skills. In some cases, staff also mentioned their goal of ensuring that children experienced joy and enjoyment at Studio R.O.C.K.S.

Physical development

Much of the recent literature on the physical health and well-being of children and youth has focused on the personal and social costs of childhood obesity. Findings from a report by the After School Investment Project suggest that OST programs provide ideal venues for contributing to the improved health and physical activity of children and youth (The After School Investments Projects, 2006). Increasing the level of student physical activity, promoting good nutritional habits, and engaging parents to encourage healthy choices at home are a few of the important ways OST programs can support physical development. Studio R.O.C.K.S. staff appear to understand the linkages between nutrition, physical activity, and academic achievement. Action for Healthy Kids, a national advocacy organization devoted to combating childhood obesity, argue that poor nutrition and inactivity negatively impact learning and development (Action for Healthy Kids, 2004).

A number of Studio R.O.C.K.S. staff mentioned the promotion of children's physical health and development as a core objective of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program. Specifically, this included ensuring children understood the importance of healthful living habits, such as eating nutritious foods, as well as helping children acquire abilities in movement and coordination.

> "[I want the kids] to grow mentally and physically. Mentally, to be open to new things, to learn new things about the world beyond them. Physically, to grow and eat healthy. Exercise is part of our goal at CentroNía. We eliminate junk foods. So, whenever we see junk food, we as educators have to take it away, and that is

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beginning to yield results. So that is my major goal: to see them grow healthier and stronger."

Long-Term Goals

This evaluation also attempted to capture staff members' thinking about the long-term influence they hope the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program will have on the children served. Team members were asked what, ten years from now, they hoped that children would have gained from participating in Studio R.O.C.K.S. Many expressed a range of aspirations for the children the program served. These included their hopes that children would be enrolled in college, and have successful careers. There was a sense that the skills learned in Studio R.O.C.K.S. would contribute to the future success of program participants. Some described their long-term goals for Studio R.O.C.K.S. participants in terms of children adopting a particular orientation toward the world, for example showing openness to new ideas or charity toward others. Many also commented that they hoped kids would continue the practices they learned in Studio R.O.C.K.S., be that healthy eating or a particular artistic talent, and that they would then reap the long-term benefits of those habits. As one educator asserted, "I would love to see the children just continue to pursue their interest in the arts, whether they decide to choose that as a career or not."

Indicators of Success

Understanding the ways in which staff members gauge impact can offer further insights into the kinds of outcomes they are trying to achieve. One common way of determining success, which was both reported by staff and observed in the classroom, was to have children repeat back things they had learned in the studio. For example, at the beginning of the studio, children might be asked to remember what they had learned the day or week before, be it about an area of the globe or a new rhythm. In some cases, educators would even give kids little quizzes to test recall. As one educator related, "We do a circle time and ask them questions related to what we talked about last session, and whoever can answer them, they get like a point or maybe a prize, just to test what they learned, you know."

The community presentation was described as an important opportunity for demonstrating what children have learned in studios. In many cases, educators themselves report being surprised at how well children performed at the community performance as compared to in the studio itself.

> "When we do the [community] celebrations, you could see a lot of kids were involved, parents were involved, and the community is involved. So, I think that's the result right there. You can see they are talking about it and love Studio R.O.C.K.S. They tell you what they learned and then the parents are involved over time. I can see before parents who were not interested in coming for such an event, but now they show up and they have a great time and see their kids actually learned something."

> "So the moment when I feel our effectiveness is when we have our community festivals. And let's say there was a video editing studio—so when I was talking to the students and they would just be breaking down the way in which they shot the video, the way they edit the video, and they just really got into kind of more technical language, and I started saying wow, they are talking about it with passion and pride. That is special."

Staff members also look for other forms of more spontaneous feedback from children to determine if they are achieving their goals. For example, children might comment about how much they like certain activities, or might talk outside of Studio R.O.C.K.S. about the things they are doing and learning in their studios. Children also ask to be signed up again for certain studios that they enjoyed, or ask their parents to stay and wait for them to finish an activity.

> "That feels good when the kids are actually at home, and their parents are like, 'How was your day today?' and they mention like what we have done and their parents can verbatim repeat what they have done and that is exactly what we did. So that is cool, because that means that they actually are using what they are doing at home."

> "I used to ask the question, 'Hey, how did you like today's lesson? If you liked it, put your thumbs up, or if you didn't like it put thumbs down.' [The children] will tell you; they are critics. I get joy out of it when I say this and they are screaming and excited about something and you know they liked it. And, for instance, if you knew that a kid could not read in the beginning, and at the end of school year they are reading, you did something. So that's where I see like the value— that's where I get my most pride. It's just rewarding."

> "I look for a smile. It is like [the children's] eyes are already glowing and it's basically the same look that happens when you put a piece of candy in front of their face. Then I know that I am going on a right direction."

