

POLICY STUDIES ASSOCIATES, INC.

1718 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, N.W. • SUITE 400 • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20009 • (202) 939-9780

INCREASING AND IMPROVING AFTER-SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES

Evaluation Results from the TASC After-School Program's First Year

Findings Regarding Parents

May 16, 2000

Prepared for The After-School Corporation
with support from
the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York

EVALUATION OF THE TASC AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM Year 1 Findings Regarding Parents

Policy Studies Associates (PSA), the evaluator of the after-school program supported by The After-School Corporation (TASC), has analyzed data collected during school year 1998-99 from the TASC after-school projects that were funded in Year 1 of the initiative. As discussed below, these analyses yielded descriptions of parents' goals for the after-school program and projects' efforts to involve parents. Evaluation data also confirm that parents were generally satisfied with key elements of the TASC projects and that the availability of free, safe after-school care enabled some parents to become more attached to the workforce and more involved in their children's education.

Focus and Scope of the Evaluation

In Year 1, the evaluation focused mainly on program start-up and initial implementation. In Year 2, the evaluation will also examine program quality. Throughout the five-year evaluation, PSA will collect information through surveys, interviews and observations conducted during site visits, and document reviews. In addition, PSA is obtaining data on participating and non-participating students through an agreement with the Division of Assessment and Accountability of the Board of Education of the City of New York (BOE).

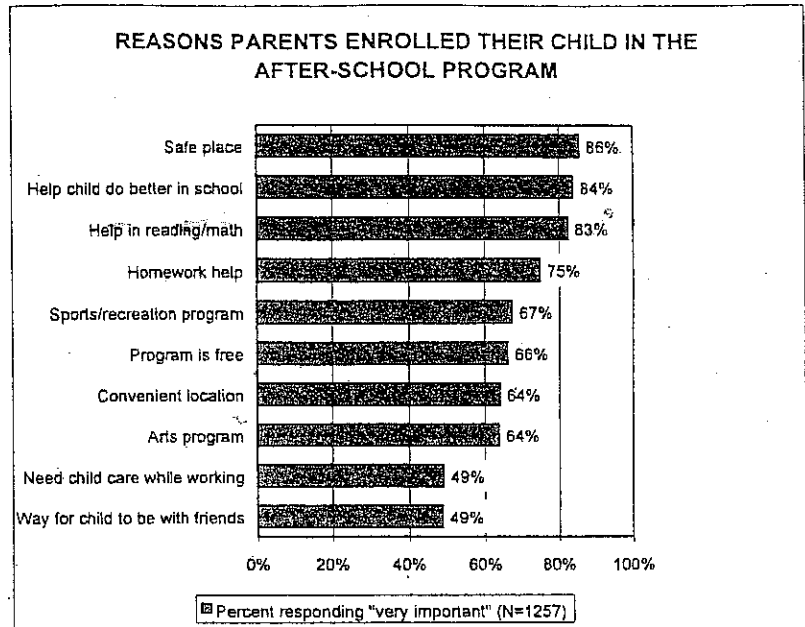
Parents' Goals for the After-School Program

In focus groups, parents said that they enrolled their children in the TASC after-school program to ensure that their children have:

- A safe place to spend time after school
- Opportunities to socialize with other children
- A chance to "see the fun side of school" and to develop motivation for learning
- An opportunity to complete homework before coming home, preferably with assistance from a qualified instructor

Most parents said they favor a structured, well-supervised environment that gives their children a chance to work on "productive" activities such as homework and special projects that reinforce the regular school curriculum. In particular, they want their children to receive individualized homework assistance that strengthens reading and math skills. Parents also want their children to discover new talents and build on existing skills.

Parents of students in 35 TASC projects completed surveys as part of the evaluation. When asked on these surveys to rate their reasons for enrolling a child in the after-school program, parents rated as "very important" a desire for the child to have a safe place to go after school (86 percent of parents), do better in school (84 percent), get help in reading and math (83 percent), and get help with homework (75 percent).



Parent Outreach and Involvement

Outreach to families varied considerably across sites, ranging from informal communication (e.g., sending occasional letters home with students) to more structured mechanisms (e.g., sponsoring monthly events, employing parents). Based on interviews with site coordinators, structured outreach tended to occur in sites serving elementary students, while informal strategies were reported in sites serving middle- to high-school students.

According to surveys of after-school site coordinators, the most frequent outreach and communication strategies included sending materials home and talking informally with parents by telephone and at the school:

- Almost two-thirds of all responding site coordinators reported **sending materials home** a few times a month (30 of 47). This practice was relatively common among sites serving the middle grades (three out of four) and high schools (two out of four), when survey responses were examined by the grade level of students served.
- More than half of the site coordinators (27 of 46) reported **holding events or meetings to which parents were invited** at least a few times a month, including two out of three middle-grades coordinators. Only one out of four high-school coordinators reported this practice, however.

