THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
UTAH EDUCATION POLICY CENTER

Afterschool Quality Improvement Grant

Year Three Evaluation 2020-21

Prepared by the Utah Education Policy Center
on behalf of the Utah Department of Workforce Services
Office of Child Care

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THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
UTAH EDUCATION
POLICY CENTER

Bridging Research, Policy, and Practice

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Purpose

In 2018, the Department of Work Force Services Office of Child Care (DWS-OCC) initiated the Afterschool Quality Improvement (AQI) grant program. Supported by the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), the DWS-OCC allocated grants to 8 organizations that operate 14 afterschool program sites for a period of three years (July 2018 through June 2021). The grant seeks to address the critical need for quality out-of-school programming in rural and high poverty areas. To this end, grantees were required to develop program structures that provide students with academic support and prevention education, involve students' families in program activities, facilitate the professional learning of staff and volunteers, and work more closely with schools and community partners.

Evaluation Background

To measure program impact, the DWS-OCC contracted with the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) to conduct an external evaluation for each year of the grant. The first annual evaluation report (2018-19) focused on AQI program structure and student academic outcomes. The second annual evaluation report (2019-20) explored the impact of quality improvement initiatives, focusing on the specific work of grantees to improve quality of programming. The findings from the first two years of the AQI evaluation indicated that grantees would benefit from additional support for prevention data collection and utilization. Therefore, this third year evaluation (2020-21) tracks the AQI grantee teams as they engaged in a monthly Community of Practice (CoP) and monthly grantee data meetings to study the continuous improvement cycle using their individual program's prevention data.

Report Organization

As outlined in the amended DWS-OCC contract, this Year Three report includes: (1) A summary of the continuous improvement activities that occurred during monthly CoP webinars (2) A description of changes in data practices of the AQI grantees from January through May 2021; (3) Results of the pre- and post-surveys to demonstrate the growth in data competency and utilization by AQI grantees; and (4) Considerations for scaling and sustaining these data practices with future DWS-OCC grantees.

Afterschool Quality Improvement

Program quality has been an area of focus among Utah afterschool advocates for several years. In 2017 two Utah agencies (DWS-OCC and USBE) partnered with the UEPC and the Utah Afterschool Network (UAN) to implement a state-wide study of afterschool programs utilizing a quality improvement model aimed at positively influencing staff behaviors. (https://uepc.utah.edu/our-work-by-year/). The study provided a foundation for continued efforts toward enhancing the effectiveness of afterschool programs, such as the AQI grant. Building on these efforts, the Year Two evaluation studied how multiple factors interact to contribute to quality program improvement, namely high-quality program design and implementation, adequate participation dosage, and the incorporation of prevention initiatives. In addition, we reviewed the Continuous Improvement Cycle and the AQI Logic Model (described below) as additional frameworks for understanding afterschool quality improvement related to the evaluation of the AQI grant program. Now, for the third and final year of the grant, our evaluation explores the grantees' implementation of the Continuous Improvement Cycle, and aligns with the AQI Logic Model, using various tools and resources studied together during monthly CoP meetings.

Continuous Improvement Cycle

The Continuous Improvement Cycle framework was developed by the UEPC in 2019 to guide the discussion about continuous quality improvement within afterschool programs statewide. In the context of afterschool program settings, program administrators conduct a needs assessment to determine specific needs of students and families, and then engage stakeholders to develop a vision for the program. Program services are then designed and planned based on those specific needs. During this time, program and student outcomes, as well as the data to monitor progress towards each of those outcomes, is determined. During the implementation of program services, staff collect the data for each outcome. As they analyze the data, program teams identify what adjustments to services for students and families are needed to reach the desired outcomes. Then, they reengage stakeholders to discuss these adjustments to the program services. This cycle is fluid and teams can be at multiple stages simultaneously if they are focusing on several outcomes and multiple data points.

