

After-School Programs:

AN UPDATE OF THE NEED, THE BENEFITS, AND PUBLIC OPINION

Today's heightened interest in after-school programs arises from two relatively recent circumstances. The first is that more students than ever before enter empty homes after school. These children and youth are alone and unsupervised for several hours until an adult comes home. With more women working outside the home and the growth of single-parent families, after-school child care has become a critical issue in American life. The second reason for this upsurge of interest in after-school programs is that expectations for students have changed. More rigorous standards and demands for higher academic performance are placing new challenges on students. To meet

these challenges, many children and youth need more time and opportunities to learn.

After-school programs offer a sound response to both these needs. They offer children safe and supervised places to go after school, and they extend learning opportunities that can improve students' academic performance.

This report reviews the need, the benefits, and public opinion on after-school programs for children and youth. Building on an earlier review of the literature on after-school programs, it incorporates new findings drawn from a search of education, social work, criminal justice, psychological, and public opinion research since 1993.

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Executive Summary

Demographic and social shifts have changed the structure of American families. More mothers of school-age children are in the workforce and parents generally are spending more hours on the job. One consequence is that more children are home alone after school, unsupervised and exposed to numerous dangers, including injury, crime, and alcohol, tobacco, and drug use.

- ▶ More than seven school-age children in every ten live in households where either both parents or the single parent works outside the home.¹
- ▶ Employees who worked at least 20 hours a week spent an average of 3.5 more hours per week on the job in 1997 than they did in 1977.²
- ▶ A national study estimated that four million children between ages 6 and 12 are home alone after school.³
- ▶ Juvenile crime peaks between 3 and 6 p.m. on school days, as do car crashes involving youth. Unsupervised youth are more likely to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, engage in sex, and use drugs.⁴
- ▶ In a New York State survey, 59 percent of young people reported that there are not enough after-school programs in their area that interest them.⁵

Children in high-quality after-school programs have better peer relations, emotional adjustment, conflict resolution skills, and conduct in school.⁹

Economic downturns and the enactment of federal welfare reforms have made the care of school-age children a major challenge for American families. This comes at a time when the country is raising the bar for students' academic achievement.

- ▶ New York State experienced a 39 percent decrease in the number of families receiving welfare between August 1996 and June 2000, creating serious concerns about after-school care in many families where the primary caregiver had left the home to go to work.⁶
- ▶ Research over the last half century consistently shows that the more time students spend on educational tasks, the higher their achievement.⁷

Students in after-school programs show higher academic achievement than comparable students not in after-school programs. After-school participants behave better and are more respectful toward others, attend school more, have higher graduation rates, and are more likely to continue their education after high school than students not in after-school programs.

- ▶ Eighty-six percent of parents with children in the TASC after-school program agreed that the after-school activities help their children to get their homework done, do better in school, and get the academic help they need.⁸
- ▶ Children in high-quality after-school programs have better peer relations, emotional adjustment, conflict resolution skills, and conduct in school than do other students.⁹
- ▶ Boys and girls in five cities randomly assigned to participate in the Quantum Opportunities program were half as likely to drop out of high school and 2.5 times more likely to continue their education after high school as those not in the program.¹⁰

After-school programs reduce anxiety within families, provide ways to prevent the use of drugs and alcohol among children and youth, and prevent teenage pregnancy prevention.

- ▶ Parents of children enrolled in the TASC program said that TASC helped them to balance work and family life.¹¹
- ▶ A study comparing housing projects with Boys & Girls Clubs with those with no clubs showed 50 percent more vandalism and 30 percent more drug activity in housing projects without clubs.¹²
- ▶ Girls in the Children’s Aid Society-Carrera Program significantly delayed the onset of sex, increased the use of contraceptive methods, and reduced pregnancy and birth rates.¹³

After-school programs are safe havens for children and youth who have no place to go and nothing to do after school but get into trouble. High-quality after-school programs pay attention to the needs and schedules of working parents. They are a cost-effective investment in improving students’ academic performance and preventing crime.

