

Meeting the High School Challenge: Making After-School Work for Older Students

"As a freshman I was very hyperactive, with misdirected energy," Grace C. Petit, a Manhattan high school senior, wrote recently. "The after-school program that I attend has helped shape me into the person I am today. It got me involved with activities where I was able to focus my attention on one specific goal. My favorite thing" about the program, she wrote, "is the instructors. They are hard-working adults who truly care about the well-being of the students. It is easy to develop close, lasting relationships with these women."

About 68% of young Americans who enter high school graduate four years later.¹ In New York City, according to its Department of Education, fewer than 60% of students, and only 55% of young men, do so.² Across New York State, just 47% of black students, 45% of Hispanic students and 27% of English-language learners finish high school on time.³ The need to engage and sustain more young people through successful high school careers is urgent.

High quality after-school⁴ programs have emerged as important tools in meeting this challenge. Research has repeatedly shown that youth who participate in after-school programs improve their grades and school attendance, and are more likely to graduate.⁵ After-school opportunities can be especially crucial in reaching young people who are most at risk of dropping out, and who can benefit from close, informal relationships with adults.⁶ Programs that engage older students in meaningful academic, vocational and recreational activities can bolster their attachment to school and improve their chances to graduate and become successful and productive citizens.

For many reasons, however, serving teens effectively is one of the greatest challenges for the after-school field. Participation in after-school programs declines steadily with age. Many teens have responsibilities outside of school, including work and family commitments. Compared to younger students, whose lives are often managed by parents, high school students make their own decisions about whether to participate in after-school programs, and they want choice and influence. They expect returns on their investment of time, in the form of leadership opportunities, job preparation, academic credits or stipends. They're also interested in exploring subjects not covered during the school day, socializing with other students and creating tangible works, such as art or video projects. Their interests are more individualized and varied than those of children and younger adolescents.

This report examines the challenges of engaging teens in after-school programs and describes three programmatic approaches. It reflects the wisdom of The After-School Corporation (TASC) and its many partners in engaging older students, and creating programs that can be replicated on a large scale.



THE AFTER-SCHOOL CORPORATION

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The After-School Corporation (TASC) is a non-profit organization established through a challenge grant from the Open Society Institute in 1998. Its mission is to enhance the quality, availability and sustainability of after-school programs in New York City and beyond, with the goal of making after-school a public responsibility. TASC funds, monitors, evaluates and supports after-school programs in New York City. It works with local and national partners to build high quality, sustainable after-school systems in New York and beyond.

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Executive Summary

Students who participate in after-school programs improve their grades and school attendance, and they are more likely to graduate on time.

The After-School Corporation (TASC) was the first nonprofit organization in the nation to set about building a city-wide K-12 after-school system. It has engaged in one of the nation's largest, longest-running and most sustained efforts to offer teens high quality, structured after-school programs, filling more than 40,000 seats in high school after-school programs over nine years.

Of all those in grades K-12, high school students are the hardest to attract and retain in after-school programs. Teens have many competing responsibilities and interests, including the strong motivation among many to earn money. They have widely divergent social and developmental needs, academic preparation and levels of achievement, and they expect to exercise choice in how they spend their time after school.

They want substantive returns on their participation in after-school, such as job preparation, stipends, academic credits or tangible accomplishments. Though they benefit from engaging in structured activities, they highly value social time with peers and informal relationships with adult leaders. To keep high school students coming back for more, after-school programs must offer a blend.

Though TASC programs for younger children and teens can operate successfully with a per-student cost model of \$1,000 to \$1,500, high school programs can be more expensive. They demand staff members who have high levels of expertise in their fields of interest, as well as a mastery of youth culture and the temperament to mentor and appreciate teens.

High school students who participate in after-school programs improve their grades and school attendance, and they are more likely to graduate on time. Given the low graduation rates among many high school groups, it's essential for high school after-school programs to succeed, particularly those that offer students opportunities to earn credits.

