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Measuring Partnership and Supports in Out-Of-School Time

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

Contents

Introduction

For more than 30 years, BellXcel has been a leader in advancing high-quality, accessible youth programming. 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.

With a strong foundation of research-backed strategies, Arly provides evidence-based solutions that help organizations streamline operations, strengthen program quality, and drive meaningful outcomes for youth, families, and educators.

To deepen its understanding of Arly's effect on youth program operations, culture, and systems, BellXcel designed a two-year study as the project focus for their partnership with the Strategic Data Project Fellowship through the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University.

Ultimately, the study illuminated how leveraging Arly's software, coaching, and evaluation tools supports organizational change and long-term quality improvements.

Supporting High-Quality Programming at Scale

Research has identified several critical elements for high-quality out-of-school time (OST) programs to achieve intended positive outcomes. Arly integrates these elements into a single, scalable platform that supports organizations in:

- **Curriculum & Enrichment** - Offering structured learning and engagement activities
- **Professional Development** - Providing training and resources for staff growth and lesson facilitation
- **Evaluation & Measurement** - Using data-driven tools to assess impact
- **Operations & Business Resources** - Streamlining program planning and administration

By embedding these proven supports into Arly, paired with personalized coaching from Arly staff in areas such as program design, implementation, instruction, software support, and evaluation, organizations gain the flexibility to scale and accelerate program quality, ensuring they effectively meet the needs of their communities.

Key Findings:

1. Organizations turned to Arly to 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.

[1]Because 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.

Measuring Impact on Organizations

As part of this study, BellXcel and its research affiliate, Sperling Center for Research & Innovation (SCRI), sought to understand how partnering with BellXcel may influence structural, relational, and transformational changes within organizations. The research, informed by FSG's System Change Framework [1,2], identified five areas where programs experienced positive shifts after engaging with BellXcel[3]:

- **Use of outcomes and evidence** - Strengthened data-driven decision making

- **Community relationships** - Enhanced partnerships with schools and local organizations

- **Organizational confidence** - Greater ability to plan, execute, and sustain programs

- **Philanthropic engagement** - Increased funding opportunitites and donor confidence

- **Program planning and operations** - Improved efficiency and structure in day-to-day management

2022-2023 Study: Measuring Adoption & Systems Change

In 2022, BellXcel expanded the study to evaluate how organizations use Arly's tools and services to implement high-quality strategies. The research focused on how Arly's platform supports evidenced-based practices.

FSG's Systems Change Framework, SCRI's 2021 study, and research by RAND[5] and the Wallace Foundation[6] served as the foundation for survey design. The study reviewed 24 of Arly's features and services including:

- **10 software platform-specific features** (e.g., enrollment, attendance, and reporting)

- **5 sales & coaching conversations** (e.g., training and implementation guidance)

- **6 evaluation tools & services** (e.g., surveys, assessments, and reporting features)

- 3 other features and services

Between November 2022 and February 2023, over 100 administrators who had engaged with Arly from 2021 through 2022 were surveyed. Ultimately, 35% of administrators responded—exceeding the initial goal of 25%—with responses from 28 organizations across 26 cities and 14 states.

[1]FSG is a global nonprofit consulting firm that partners with foundations and corporations to create equitable systems change.
[2]Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018). The water of systems change.
[3]Sperling 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

[5]Schwartz, H., McCombs, J., Augustine, C., & Leschitz, J. (2018). Getting to work on summer learning. *Rand Corporation*.
[6]Browne, 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 top four noted areas for support were:

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

To assess the impact of Arly, respondents were grouped based on their level of adoption—those who used fewer features and services (low-adoption group) and those who used more (high-adoption group).

Respondents using more of Arly features and services reported improved 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**

Findings indicate that organizations leveraging more of Arly's features and services saw greater improvements in implementation.