- ▶ Police chiefs believe that after-school and educational child care programs are the most effective way to reduce juvenile crime, ahead of prosecuting more juveniles as adults, hiring more police officers, and installing more metal detectors and surveillance cameras in schools.¹⁴
- ▶ Half or more of parents surveyed about the TASC after-school program agreed that the program fitted their needs, allowed them to miss less work than before, and helped them keep their jobs and work more hours.¹⁵
- ▶ At a cost of approximately \$1,500 per child per year, after-school programs need to prevent only a handful of adolescents from getting involved in drug use or crime in order to justify their investment.¹⁶

The general public, along with parents, educators, and law enforcement officials, overwhelmingly supports after-school programs.

- ▶ A public opinion survey conducted in the summer of 2001 found that 7 out of 10 voters supported an \$800 million expansion annually of federal funding for after-school programs.¹⁷
- ▶ When asked if they would favor or oppose having their state taxes increased by \$100 per year to pay for every child to attend an after-school program, 67 percent of voters said that they would favor the tax increase.¹⁸

At a cost of approximately \$1,500 per child, after-school programs need to prevent only a handful of adolescents from getting involved in drug use or crime in order to justify their investment.¹⁶

The Need for After-School Programs

Workforce and Other Demographic Trends

MORE WORKING PARENTS

Demographic and social shifts have changed the structure of American families. More mothers in the workforce means that more children are home alone when they return from school.

- ▶ Between 1969 and 1996, the percentage of married mothers in the workforce increased from 38 percent to 68 percent.¹⁹
- ▶ More than seven school-age children in every ten live in households where either both parents or the only parent works outside the home.²⁰
- ▶ Between 1997 and 1999, the percentage of low-income single parents who were employed rose from 63 percent to 67 percent, while employment rates for higher-income single parents remained at 94 percent.²¹
- ▶ Since 1990, changes in public policy and the economy produced a 38-percent increase in the labor force participation of single mothers with young children.²²

MORE TIME SPENT AT WORK

Not only are more mothers of school-age children in the workforce, but parents generally are spending more hours on the job.

- ▶ One study of the workforce found that, although the vast majority of workers had day-to-day family responsibilities, employees spent an average of 44 hours per week working.²³
- ▶ Employees who worked at least 20 hours a week spent an average of 3.5 more hours per week on the job in 1997 than they did in 1977.²⁴

MORE CHILDREN HOME ALONE

A consequence of more women and single parents entering the workforce is that more children are home alone after school.

- ▶ A nationwide child care survey found that 44 percent of families did not have any regular after-school care for their children.²⁵
- ▶ A national study estimated that four million children between ages 6 and 12 are home alone after school.²⁶ An additional four million 13- and 14-year-olds are home alone.²⁷
- ▶ Five percent of 6- to 9-year-olds regularly care for themselves while the mother is working. Twenty-four percent of 10- to 12-year-olds have self-care as the primary form of care while the mother is working.²⁸
- ▶ On any given day an estimated 8 million—and up to as many as 15 million—children go home to an empty house after school.²⁹
- ▶ More than half of teens (54 percent) say they wouldn't watch so much television or play video games as intently if they had other things to do after school.³⁰
- ▶ In a New York State survey, 59 percent of young people reported that there are not enough after-school programs in their area that interest them.³¹

Since 1990, changes in public policy and the economy produced a 38 percent increase in the labor force participation of single mothers with young children.²²

Dangers in Self-Care

Unsupervised time exposes children and youth to numerous dangers, including injury, crime, and alcohol, tobacco, and drug use.