TASC has developed three promising programmatic models. Comprehensive and Targeted programs are operated by community-based organizations in partnership with public schools. Stand-Alone programs take place outside of schools. This report describes these program models; provides examples; examines the situations in which they work best; and warns of possible pitfalls. It reflects the wisdom accrued over nine years by TASC and its CBO high school partners, their staffs, school leaders and youth.

TASC's Scope of Work with High School Students

The After-School Corporation (TASC) was established in 1998 to enhance the quality, availability and sustainability of after-school programs in New York City and beyond. TASC developed a comprehensive, school-based program model that reflects best practices in the field [see Appendix for more information about TASC]. TASC has supported 324 after-school programs that are operated by community-based organizations (CBOs) in partnership with local schools, serving more than 250,000 students.

Since its inception, TASC has engaged in one of the nation's largest, longest-running and most sustained efforts to offer teens high quality, structured after-school programs, serving an average of 4,500 students a year over nine years. Though TASC has developed programs for students with widely differing needs, its efforts have been concentrated in high-poverty schools. Compared to citywide averages, four-year high schools where TASC programs have operated generally serve greater numbers of black and Hispanic students, English-language learners and students receiving special education. Approximately 70% of the high schools receive Title I funding, meaning that 60% of enrolled students must be eligible to receive free lunch. TASC has developed programming for students who are over-aged, under-credited and at high risk of dropping out, as well as students on course to attend top universities.

- Number of high school programs TASC has funded from 1998 to 2007: 44
- Number of high school student slots from 1998 to 2007: 40,507
- Average number of students served per year: 4,501
- Number of CBOs operating TASC high school programs from 1998 to 2007: 40

The original TASC program model, built on the expectation that students would attend daily, has been highly successful with elementary and middle schools students. Within its first year of supporting high school programs, TASC recognized it would need to modify its model to serve older youths. In collaboration with the CBOs that TASC supports in their operation of programs, TASC has developed several approaches to providing appealing and appropriate enrichments for older students after school, and during weekends and summers. All are intended to meet three key goals:

- To support students' transition from middle to high school, and/or from high school to college or work;
- To increase the likelihood of their timely graduation from high school; and
- To help them acquire skills for responsible citizenship and success in the workplace.

High school students who had the lowest attendance rates, and the poorest prospects for graduation, showed the greatest attendance gains when they regularly participated in after-school programs.

Despite the differences among the students who participate at various school sites, as well as the wide variation in programmatic approaches, TASC's high school programs have led to positive outcomes. An evaluation of these programs by Policy Studies Associates⁷ showed that participants in after-school programs had higher school-day attendance rates than non-participants. High school students who had the lowest attendance rates, and the poorest prospects for graduation, showed the greatest attendance gains related to their participation in after-school. A higher percentage of after-school participants compared to non-participants passed Regents exams, and after-school participants earned more credits toward graduation than non-participants.

School Year	Number of TASC-funded High School Programs	Students Served
1998-99	4	950
1999-00	9	1,830
2000-01	12	2,990
2001-02	21	3,800
2002-03	22	4,999
2003-04	22	5,067
2004-05	35	6,421
2005-06	38	7,610
2006-07	41	6,840

Lessons Learned

No one type of after-school program fits all high school situations, or responds to the complex and varied needs of all young people, but TASC and its partners have learned some universally applicable lessons. These include:

- High school students cannot or will not attend an after-school program every day. The most effective programs require sustained but not daily attendance.
- In order to be competitive with youths' other interests and responsibilities, programs must offer a blend of structured activities and social time.
- Older youths demonstrate little interest in activities they have no influence in planning or selecting, no matter how varied or potentially appealing.
- The range of ability and achievement among young people is broad by the time they reach high school. This must be addressed through differentiated, often targeted program activities.
- Program success depends in part on hiring staff members who develop strong working relationships with principals and key school personnel, and who are available to students during as well as after school. Staff must be trained to work with teens. They should be able to tap into and communicate an understanding of youth culture, while acting maturely and with empathy.
- To engage high school-aged youth effectively, staff members must be more expert and sophisticated in their subject matter than those who serve younger children.
- While TASC program cost models can range from \$800 to \$2,400 per student, programs can create cost efficiencies through scale.
- Teens are strongly motivated to join programs that provide academic credits, college or job preparation, internship opportunities, stipends for participation or help in securing paying jobs.
- School-based programs are more successful when they are sited in well-functioning schools. When young people perceive a school to be dangerous or the staff hostile, not even charismatic staff can persuade them to stay. Strong programs, however, can contribute to the success of low-performing schools that are reorganized or otherwise on the mend.
- Devoting after-school resources in low-performing schools primarily to remediation is generally not a successful strategy. It not only leads to low program attendance, but typically offers too little remediation to change outcomes for students who are farthest behind.
- Programs targeted to teens with academic or attendance deficiencies should not be structured to exclude others. Teens are aware of being sorted or tagged. Programs should be open to all, with those in greatest need discreetly targeted for recruitment and support.

Program Models for High School Students

TASC's aim was to create templates for high school programs that encouraged operators to experiment, but which gave them road maps to maintain quality and sustainability.

TASC's success in creating high-quality programming was built on evidence that rigorous standards for enrollment and attendance are critical to helping students achieve positive outcomes. TASC requires elementary and middle school students to enroll in programs, and expects them to attend daily. As a result, TASC programs have some of the highest attendance rates in the nation.⁸ They are funded at approximately \$1,000 to \$1,500 per child, with the expectation that by serving at least 150 to 300 children, providers can achieve economies of scale and maintain quality and sustainability.

Early in the process of working with high schools, TASC recognized that daily attendance targets were unrealistic. Among high school after-school programs, getting older teens in the door – and keeping them there – is a challenge. In a recent report on 15 high school after-school programs in California, only five achieved participation rates (proportion of students attending 30 days or more) greater than 50%, with an average attendance across programs of 32%.⁹ Attrition rates of 20-40% are common.¹⁰

TASC's aim was to create templates for high school programs that encouraged operators to experiment, but which gave them road maps to maintain quality and sustainability. Though programs have employed varied strategies and interventions, the most successful share common principles:

- School-based programs are operated by community-based organizations in collaboration with school leaders;
- They have strong adult leadership and skilled staff;
- Programs offer participants small learning communities and opportunities to enjoy unstructured time and to build close relationships with adults and peers;
- Programs support students' timely progression toward graduation, and respond to their interests in college and careers.

TASC has developed three approaches to serving high school youths, each containing innovations to promote engagement and sustain participation. **Comprehensive School-Based Programs** closely follow the TASC comprehensive model for younger students and align after-school programs with the activities of the school day. They differ from programs for younger students by allowing more choice and flexibility in scheduling and attendance. **Targeted Programs** are smaller initiatives that focus on groups of young people who share interests or needs. These operate within compre-

hensive school-based programs. **Stand-Alone Programs** are not associated with individual schools, but rather draw young people from a number of schools. They typically engage teens by focusing on work or work preparation, and they operate on weekends or during the summer.

Each program model is described in detail below.

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS

Comprehensive school-based programs offer a mix of academic, arts, sports and recreational activities that enhance the skills students need to succeed academically. They include these common elements:

- Enrollment is open to all students in the school
- They offer a broad range of activities aligned with the school day
- They allow for socializing and self-directed activities

These programs typically extend hours for school-day support services, such as college guidance. Principals contribute ideas and resources. Both large and small New York high schools have had success with this program model.

Students in these programs take active roles in designing program activities. They choose from a menu of offerings, and are also encouraged to relax, socialize and work independently in libraries and computer and science labs. Although students are encouraged to engage in daily after-school activities, staff members sustain their participation by offering other ways to participate. Many encourage students to visit and use after-school facilities, such as computers, during study periods and lunch breaks. Program staffs often include school-day teachers.