III. Strengths of Program Implementation

This study documents not only the goals that staff members have for the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program, but also the ways in which the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program is effectively implemented in practice. Overall, there is the sense among Studio R.O.C.K.S. staff members that the program is changing in positive ways that will lead to improved quality and outcomes for children in the long run, although there may be some "growing pains" associated with the transitions currently taking place. As compared to CentroNía's older afterschool program model of "clubs," the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program is much more structured. As one staff member noted, "In looking at the strengths of the program, I feel that there is a real deliberateness. You have to really focus and develop curriculum. So there has really been that shift." This new more structured enrichment program also draws more effectively on the particular strengths and talents of each educator. As one interviewee noted:

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"Now the folks who are musicians are teaching music, the folks who are artists are teaching art, the folks who have a fascination with projects and putting things together are teaching robotics. And I think that has been a really important part: giving educators opportunities to teach from a place of strength."

Richness of Studio R.O.C.K.S. curriculum

The variety of programming offered and the interest generated among participants are key strengths of the program. A wide range of studios are offered, and innovative activities are occurring within studios, many of which are arts-based and culturally rich. As one staff member noted, "I like all of the different programs that we have. I think we have more than any other school." Another positive development is that parents can choose which studios a child will attend. This generally means that participants will be more engaged with the topic of the studio. A staff member asserted, "We have a lot of opportunities. If you like arts, you can do arts. If you like sports, you can do sports. If you like visual arts, you can do it. So this is great." Children have also suggested new studios that CentroNía might offer.

The curriculum implemented in Studio R.O.C.K.S. classrooms draws on things that children are already interested in and can relate to, but at the same time broadens participants' horizons by introducing things unknown to them. One educator stated, "Initially to get them engaged I asked [the kids] what was important to them. You know, to try to make it about them as much as possible." This approach balances a fundamental pedagogical goal of meeting students where they are, while striving to expand their understanding of things previously unfamiliar to them. As one staff member intimated, "I think what we choose pretty much activities or topics that are not only relevant to the mission that we have sort of come up with, but that are also relevant to the population that we are dealing with. We are trying to meet them halfway, you know." In some cases, educators are able to effectively bridge those two goals, for example, asking children of Mexican heritage to share their experiences of Mexico before beginning a lesson about an ancient Mexican culture, or asking children to reflect on how it would be if there were no technology by sharing stories about places they have lived or visited where technology is less accessible.

Studio R.O.C.K.S. aims to instill structure in the curriculum, but in ways that allow educators a great deal of flexibility to draw on their own creativity and respond to children's interests. In general, educators try to be innovative and think from the perspective of children to determine how to package the content they want to impart in ways that ensure that kids will engage with the lesson. One educator explained:

"I kind of decide [a lesson] also just by putting myself as a first grader, what I would find interesting. And I also bounce it off my colleagues, because they are like, 'Okay, that sounds really boring, and I don't know even want to learn that.' So I change it to something else, or give it a twist so that it sounds more interesting or it's more hands on and [the children] are still getting the concepts.

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It's kind of like feeding them vegetables—it is just you have to find different way to serve it to them because you want them to eat it."

This approach to the Studio R.O.C.K.S. curriculum tends to bear fruit. In many classroom observations, it was noted that children were clearly engaged and enjoying themselves. One researcher recorded the following interaction in her second classroom observation: "Yesterday was really fun," one kid said. "Yeah, that was good, right?" the educator said. I think this was in reference to a special workshop they'd had the day before." Another set of observation notes read: "I can really see the kids enjoying themselves. In fact, the second time they practice it, they seem to be having so much fun dancing to the music that they forget about their singing and it turns out to be more shouted than sung."

Observations of children engaging joyfully in Studio R.O.C.K.S. tend to occur in moments where children are able to let go a bit, as opposed to in moments when they are asked to follow directions or do something academic in a way that is similar to a traditional school class. Freeze dance was clearly one of the activities that children enjoyed most, and was used in some cases as a reward for children's diligent participation in other activities.

Dedication of Staff

Perhaps the most important strength of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program is the level of dedication and commitment of staff. Educators and administrative staff alike "bring themselves" to the work of Studio R.O.C.K.S. in many ways. They are of diverse backgrounds: some have extensive prior teaching experience or pedagogical training and may even be teachers during the day, and others are skilled artists or experts in their given field; some grew up in communities similar to Columbia Heights and relate shared experiences with populations served by CentroNía, and others have a very different history, perhaps even growing up in another country with an entirely different schooling system. Overall, we noted that staff drew on their unique prior experiences and skill sets to contribute to building and improving Studio R.O.C.K.S. Thus, their diversity was reflected in the different ways that they conceived of and implemented the goals of the program.