- ▶ Nearly 4.5 million children 14 and younger are injured in their homes every year, and most deaths from unintentional injury occur when children are out of school and unsupervised.³²
- ▶ More than half of former latchkey children said they had serious emergencies when they were home alone.³³
- ▶ Juvenile crime peaks between 3 and 6 p.m. on school days.³⁴ Children are more likely to be victims of violent crime in the hour after the end of the school day than at any other hour of the day.³⁵
- ▶ Most juvenile sexual assaults occur from 3 to 4 p.m. on school days.³⁶
- ▶ In New York State, 21 percent of young people left unsupervised three or more times a week reported that they frequently or sometimes had engaged in activities that could have gotten them arrested.³⁷
- ▶ Prime time for youth who are 16 or 17 years old to be in a car crash or to cause a car crash is 3 to 6 p.m.³⁸
- ▶ In 1999, 104,000 youth under the age of 18 were arrested for serious violent crime, including robbery, forcible rape, aggravated assault, or homicide.³⁹
- ▶ The rate of juvenile violence is four times greater from 4 to 7 p.m. than it is from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., and 57 percent of all juvenile violence occurs on school days.⁴⁰ More than twice as many violent crimes occur in the four hours after school than in the hour that precedes it.⁴¹
- ▶ In 1995, New York ranked first among the 50 states in violent juvenile crime arrest rates, with 1,006 arrests per 100,000 among 10- to 17-year-olds.⁴²
- ▶ A study of almost 5,000 eighth graders found that children who took care of themselves for 11 or more hours a week were twice as likely to use alcohol, tobacco, or drugs.⁴³
- ▶ Compared to teens supervised every day, teens unsupervised one or more days a week are more likely to drink liquor, beer, or other alcohol (34 percent vs. 22 percent), smoke cigarettes (16 percent vs. 11 percent), and engage in sex (17 percent vs. 11 percent), and are three times more likely to use marijuana or other drugs (14 percent vs. 4 percent).⁴⁴
- ▶ The hours between 3 and 6 p.m. are the most common time for children and youth to engage in sexual intercourse.⁴⁵ Sixty percent of sexually transmitted diseases are contracted by teens.⁴⁶
- ▶ Latchkey children watch significantly more television than children under adult supervision. By age 18, the average child has seen 200,000 acts of violence, including 40,000 murders, on television.⁴⁷
- ▶ In a study of fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students, latchkey students who cared for younger siblings for more than a year reported more “deviant behaviors.” The researchers suggested that the behaviors may have been a protest against too much responsibility at too young an age.⁴⁸
- ▶ In a study of former latchkey children, 20 percent experienced long-term negative effects from high levels of fear, isolation, and too much responsibility.⁴⁹

The rate of juvenile violence is four times greater from 4 to 7 p.m. than it is from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., and 57 percent of all juvenile violence occurs on school days.⁴⁰

New Challenges and Trends

CHANGING ECONOMIES

Economic downturns and the enactment of federal welfare reform in 1996 have made the care of school-age children a major challenge for American families.

- ▶ Between August 1996, when the Welfare Reform Act was implemented, and June 2000, 50 percent fewer families received welfare funds. The largest drop, 94 percent, was in Idaho; the smallest, 27 percent, was in Delaware. New York State experienced a 39 percent decrease in the number of families receiving welfare.⁵⁰
- ▶ Families leaving welfare may need after-school care more than most. Low-paying jobs often have irregular hours, leading the General Accounting Office to estimate that welfare reform will be associated with a “substantial increase” in unmet child care needs.⁵¹
- ▶ A study in Florida showed an increase in adolescent arrests, convictions, and involvement with police as parents moved off welfare rolls and into the workforce.⁵²
- ▶ In rural areas, experts estimate that the availability of school-age care can cover only about one-third of the population of children with employed parents.⁵³

HIGHER EDUCATION STANDARDS

States across the country are raising the bar for students’ academic achievement. This, in turn, is drawing new attention to the ways that students spend their free time and increasing public interest in making that time meaningful.

- ▶ Research over the last half century consistently shows that the more time students spend on educational tasks, the higher their achievement.⁵⁴
- ▶ Students need assistance to meet higher standards: Only 21 percent of New York City high school graduates earned a Regents-level diploma in 1997. Outside the state’s five largest cities, only 40 percent of the graduates earned a Regents diploma.⁵⁵
- ▶ In 1997, 63 percent of incoming freshmen at the CUNY senior colleges failed at least one of the placement tests. Of the 8,000 students who entered the senior colleges that year, 5,000 would have been excluded if they had needed to pass all three exams.⁵⁶

Research over the last half century consistently shows that the more time students spend on educational tasks, the higher their achievement.⁵⁴

The Benefits of After-School Programs

Educational Impacts

IMPROVED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Students in after-school programs show more engagement with their studies, a willingness to get help when they need it, and higher academic achievement.