Large School Program Example: Manhattan Center for Science and Math

Program at a glance, 2006-07: Manhattan Center for Science and Math

- Operated by: Children's Aid Society
- Funded by TASC: Fall 1998 to Spring 2007
- Number of high school slots for all years: 3,645
- Current enrollment: 400
- Average attendance: More students attend than formally enroll

At the Manhattan Center for Science and Math, a high school of 1,500 students in East Harlem, a TASC-model after-school program has been operated by the Children's Aid Society since 1998. At the principal's request, all freshmen must enroll in a year-long, twice-weekly after-school course on transitioning to high school, which serves as a springboard to ongoing involvement in other after-school activities.

Program funds keep the library, computer lab and college guidance office open until 6 PM. This "passive" programming offers older students the independence and self-direction they crave, but lets them seek out support from adults who relate to them less formally than teachers.

In addition to offering a variety of arts, clubs and other activities, the program offers credits for art, photography and other after-school workshops to students who attend consistently (with three or fewer workshop absences).

Alignment between the school day and after-school is evident in the peer math tutoring program. In a large, comfortable room, high-performing math

students tutor their peers one-on-one after school. While an effort is made to keep the noise down, the popular space, with couches and music in the background, has the feel of a casual drop-in center.

Small School Program Example: School of the Future

Program at a glance, 2006-07: School of the Future

- Operated by: Educational Alliance
- Funded by TASC: Fall 1999 to Spring 2007
- Number of program slots for all years: 2,103
- Current enrollment: 120
- Average attendance: 72 percent

At the School of the Future, a combined middle and high school which serves 600 students in downtown Manhattan, the comprehensive program, operated by the Educational Alliance, is fully integrated into an extended day program. The first activity of the afternoon is a "power hour" devoted to homework help, tutoring and test prep. It is staffed by school-day teachers together with after-school personnel, and is mandatory for all students who want to participate in other after-school activities. The program is funded to provide students and staff access to the entire school building. Students operate a store where they buy snacks and socialize.

After-school leaders solicit ideas from students for activities, then let students choose from a catalog of offerings that may include robotics, yoga, spo-

ken word, photography, drama, and video documentary-making. Activities that fail to attract students in sufficient numbers are dropped from the catalog.

The after-school program sustains student participation by actively promoting itself to families and the larger school community. The program showcases students each semester with evening performances of drama, music, dance and demonstrations. TASC funds were used to underwrite an SAT test prep class, and provided scholarships for students whose parents could not afford the class.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Comprehensive School-Based Model

The comprehensive model provides a program structure that promotes high quality, sustainability and cost-effectiveness. Comprehensive school-based programs can operate on a scale that allows for a greater variety of creative and relevant programming than would be possible in a smaller-scale, targeted program.

The most successful comprehensive school-based programs, however, count on significant support from the schools themselves, and operate best in safe, well-functioning high schools. Both programs described above were created in collaboration with school principals and were sustained by succeeding principals (a testament to their importance to school cultures). Attaining consistent administrative support and a contribution of resources by the principal can be a significant challenge in many schools.

A Principal's View

Corinne Vinal, Principal of Manhattan Center for Science and Math:

“Our after-school program is almost like a seamless day of instruction for us, following the school day. On any given day of the week there is a specific make-up science lab for students who have missed it. We offer for-credit courses that we cannot fit into our school day. We offer painting for an elective credit. We also offer a lot of art programs that are not for credit, but we bring in people working in those professions. American Ballet Theater comes in and teaches choreography, lighting, production, how to advertise and find backers. The skill sets of kids this age are already developed, so they need real professionals.

"This year we brought back our first play in many years, and it's our most well-attended program. The lead teacher is a professional dancer/singer, and we brought in a professional actor to help her. It needed additional funding, so students put together a proposal, made a rehearsal schedule and brought it to the Children's Aid Society. It gave students ownership of their learning. It was something driven by their commitment and motivation. Performance is a large part of the hook for kids attending. They all come together and put on this huge multi-cultural show.

"Another thing that hooks kids is that the neighborhood high school is a thing of the past. With school choice, our kids travel 1 ½ hours or 2 hours to come to school, so being able to socialize with kids at school, after school, is a big deal. In the after-school, the cafeteria is open, and the computer lab. There is someone in our college office every afternoon to help with college essays.