Figure 1. Continuous Improvement Cycle Model
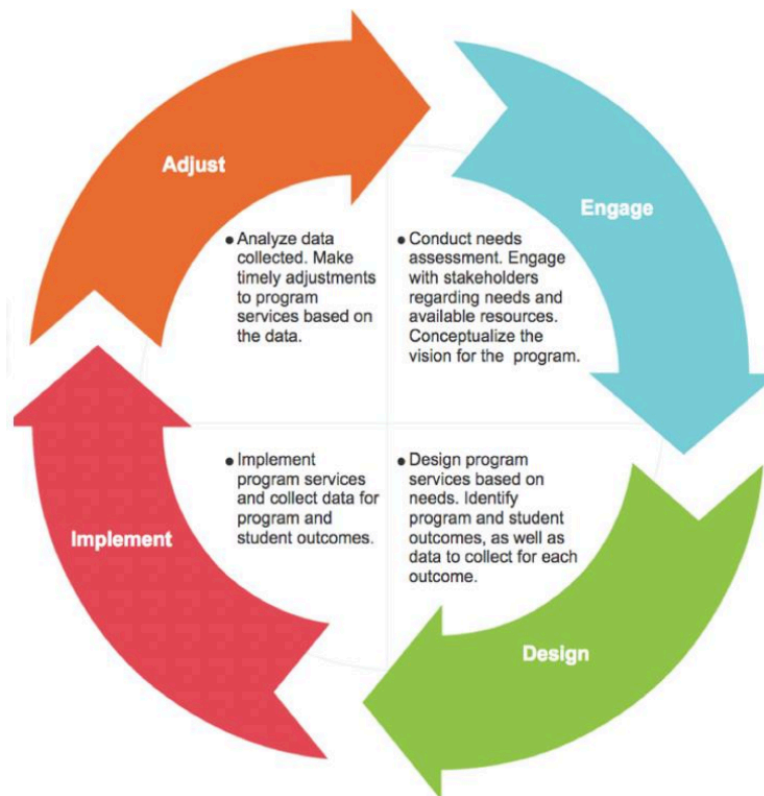
AQI Logic Model

Upon completion of the Year One evaluation report, UEPC met with the DWS-OCC team to discuss the considerations and implications from the first year of AQI program implementation and collection of student outcome data. During the summer of 2019, UEPC and DWS-OCC engaged in a series of discussions in which they developed the following AQI Logic Model. This logic model serves as a communication tool for deepening awareness and understanding of the AQI grant program purpose (*the Why*), the expected outcomes of the program (*the What*), and the resources and strategies that are designed to reach those outcomes (*the How*). Studying the AQI programs through this logic model

enables the program teams, along with their stakeholders, to develop shared language and understanding regarding the outcomes and how progress towards these outcomes can be monitored and achieved.

Figure 2. AQI Logic Model

Resources	Strategies	Activities	Outcomes
DWS Grant Funding Access to Quality Data: • Academic and Participation Data • SAPQA • AQI Coordinator Interviews • Staff, Student Surveys • Quality Tool Technical Assistance (TA) tools, materials, resources, protocols: • DWS grant support • UAN Quality Tool • School Day Alignment Rubric and Survey • UAN Online Resource Library • UEPC Evaluation support Access to research to inform program quality Shared resources, tools, and strategies across grant programs (e.g., consistency of language and terminology with grants; shared access and coordination)	Develop strong partnerships, including families and community-based organizations Design quality curriculum, services, and activities Engage with families to support youth outcomes, solicit feedback about program quality, and share resources Align with school day based on the following areas: • Relationships • Program and School Policy • Shared Resources • Student Needs • Academics Engage in state-wide professional learning: • Jumpstart & Recharge • Afterschool Professional Development Incentive • Behavior Management Institute • Communities of Practice (e.g., "Talk Tuesdays") • Webinars (e.g., weekly "nuggets") Design program/grantee level professional learning PLCs and ongoing workshops Beginning of year orientation and staff onboarding Technical Assistance (UAN, DWS, UEPC) Monthly check-in with DWS Grant orientation Site support and observations Action planning and goal setting Quality Tool Support Engage in Continuous Improvement Cycle Multiple data with clear goals and outputs	Minimum one family engagement activity per quarter (Dual Capacity Building Framework) Minimum 2 prevention activities each week (30 min each) Minimum 30 minutes academics/homework daily 20 hours of professional learning for front line staff (working more than 10 hours/week) 20 hours of professional learning for supervisors	**Staff** Increased knowledge and skills in planning and facilitating curriculum and activities Decreased staff turnover Increased communication and coordination between afterschool and school staff Increased communication and coordination with families **Youth** Increased Positive Protective Factors Decreased Negative Risk Factors Chronic Absence Youth violence/gang activity Addiction Academic Success (e.g., improved attendance, grades, Acadience, etc.) Increased Family Engagement