- ▶ A statewide evaluation of California’s After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program showed that low-achieving students who participated in the program were more likely to raise their test scores above the 25th percentile in both reading and math than were students generally in the state. Low-achievers with regular after-school participation were especially likely to climb above the 25th percentile.⁵⁷
- ▶ Evaluations of LA’s BEST show that students with higher participation in the program had higher scores on standardized tests of math, reading, and language arts.⁵⁸
- ▶ Fourth-grade participants in the Foundations, Inc., Age Enrichment Program, an after-school program designed to improve students’ academic achievement and to foster physical and emotional development, showed larger improvements on the Terra Nova Achievement tests than nonparticipants.⁵⁹
- ▶ Fourth graders who participated in the Ohio Urban School Initiative School-Age Care Programs exceeded the statewide percentage of students meeting proficient standards in math, writing, reading, citizenship, and science.⁶⁰
- ▶ Of 40 schools involved in a citywide after-school program run by the Chicago Public Schools, 30 schools showed gains in students’ reading scores, and 39 schools showed gains in mathematics scores.⁶¹
- ▶ Tenth graders who spend their time outside of school in structured activities with adults have higher school engagement, perception of life chances, and achievement as twelfth graders.⁶²
- ▶ In TASC, 31 percent of active participants scoring at the lowest proficiency level in math in 1998-99 scored at a higher proficiency level in 1999-2000, the most recent year for which data are available, whereas only 23 percent of nonparticipants scored at a higher level.⁶³
- ▶ Eighty-six percent of parents with children in the TASC after-school program agreed that the after-school activities help their children to get their homework done, do better in school, and get the academic help they need.⁶⁴
- ▶ When asked about academic benefits, students surveyed in the TASC program, including 73 percent of participating fourth and fifth graders, 66 percent of sixth through eighth graders, and 75 percent of ninth through twelfth graders, responded positively to statements such as “the after-school project has helped me read and understand more.”⁶⁵
- ▶ After-school programs can help improve grades even when the program focus isn’t academic. A six-month study of a cultural and recreational after-school program in Baltimore found that participating children significantly improved their reading and math skills over a comparison group.⁶⁶

Evaluations of LA’s BEST show that students with higher participation in the program had higher scores on standardized tests of math, reading, and language arts.⁵⁸

IMPROVED BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL

Children who spend time in after-school programs are better behaved and more respectful toward others, which creates a more positive and productive in-school learning environment for all.

- ▶ Children in high-quality after-school programs have better peer relations, emotional adjustment, conflict resolution skills, and conduct in school.⁶⁷
- ▶ Teachers in Manchester, New Hampshire, reported that nearly 50 percent of the children in one after-school program had fewer behavioral problems than before, and nearly 40 percent had learned to handle conflicts better.⁶⁸
- ▶ Third-grade children in three different after-school programs—one academic, one primarily cultural and recreational, and a third a mix of both—showed that the children in all three programs were rated as having better peer relations and as less likely to be antisocial than children who were informally supervised after school.⁶⁹
- ▶ Before participating in Boys & Girls Clubs' Educational Enhancement Program, middle-grade students had 50 percent more behavior problems than those in other after-school programs; after 30 months in the program, they had only half as many behavioral problems as those in other programs.⁷⁰

Third-grade children in three different after-school programs—one academic, one primarily cultural and recreational, and a third a mix of both—had better peer relations and were less likely to be antisocial than children who were informally supervised after school.⁶⁹

IMPROVED ATTENDANCE AND GRADUATION RATES

Students in after-school programs attend school more, have higher high school graduation rates, and are more likely to continue their education after high school than students not in after-school programs.