"Another advantage is that students see their teachers in a different setting and they make more meaningful connections. Many people say students should be able to say they had at least three meaningful relationships with adults in high school.

"There are students whose participation in after-school might be limited to the spirit days we have, with parties and picture-taking. That might be the only time they get to stay because they have to take care of a sister or brother. So you have to offer things that require less commitment for those who can't come every day, but who really do want to make a connection to school."

TARGETED PROGRAMS

Smaller-scale initiatives within programs can appeal to young people who struggle to make academic progress.

By the time young people reach high school, they have meaningful differences in their interests, abilities and achievements. Although comprehensive after-school programs try to offer something for everyone, smaller-scale initiatives within programs can appeal to young people who struggle to make academic progress or face other obstacles to success. These programs can put sensitive adults in regular contact with young people who need support through informal learning, recreation and community-building activities. Participants may be only nominally a part of the more comprehensive after-school program.

Targeted programs include these common elements:

- They serve specific groups with common needs and interests
- They focus on specific objectives
- They may allow students to sample by taking less than a school year to complete
- They can be school-based but often include off-site activities

Program Example: Community Justice Project

Program at a glance, 2006-07: Community Justice Project

- Operated by: TASC
- Piloted in 2002 at two sites
- Number of students served: 220
- Number of program sites: 14
- Current average enrollment by school: 15-16
- Average attendance: 70 percent

TASC's popular Community Justice Project (CJP) is offered at a growing number of high schools. Students participate in CJP for at least two hours each week at their schools, and take field trips to courthouses, police precincts and prosecutors' offices. The program focuses on teens in poor communities who may have frequent, often negative interactions with police and criminal justice personnel. The goals are to build students' leadership and other skills while mitigating their hostility and anxiety towards police, and giving law enforcement personnel opportunities to respond to teens' needs.

Police youth officers and CJP students meet to candidly discuss police work and their perceptions of each other. Young people learn from visiting judges about the court system and the rights of juvenile defendants. They get insight into how to pursue legal careers. Some participate in mock trials or develop law-related projects that serve their school communities.

CJP participants are encouraged to advocate on behalf of themselves and their peers. In the Bronx, participants established a "Town Hall" forum, giving their classmates opportunities to discuss problems and draft plans to reform school policies. As a result, the principal was persuaded to reorganize lunch period, improve school meals and increase recognition of student achievement. CJP participants at Murray Bergtraum High School organized and launched their own Youth Court. TASC recruited 12 volunteer attorneys and judges to lead the teens through intensive training to deliver arguments at trial, question witnesses and deliver appropriate youth sanctions.

In an evaluation of CJP, participants reported they were 50% more likely to have positive attitudes towards police officers than they had before becoming involved. More than 80% reported feeling that they could successfully work with their peers to improve their school communities.¹¹

Program Example: TASC Fellows Program

Program at a glance, 2006-07: TASC Fellows Program

- Funded through Workforce Investment Act (WIA)
- Dates of operation: Fall 2000 to Spring 2007
- Number of program slots: 2,682
- Number of program sites: 11

This program tapped into a federal funding stream (Workforce Investment Act) to offer high-risk teens in large high schools small, supportive after-school learning communities where they received academic support, job preparation and case management when needed. The year-round program brought students together in small groups led by fellowship advisors who supported and advocated for students and helped them stay on track toward graduation.

Program leaders planned activities that matched students' interests, including a public speaking class at a high school in Queens, and monthly panels where visiting professionals offered career advice at a Manhattan high school. Eligible students participated in internships during the school year. Participation was sustained by the promise of paid summer jobs for students who completed the program.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Targeted Program Model

Targeted programs appeal to high school students by offering direct benefits, such as leadership or job opportunities or the kinds of relationships with adults that strengthen their ties to school. With their narrower scopes and defined goals, targeted programs may be able to use resources more efficiently, and more clearly demonstrate benefits.