- **91% of those who accessed at least 16 features and services improved in implementation**, compared to 77% of those who used fewer than 15

Comparing use of only Arly's software-specific features (without services)

- **92% of those who used at least 7 Arly features improved in implementation**, compared to 75% of those who used fewer than 7 improved

These findings suggest a clear correlation between engagement with Arly's features, services, and coaching, and improved program planning and implementation. They reinforce that greater adoption of Arly's tools helps organizations more effectively embed evidence-based practices into their programs.

Curriculum & Professional Development

Organizations needing support saw significant improvements with Arly:

- 90% improved curriculum use
- 89% enhanced instructional quality
- 77% strengthened staff management

Additionally, access to high-quality resources grew from 61% to 93%, while staff preparation rose from 47% to 85%, demonstrating the power of Arly's professional development and instructional tools.
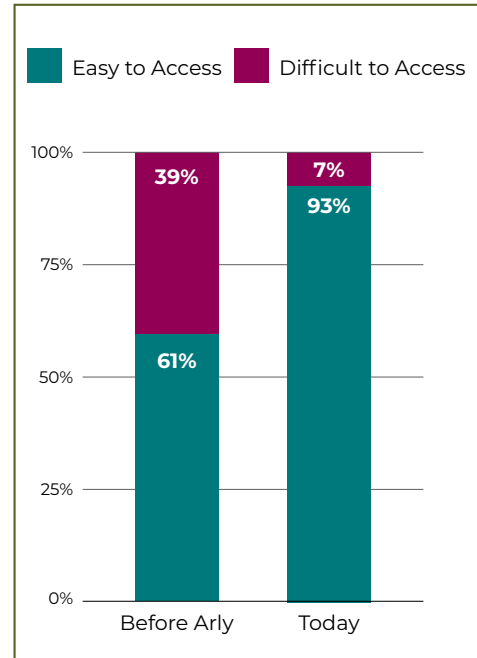
Partners said:

> "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."
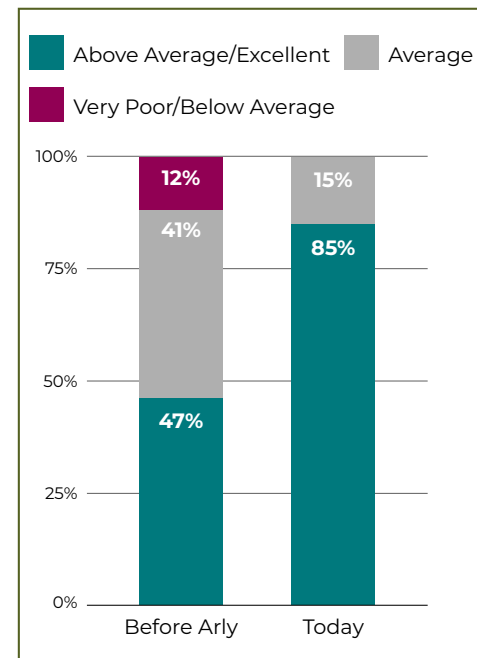
> "The staff had not really utilized [English Language Arts] and Math curricula in the past. Having the scholar[8] bundles and [professional development] was very helpful for the staff."

> "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

Easy to Access | Difficult to Access

	Before Arly	Today
Difficult to Access	39%	7%
Easy to Access	61%	93%

Organizations' Ability to Prepare Staff Effectively

Above Average/Excellent | Average
Very Poor/Below Average

	Before Arly	Today
Very Poor/Below Average	12%	
Average	41%	15%
Above Average/Excellent	47%	85%

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[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

Organizations that sought support in data use saw remarkable progress:

- 100% improved external data use, while 90% improved internal data use

- Abililty to facilitate program evaluation grew from 33% to 77% for those using atleast one evaluation feature or Arly's data dashboard

- Stronger engagement with funders (from 68% to 80%) and community partners (from 66% to 83%)

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

For organizations that struggled with recruitment, enrollment, and attendance tracking:

- 94% improved in attendance tracking

- 69% enhanced recruitment and enrollment

- Enrollment success rose from 55% to 82%

- A dramatic shift in confidence—before Arly, 15% rated their enrollment efforts below average, but none felt this way after Arly
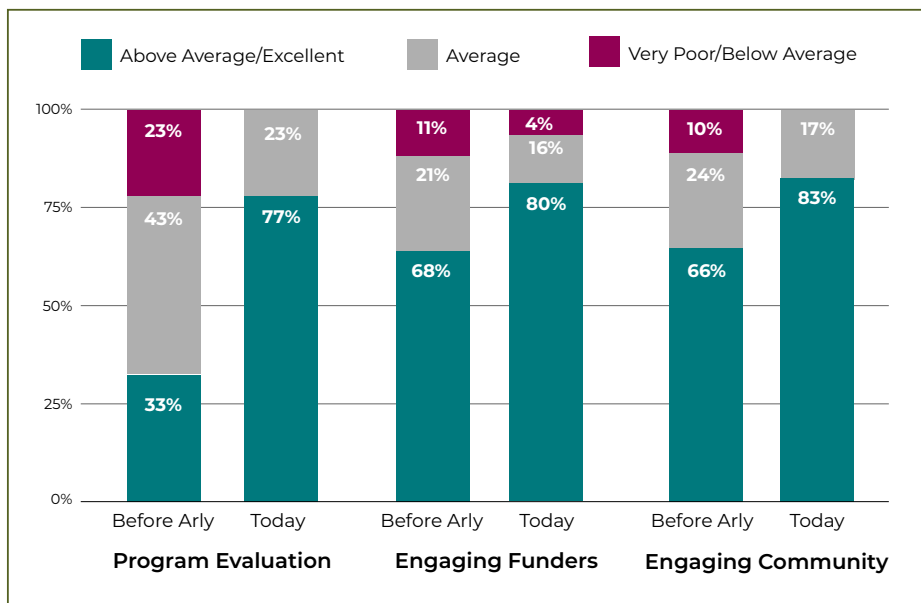
Partners said:

> "[Arly provided] online enrollment that is easily accessible for parents. Easy communication and attendance rostering."
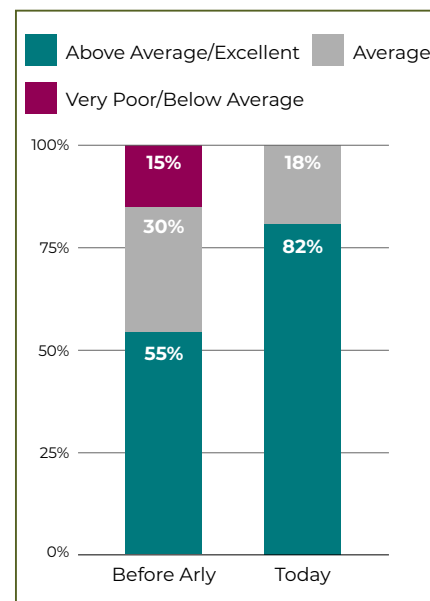
> "It created a formal system for us to use for attendance tracking, and allowed multiple people to see/track attendance at any time."

> "[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

Legend: Above Average/Excellent | Average | Very Poor/Below Average

Program Evaluation — Before Arly: 33%, 43%, 23% | Today: 77%, 23%
Engaging Funders — Before Arly: 68%, 21%, 11% | Today: 80%, 16%, 4%
Engaging Community — Before Arly: 66%, 24%, 10% | Today: 83%, 17%

Organizations' Ability to Reach Sufficient Enrollment for Their Program

Legend: Above Average/Excellent | Average | Very Poor/Below Average

Before Arly: 55%, 30%, 15% | Today: 82%, 18%

Program Planning & Design

For organizations looking to strengthen planning and program design:

- 80% improved in program planning
- Support systems development grew from 52% to 67%
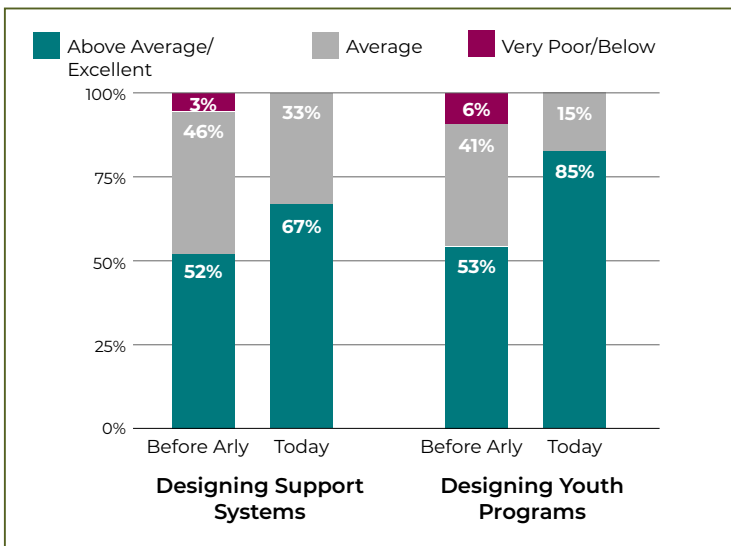- Program design capabilities increased from 53% to 85%

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 lead[9] and making decisions based on [their] experience [contributed to better program planning]."

Family Engagement

Family engagement efforts became more effective, as organizations' ability to engage families grew from 66% before Arly to 81% after Arly.
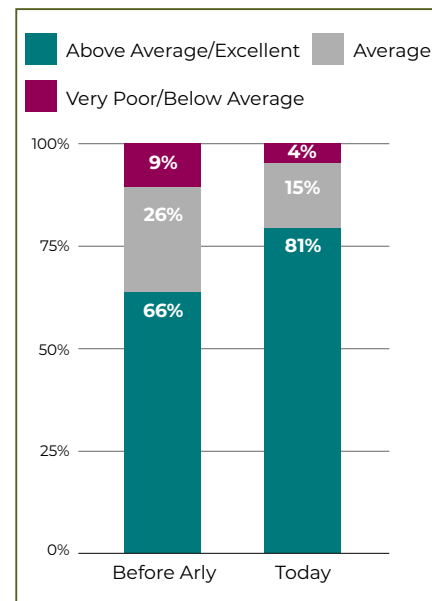
Partners said:

"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

Legend: Above Average/Excellent, Average, Very Poor/Below Average

	Before Arly	Today
Very Poor/Below Average	9%	4%
Average	26%	15%
Above Average/Excellent	66%	81%

Organizations' Ability to Design Support Systems and Design Youth Programs

Legend: Above Average/Excellent, Average, Very Poor/Below

Designing Support Systems

	Before Arly	Today
Very Poor/Below	3%	—
Average	46%	33%
Above Average/Excellent	52%	67%

Designing Youth Programs

	Before Arly	Today
Very Poor/Below	6%	—
Average	41%	15%
Above Average/Excellent	53%	85%

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[9] "Success lead" is another term for the primary Arly coach.

Culture & Climate

A positive organizational culture is critical for success, and Arly helped organizations make key improvements:

- 81% saw growth in building a positive culture and climate

- Staff workplace culture grew from 53% to 85%

- The 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."