- ▶ While school attendance rose for all TASC participants in grades K-8, it particularly rose for low-attending participants. Of these students, 51 percent improved their school attendance, while only 32 percent of nonparticipants improved their attendance.⁷¹
- ▶ Children who participated in LA's BEST on a regular basis over several years improved their school attendance.⁷²
- ▶ Boys and girls randomly assigned to participate in the Quantum Opportunities program were half as likely to drop out of high school and 2.5 times more likely to continue their education after high school as those not in the program.⁷³
- ▶ Improvements in school behavior can lead to higher daily attendance rates and, eventually, higher graduation rates among after-school program participants.⁷⁴
- ▶ A study of nearly 1,000 children participating in Big Brothers and Big Sisters programs found that the experience was likely to improve their school attendance.⁷⁵

Family Life and Social-Emotional Adjustment

ENHANCED FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

After-school programs reduce anxiety within families, creating more nurturing home environments and increasing parents' involvement in their children's school life.

- ▶ A study of more than 800 elementary school children found that children who went to an organized after-school program were less likely to be lonely than their peers who went home to an empty house.⁷⁶
- ▶ Parents of children enrolled in the TASC program said that TASC helped them to balance work and family life. The program also increased parents' attendance at parent-teacher conferences and other school events.⁷⁷
- ▶ Three-quarters of the parents surveyed for the evaluation of LA's BEST indicated that they worried significantly less about their children's safety and that they had more energy in the evening since enrolling their children in the program.⁷⁸
- ▶ First-graders who received emotional support in an after-school program had fewer behavior problems at home.⁷⁹

Parents of children enrolled in the TASC program said that TASC helped them to balance work and family life.⁷⁷

PREVENTION OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

After-school programs are providing a way to prevent the use of drugs and alcohol among children and youth.

- ▶ A study comparing housing projects with Boys & Girls Clubs with housing projects without clubs showed 50 percent more vandalism and 30 percent more drug activity in housing projects without clubs.⁸⁰
- ▶ Eighty percent of the youth interviewed in the evaluation of New York City's Beacons described the program as either "very helpful" or "pretty helpful" in avoiding drug use.⁸¹
- ▶ When compared to children who spent one to four hours per week in after-school programs, students who spent no time in extracurricular activities were 49 percent more likely to have used drugs.⁸²

PREVENTION OF PREGNANCY

After-school programs targeting older students reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy.

- ▶ The Children's Aid Society-Carrera Program, a comprehensive after-school pregnancy prevention program, found that girls participating in the program significantly delayed the onset of sex, increased the use of contraceptive methods, and reduced pregnancy and birth rates.⁸³
- ▶ A three-year study of a Girls' Inc. program for 750 teenage girls found that program participants were less likely to become pregnant than were their nonparticipating counterparts.⁸⁴
- ▶ Boys and girls not in the Quantum program were 50 percent more likely to have children during their high school years than those participating in Quantum.⁸⁵

Crime and Safety

After-school programs are safe havens for children and youth who have no place to go and nothing to do after school but get into trouble. They offer a healthy alternative to juvenile delinquency and keep children safe from injury and victimization.

- ▶ Juvenile crime surges at age 14 and drops off at the age of 18. Experts agree that if a child can get through this period, he or she is more likely to stay out of serious trouble later in life.⁸⁶
- ▶ Police chiefs believe that after-school and educational child care programs are the most effective way to reduce juvenile crime (69 percent), ahead of prosecuting more juveniles as adults (17 percent), hiring more police officers (13 percent), and installing metal detectors and surveillance cameras in schools (1 percent).⁸⁷
- ▶ Boys randomly assigned to participate in the Quantum Opportunities program were only one-sixth as likely to be convicted of a crime during their high school years as the boys left out of the program.⁸⁸
- ▶ Three years after Baltimore’s Police Department initiated a neighborhood after-school program, juvenile crime dropped nearly 10 percent and the risk of children and teens becoming crime victims was cut almost in half, with crime rates falling almost three times as fast as they did for the city as a whole.⁸⁹
- ▶ In an evaluation of New York City Beacons, 85 percent of youth reported that it was “always true” or “mostly true” that they felt safe at Beacons.⁹⁰

Parents in Ohio reported that they were able to work more hours and had more flexible schedules when their children were in after-school programs.⁹²

Parental Employment/Workforce Productivity

High-quality, after-school programs pay attention to the needs and schedules of working parents.