The programs are relatively expensive because of the level of services they offer. The TASC Fellows program costs approximately \$2,000 per youth, not including youth wages paid by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. Comprehensive programs can provide an infrastructure to make staff-intensive targeted initiatives more economically sustainable. While targeted programs may operate as free-standing initiatives, some targeted programs, including a small number of TASC Fellows sites, were less successful in schools that had no after-school infrastructure.

Targeted programs can be harder to sustain than those with a broad focus because they are less appealing to a general school population. Programs that target young people with specific risk factors may be stigmatizing, and teens may resist enrolling. Such programs then become difficult to grow to scale, never achieving the critical mass of participants needed to spur greater participation.

STAND-ALONE PROGRAMS

Before these stand-alone programs were established, high school students had little access to age-appropriate training opportunities.

TASC's stand-alone programs build on youths' desire to work or prepare for college, while offering teens opportunities to develop social, leadership and teamwork skills. Program leaders – many of whom share common backgrounds and build strong relationships with teens – carefully cultivate feelings of community and loyalty among the teens who give up their scarce free time to attend, and who share similar aspirations. The programs, each of which serves students from numerous schools, validate and enhance participants' volunteer and paid work experiences. Students who work after school look forward to these weekend or summer opportunities to congregate with their peers.

Stand-alone programs include these common elements:

- They serve geographic areas, not individual schools
- They focus on youths' interest in college, work, leadership and independence
- Weekend and summer schedules accommodate participants' other responsibilities

Program Example: City Scholars

Program at a glance, 2006-07: City Scholars

- Funded by: NYC Department of Youth and Community Development and TASC
- Dates of operation: Fall, 2005 to Spring 2007
- Enrollment in 2006-06 school year: 657, representing students from 40% of NYC high schools
- Enrollment in 2006-07 school year: 1500

In 2005, TASC launched the citywide City Scholars program to provide training and community to high school students who are interested in working with younger children in after-school and other programs. Teens attend Saturday sessions during the school year at ten regional sites throughout the city (typically high schools or college campuses). The first sessions are entertaining "kick-offs" designed to build community and excitement among teens who are otherwise strangers. Participants become the program's best recruiters, returning to their home schools with positive word-of-mouth.

Teens progress through eight training workshops that cover such topics as professionalism, planning activities and child development. They tour area colleges, learn to write resumes and attend weekly "advisories" where they check in with each other and with staff on their progress in the program and in school.

Teens conceive, design, and often reap enthusiastic feedback for executing service projects in their communities. Recently, 150 City Scholars spent three Saturdays being trained and making plans to carry out a project to encourage elementary students to read for pleasure. The City Scholars spent several afternoons visiting elementary after-school programs where they read and interpreted stories with children, then helped them create pop-up books and live dramatic presentations based on their readings.

One staff member noted, "City Scholars gives young adults the opportunity to share and exchange ideas that are meaningful to them." A teen described the program as "a safe space" that is "preparing us for jobs and life overall." Another recent participant wrote, "It helps prove to people that teens can make a positive difference in the world."

Program Example: The New York Times Summer Jobs Program

Program at a glance, 2006-07: The New York Times Summer Jobs Program

- Dates of operation: Summer 2003 to Summer 2006
- Number of students served: 3,615
- Average number of students served by year: 904
- Participation rates (as a proportion of possible hours worked): 77%-91%

With funding from The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund, the program offers summer jobs to low-income youths at day camps and youth recreation programs run by partnering social service agencies. TASC manages the program and provides technical assistance and intensive pre-service and in-service training to job site supervisors and teens, who meet frequently to reflect on their experiences. At the end of the summer, TASC hosts a day-long college and career fair.

One mark of the program's success is that many of the practices it pioneered for guiding teens through

their job experiences were adopted by other social service agencies that employ young people. New York City has adopted the use of a handbook similar to the one TASC developed for working teens, as well as the use of flexible work schedules and intensive training before and during teens' job tenure.