Three primary factors motivate staff working within Studio R.O.C.K.S. The first is a love of children, including both their connection to the particular children they work with, and more broadly, their overall desire to impact children's lives. As one educator responded when asked the best thing about being part of Studio R.O.C.K.S., "I think it is more my connection with the kids. I think that's where my passion lies: with children." Secondly, staff members are motivated by their love of their "practice." It could be their passion for a particular art form, such as music or dance, or their passion for the art of "teaching." Often they are driven by their desire to share with others something that has enriched their lives. As one interviewee stated, "Every child needs arts and music, and that is just my personal opinion. I believe very strongly in learning about art. It enhances your life, but it also can help with other subject areas, and it helped me." Finally, Studio

R.O.C.K.S. staff members are inspired by their personal philosophy or mission in life, such as a commitment to social justice or to humanitarian ideals.

Resourcefulness of Staff

Another related strength of Studio R.O.C.K.S. is staff members' resourcefulness and capacity for innovation, including their ability to work around challenges in creative ways. Much of the content of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. curriculum is generated by educators themselves, who draw primarily on their own experiences, on help from their peers, or on outside resources, such as the internet, to design activities and lessons. As educators related:

> "I go and sit down in front of the computer and see what we can use. I have couple of accounts with [online educational sources], and they have a lot of material. I also go to the library and attempt to read things, and I talk to my co-workers because we have a lot of people here."

> "I just think of it as, okay, I did this when I was a kid, so I will try to do it with my kids, and see if they enjoy it. So that's basically how I come out with the lesson plans."

While the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program aims to provide support for educators in planning lessons, including arranging for coaching by other teachers or professional development trainings devoted to building curriculum, these resources were almost never mentioned by educators in describing the process of coming up with a lesson. In some cases, the decision to come up with lesson plans independently was one of personal preference. As one interviewee related, "I think it is easier when I make up stuff. Because if I have to follow other people's plans, that is the only time it does not come out right." In other cases, however, teachers merely found their own ideas and resources more useful than those provided by the program, and even suggested that the professional development sessions took needed time away from lesson planning.

Many educators found it useful to collaborate with their peers, and particularly their studio co-teacher, in designing lessons. One interviewee noted, "As far as other resources or support, it is nice to have my co-teacher with me. We plan together, which helps. I draw from a lot of what I have already done in my past and then try them modern it up, I guess, to make it more pertinent to [the kids]." Or as another educator related, "What [my co-teachers and I] do is more of a collective thing, so I don't really assert my vision or my thing like 100%. We just sort of come to the table and just kind of share what we are going to do next." Not all educators reported effectively planning together, and in some cases staff noted that the lead teacher took primary responsibility for planning.

CentroNía provides time for this kind of collaboration, although it has been noted that sometimes the time allocated is not enough. One interviewee reported:

> "We are meeting for professional development training, so that takes away a lot of time to plan, then they are upset when we are not having our lesson plans

completed. But it is like, when do you have the time? Because, you can't just do your lesson plan by yourself, you need to be with your partners."

Some educators carried out preparation for studios on their own time.

Educators also tended to take personal responsibility for ensuring they had the materials needed to carry out their lessons, including determining where to buy needed materials online or, in some cases, using their own funds to get materials from Target if they had not been provided by the program in time for the studio (for which they were reimbursed). As one interviewee commented, "I personally believe that we could use a lot more of supplies and resources than we have now, but I feel like we all learn to kind of use things in creative ways and go on." Educators also reported bringing materials from home in the case that they could not purchased needed supplies.

Many educators were innovative and demonstrated flexibility in their capacity to modify lessons based on students' reactions, as well as on unanticipated challenges, such as inconsistent attendance. As one educator recalled:

> "There were some adjustments that I made. For example, if I am going to work on the project with [the kids] and that was my plan, and it did not work out, I have to change my plan and do something else involved with the theme. Because maybe some students aren't there, and if you want to do a big project you have to include everyone. So we have to adjust things around."

In some cases, educators also spontaneously modify lessons because kids seem disengaged, or are not in the mood for that particular activity. An educator reported:

> "I will set a tentative plan idea of what I want them to do for the day, but I usually decide judging by their energy. They are actually better towards the end of the week. The beginning of the week like on Tuesdays, they have less energy, so I will try to mix it up and have more fun."

There were also cases in which educators perceived the lesson was not appropriate for the age group they were teaching, and so changed the activity to address the same theme in a way that catered to younger or older children.

Effective behavior management

Staff seems equipped with a range of behavior management strategies that effectively redirect children's behavior. These strategies ranged from the use of a "cool down corner," where a child can take time out to regroup, to having children repeat a pattern that an educator claps to show that they are attentive and listening. One set of observation notes mentions how an educator used a "gentle form of discipline which helped kids stay in line, but also feel valued and respected." In other observations notes, researchers noted a variety of different techniques used to maintain order, for example:

> "The kids were listening quietly and if one of them turned around or was not focused on the reader, the educator told them he would take away points (the summer points). This was very effective at getting them to focus."

> "The educator had well-behaved volunteers do the preparation. The educators use this technique called 'bubbles' where the students have to make bubbles with their mouths. I believe the idea is that they are focused on an activity and can't use their mouths to talk."