- ▶ Half or more of parents surveyed about the TASC after-school program agreed that the program fitted their needs, allowed them to miss less work than before, and helped them keep their jobs and work more hours.⁹¹
- ▶ Parents in Ohio reported that they were able to work more hours and had more flexible schedules when their children were in after-school programs.⁹²
- ▶ Research indicates that when parents are comfortable with their child care arrangements, they are more productive on the job. When care is inadequate, parental stress mounts, and parents can miss work.⁹³

Cost-Effectiveness

After-school programs are a cost-effective investment in improving students' academic performance and preventing crime.

- ▶ At a cost of approximately \$1,500 per child per year, after-school programs need to prevent only a handful of adolescents from getting involved in drug use or crime in order to justify their investment.⁹⁴
- ▶ Nine out of ten police chiefs agreed that greater investments in after-school programs today will prevent paying far more later in crime, welfare, and other costs.⁹⁵
- ▶ Every \$1 invested in the Quantum Opportunities after-school program produced \$3.04 worth of benefits to youth and the general public. This figure does not include the added savings from a six-fold drop in crime by boys in the program.⁹⁶
- ▶ For each high-risk youth prevented from adopting a life of crime, experts estimate the country saves between \$1.7 and \$2.3 million.⁹⁷

Nine out of ten police chiefs agreed that greater investments in after-school programs today will prevent paying far more later in crime, welfare, and other costs.⁹⁵

Public Opinion

The general public, along with parents, educators, and law enforcement officials, overwhelmingly supports after-school programs.

- ▶ A public opinion survey conducted in the summer of 2001 found that 7 out of 10 voters supported an \$800 million expansion annually of federal funding for after-school programs.⁹⁸
- ▶ When asked if they would favor or oppose having their state taxes increased by \$100 per year to pay for every child to attend an after-school program, 67 percent of voters said that they would favor the tax increase.⁹⁹
- ▶ Eighty-two percent of people polled said they believed after-school programs help students do better in core academic subjects, 83 percent believed they reduce juvenile crime rates, 89 percent believed they provide values training for children that help steer children away from drugs and alcohol abuse, and 91 percent said that they reduce stress on working families. Support crossed party lines and was favored by wide margins of men, women, married voters, and singles.¹⁰⁰
- ▶ Sixty-nine percent of voters said that it was difficult for parents to find after-school programs.¹⁰¹
- ▶ Over half of teens surveyed by the YMCA said that they wish there were more after-school activities in their neighborhood or community, and two in three said that they were likely to participate in programs that would help them get better grades, develop leadership skills, and become more involved in their community while having fun with other teens.¹⁰²
- ▶ An overwhelming majority of voters in New York State (84 percent) agreed that publicly funded after-school programs operating until 6 p.m. every school day should be available for children and teens. The poll also found that 68 percent of voters thought programs should be located in school buildings, and 75 percent were willing to pay an additional \$10 per year to establish after-school programs in their community.¹⁰³
- ▶ A *Newsweek* magazine poll found that 71 percent of parents believed that schools should remain open all day. Thirty-five percent of parents said they had difficulty finding after-school supervision.¹⁰⁴

Over half of teens surveyed by the YMCA said that they wish there were more after-school activities in their neighborhood or community.¹⁰²