Evaluation Overview

The AQI Year One evaluation (2018-19) focused specifically on evaluation questions related to program implementation and student outcomes, while the Year Two evaluation offered an examination of AQI program quality through various qualitative data, such as UAN staff interviews and professional learning opportunities offered to grantees. This final Year Three evaluation focuses on AQI grantee teams in their ongoing application of the continuous improvement cycle to identify, collect, and study prevention data to make informed program decisions.

Participants

Five of the eight AQI grantees participated in this third-year evaluation. (The remaining three grantees did not participate due to reorganization of AQI structure during the COVID-19 pandemic). The five AQI grantees include:

- Afterschool All Stars
- Cache County School District
- Utah State University Extension- Iron County
- Utah State University Extension- Sanpete County
- YWCA

AQI team members participating in the CoP sessions and monthly data meetings included Grant Directors, Program Site Coordinators, and AQI program staff. These sessions occurred January through May 2021.

Data Sources

The UEPC used a variety of data sources to inform the evaluation of grantee progress in their CoP sessions as they focused on the continuous improvement cycle.

Prevention Data

During the initial grant application process, all AQI programs were required by DWS-OCC to identify two prevention components based on the specific needs of their students. Applicants selected any two of the following nine prevention areas:

1. Addiction Prevention	6. Civic Engagement
2. Education and Career Readiness	7. Emotional Intelligence
3. Financial Literacy	8. Healthy Relationship Education
4. Physical Activity and Nutrition	9. Interpersonal Relationships
5. Violence and Gang Prevention	

From January to May 2021, grantees engaged in the monthly CoP sessions and data meetings using their selected prevention area(s).

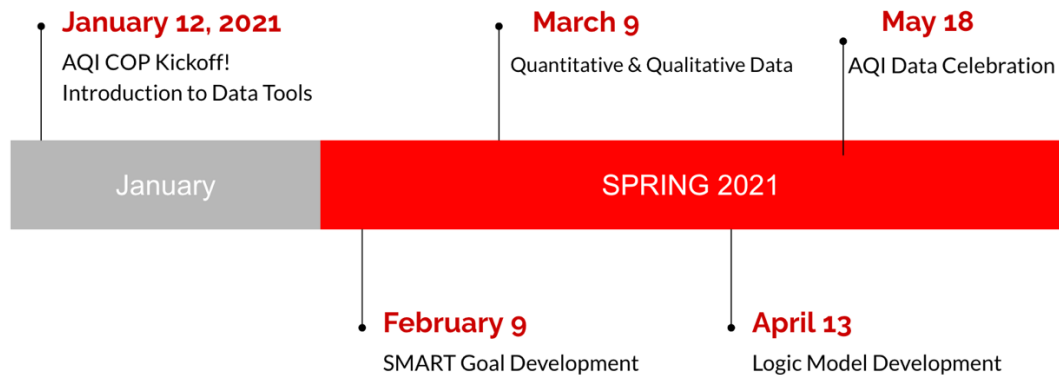### Community of Practice Convenings

Each month during the spring of 2021, AQI grantee teams joined a two-hour virtual session co-facilitated by UEPC, DWS-OCC and UAN. Each of these CoP convenings consisted of initial connection time, 20-30 minutes to explore a new tool or resource together, opportunities for application/practice in team

breakout rooms, and time to determine team action items. These action items paved the way for the individual team follow-up discussions with UEPC, DWS-OCC, and UAN each month.