> "When the children came back into the room, it took a while to calm them down. The educator counted to three, they quieted down, and then the noise level rose again. Then she counted for 'la última vez,' and they quieted down for good."

Still other educators adjusted their responses to the particular child or circumstance. As one educator stated:

> "Sometimes kids, they have temper tantrums, you know. Because I know my kids very well. One specific student, he just boo-hoo cried, and I would say, just cool down, this will give time so you can be by yourself, reflect, you know, and when you are ready you can come back to the class."

In other cases, teachers would use Spanish with particular children when they were giving directions or imposing discipline. Educators also made efforts to use positive reinforcement as a strategy for ensuring good behavior, as noted in the following classroom observation: "Educator said to students, 'It's ok to have fun, but refocus.' Educator affirmed students periodically throughout the session by saying 'good job.'"

To some extent, Studio R.O.C.K.S. staff members establish a distinction between spaces and moments when kids are allowed to be loud, move around, and goof around, and instances when they need to follow a stricter protocol of discipline. Researchers described moments in the classroom in which educators seemed to appropriately allow a lesser degree of control:

> "Then the kids started chanting 'Justin Bieber' and jumping up and down, so the teacher turned on a song by Justin Bieber, and they went wild. Most of them knew most of the words, and sang them, while they danced like crazy and jumped around. When it was over, they started yelling, 'Again, Again!' The teacher said, 'Okay, última vez,' and played it one more time."

In other instances, for example when children were in transit from one space in the building to another, educators tended to maintain much stricter standards of discipline.

> "When we got by the water fountain, the teacher made everyone stop and waited for them to line up appropriately, not leaning against the wall. She told them that 'doing 100% is really important' and wouldn't let them continue to the classroom until their line was neat. Some kids were lined up nicely, others slouched against

the wall or were out of alignment and she reminded them that she would wait until everyone was ready."

Staff members did not consistently make this distinction between appropriate moments for imposing tight restrictions on children's behavior and moments for allowing much freer movement or talk by children. In some cases, less emphasis on quiet and control would be helpful, for example in classroom exercises where kids might benefit from talking with their peers and relaxing a bit more. On the other hand, there are incidences when more control should be exercised, for example in leading children to walk from one building to another.

Connection between staff and Studio R.O.C.K.S. participants

Finally, there is a close connection between Studio R.O.C.K.S. staff members and children participants. Educators tend to be closely engaged with children during classroom activities, even at times when children are doing an independent activity, like reading or drawing. Many instances were noted of educators using a wide range of approaches to engage children, for example, trying to make kids laugh by acting goofy, making faces, or dancing in funny ways. One classroom observation noted that "the dynamic is very fun/let loose/laugh at ourselves between the educators and the kids."

In classroom interactions, staff members often talk to children in ways that reflect a high level of respect, and in ways that encourage and empower them. As described in classroom observation notes:

> "The educator said to one kid, 'Can you do me a favor? Can you start cleaning up? Such a great helper.' Then to another, 'Jamie, I think you are the leader. So lead us.' Another kid's guardian came, 'Francisco, time to go,' the teacher said. 'Francisco, thank you for coming.'"

Educators also often exhibit a tenderness and sensitivity to children's feelings in classroom interactions, as shown in the following observation:

> "The educator told the class, 'I don't know how to thank you enough for paying such good attention.' She told them that they would read their stories at the next presentation. She said that she loved Amy [child], but she would be last to read next time because she went this time. Amy said, 'That's fine with me,' and the educator said, 'I knew you would say that. Because you're a team player.' One kid said, 'Amy did good on the Spanish project too,' and the educator said, 'You're all doing good. It's not about who does better or worse. You're all good.'"

Staff is often able to connect with different children in different ways, taking into account children's backgrounds, and making a point to understand their distinct strengths and vulnerabilities, as well as their likes and dislikes. Some educators noted that developing this kind of a close relationship was more difficult with their studio participants than their

home room participants, since they had less time with studio participants given the changing schedule and inconsistent attendance patterns.

Overall, staff members seem to feel a deep love for the children in the program. Researcher observation notes describe moments where a child reaches up to take an educator's hand while she is giving instructions, or a child leans his head against an educator's shoulder while sitting in a circle on the floor. The following classroom observation captures this intensity of feeling:

> "At one point in the class, an older (12 years old?) boy appeared at the door with what looked like his dad. The educator saw him and yelled out, jumped up and ran over to him and gave him a hug. She held his cheeks in her hands, and the boy smiled. 'Thank you for bringing him,' she said to the adult. She came back in and explained to me that the boy had been in her class."

IV. Challenges and Recommendations

Finally, this evaluation of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program aimed to identify areas where improvements might be made that would enhance the program and ultimately lead to improved outcomes for the children and families served. The following section outlines five challenges that were both observed by researchers and noted by multiple interviewees. Recommendations are offered for addressing each particular challenge.

1. Organization of Studio Schedules

One of the most significant challenges faced by Studio R.O.C.K.S. relates to the scheduling of different studios. Studios are currently offered in approximately 8-week cycles, and children attend two studios per cycle which meet either on Mondays and Wednesdays or on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Staff members noted that a more complicated studio schedule had been tried earlier in the year, and many appreciated the adoption of this somewhat simpler schedule. However, the current schedule still involves multiple studios occurring during a week, and many changes in the studios offered over the course of the year. The schedule is not being implemented in a way that gives educators sufficient time to plan their studios.

One recurring problem is that educators often do not know what studio they are teaching far enough in advance to be able to sufficiently prepare lessons. This issue becomes particularly problematic when educators are assigned to teach a topic about which they have little previous knowledge or familiarity. Given that educators are often generating curriculum content by drawing primarily on their own ideas and resources, a significant amount of time is needed to develop a series of lesson plans. Moreover, as studios change each session, many educators must repeat this process every couple of months. As one educator commented:

"I would say just overall being a tad bit more organized with us knowing what we are going to do before it actually comes that date. For instance, I did not know I was going to be teaching this studio until about a week before. So, I feel like that is something I could have known eight weeks ago. I had a little bit more freedom in making choices of what I wanted to do, but other people in the group don't— they are kind of given what they are going to do, and I don't think they are ready."

There are also relatively frequent last minute changes to studio schedules that create disruptions and confusion, not only for staff but for parents as well. As one staff member recommended, "Structure wise, it could be a little bit more organized--just more consistent on certain things and just not be very last minute on certain things. More organization is definitely always good."

The abovementioned challenges related to scheduling also lead to problems in ensuring that materials are available in a timely manner. Staff members generally affirmed that needed supplies were provided by the program, but often commented that these materials arrived weeks into the studio session, which became an impediment to carrying out the curriculum they had planned. Support was generally provided to educators who chose to purchase their own materials, but this solution is inefficient and relies too heavily on educators. As one educator reported, "The financial support for buying supplies was good. I think the organizational support was not. So, I was often able to get the things I would like, but I would often not know what I was teaching until Friday before the first class."

Recommendations:

- *Implement the current schedule with greater advance notice and consistency.*

Educators need to know what studio they are teaching further in advance so that they can adequately prepare lessons, and so that materials for the studio can be acquired in time. Ensuring this occurs may merely involve beginning the process of determining the upcoming studio schedule earlier in the cycle. This problem might also be solved by implementing the same studio schedule used in the previous year.

- *Consider adopting a simpler studio schedule.*

Simplifying the studio schedule would limit the number of times studios change during the year, and, thus, the numbers of studios for which educators need to prepare. One option would be to lengthen the period of each studio cycle (i.e. longer than eight weeks) to allow further time to settle in to a rhythm of class. Another option would be to have kids only participate in one studio per cycle (i.e. for four days of the week). We recommend brainstorming with teachers to determine an appropriate alternative that addresses some of the challenges currently being experienced.

2. Participant Attendance

Inconsistent attendance of Studio R.O.C.K.S. participants is another major challenge that hampers the program's ability to achieve desired outcomes. Some studio participants are concurrently enrolled in tutoring, and thus regularly miss studios to attend tutoring on certain days. In some cases, these children return to participate in their studio at the end of the multi-week cycle. Cases were also reported of children participating in more than one studio on the same day. In observation notes, researchers describe educators from another classroom coming to pull children from the studio being observed, often to the surprise of the educator being observed.

The most common reason for children missing studio time is that parents regularly arrive early to pick children up, sometimes even showing up only minutes after a lesson has started. Educators reported asking parents to wait until a child could at least finish the activity at hand, but this request was often denied.

These variances in attendance lead to multiple difficulties for educators. Firstly, a child leaving during a lesson creates an interruption in the classroom that can disturb the concentration of other students. Secondly, class sizes vary greatly, not only from one day to the next, but even within a given day; a lesson might start with 18 children and end with six. One educator summarized:

> "Sometimes I don't have the same students from one class to another. Right now I have a group of 31 students, but around 12 of them are always in tutoring during that time. So, I have never seen them before. And then we have the class at 04:30 p.m. and we finish at 05:30 p.m., but by the end of the class some of [the kids] have already left. And it is very hard for me to work with all of them on the same lesson because some of them are already finished, some are in the middle, and some are in the beginning."

The inconsistent attendance pattern of Studio R.O.C.K.S. participants is incompatible with the kinds of cumulative or project-based learning that the program aims to implement. It is very difficult for children to build skills or knowledge when they miss lessons or activities that are designed in sequence. This challenge is particularly acute when children only attend a given studio two times during a week, and when studios change frequently throughout the year. Missing one class thus constitutes missing half a week of material in an 8-week long cycle.