Implementation & Day-to-Day

For organizations needing support in program implementation, results showed:

- 100% improvement in implementation

- Day-to-day operations management grew from 53% to 81%

- Nearly all (96%) felt highly confident in implementing youth programming after Arly, compared to 79% before Arly
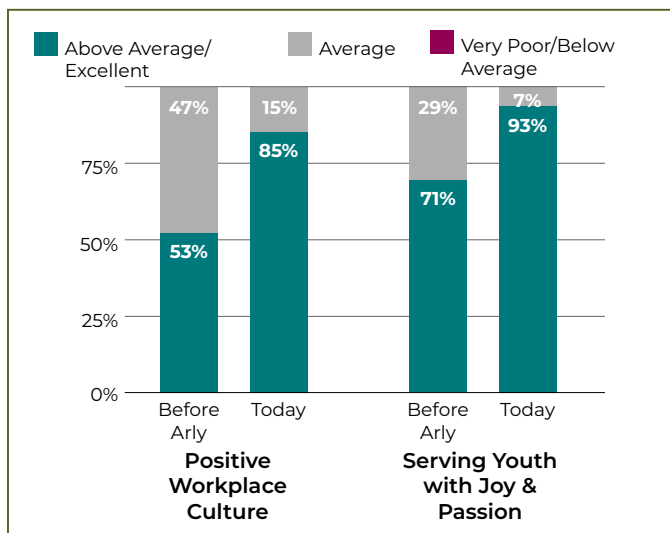
Partners said:

> "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."
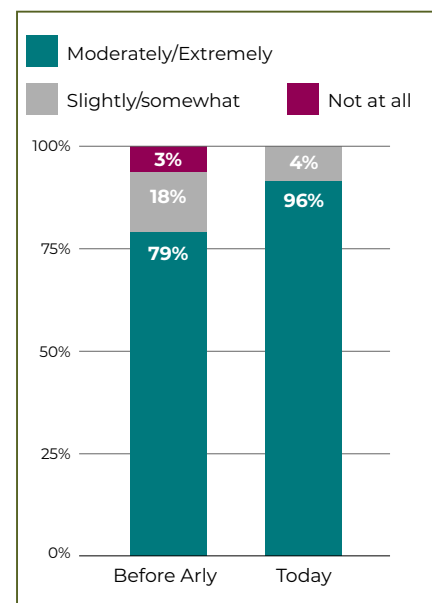
> "[Arly] gave access to resources that provided efficiency."

> "Streamlined processes so time with students was increased [contributed to culture and climate]."

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

Legend: Above Average/Excellent, Average, Very Poor/Below Average

Positive Workplace Culture:
- Before Arly: 53% (Above Average/Excellent), 47% (Average)
- Today: 85% (Above Average/Excellent), 15% (Average)

Serving Youth with Joy & Passion:
- Before Arly: 71% (Above Average/Excellent), 29% (Average)
- Today: 93% (Above Average/Excellent), 7% (Average)

Organizations' Confidence in Implementing Youth Programs

Legend: Moderately/Extremely, Slightly/somewhat, Not at all

- Before Arly: 79% (Moderately/Extremely), 18% (Slightly/somewhat), 3% (Not at all)
- Today: 96% (Moderately/Extremely), 4% (Slightly/somewhat)

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.

Maximizing Arly's Value

An overwhelming 93-100% of organizations using Arly's features and services found them helpful in meeting their goals. The most valued resources included:

- Pre-program coaching, especially in planning and preparation
- Data collection and reporting tools
- Pre-launch and planning coaching sessions
- Attendance and evaluation services

These findings align with OST research, reinforcing that strong planning and measurement are essential for program quality[10,11] - areas where Arly provides critically valuable support.

Conclusion

This study highlights Arly's effectiveness in improving youth program quality and identifies opportunities for further enhancement.

Key takeaways:

1. The majority of organizations sought Arly's support in at least one area that can positively impact program quality.

2. Organizations that engaged more deeply with Arly's features, services, and coaching saw greater improvements in implementation and planning.

3. Providers' confidence in their ability to deliver high-quality programs increased across all eight key program areas.

4. Nearly all respondents found Arly's tools and services helpful for their organization to meet its goals.

With a research-backed foundation and commitment to continuous innovation, Arly remains dedicated to empowering organizations with the tools, insights, and support needed to deliver high-quality, scalable youth programs.

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.