The timeline and focus areas for each of the CoP meetings is outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Spring 2021 Community of Practice Timeline

Spring 2021 Community of Practice

January 12, 2021
AQI COP Kickoff!
Introduction to Data Tools

March 9
Quantitative & Qualitative Data

May 18
AQI Data Celebration

January	SPRING 2021

February 9
SMART Goal Development

April 13
Logic Model Development

Monthly Grantee Data Meetings

To provide ongoing, differentiated support and guidance in between each of the monthly CoP sessions, the UEPC evaluators, DWS-OCC administrator, and UAN Out-of-School Time Specialists met with each AQI grantee team for 30-45 minutes each month. These data meetings provided the opportunity for the grantees to share progress on actions steps from the last CoP meeting, ask questions/clarification on new CoP content, and receive concrete feedback on their Continuous Improvement Cycle implementation progress and prevention data collection.

Prevention Data Tool

The Prevention Data Tool shown in Figure 4 was designed by the UPEC in 2020 and was used during this Year Three evaluation as a foundation for CoP sessions and monthly grantee data meetings. The CoP facilitators guided program teams through the continuous improvement cycle as they focused on reviewing needs assessment data, designing SMART goals, and aligning prevention activities and data collection to those goals in order to make timely, intentional adjustments to program services based on the data. This tool also guides teams through the reflection process to identify why an outcome was or was not met.

Figure 4. Prevention Data Tool

Below we turn to the findings and lessons learned from the CoP sessions and the impact that these experiences had on participating grantees.

Findings from the Community of Practice Sessions

The monthly CoP sessions provided a unique opportunity for the AQI grantee teams to convene and engage in shared learning, identify strategies to apply their new learning into practice within their programs, and share ideas, resources, and reflections with the other teams. One of the agreements of the CoP was the understanding that these monthly meetings "belonged" to the AQI Grantees. This was their shared time together to learn from and with each other. The agendas for each month's discussions were designed based on the monthly data calls with each grantee in between each of the CoP meetings and were flexible based on the teams' specific needs and areas for improvement within the data collection process.

Changes in Grantees AQI Data Use Practices

During the January CoP Kick-off, AQI grantee team members took a brief pre-survey asking about their current data practices, including collecting and reviewing data, and adjusting program services based upon that data. The team members then completed a post-survey during the May Data Celebration CoP, responding to the same questions. The pre- and post-survey data indicate that the grantees reported changes in their data practices over the course of the four-month period. As shown in the figures below, grantees reported an increase in the frequency of their data collection, review of data, and program adjustments during the four months of the AQI CoP and data support.

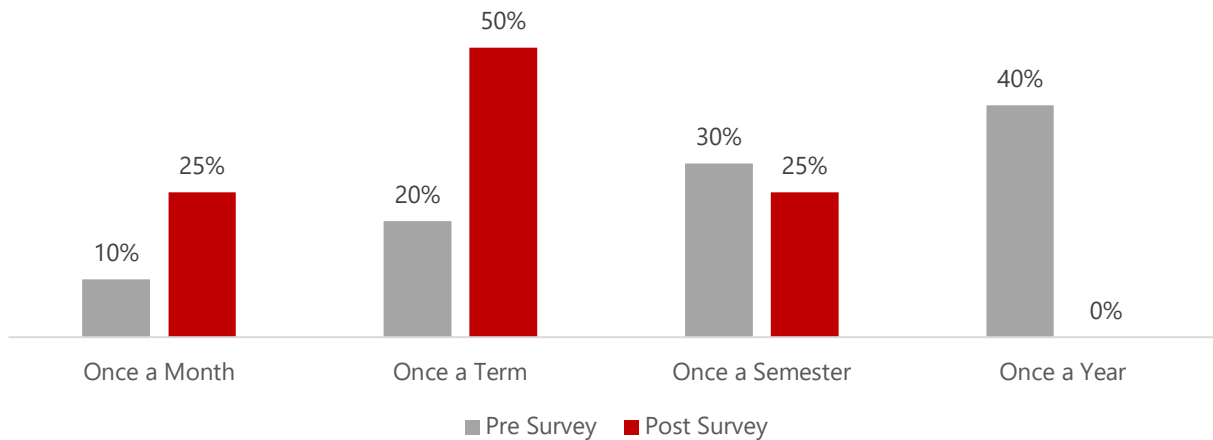**Figure 5. How often is your team collecting prevention data?**

