

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Measuring Partnership and Supports in Out-Of-School Time

bellxcel®

Project focus for BellXcel's partnership with the Strategic Data Project Fellowship through the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University



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INTRODUCTION

For more than 30 years, BellXcel has been an innovator of solutions and services for youth program providers to advance the quality and accessibility of their experiences. Through its youth management platform Arly, BellXcel engages hundreds of school districts and community organizations with coaching tools, and resources to enhance their summer and afterschool programs. BellXcel built a full body of evidence of its impact on students, educators, and families.

BellXcel designed a two year study to expand its measurement strategy to understand the effect of Arly's products and services on the operations, cultures, and systems within these provider organizations as the project focus for its partnership with the Strategic Data Project Fellowship through the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University.

The study revealed four essential findings:

1. Most organizations chose Arly to support areas that could improve program quality.
2. Programs using more features and coaching saw better planning and implementation.
3. Quality ratings improved across all eight key program areas.
4. Nearly all respondents found Arly's features helpful in meeting their organization's goals.

Ultimately, the study illuminated customer experiences and how leveraging the functionality and services of Arly can influence organizations' integration of high-quality program elements and overall systems change.

PROGRAM SUPPORT

Research has identified several critical elements for high-quality out-of-school time (OST) programs to achieve intended positive outcomes. Leveraging its three-plus decades of OST experience, BellXcel has designed a suite of supports to amplify organizations' ability to embed these evidence-based practices into programming. These supports include enrichment and academic curriculum, professional development, evaluation and measurement tools, and operational and business resources.

To deliver these supports to OST providers at scale, BellXcel built a youth program management platform, branded as "Arly" in 2022. Pairing this technology with personalized support from Arly staff in areas such as program design, implementation, instruction, software support, and evaluation, creates a partnership experience for the organizations. Flexible and scaffolded features and services enable organizations to meet their community needs effectively, and ultimately to set up the basics for or accelerate quality where needed.

¹Because this study began in 2021, the original study instruments referenced BellXcel. Given the branding of Arly in 2022, this report refers to "Arly" throughout to align with more current terminology, and maintain consistency.

2021 QUALITATIVE STUDY

BellXcel's shift in delivery required a new measurement strategy and FSG's systems change framework² helped inform efforts to better understand the totality of the partnership experience. This approach focused on how BellXcel may influence structural changes (policies, practices, and resource flows), relational changes (relationships, connections, and power dynamics), and transformative changes (mental models).

In 2021, BellXcel and its research affiliate, Sperling Center for Research & Innovation (SCRI), interviewed program leaders, and found that after engaging with BellXcel, leaders reported positive organizational changes in the following areas³:

- Use of outcomes and evidence
- Community relationships
- Organizational confidence
- Philanthropic engagement
- Program planning and operations

The qualitative findings served as a starting point for the second phase of the project, which focused on gathering more information from a larger sample of partner organizations.

2022-2023 STUDY

In 2022, BellXcel launched a second phase of this study as the project focus for their partnership with the Strategic Data Project Fellowship through the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University. The goal of this phase was to gain insights for making data-informed

refinements to its strategies, tools, and resources within its youth management software solution, Arly, to better support partners and to expand quality within the larger OST field.

BellXcel hypothesized that by using Arly's features and services, OST provider organizations would increase their awareness and adoption of evidence-based practices, leading to adapted policies, behaviors, and systems to align with high-quality strategies. By measuring organizational needs, the efficacy of Arly's features and services, direct program impacts, and systems changes, BellXcel hoped to measure changes experienced by organizations internally and within their ecosystem, as well as what changes may have been driven by the utilization of Arly.

FSG's Systems Change Framework, SCRI's 2021 study, and research by RAND⁵ and the Wallace Foundation⁶ served as the foundation for survey design. The study included 24 of Arly's features and services including:

- 10 software platform-specific features
- 5 sales & coaching conversations
- 6 evaluation tools & services
- 3 other features and services

From November 2022 through February 2023, the retrospective survey was distributed to over 100 administrators who had engaged with Arly from 2021 through 2022. Ultimately 35% of administrators responded to the survey, exceeding BellXcel's goal of 25%. Responses came from 28 organizations in 26 cities and 14 states.