Two site coordinators, including one whose project served middle grades, reported holding such events or meetings almost daily, which included invitations to parents to visit the program and observe or assist with program activities. However, 17 site coordinators (including one middle-grade and three high-school coordinators) indicated

that they rarely or never invited parents to events or meetings. Events for parents included: informational breakfasts or dinners, after-school registration drives, holiday parties, cultural festivals, sports events at which parents competed against their children, and health fairs at which parents obtained information and free materials. Projects also invited parents to serve as chaperones on after-school field trips.

- More than half of all responding site coordinators (28 of 47) reported that they spent time almost every day **talking with parents on the phone**. This group included two of four middle-grade coordinators and one of four high-school coordinators. Three coordinators, including one who served high school students, reported rarely or never talking with parents on the phone.
- Almost two-thirds of all responding site coordinators (30 of 47) reported **talking informally with parents at the school** almost every day, including one middle-grade coordinator and one high-school coordinator. Nine coordinators reported holding such conversations once or twice a week, including one middle-grade coordinator. Seven coordinators reported that such interactions occurred a few times a month, and one (at a high-school site) reported rarely or never talking with parents at the school.
- Six of 47 site coordinators—all of whom served children in the elementary grades—**held conferences with one or more parents** almost daily. Ten coordinators (including one at a middle-grade site) held parent conferences once or twice a week. Twenty-two coordinators, including two serving middle grades and two serving high school, held parent conferences a few times a month. Nine coordinators rarely or never held conferences, including one middle-grade coordinator and two high-school coordinators.

Interview data illustrated the efforts that sites undertook to involve parents. A few sites reported that they employed parents as parent coordinators and instructional aides. In these roles, parents organized monthly parent activities, helped enroll new students, and served as informal project liaisons for parents who did not speak English. Other sites did the following, in order of frequency:

- Recruited parents to organize culminating events and family nights that commemorate the end of after-school sessions
- Hired parents of participating students as assistants or counselors, supervised by a parent coordinator; for example, parents at one site held weekly counseling sessions for students with behavioral problems
- Hosted special events for families, including dinners, student performances, and cultural evenings
- Sent home flyers, newsletters, and monthly calendars to inform parents about activities and cultural events
- Held monthly workshops for parents on such topics as literacy for non-English-speaking families

- Designated the school's PTA president to oversee family outreach efforts for the after-school project
- Referred parents to other programs hosted by their sponsoring agency (e.g., English, GED, or computer classes; parenting workshops; housing and legal services; mental health counseling; legal representation; childcare)
- Organized parent volunteers to help recruit students, provide homework help, and chaperone field trips
- Included parents on project leadership committees

As reported in interviews with site coordinators, factors limiting outreach to families included (in order of frequency reported): lack of engagement by parents of adolescents, lack of support from the host school, parents' work schedules, parents' language and cultural barriers, and families' residence outside the school neighborhood.

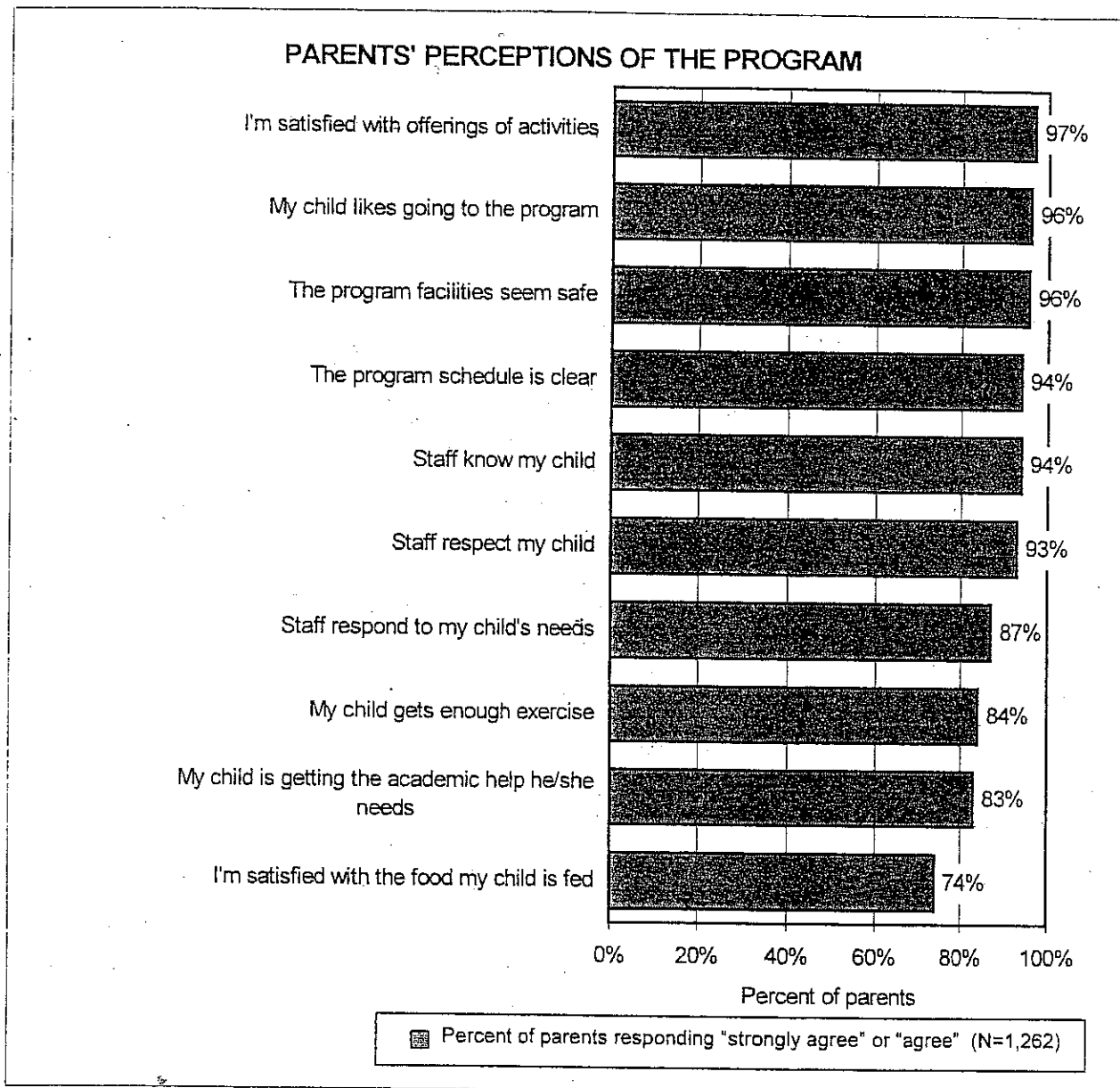
Parents' Perception of Student Participants