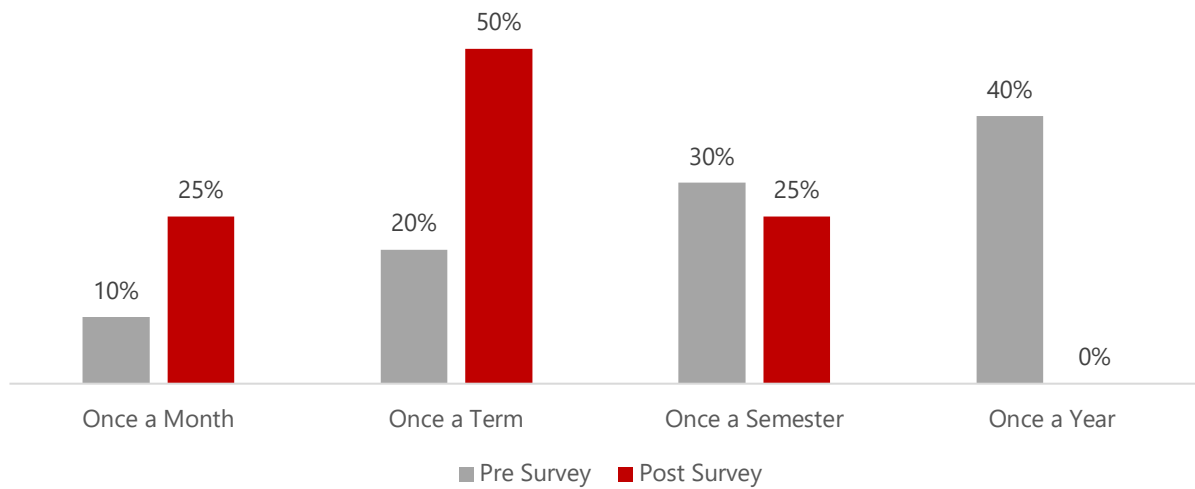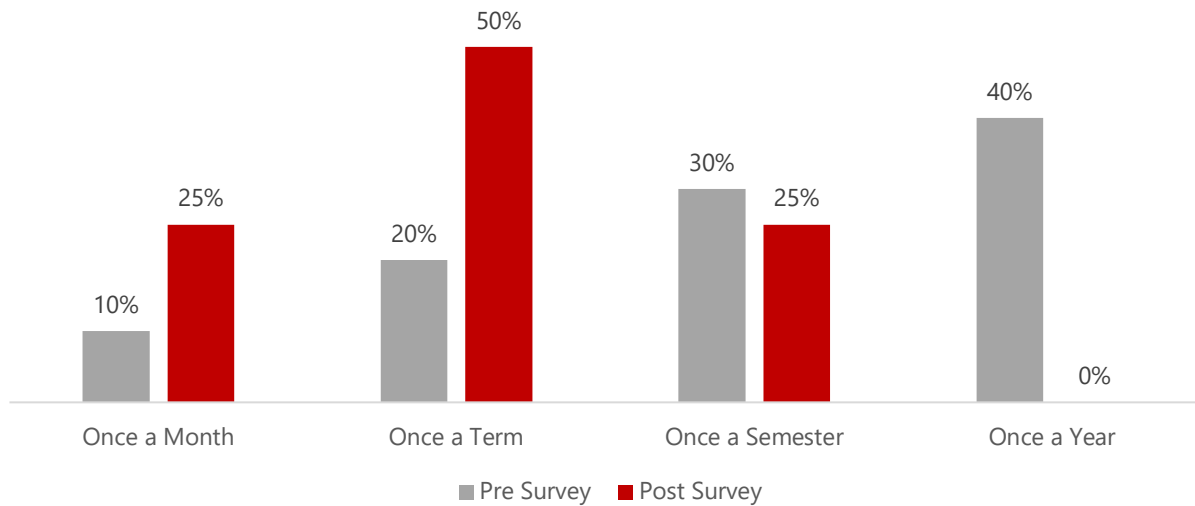**Figure 6. How often is your team reviewing and discussing the prevention data that you collect?**

