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Commissioner

October 26, 2011

Dear Community Members:

On behalf of the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), I am pleased to present, “The Beacon Community Centers Middle School Initiative: Final Report on Implementation and Youth Experience in the Initiative,” an independent evaluation conducted by Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

Launched in September 2007, the DYCD Beacon Community Centers Middle School Initiative required each of the 80 Beacon Community Centers (Beacons) to provide structured programming for at least 200 youth in grades 5 through 8 in academics, life skills, career awareness, civic engagement, physical health, arts and culture. As detailed in this evaluation, the Initiative was based on recent research highlighting the importance of successful transitions for students in middle school, and Beacons were asked to accommodate the Initiative within their overall programming for youth, adults and families. The evaluators found that the majority of Beacon Centers met or exceeded the Initiative’s target of enrolling 200 middle-grades participants. In 2009-10, the Initiative served nearly 22,000 youth and the report notes that most participants were positive about their experiences. More than two-thirds of survey respondents agreed that Beacon activities are engaging and offer opportunities to try new things. In addition, as a result of their participation in the Initiative, youth reported gaining awareness of their communities and ways to assist others. Program participation also made youth feel more confident and helped them complete their homework more often. A majority of respondents reported strong relationships with their peers at the Beacon and being treated with respect by the staff. Evaluator observations of a sample of programs also found staff were warm and caring, and youth were typically on-task and engaged.

In addition to these encouraging findings, the evaluation also notes variations among Beacons and underscores specific challenges and areas for improvement. These include the need for targeted outreach and recruitment of middle-grades participants, programming that can address participants’ academic needs, and the strategies to connect with families and strengthen relationships with Beacon host schools.

We urge you to share this important report with others in your community. As we work to apply the lessons learned and begin planning for a new solicitation over the coming year, DYCD will take the findings and recommendations of this evaluation into account. We look forward to working with all our community partners and other stakeholders to promote the continued success of the New York City Beacons.

Sincerely,

Jeanne B. Mullgrav



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