Although the pay teens receive is equivalent to what their peers receive in publicly funded jobs programs, employers remark on the qualitative differences in the preparation and job performance of teens who are part of the TASC program. As his summer job was ending, one high school student wrote, "The kids were great and looked at me as a role model...They opened my eyes to the world of responsibility. As a teenager, please believe I needed a lot of that."

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Stand-Alone Program Model

City Scholars builds on the long-standing practice of employing high school students as tutors and program assistants for younger children in after-school programs. While teens get important work experience and earn money, after-school programs get staff at low cost, and younger students get spirited activity leaders and role models. Before these stand-alone programs were established, however, high school students had little access to age-appropriate training opportunities.

Stand-alone programs operate for relatively low cost, as students' wages are paid by their work sites. The per-student cost for City Scholars is \$790; for the Summer Jobs program, \$1,500. The model is also readily scalable, and can be adapted to match teens' interests other than working with younger children.

The movement of youths between multiple training and work sites can be challenging to organize, and not all students are willing to travel to attend programs outside of their communities. Programs operate at the mercy of generous host organizations, and staff members devote significant time to managing logistics.

A High School Student's View

Umair Ilyas, 18, a 2005-06 City Scholar who became a City Scholars staff member:

“I got into the City Scholars program in my senior year of high school last year. It wasn't like anything else in my life, and it was not like going to class. When you're in class, you're just learning a subject, and the sad thing is that no one really asks for your opinion about anything. In City Scholars you don't have to raise your hand, you don't have to do any of that. I had a lot to say, and I met a lot of students from my own high school that I had never talked to before, besides everyone from the other high schools. During our debates, I realized these are extremely bright kids who have a lot to say, but everybody makes judgments about them.

"I started coming every Saturday, and I started to think, why am I getting up at 7 in the morning to do this? It was because of the trainers (staff members who run the training program). They had a presence you wanted to be around. If the trainings are successful, it feels like a day of fun.

"If you have great attendance in this program, at the end of the year you get a stipend. In the beginning most of the students were coming to the program because they would get money out of it, or because they had a girlfriend or a boyfriend in the program or nothing to do on Saturday. In the middle of the program, why was I still coming? Because the adults care. They connected with the students and they know who the students are, and what they need.

"I'm a freshman now at Brooklyn College, and I'm leaning toward law, philosophy, psychology, English. City Scholars really affected me and my plans for the future. I feel like I can be a great influence on others if I go into a career in teaching or training."

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Conclusions

After-school programs have been a fact of life for middle class and suburban teens for many years. Families have come to expect team sports, instrumental music ensembles, SAT prep classes and other activities as a matter of course. TASC is committed to making these opportunities and supports available to young people whose schools lack resources, and who have the least exposure to such opportunities. The demand for these programs among all families will grow as more students enter high school, having had positive after-school experiences in elementary and middle school.

High school after-school programs in New York and across the country offer many benefits to young people who attend, but the obstacles to reaching older students are formidable, and expectations for participation and attendance must be realistic. The strongest school-based high school programs may achieve participation rates that hover around 50 percent. This has implications for cost models, and it suggests the need to develop plausible participation standards for a group with many competing responsibilities.

Evaluating a program's success in terms of its impact on youths' connection to school (attendance, grades, graduation), their engagement in the community, or their readiness for work and/or college are also meaningful and useful in justifying these programs' higher costs, compared to programs for younger students.

Planning and implementing programs for older teens requires careful examination of the existing after-school climate at the proposed program site. If there has never been a formal after-school program, then the school community will need to initiate, grow and promote a program so that it becomes a part of the school culture. This may require an elongated time line, with low initial enrollment targets and significant leg work to engage the school community. Large high schools may already support a dizzying array of after-school activities. New programming requires careful planning to ensure that it does not duplicate services or get lost in the mix.

TASC is committed to assuring that high-quality programming is available for all children and teens from kindergarten through high school. Despite the difficulties inherent in creating and sustaining meaningful programs for older students, these experiences prove that the effort is worth it. Perhaps 16-year-old Ismobel Cueto from Murray Bergtraum High School said it best: "The experiences I gain [at after-school] are priceless...I would love for others to be able to have the opportunities I've had."

Appendix

The After-School Corporation (TASC) is a nonprofit organization established through a challenge grant from the Open Society Institute in 1998. Its mission is to enhance the quality, availability and sustainability of after-school programs in New York and beyond, with the goal of making after-school a public responsibility. TASC funds, monitors, evaluates and supports after-school programs in New York City. It works with local and national partners to build high quality, sustainable after-school systems in New York and beyond.

The founding vision of TASC was a direct response to cultural and economic shifts that had been taking place in American society. For more and more families with children, the primary caretaker was now in the workforce while affordable, high-quality care for school-aged children was largely unavailable. Millions of children across the country were left with unstructured and unsupervised time in the after-school hours. At the same time, the country was facing growing concerns about student achievement and global competitiveness, and demanding higher standards for academic success.

This was the context within which TASC began its work. At the time TASC was founded, few publicly supported after-school programs existed, and most were small in scale and operated with unpredictable funding. A body of research suggested that well-designed and implemented after-school programs could have a positive impact on youths' academic success and overall well-being. Yet existing programs varied greatly in quality, especially those serving children and youth in low-income communities. TASC set out to alter this landscape by pursuing three goals:

- To increase the availability of after-school programs;
- To improve the quality of after-school programs; and
- To affect policy so that after-school programming became a public responsibility.

TASC's strategy to achieve these goals has been to create a critical mass of high-quality programs with a core set of elements drawn from the research on best practices. TASC supports these programs and demonstrates their benefits, which has led public officials to accept responsibility for providing these services. TASC has used the funds from its challenge grant to leverage resources from other private and public sources and re-grant funds to community-based organizations to operate after-school programs in public schools. To ensure quality and sustainability, TASC works to strengthen relationships between key stakeholders and to build capacity in the field with extensive training and technical assistance. TASC works to increase the amount of public funding for after-school through research, analyses and advocacy.

Footnotes

- ¹ Swenson, CB, (2001) Who Graduates, Who Doesn't? A Statistical Portrait of Public High School Graduation, 2001, Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410934_WhoGraduates.pdf
- ² The Class of 2006 Four-Year Longitudinal Report and 2005-2006 Event Dropout Rates, NYC Department of Education, May 2007 Assessment and Accountability report, <http://schools.nyc.gov/daa/reports/CLASS%20of%202006%204-Year%20Longitudinal%20Report.pdf>
- ³ New York State Education Department, <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/press-release/20070425/GradratesFINAL.ppt>
- ⁴ In this report, after-school programs refers to any program that meets during the time that school is not in session, and includes the after-school hours, as well as weekends and summer.
- ⁵ After-School Programs: An Update of the Needs, the Benefits and Public Opinion, Policy Studies Associates, 2002, www.tascorp.org/publications/catalog/indrep_c/need_benefit_pubopinion.pdf ; The Afterschool Alliance, http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/after_out.cfm; Moving beyond the barriers: attracting and sustaining youth participation in out-of-school time programs. Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation #6, July 2004, Harvard Family Research Project, www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/content/projects/afterschool/resources/issuebrief6.pdf.
- ⁶ Afterschool Alliance, http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/after_out.cfm
- ⁷ Birmingham, J & White, RN, (2005) Promoting Positive Youth Development fro High School Students After School: Services and Outcomes for High School Youth in TASC Programs, Policy Studies Associates, Inc.
- ⁸ According to 2001 evaluation by Policy Studies Associates, attendance rates were 78% for elementary schools students and 57% for middle school students.
- ⁹ Hips, J., Diaz, M & Wingren, G. (2006) California 21st Century High School After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETS) Program Interim Report. WestEd. http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/assets_interim_report.pdf
- ¹⁰ Moving beyond the Barriers: Attracting and sustaining youth participation in out-of-school time programs. Harvard Family Research Project, Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation, July 2004 <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/content/projects/afterschool/resources/issuebrief6.pdf>
- ¹¹ TASC data, pre- and post-test surveys.

TASC

THE AFTER-SCHOOL CORPORATION