Once a Month: Pre Survey 10%, Post Survey 25%
Once a Term: Pre Survey 20%, Post Survey 50%
Once a Semester: Pre Survey 30%, Post Survey 25%
Once a Year: Pre Survey 40%, Post Survey 0%

■ Pre Survey ■ Post Survey

Figure 7. How often does your team make program adjustments based on data?

Once a Month: Pre Survey 10%, Post Survey 25%
Once a Term: Pre Survey 20%, Post Survey 50%
Once a Semester: Pre Survey 30%, Post Survey 25%
Once a Year: Pre Survey 40%, Post Survey 0%

■ Pre Survey ■ Post Survey

Below are additional highlights from each CoP session, further illustrating the ways in which the shared experiences translated into improved data use and continuous improvement.

January: Community of Practice Kick-Off and Introduction to Data Tools

The CoP Kick-off included dedicated time for initial introductions and connections among the AQI grantees. The CoP facilitation team, consisting of UEPC evaluators, DWS-OCC administrator, and UAN Specialists, then oriented the grantees to the Continuous Improvement Cycle Framework and Prevention Data Tool as the foundational tools for the AQI spring data support. They also reviewed the timeline for the CoP sessions, as well as the purpose and frequency of the monthly AQI grantee data meetings. The grantees expressed enthusiasm with the intentionality of the process to help them be successful with their prevention goals and data. The first CoP session also included the pre-survey regarding current AQI data practices.

> "That's something I don't do enough—think, reflect…. How do I want this to look and sound when we achieve our goal?"

February: SMART Goals

The February CoP gathering focused on the development and revisions of AQI SMART goals. The CoP began with the grantees exploring a SMART goal tool with specific examples using AQI prevention data and walking through the steps of how to make the sample goal specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. Then, the grantees had opportunities to meet in breakout rooms with their AQI teams to review their own AQI prevention SMART goals to review and revise if needed based on the model. When the grantees reconvened after their breakout groups, they reflected on their shared learning from the day, as well as their own team discussions. Participants shared that they appreciated both the shared learning at the beginning, as well as the team time to apply their learning to their individual program goals. Additional take-aways from the February CoP also included:

- Discovering original AQI goals were too broad, and this CoP helped the team narrow down the components so that they could be more specific on what the program was trying to achieve.
- Aligning AQI SMART goals to ensure that they accurately reflect the needs of the students and families of the programs
- Identifying the need and the process of conveying these SMART goals to all interested parties within a program.
- Considering the outcome when developing SMART goals—what does it look like and sounds like when the goal is achieved?

March: Qualitative and Quantitative Data

In March, the AQI grantees began the CoP by sharing data celebrations since their February CoP meeting. Several team members shared the connections they were making between SMART goals and the data they were collecting for these goals. The CoP monthly learning focused on quantitative and qualitative data, and how to use both types of data to monitor progress towards their SMART goals. Traditional quantitative data may include student grades, academic achievement scores, program and school day

attendance rates, and student surveys. The CoP discussion expanded these traditional sources and considered data such as student snack logs for programs focusing on health and nutrition, and "kindness" charts for programs teaching about interpersonal relationships.