Attendance issues interfere with preparation for the community performance, which is generally a big focus for educators, and which shapes the use of classroom time. The following studio observation illustrates this point:

> "Each rehearsal became even harder to coordinate, since some students left in the middle of class. So the educator would read a part— for example, 'the butterfly does x'—and there would be a pause and nothing would happen, and some other

student would say the person who is supposed to be the butterfly left. The students adapted quickly to the change, but it was somewhat frustrating."

In some cases, the frustration of participants missing studios in the lead up to the community performance created tensions between educators and children. Instances were noted where children were asked to do other tasks (i.e. homework) rather than participate in the studio activities because they had missed too many lessons to be able to perform, or because they reported they wouldn't be able to attend the performance. In other cases, educators made efforts to incorporate children who had missed multiple lessons into the final presentation, for example by creating a simpler auxiliary part for them.

Recommendations:

Ideally, Studio R.O.C.K.S. could find ways to work with parents to ensure consistent attendance. Recommendations to advance this goal are listed under the "Parental Engagement" section below. Absent a change in parent behavior, these are steps Studio R.O.C.K.S. might independently take to address this incompatibility between current attendance patterns and the Studio R.O.C.K.S. curriculum.

- *Minimize/eliminate conflict between studios and other CentroNía activities (i.e. tutoring).*

The fact that children who attend tutoring also participate in studios on a "part-time" basis interrupts the studio structure and also gives the impression that tutoring is more important than studio time. To address this conflict, children who are in tutoring could refrain from participating in studios during that cycle, or at least from a studio that meets on the day that they have tutoring.

- *Enroll children with inconsistent attendance in non project-based studios.*

Some studios are less oriented toward project-based learning than others (for example, Boys and Girls on the Run). If it is determined that a child will not be able to attend studios on a consistent basis, she/he might be precluded from participating in studios shaped around sequential lessons and activities. Instead, she/he could be encouraged to enroll in a studio that is less dependent on children's regular attendance.

- *Consider shortening the active studio time to 45 minutes.*

Limiting the time dedicated to structured studio activities to 45 minutes, and shifting to free play time at 5:15pm, would give parents greater flexibility to pick children up early if needed. If lessons are well prepared ahead of time and materials laid out to limit transition times, 45 minutes could be sufficient for carrying out a quality lesson.

- *As a last resort, modify curriculum to accommodate inconsistent attendance.*

An alternative to altering attendance patterns to comply with the curriculum would be to modify the curriculum to accommodate less predictable attendance patterns. In at least some studios, curriculum could be designed so that single-day lessons are complete in themselves, or even broken up into a series of activities that stand alone but are still related to the overarching theme of the studio session (i.e. the world beyond me).

3. Parental Engagement

Over the past year, Studio R.O.C.K.S. has shifted from a less-structured after school program that primarily emphasized homework help to a highly structured enrichment program that highlights arts-based and project-based learning. This change has impacted not only staff members and child participants, but also parents. To some extent, there is a misalignment between parental attitudes and behaviors and the new Studio R.O.C.K.S. agenda and structure.

First, some parents' priorities for how their children spend their after-school time do not seem to correspond with the new Studio R.O.C.K.S. enrichment curriculum. There is a clear sense among Studio R.O.C.K.S. staff that project- and arts-based programming is valuable in itself, and can also indirectly contribute to other areas of children's development, including academic performance. However, this conviction does not seem to be shared by many parents, who may see doing math homework as contributing more to their child's success than learning to play the drum. As noted in the section on "Desired Outcomes," many parents may tend to value an approach to learning that is more directly connected to children's academic outcomes—for example tutoring or activities more akin to those of the regular school day—over the types of enrichment programming that Studio R.O.C.K.S. offers. Educators noted that some parents seemed concerned that not enough time was devoted to homework help as opposed to the other activities that children pursue during Studio R.O.C.K.S. time.

Secondly (as previously noted), parents' practice of removing children from studios before lessons are scheduled to end interrupts the project-based curriculum that Studio R.O.C.K.S. aims to promote. Some staff interpreted this behavior as an indicator of parents' low prioritization of Studios R.O.C.K.S. activities, noting the fact that parents would not interrupt a school class or tutoring session in the same way. However, staff also often recognized that parents might have other motives for picking children up early from Studio R.O.C.K.S., for example, needing to go to a second job. Staff members seem to rely primarily on piecemeal information from interactions with parents to assess parent priorities and constraints. As these motives were sometimes merely speculated because of lack of clear communication between staff and parents, educators often felt undervalued by parents who arrived early. As one interviewee commented:

> "When we have the community celebrations, [the parents] are so happy once they see everything that [the kids] have been doing. Then again, with some kids, it's the night of the performance and they have been practicing this whole time and

the parents are like, 'Oh, it is time to go home. It is past 6 o'clock and it is time to go,' and they don't perform something they have been practicing this whole time, so that is heartbreaking to see."

Improving parental engagement is a challenge that staff regularly mentioned, and efforts have been made to create more linkages between parents and Studio R.O.C.K.S. Nonetheless, these efforts do not seem to have generated the kind of connection and lines of communication between parents and Studio R.O.C.K.S. that would lead to best outcomes for children.

