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# SOMETHING TO SAY:

SUCCESS PRINCIPLES FOR AFTERSCHOOL ARTS PROGRAMS FROM URBAN YOUTH AND OTHER EXPERTS

*What the Wallace Foundation Report Means for Rhode Island*

The recent report released by the Wallace Foundation takes a marketplace approach finding out how to better engage youth, particularly “tweens” (grades five through eight), in urban communities in afterschool arts programs. While the afterschool field tends to focus on expanding access to high quality programs, this report provides an important perspective, that of the young people participating. Tweens, who tend to “vote with their feet”, have a major say in what activities they participate in. By listening to 200 young people about their involvement in arts programs, the report offers some interesting findings about what youth are really looking for in an arts program. While the report focuses on the arts, the criteria are applicable across program content.

In addition to featuring Riverzedge Arts, an Rhode Island-based organization that provides teens in Woonsocket with hands-on work experience in graphic design, digital media and visual arts (see back for feature on RiverzEdge), the report shares findings on what youth are looking for as well as ten common principles for exemplary youth arts programs, such as RiverzEdge.

## Ten Principles for Effective, High-Quality Afterschool Arts Programs

1. Instructors are professional, practicing artists, and are valued with compensation for their expertise and investment in their professional development.
2. Executive directors have a public commitment to high-quality arts programs that is supported by sustained action.
3. Arts programs take place in dedicated, inspiring, welcoming spaces and affirm the value of art and artists.
4. There is a culture of high expectations, respect for creative expression and affirmation of youth participants as artists.
5. Programs culminate in high-quality public events with real audiences.
6. Positive relationships with adult mentors and peers foster a sense of belonging and acceptance.
7. Youth participants actively shape the programs and assume meaningful leadership roles.
8. Programs focus on hands-on skill building using current equipment and technology.
9. Programs strategically engage key stakeholders to create a network of support for both youth participants and the programs.
10. Programs provide a physically and emotionally safe place for youth.

Download the full report, watch the videos, and access all materials related to the report at:

[www.wallacefoundation.org/somethingtosay](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/somethingtosay)



RHODE ISLAND AFTERSCHOOL PLUS ALLIANCE

AN EDUCATION INITIATIVE OF



United Way of Rhode Island



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# SPOTLIGHT

## RiverzEdge Arts Project

To support the development of the ten principles shared in the *Something to Say* report, RiverzEdge Arts Project was identified as an exemplary OST arts organization and was chosen as one of eight organizations chosen for the case study. RiverzEdge, which serves youth ages 18-24 in Woonsocket, RI.

In the report, RiverzEdge is highlighted in connection with several key principles. RiverzEdge maintains engagement in their programs by setting high expectations for youth. RiverzEdge achieves this culture by engaging youth in professional contracts, such as for graphic design projects. Participants, similarly to in apprenticeships, are held to professional standards and



are paid a stipend for their work.

In addition to creating high expectations for youth, RiverzEdge also provides leadership and peer mentoring opportunities for youth and cultivates student voice, providing opportunities for youth to design projects based on community and local issues they care about.

Click [HERE](#) to view a video that showcases RiverzEdge.

For more information about RiverzEdge, visit their website: [www.riverzedgearts.org](http://www.riverzedgearts.org)

### ARE YOU A STE(A)M ORGANIZATION?

For more information on RIASPA's upcoming STE(A)M work, visit our website:

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## SOMETHING TO SAY:

### SUCCESS PRINCIPLES FOR AFTERSCHOOL ARTS PROGRAMS FROM URBAN YOUTH AND OTHER EXPERTS

High-quality arts programs can offer young people skills, confidence, and delight. Still, youth in low-income, urban areas can be elusive. What attracts "tweens"—ages 10 to 13—to exemplary programs and keeps them coming back? We asked them directly—and parents and professionals, too—in this national research study. Download it for free at [www.wallacefoundation.org/somethingtosay](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/somethingtosay).

#### TWEENS CAN BE ELUSIVE—SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY WANT

Tweens drive decisions about their free time.

"I have 75% of the power. I make more of the decision. I say there's a thing I think I want to do."



Tweens need their interest sparked quickly.

"I don't want to talk about it a lot; I want to just get straight to it."



Tweens demand—and can define—high-quality.

"(I want) a teacher that knows what they're talking about."



#### EXEMPLARY YOUTH ARTS PROGRAMS SHARE 10 COMMON PRINCIPLES, SUCH AS:

Instructors are **professional, practicing artists**, and are valued with compensation for their expertise and investment in their professional development.

"They've gotta be famous... or a professional. If not, then at least top notch, 'the best in New Jersey...'"



Programs culminate in **high-quality public events with real audiences**.

"It makes you feel good, it makes you feel special, other people can see my work."



Programs focus on **hands-on skill building** using current equipment and technology.

"The fact that our equipment is quality and relatively new is a huge draw, it is typically not something the youth can access at home."

Kassandra VerBuggen  
Executive Director of  
Say Hip Productions



#### LEARN MORE FROM THIS NATIONAL STUDY

- 250+ low-income teen, tween, and parent interviews
- In-depth expert interviews
- Lessons from exemplary programs

It's the kind of market research seldom made public. Download the full report. Watch the videos. All free at [www.wallacefoundation.org/somethingtosay](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/somethingtosay).



Adapted from *Something to Say: Success Principles for Afterschool Arts Programs from Urban Youth and Other Experts*

Excerpt from the infographic adapted from *Something to Say: Success Principles for Afterschool Arts Programs from Urban Youth and Other Experts*

## New Urban Arts



While not included in the case study portion of *Something to Say*, New Urban Arts, an arts organization in Providence, was also highlighted for its best practices in engaging "tweens". One element that is key to New Urban Arts' success are the engaging mentorship relationships that are developed between youth and artists mentor. Artist mentors guide youth through their projects, share skills, but also support students in their social and emotional needs that extend beyond the program. New Urban Arts cultivates these mentoring relationships by promoting a culture that values learning and supports experimentation. New artist mentors participate in leadership training and are teamed up with peer mentors who provide advice, resources, and support to new mentors.

For more information about New Urban Arts, visit their website: <http://newurbanarts.org/>