Overall, parents' survey responses showed that they had generally positive perceptions of their children. Over three-quarters of responding parents said that (1) they expect their child to finish high school, (2) their child liked him- or herself and gets along well with teachers, (3) their child cares about doing well in school and enjoys school, and (4) their child respects others, gets along well with other students, and is happy most of the time. The perceptions that parents reported on surveys were occasionally more positive than those reported by students, however. Only 5 percent of parents reported that their child fought often with other students, for example, while 20 percent of middle- and high-school students reported getting in fights often, as did 8 percent of elementary students.

Parent Satisfaction With the Program

Parents' opinions of the after-school projects were generally positive. With regard to basic project administration, 96 percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the facilities used by their children's project seemed safe, and 94 percent said that schedules were clear. Ninety-seven percent of parents reported satisfaction with the selection of activities offered by the project their child attended. Ninety-six percent of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child liked to attend his or her after-school project. Ninety-four percent agreed or strongly agreed that program staff knew and respected their child, and 87 percent said that staff responded to his or her needs.

Parents reported slightly lower levels of satisfaction with the food, exercise, and academic support offered by the Year 1 projects, however. Eighty-four percent agreed or strongly agreed that the after-school project provided children with adequate exercise, and 83 percent felt the program provided the academic support their child needed. Seventy-four percent agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the types of food their child received at their program.

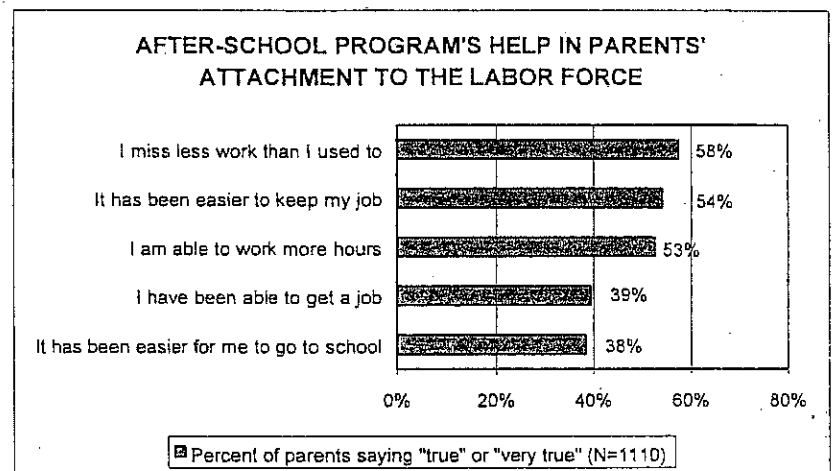


Program's Effects on Parents

One of the immediate objectives of the TASC program was to help parents hold jobs or pursue their own education, by making dependable, safe, and free child care available after school. The majority of parents who responded to the survey reported that the program met those objectives.

Almost all parents agreed or strongly agreed that the program's operating hours met their needs. A significant proportion of parents also indicated that the TASC after-school program had made it possible for them to become more attached to the labor force:

- Fifty-eight percent of parents said it was true or very true that, because of the TASC after-school program, they missed less work than they used to.
- More than half of the parents (54 percent) said the services provided by TASC made it easier for them to keep their job.
- Fifty-three percent of parents said they had been able to work more hours because their child was enrolled in the TASC program.
- More than one-third of the parents (39 percent) said that the TASC after-school program made it possible for them to get a job.
- More than one-third of parents (38 percent) said the program made it easier for them to go to school.



Parent involvement in their children's education also appears to have increased as a result of the TASC program. Sixty-three percent of parents who responded to their survey said that they have more contact with their child's school as a result of his or her participation in the after-school program.