Recommendations:

- *Establish systematic ways of soliciting input and feedback from parents.*

Collecting greater information from parents in more systematic ways would be helpful for aligning parent expectations and behaviors with Studio R.O.C.K.S. program structures and delivery. Studio R.O.C.K.S. might consider administering a survey to parents to gather information about their expectations for the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program, any anticipated barriers or constraints in terms of studio attendance, and ideas or suggestions about how potential problems with attendance could be addressed with help from the program or other people in the community. In addition, Studio R.O.C.K.S. could establish a periodic process of gathering feedback about parents' satisfaction with the program, including perceived strengths and weaknesses. Making program decisions that take into account parents' feedback should help improve parental engagement, and specifically practices related to studio attendance. For instance, data about parental availability collected while kids sign up for studios could help plan for studios and schedules that will better fit those needs.

- *Find ways to communicate to parents the value and intent of enrichment activities.*

While the community performances have been noted as moments in which parents can realize and appreciate the value of Studio R.O.C.K.S. activities for their children, there might be other opportunities to communicate the aims of Studio R.O.C.K.S. enrichment activities, perhaps in terms of things that parents care about—for example, sharing specific examples of how an arts-based activity is contributing to reading skills. This communication might occur at DC Bilingual meetings that parents are already attending. Perhaps even having school teachers endorse Studio R.O.C.K.S. and emphasize the ways in which the enrichment curriculum reinforces and strengthens what is done in school would communicate program benefits. It may also be helpful to better clarify to parents the distinction between school time and Studio R.O.C.K.S., and the unique value of each.

4. Teaching Strategies and Curriculum Development

Studio R.O.C.K.S. has not yet developed an institutionalized curriculum model. While Studio R.O.C.K.S. leadership has played an important role in defining the program's

goals and structures, including establishing processes for developing more deliberate lesson plans, the actual content of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. curriculum is primarily generated by educators themselves. As noted above, this constitutes one of the program's strengths, as educators innovatively draw on their own prior expertise and knowledge, as well as outside resources, to construct lessons. However this "learn-as-you-go" approach is also problematic in that it has not been accompanied yet by systematic documentation that will generate a replicable Studio R.O.C.K.S. curriculum model. Through an evolving and organic process, a model is being shaped, as educators accumulate knowledge and experience by trying new things and seeing what works. However, this "institutional memory" of Studio R.O.C.K.S. and its curriculum is housed in staff members themselves, as opposed to documented for future use.

Studio R.O.C.K.S. also does not count on a systematized set of teaching strategies for implementing curriculum. Not only what is taught, but also how it is taught varies from classroom to classroom and educator to educator. While staff members seem to draw from a somewhat standardized set of tools for behavior management, they do not seem to have this same repertoire of techniques for designing and executing classroom activities. Training might lead to more widespread use of teaching strategies the staff agrees upon as best practices for Studio R.O.C.K.S. A number of areas were noted where teaching strategies varied.

The first relates to what is done when students are not grasping the content of a lesson. Teachers often use modeling as a way of teaching skills or imparting knowledge, demonstrating a given task and asking the children to repeat. While in some cases this approach was effective, in others it was clear that learning needed to be broken down into smaller steps for children to effectively grasp the concept or task being presented. Moreover, in cases where children were not understanding or able to execute a particular activity, educators were not always able to present the instructions in different ways, as opposed to merely repeating the same instructions.

Another area is in the age appropriateness of activities and topics. The sophistication of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. curriculum is one of its strengths, as it exposes children to wide variety of topics and experiences that are often outside of their daily reality. But in some cases, educators are challenged to find ways to present these themes or tasks in ways that meet the needs of a particular age group. In part because educators often change the grade level that they are teaching, they may struggle to adjust to the particular capacities of the new age group, and in particular may present materials in ways that are not ideal for younger children.

Two other areas where strategies varied were in the exploration of creativity and use of play. While the Studio R.O.C.K.S. curriculum is clearly arts-based, and thus suggests a creative approach, some themes might be taught in methods that offer greater opportunities for children to generate their own ideas and use their imagination. Finding more ways to teach children through play can also help distinguish Studio R.O.C.K.S. as an after-school space, where learning occurs but children are not necessarily expected to behave in the same manners as they do during the school day. Having already spent all

day in school, it seems important that the after-school hours are a time to play and have fun, albeit in a structured fashion that promotes development and learning.

Although staff members reported that structures are in place to provide teachers with support for building curriculum and developing teaching capacity, such as professional development trainings around particular themes, these resources were not seen as consistently useful and were not often referred to in conversations about how lessons are planned and implemented. Some educators made specific requests for further training, particularly to teach topics that are less familiar to them. As one interviewee noted, "Another thing I wish could happen: If we have a class that you want us to teach, like if we could have training in it. So, like if we were teaching X, we can have lessons in it, and that way we can implement it and teach it."