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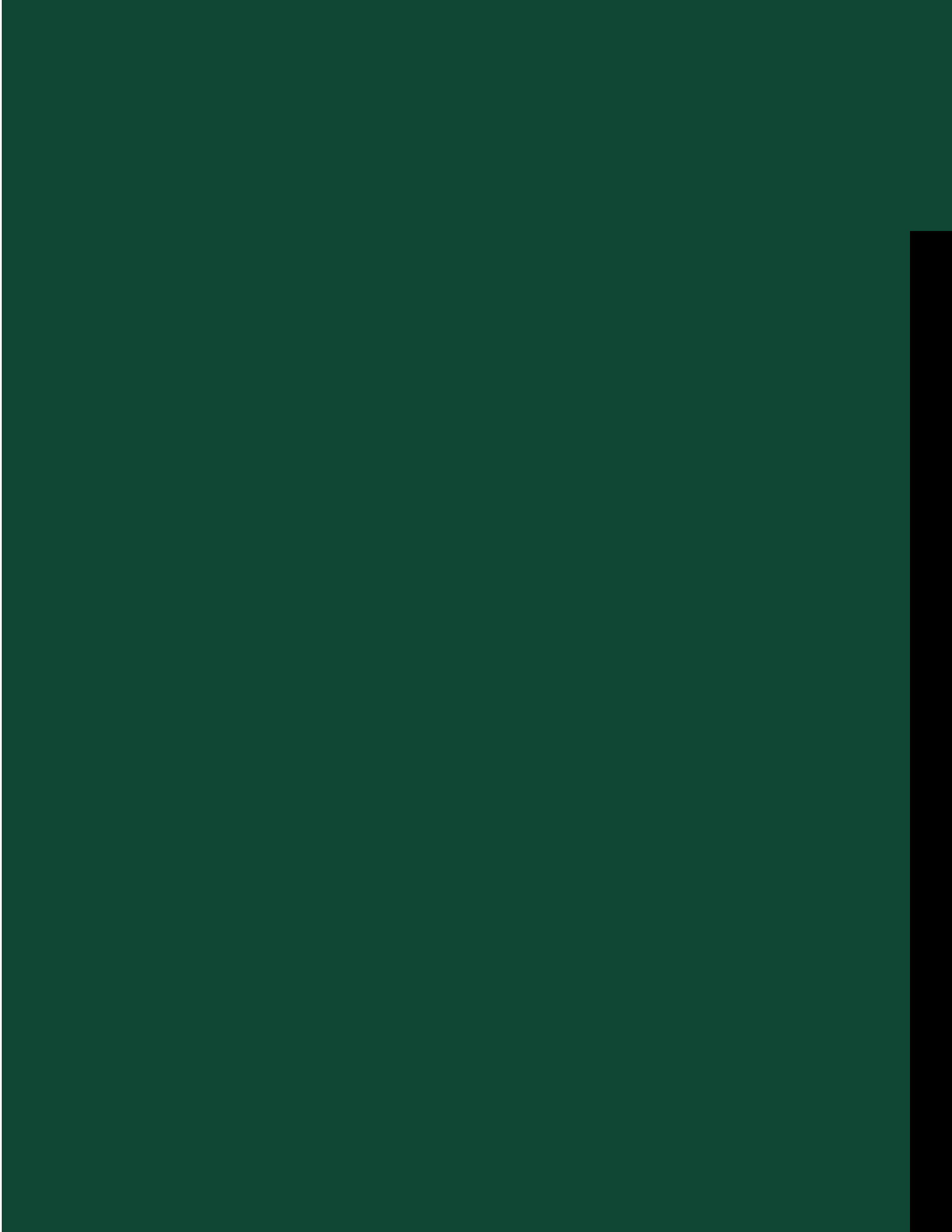
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The After-School Corporation

The After-School Corporation (TASC) was established in April 1998 to enhance the quality, availability, and sustainability of in-school after-school programs in New York City and State, and eventually across the nation. TASC began with a challenge grant from philanthropist George Soros's Open Society Institute, which pledged up to \$25 million per year for each of five years, providing TASC could match those funds from the public sector and other private donors on a three-to-one basis. Recently, OSI extended the \$125 million challenge grant for two additional years and possibly beyond.

Since its inception, TASC has built partnerships with the City and State of New York, local Boards of Education, and other public and private funders to establish over 200 programs statewide. TASC also supports staff training and program evaluation activities and advocates to expand the quality and availability of after-school programs. Together with these partners, TASC is working to create a network of high quality after-school programs that are operated by community-based organizations in public schools. The After-School Corporation's ultimate goal is to promote sustainable, universal after-school programming as a public responsibility.

For more information on after-school programs or this report, please contact The After-School Corporation at (212) 547-6950 or info@tascorp.org.



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