FSG is a global nonprofit consulting firm that partners with foundations and corporations to create equitable systems change.

²Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018). The water of systems change.

³Sperling Center for Research and Innovation. (2021). The Power of Partnerships: Exploring How a Partnership with BellXcel Influences Systems Changes. https://www.sperlingcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/BellXcell_SCRIOrganizationalImpact.pdf

⁴<https://sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/data-fellowship>

⁵Schwartz, H., McCombs, J., Augustine, C., & Leschitz, J. (2018). Getting to work on summer learning. *Rand Corporation*.

⁶Browne, D. (2019). Summer: A Time for Learning. Five Lessons from School Districts and Their Partners about Running Successful Programs. Perspective. Wallace Foundation.

FINDINGS

When deciding to purchase Arly, at least 70% of respondents felt their organizations needed support in 11 areas that contribute to high-quality programming. The five most noted areas for support were:

- Using data internally (95%)
- Family engagement (91%)
- Using curricula for activities (91%)
- Facilitating high-quality instruction (91%)
- Program planning (88%)

Respondents were split into groups - those who used fewer features and services (low-adoption group) and those who used more features and services (high-adoption group). Directionally, more respondents in the high-adoption groups noted improved planning and implementation.

91% of those who accessed at least 16 features and services improved in implementation, while 77% of those who used less than 15 improved. When looking at those who only used Arly's software-specific features and no services, 92% of those who used at least 7 Arly features improved in implementation, while 75% of those who used fewer than 7 improved.

Directionally, these findings show respondents who accessed more of Arly's features, services, and coaching saw greater improvement in program planning and implementation. These findings help define the impact of features and services, while showing a positive overall effect of engaging with more features to embed evidence-based practices.

Respondents using more of Arly features and services reported improved program planning and implementation, showing how these tools align with evidence-based practices for a high-quality program.



Organizations that needed support improved in many critical program areas including:

- Curriculum & Professional Development
- Recruitment, Enrollment & Attendance
- Program Planning & Design
- Family Engagement
- Culture & Climate
- Implementation & Day-to-Day

Curriculum & Professional Development

Organizations needing support saw major improvements with Arly: curriculum use improved by 90%, high-quality instruction by 89%, and staff management by 77%. Access to high-quality resources grew from 61% to 93% and staff preparation increased from 47% to 85%. Partners said:

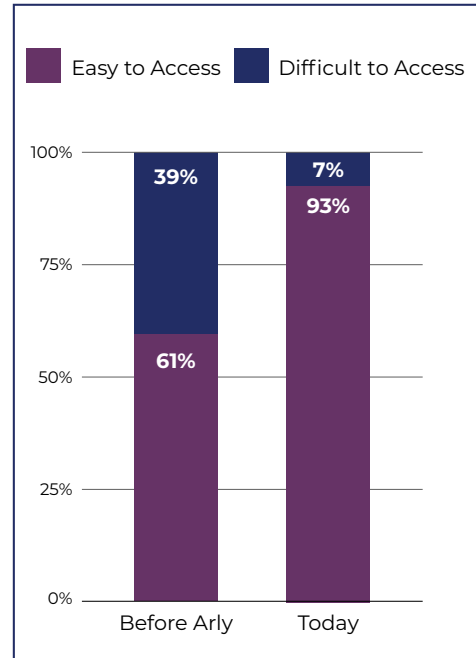
Partners said:

“The curriculum provided desired outcomes, goals, and standards to meet...giving the program a high-functioning structure. Additionally, the resource library had tools available to staff that supported their ability to confidently facilitate instruction and learning.

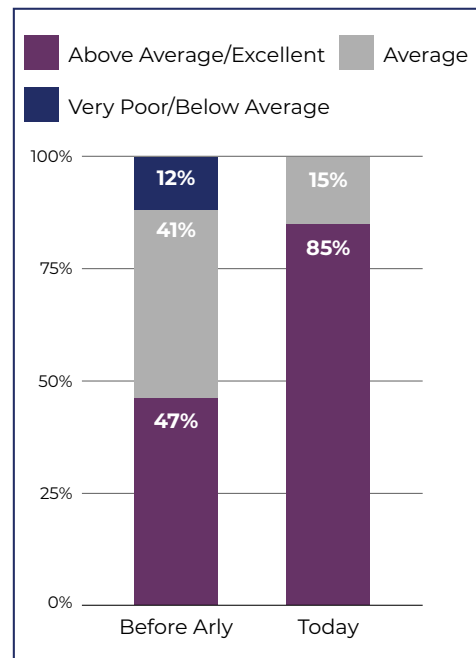
“The staff had not really utilized [English Language Arts] and Math curricula in the past. Having the scholar⁸ bundles and [professional development] was very helpful for the staff.