"Our data is becoming easier to collect—it doesn't even look the same."

The March CoP discussion also focused on the possible qualitative data that grantees could consider for their AQI goals, such as informal discussions with family members during program check-out, staff observation logs, conversations with students about their prevention progress, etc. The grantees actively engaged in the conversation as we posed the question "What will your prevention data look like and how will you collect and store it?" In considering their SMART goals and using their data prevention tool to ensure that they were intentional and systematic in the process, the grantees were able to ensure they were collecting the right types of data to demonstrate incremental progress.

At this point in the CoP and monthly data meeting processes, we also shared the idea of students collecting data as an effective, efficient means of expanding AQI data sources to support ongoing program and student progress. As we explored this concept over the next month, the grantees recognized they had more data to support their progress on goals, but they also appreciated the opportunity to use the student-collected data to spark discussions with students around personal goal setting, realistic, incremental progress, and individual success. These critical thinking skills were a welcomed biproduct of a more robust, yet efficient data collection system for the AQI grantees.

"The kids have really enjoyed collecting their own data and seeing their progress."

April: Logic Model Components and Practical Application to AQI Data

The March monthly data meetings with the AQI grantees offered insight into the struggles that some of the teams were still having around narrowing down their focus for AQI prevention areas and data collection. Despite their progress on using the prevention data tool to outline one prevention goal and track student progress across the spring, the grantees needed another tool to help them to see how all of their individual goals fit into the bigger picture. Therefore, the April CoP shared learning focused on developing practical logic models to streamline their student and program outcomes. Even though the grantees designed logic models for their original AQI grant application, none reported using a logic model regularly with their entire staff so that all have shared language and understanding of intended program outcomes.

Using the AQI logic model discussed earlier in the *Afterschool Quality* section of this report (see Figure 2), the CoP group talked through each of the sections, paying careful attention to how the resources, strategies, activities, and outcomes are intentionally aligned. CoP facilitators encouraged the grantees to break up the development of their logic models into manageable parts, focusing on one outcome at a time, just as they have all spring in their prevention data tools. Grantees actively participated in this discussion, and several offered feedback that this would be a valuable process and a helpful tool for their entire program teams.

May: Data Celebration

Grantee teams were asked to join the May Data Celebration prepared to share their overall take-aways, successes and challenges from the past four months. Participants shared their appreciation for the prevention data tool and how it helped them to stay on track with their program's prevention data. One participant commented, "Whatever outcome you want to achieve, you can get there through this tool".

In addition, teams shared their successes in including students in prevention data collection. One team described not only having students be responsible for their own punch cards to track their progress, they met with each student at the start of each week to review their individual progress and set new goals for the week. These weekly meetings not only built capacity of the students to set and monitor their own goals, they helped the staff to build relationships with the students throughout the process.

Another takeaway from the grantees was the idea of intentionality in connecting program activities to prevention goals. One team focused on service and acts of kindness with their students. Instead of having the students come up with their own ideas for kind actions, the staff made a jar full of ideas from which the students could select five ideas per week. This intentionality of the team set the students up for success with their prevention goals.

One additional celebration of the AQI teams was the realization that the whole process of goal setting, collecting data, and reviewing the data for program adjustments is much easier and more successful if the whole program team is on board. When grantees co-design the data plans with their entire staff, the process is more successful thanks to the shared language and understanding of the program goals and the intended path to achieve those outcomes.

