

# Quality Matters



UNITED WAY OF GREATER KANSAS CITY

## The Issue

Educators, youth development experts, parents, and civic leaders universally recognize the immense challenges of adequately preparing youth for life and career success in today's complex and rapidly changing society. Every system serving children and youth is increasingly asked to generate more developmental outcomes, often with diminishing resources.

### The Critical Investment:

A national evaluation of after-school effectiveness revealed a key insight into how programs are successful in measurably increasing youth outcomes. Successful programs commit to specific quality practices. Conversely, in the evaluation programs without specific quality practices had no effect. Recognizing the critical importance of ensuring after-school programs implement these quality practices, the United Way launched the Quality Matters initiative in 2009. Since that time, nearly \$3 million has been invested to train staff in more than 200 programs. Participants have included both school district sites and community-based organizations, serving urban, suburban, and rural students. During the current academic year, more than 55 sites will participate in Quality Matters with a cumulative reach of more than 8,000 students.

## The Approach

United Way of Greater Kansas City utilizes the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI), a continuous quality improvement process offered by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, Ypsilanti, Michigan. The Weikart Center administers the YPQI to more than 4,000 programs in more than 30 states, which positively impacts more than 300,000 children and youth nationwide.

The YPQI quality improvement process is based in positive youth development research, which stresses the transformative effects of creating a safe, supportive, and productive environment for youth. When sites create this type of environment, children and youth flourish and positive learning and development occurs.

## Why it matters

Employers increasingly ask for a workforce better equipped with skills such as initiative, persistence, problem-solving, adaptability, and empathy. Employers also report that despite the numerous opportunities in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields, many applicants lack the needed skills. After-school programs are ideally suited to develop these skills in youth. Yet research clearly shows that measurable change is found only in programs committed to utilizing specific quality practices. The United Way Quality Matters initiative strengthens program quality to ensure children and youth receive the support they need to capably step into the societal roles of tomorrow.

## Our Partners

Youth development organizations embrace Quality Matters as a resource for making the maximum difference for children and youth in our region (complete list of participating partners is available).

United Way is also pleased to partner with a range of research and technical assistance partners, including:

