Entrepreneurship in Out-of-School Time

Findings from High School Focus Groups
OVERVIEW

Entrepreneurship provides young people with hands-on opportunities to learn and build the skills needed to succeed in the 21st and 22nd centuries. The Ohio Afterschool Network (OAN) and Young Entrepreneur Institute (YEI) are partnering, with support from the C. S. Mott Foundation, to ensure Ohio youth can explore entrepreneurship in out-of-school time (OST) programs.

To inform this work, focus groups with high school students in five different Ohio communities were held to learn about and understand students’ views on entrepreneurship and what they want from entrepreneurship programs in OST such as afterschool programs and summer camps.

OAN engaged Abigail Fisher, a recent Columbus Academy graduate, as a summer intern to conduct focus groups with the belief that young people would be more willing to speak candidly to a peer.

FOCUS GROUP GOALS

1. How are youth engaged in entrepreneurship in general?
2. What makes high school students want to spend time engaging in entrepreneurship in OST programs?
3. How do we help OST programs engage high school youth in entrepreneurship? (e.g. What do programs need to do?)

Focus Group Planning

Abigail conducted research to develop a format for the focus groups based on best practice and learned of recommended a common question format for focus groups known as the three E’s.

1. **ENGAGEMENT**: introduce participants to the topic and make them more comfortable with the environment.
2. **EXPLORATION**: open-ended questions that get participants to discuss the topic at length.
3. **EXIT**: to catch missed ideas and possible game.

She also learned that a recommended focus group size is eight to ten participants. It was also decided that there would be about ten to thirteen questions asked over a period of thirty to forty-five minutes.

Focus Group Implementation

Each focus group engaged eight to twelve students who ranged from twelve to eighteen years old. The groups’ demographics ranged from Caucasian, African American, Asian American and Indian American. Students in all but one group attended summer programs that were currently operating. One group consisted of suburban students not currently participating in a summer program.

Questions Asked Included:

**ENGAGEMENT**
- Describe what you think entrepreneurship is or means.
- Do you know someone who makes money by selling things or performing a service?

**EXPLORATION**
- Do you know of a program that can help you be an entrepreneur? If not, would you be interested in doing one?
- What is your favorite thing from an organized activity that you have participated in?

**EXIT**
- Skills card game

KEY FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

High school students in these focus groups, have a general idea of what entrepreneurship is (e.g. owning your own business, being independent, taking a risk to trust a creative thought, knowing how to brand yourself). However, the more that entrepreneurship was talked about in a conversational, comfortable setting, the better students understand what it really is.
Eyes Opened

We found many students are entrepreneurs but do not give themselves credit for it because they don’t fully understand entrepreneurship. Many of the students who participated in the focus groups were entrepreneurs in their school, neighborhood or even on social media and websites. Time and time again during our focus groups we found that students did not realize until halfway through the questions that their lawn care or nail business made them entrepreneurs. They associated entrepreneurs with being wealthy and famous, like Steve Jobs, Elon Musk or Oprah Winfrey, not with their community members, parents, friends and themselves.

Limited by age?

In addition to lack of entrepreneurship education, students feel limited by their age. This can be an issue with teens who may feel that they are too young to become entrepreneurs, even though probing questions during the focus group process revealed many students had their own entrepreneurial enterprises. Many students who participated in focus groups did not believe Abigail when she introduced herself as a high school intern. They were surprised to learn that a near-peer could conduct herself professionally and take responsibility for designing and conducting focus groups.

Financial Limitations

Another limitation of students’ thinking revealed in the focus groups is a belief that substantial funds are needed to launch a business. Students didn’t consider that a business could be launched with modest funds, or that they could secure investors.

Enjoyable Experiences

When asked what they most enjoy about organized out-of-school experiences, student reported the following:

- The social aspect
- Making new, mutually beneficial connections with others
- Competition and collaboration
- Overcoming the nervousness of presenting oneself
- The supportiveness of a team
- Seeing a final product of one’s work

Entrepreneurial Skills

A card game was developed for the final three focus groups; it was designed to facilitate conversation about skills needed for successful entrepreneurship. Students had to rank nine skills: confidence, communication, creativity, time management, financial planning, strategic thinking, curiosity, grit, courage. The first group, the least knowledgeable about entrepreneurship, landed on creativity as the most important. The second group had an extremely heated discussion that ended up with students pitching their ideas for why each skill was better and ending in a vote. They ultimately voted “strategic thinking” as a second to “confidence.” The final group, whose students had just participated in entrepreneurial education, easily ranked strategic thinking as first. Our conclusion is that students who are less familiar with the entrepreneurial mindset do not understand how foundational skills and can lead to developing other skills.

It was exciting to see students passionate about their ideas, participate in friendly debate, come to a consensus, and be engaged in deep thinking about entrepreneurship.
Ideal Program Design

Over the course of the focus groups, students shared a variety of thoughts about the preferred setting, time of year, and ideal facilitators for entrepreneurial education. However, they said their preferred setting is at school during the summer or after school.

Focus group participants did not care if the program leaders are entrepreneurs or not, but they would prefer for them to be close to their age. Similarly, they would like to hear from guest speakers who are local or well-known entrepreneurs who are close in age to them.

PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR PITCH (YEP)

The final focus group was with students who had participated in an entrepreneurial camp using the Young Entrepreneur Institute’s (YEI) Young Entrepreneurship Pitch (YEP) curriculum. These students responded to the same questions asked in other focus groups as well as some questions tailored to their experience.

What Students Liked About YEP

- Prize money
- Opportunities you get from it
- Practice “pitching yourself”
- Learn how to explain information in a fast amount of time
- Learned relying on other people isn’t necessary → you can be independent
- Learn how to make a persuasive presentation

Opportunities to Strengthen Entrepreneurial Education

Students were asked how they would design the YEP camp differently. They suggested that entrepreneurship education be concentrated in one full week of this camp, instead of once a week mixed in with other activities and topics over the course of a summer program. Combining it with another camp caused some to lose interest in a topic that really was appealing to them.

They didn’t get enough days to work on developing their business idea and practice their pitches; they would forget certain parts of their work from week to week.

Students reported needing more time to practice their pitches before delivering them in front of an audience.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Include entrepreneurship education in after-school and summer programs—this is a topic of great interest to students and young adults! With structured opportunities to learn about and experience entrepreneurship in out-of-school time, students can consider and pursue entrepreneurship as a “side hustle” or a career choice.

2. Educate students that one doesn’t have to be rich and famous or have a substantial start-up fund to be a successful entrepreneur. Provide examples of entrepreneurs who started small or were able to secure investors.

3. Introduce students to local entrepreneurs through field trips and guest speakers. It helps them to see what is possible, imagine themselves as entrepreneurs and better understand their local communities. When possible, focus on engaging young entrepreneurs as speakers and mentors to students.

4. Discuss the entrepreneurial mindset and the different skillsets it involves. Provide students with opportunities to talk with entrepreneurs about how their skills helped them in their business ventures. Create opportunities for students to practice and strengthen their own entrepreneurial mindset as they help them to be successful in school, work and life.
THANK YOU

The Ohio Afterschool Network would like to extend a thank you to the organizations that not only volunteered to host focus groups at their programs, but also recruited the teenagers to participate and give their feedback.

- YMCA Hilltop of Columbus
- Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services
- Cleveland Boys and Girls Club
- Vineyard Columbus

Additionally, OAN would like to extend a thank you to the group of Worthington High School Students who were not in a summer program but provided insight on these questions as well.

Without these organizations our focus groups would not have been able to be so successful, so thank you!

Abigail Fisher interned at the Ohio Afterschool Network during the summer of 2019. She conducted research to design the focus groups, worked with OAN and the Young Entrepreneur Institute to refine her process, facilitated five focus groups and created recommendations and this report. Abigail has multiple entrepreneurs in her family, previously interned at a community foundation and law office, and entered Elon University as a freshman in the fall of 2019. She lives in Gahanna Ohio.