Recommendations:

- *Establish systems for documenting curriculum as it is developed.*

If Studio R.O.C.K.S. is meant to be a model, a system needs to be established to capture what is done in the classroom, assess what works and what doesn't, and enable successful lessons to be replicated in the future. Otherwise, the curriculum will continue to be staff-dependent and reinvented each time. A documentation system should be developed that allows staff to consistently record successes and challenges in the classroom, with space for noting the effectiveness of different lessons or activities. To be sustained, it is important that this system is not overly burdensome on educators.

- *Provide greater support for curriculum development that builds on educator strengths.*

Through a systematic process, program staff can identify the teaching strategies that best address the curriculum and their specific lesson goals. Helping educators build on their own ideas and experiences, and further develop lessons that they have already found successful, or that they are excited about teaching, can expand the moments of great teaching that are already occurring. Specific areas where educators might benefit from curriculum development training include:

- Adapting activities to students' age or developmental/skill level. This can be useful when the studio curriculum is used with different age groups or when the class consists of students at different developmental or skill levels;
- Breaking learning down into component parts that children can more easily grasp
- Promoting learning through play, as opposed to just replicating school time structures and activities
- Offering more opportunities for children to develop their imagination and creativity by generating their own ideas

To add to or modify this list, we recommend soliciting input from educators regarding areas in which they would like further support or training.

5. Valuing of Staff

There is variance in degree to which staff members feel listened to, appreciated, and respected as part of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. team. In particular, there is in some cases a difference in the way that Studio R.O.C.K.S. educators who are also DC Bilingual day teachers are viewed and valued as compared to those who only serve as after-school educators. One educator described this differentiation as reflected in the attitudes of the children:

> "[Children] have this differentiation between you know, these are my teachers and these are my after-school teachers. And we have been working that all the way to get that kind of respect. You know, even though we are after-school teachers, we are still the teachers. You still have to listen to us, and if you do not listen to us, you still have to face the consequences."

Staff did not unanimously and consistently feel that their ideas were accepted and valued by others. Some noted ways in which channels of communication, particularly between educators and management, should be improved. As one interviewee explained, "I feel like each teacher is special in their own way, so their ideas should be heard. You're trying to give feedback and there is not a space to do that." It is important to note, however, that many staff members mentioned feeling a closeness and acceptance as part of the CentroNía family, despite these challenges.

As in many community-based organizations, Studio R.O.C.K.S. staff members at all levels are motivated by their commitment to the goals of the organization. In general, staff are overstretched and undercompensated for the invaluable contributions they are making to society as a whole. While budget constraints may dictate that staff salaries remain fixed in the short term, there are ways to make if possible for staff to feel valued and appreciated for their work.

Enhancing staff retention and increasing opportunities for staff capacity building will be critical for ensuring that, in these early stages of developing the Studio R.O.C.K.S. model, the program and the staff can grow together.

Recommendations:

- *Establish more ways of showing mutual appreciation among staff*

Studio R.O.C.K.S. should build in more ways of celebrating staff for their efforts and successes. For example, while there is the need to increase professionalization among educators over time, it is also important to recognize the abilities, talents and labors of those with less formal training. Strategies might include increasing verbal or written acknowledgement of staff contributions, inviting staff members to share their successes

or report successes they observed of other staff, or organizing small events to celebrate staff accomplishments.

- *Expand opportunities for more open communication among staff*

The program would benefit from more systematized opportunities for communication among educators and administrators. In particular, the staff members who interface with parents and students should feel more welcome to share their inputs and recommendations.

- *Work to increase staff compensation over time*

Concurrent with the staff capacity building program, efforts should be made to increase staff compensation accordingly. Pay increases should be considered when applying for additional funding, and staff should be kept informed of these efforts. Ideally, CentroNía could support a core group of staff who stay on, not only out of personal commitment, but because the professional development opportunities and compensation are compelling enough to sustain for the years needed to solidify the Studio R.O.C.K.S. model.

Conclusion:

Studio R.O.C.K.S. is a growing and dynamic after-school program that draws on many areas of strength to provide quality enrichment experiences for children participants. This process evaluation was able to identify many ways in which the program is offering a rich and meaningful experience for participants, as well as to document the aspirations program staff have for improving and expanding impact. Overall, this report tells the story of a committed group of people who draw on their unique talents and capacities to serve the children and families of Studio R.O.C.K.S. As researchers, we are inspired by both the accomplishments and the potential of the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program.

The CentroNía after-school program has undergone significant change over the past year, demonstrating the organization's capacity to adjust its structures and programs to meet the needs of the children and families served. This ability to change and adapt will help the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program continue to develop in positive directions. Next steps are already in place to continue the partnership between AU and CentroNía, and we believe the proposed follow-up plan will help Studio R.O.C.K.S. address a number of the challenges identified in this report, as well as to continue to build on the strengths identified. We look forward to working together toward the mutual goal of continuing to enhance and improve the Studio R.O.C.K.S. program.

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