“Candidates were more interested when learning that [Arly] provides curriculum and a library of tools/resources to assist teachers with facilitating learning.

Organizations' Ability to Access High-Quality Resources



Organizations' Ability to Prepare Staff Effectively



⁷"Significant support" includes somewhat, moderately, or very much in need of support.

⁸"Scholar" is a term used for youth participants in some of the partner organizations' programs.

Evaluation, Data & Outcomes

Nearly all organizations seeking significant support improved data use: 100% externally and 90% internally. Those using at least one evaluation tool or the data dashboard saw a 44% increase in evaluation facilitation. After Arly, respondents felt successful at facilitating evaluation, with funder engagement up by 12% and community partner engagement up by 17%. Partners said:

- “ [We] used data for presentations and talking points, resulting in greater buy-in.
- “ We compiled data from pre and post-assessments to determine program and curriculum effectiveness.

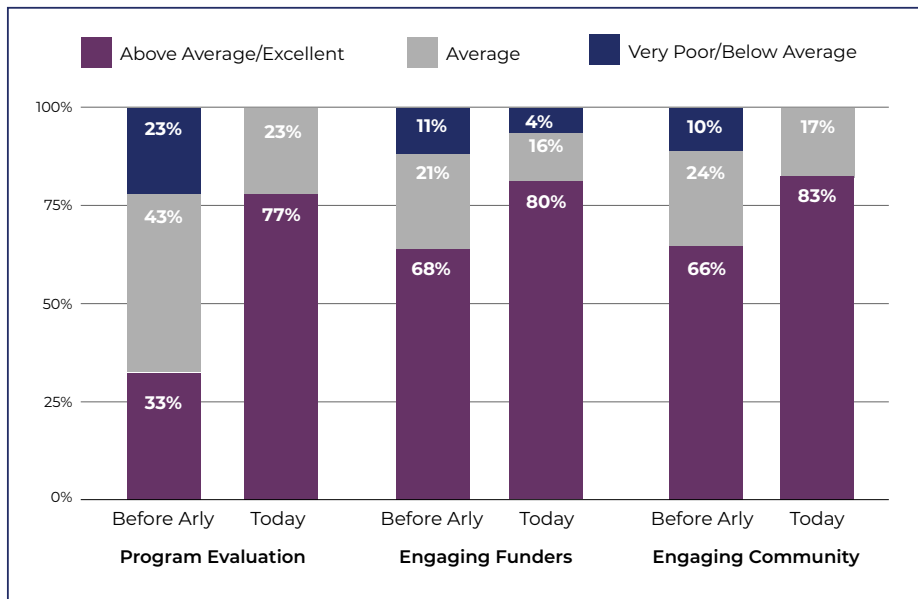
“We have not ever had data like what [Arly] provided before - a report of survey data, [academic] assessment, attendance, retention, etc.”

Recruitment, Enrollment & Attendance

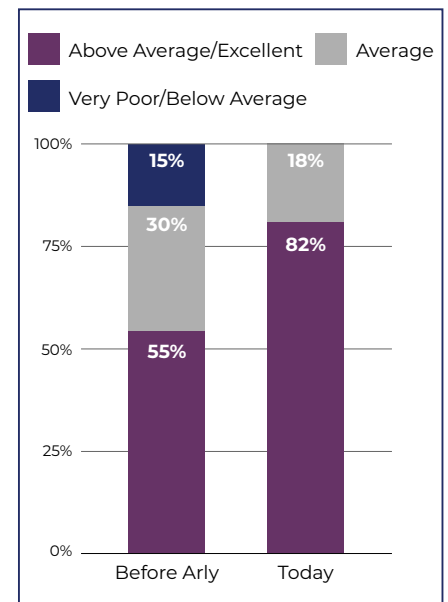
Organizations needing significant support experienced 94% improved attendance tracking and a 69% boost in recruitment and enrollment. Using at least one enrollment feature raised the ability to enroll participants from 55% to 82%. Before Arly, 15% rated their enrollment efforts below average—none felt this way after Arly. Partners said:

- “ [Arly provided] online enrollment that is easily accessible for parents. Easy communication and attendance rostering.
- “ It created a formal system for us to use for attendance tracking, and allowed multiple people to see/track attendance at any time.
- “ [We] used the platform to complement traditional paper sign-in, which made reporting much easier.

Organizations’ Ability to Facilitate Program Evaluation, Engage Funders, and Engage Community Partners



Organizations’ Ability to Reach Sufficient Enrollment for Their Program



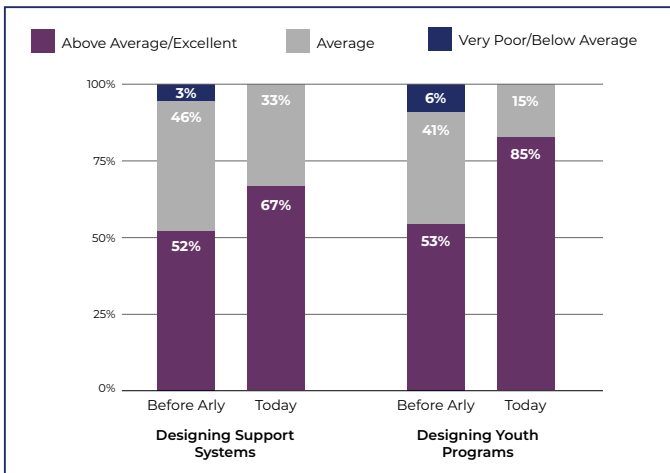
Program Planning & Design

Organizations needing significant support saw 80% improvement in program planning. Their ability to build support systems grew from 52% to 67%, and their ability to design programs increased from 53% to 85%.

Partners said:

- “ It was helpful to discuss the pricing of the material ahead of our budget.
- “ Goal setting begins early on, making it clear what everyone has to do and work toward.
- “ Brainstorming with our success lead⁹ and making decisions based on [their] experience [contributed to better program planning].

Organizations' Ability to Design Support Systems and Design Youth Programs

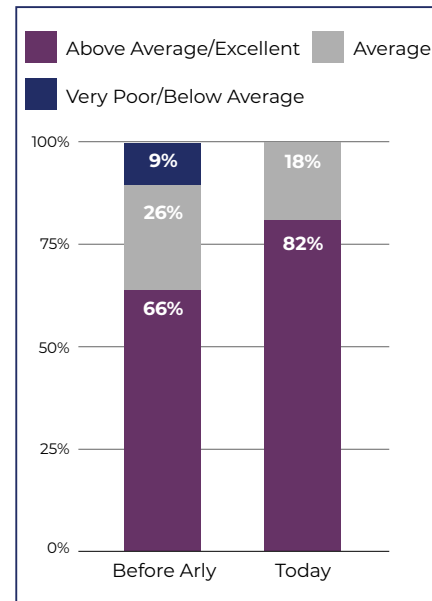


Family Engagement

Organizations' ability to engage families grew from 66% before Arly to 81% after Arly. Partners said:

- “ Family communication improved by using the app.
- “ [Arly provided] online enrollment that is easily accessible for parents. Easy communication and attendance rostering.
- “ We implemented ideas around how to best engage families, such as a culture share.

Organizations' Ability to Engage Families



⁹“Success lead” is another term for the primary Arly coach.