Program Spotlights

During the mid-month data meetings with individual grantee teams, the UEPC, DWS and UAN facilitators identified several promising practices that grantees were implementing as a result of the prior month's CoP session. Throughout the spring, each of the AQI grantees was invited to share a brief explanation of these promising practices during the last portion of each of the monthly CoP meetings. This sharing of practical application offered a unique perspective from other AQI programs. One grantee shared the "Acts of Kindness" chart they designed for students to track progress on interpersonal relationships. Another grantee shared pictures of students tracking their daily snack choices and planning healthy meals on a nutrition chart. Finally, another grantee shared their use of student data collection and analysis through student portfolios.

"It's nice to have the opportunity to brainstorm and share ideas with other AQI teams..."

The grantees learned from these program spotlights each month, asked clarifying questions and exchanged contact information so that they could follow up as they attempted implementation in their own programs.

Conclusions and Next Steps

This Year Three AQI Evaluation studies the grantees as they engaged in a monthly CoP and monthly grantee data meetings to study the continuous improvement cycle using their program's prevention data during the 2020-21 academic year. The grantees demonstrated several meaningful changes in their teams' data practices during this time. These changes are summarized below.

- Utilizing the Continuous Improvement Cycle Framework and the Prevention Data Tool as guides through the data process, as well as revisiting these tools frequently to ensure they remain on track to meet their goals

- Strategically developing SMART goals based on the specific needs of the students and community

- Narrowing down larger goals to identify smaller, more manageable outcomes that are easier to monitor with available data

- Ensuring consistent alignment among student needs, SMART goals, program activities, and data collected to help teams tell their program stories

- Identifying and collecting both qualitative and quantitative data to demonstrate impact and progress on goals

- Involving students in their own goal setting, data collection, and monitoring of their progress

> "It's been helpful to receive feedback about data collection and how to set specific goals. The process doesn't feel so intimidating after getting useful feedback."

- Collaborating with the entire program team to develop goals, collect data and monitor progress to promote shared understanding and commitment among all staff

- Using prevention data to initiate dialogue with school teachers, administrators, and others about the overall intention and impact of the program.

Strategies for Continuous Improvement

Based on the evidence of implementation presented in this report, we offer the following list of promising practices to support efforts to strengthen and sustain the ongoing data collection and continuous program improvement of future DWS-OCC grantees:

> "In the short period I personally have participated, I have experienced a deeper understanding of how to look at data as a tool to improve our programming."

Figure 8. Strategies for Increasing Afterschool Quality and Continuous Improvement

Communities of Practice

- Build regular CoP convenings into future grant opportunities. This will provide a forum for grantees to share successes, challenges, and tools with each other and learn together as they make progress towards program and student objectives.

Data Use Tools and Frameworks

- Consider including the Continuous Improvement Cycle framework and the Prevention Data Tool during future grantee orientations and within required annual reports so that teams develop shared understanding about the tools and utilize them consistently throughout the grant cycle.

Professional Learning for Data Use

- Continue to provide regular professional learning opportunities for grantees on collecting and utilizing data as part of the Continuous Improvement Cycle

Differentiated Support

- Incorporate smaller, individual grantee data meetings in between larger professional learning sessions in order to differentiate support for individual grantees and help them to successfully implement the learning from the larger convenings.

Tools and Guidance for Communication

- Provide concrete guidance and tools for grantees to share their program data regularly with teachers, administrators, community members, and other interested parties. This will highlight the various impacts of the program and offer an opportunity to secure additional resources for program services.

Alignment with the Original Purpose of the AQI Grant

In considering the original intent of the AQI grant, the Year 3 evaluation data and considerations support the overall goals to "…develop program structures that provide students with academic support and prevention education, involve students' families in program activities, facilitate the professional learning of staff and volunteers, and work more closely with schools and community partners." Utilizing the Continuous Improvement Cycle and Prevention Data Tool this past year, the grantees were able to address each of these AQI objectives as they intentionally aligned the needs of students and families, SMART goals, program services, data collection, and ongoing communication with program partners. As the grantees become even more comfortable with the structures and processes of the continuous improvement framework, they can begin to institutionalize these structures and processes within their teams and apply them to their efforts in future out-of-school time programs.