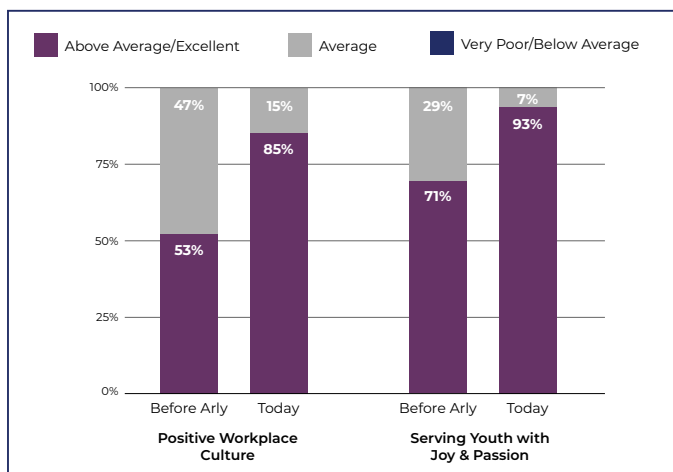
Culture & Climate

81% of organizations needing significant support saw improvement in building a positive culture and climate. Their ability to maintain a positive workplace culture for staff grew from 53% to 85%, and their ability to serve youth with joy and passion increased from 71% to 93%.

Partners said:

- “ Streamlined processes so time with students was increased [contributed to culture and climate].
- “ Because there was less stress on creating lesson plans, staff were much less stressed and much happier.
- “ The trainings on social-emotional development and classroom culture/climate really helped prepare staff to meet the students’ needs not just academically but socially and emotionally. This supported [them] in developing the whole child—mind, body, and spirit.

Organizations’ Ability to Establish Positive Workplace Culture for Staff and Serve Youth with Joy and Passion



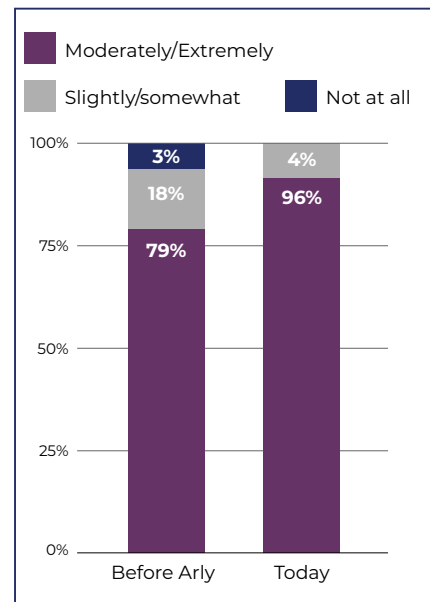
Implementation & Day-to-Day

100% of organizations needing significant support in program implementation saw improvement. Their ability to manage day-to-day operations grew from 53% to 81%, and confidence in youth programming grew from 79% to 96%. Almost all organizations felt highly confident in implementing youth programs after Arly.

Partners said:

- “ Using [Arly] made my work more efficient by providing me with options for my specific needs. If I didn’t understand how to implement something or just needed more information on something, I went to the Software platform and found help.
- “ [Arly] gave access to resources that provided efficiency.
- “ Streamlined processes so time with students was increased [contributed to culture and climate].

Organizations’ Confidence in Implementing Youth Programs



Nearly all users reported that Arly's features and services helped their organization achieve its goals. The most highly valued supports included program planning, data collection, and data utilization.

Almost all (93-100%) of those using Arly's features and services found them helpful for meeting organizational goals. Respondents particularly valued pre-program coaching focused on planning, along with data collection and reporting tools. Top-ranked coaching conversations were pre-launch (100%) and planning (94%), with attendance and evaluation services also highly rated (83% each).

These findings align with OST research, which shows that planning and measurement are essential for program quality.^{10,11}

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

¹⁰ Browne, D. (2019). Summer: A Time for Learning. Five Lessons from School Districts and Their Partners about Running Successful

¹¹ Schwartz, H., McCombs, J., Augustine, C., & Leschitz, J. (2018). Getting to work on summer learning. Rand Corporation.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights areas where Arly can refine or expand features to better support youth program providers and enhance program quality.

The study revealed four essential findings:

1. When deciding to purchase Arly, the majority of organizations identified a need for support in at least one area that can positively impact program quality.
2. When programs utilized more features and services and engaged in more coaching conversations, they noted improved implementation and planning compared to those who used fewer features and services.
3. Respondents' assessments of their ability to deliver quality increased in all eight key program areas.
4. Most or all of the respondents who used Arly's features and services found them helpful for their organization to meet its goals.

BellXcel successfully invested in a fundamental shift in its data measurement strategy: to learn about providers' experiences and changes.

