



**SHARED FEATURES OF  
HIGH-PERFORMING AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS:  
A FOLLOW-UP TO THE TASC EVALUATION**

Jennifer Birmingham  
Ellen M. Pechman  
Christina A. Russell  
Monica Mielke

Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

November 2005

Prepared for:  
The After-School Corporation and  
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

With Support from:  
U.S. Department of Education

## Executive Summary

This study examined high-performing after-school projects funded by The After-School Corporation (TASC), to determine what characteristics, if any, these projects shared. Evaluators reanalyzed student performance data collected during the multi-year evaluation of the TASC initiative to identify projects where the TASC after-school program was especially likely to have contributed to improvements in students' academic achievement. Once these 10 projects were identified, evaluators visited each project to learn more about program structures and practices and whether the 10 projects shared common features. Interview and observational data revealed that, while these high-performing after-school projects were identified through their participants' achievement gains, the projects did not primarily focus on academics. Across the 10 projects, evaluators found shared characteristics around programming, staffing, and support systems. These include:

- 1. A broad array of enrichment opportunities:** For many participants, the after-school project provided their first exposure to new learning opportunities in areas such as dance, music, art, and organized sports. Enrichment activities introduced participants to experiences that could spark interests and expand their goals for their own schooling, careers, and hobbies.
- 2. Opportunities for skill building and mastery:** Each after-school project created opportunities to build participants' literacy skills through reading, story-telling, writing activities, and use of formal curricula, such as *KidzLit* and *Passport to Success*. In addition, these after-school projects integrated a focus on mastery into arts-based activities. Because arts activities involved practicing new skills in preparation for an exhibition or a performance, participants gained experience in practicing a skill to the point of mastery.
- 3. Intentional relationship-building:** This process began with each project fostering positive relationships with the host school, followed by steps to set a positive tone with staff through orientation, training, and establishment of participant norms. Throughout the year, the site coordinator worked on relationships with the project's primary stakeholders through ongoing classroom-management training for staff, conflict resolution classes and team-building activities for participants, and regular communication with and the provision of support services to families.
- 4. A strong, experienced leader/manager supported by a trained and supervised staff:** First and foremost, the site coordinators at these high performing projects brought with them experience in youth development and a strong connection to the community, the children, and the families

they served. Through orientations at the beginning of the project year, ongoing staff meetings and supervision, and consistent feedback on what worked and what didn't work, all 10 site coordinators made efforts (and budgeted the time) to communicate and reinforce their vision of effective programming with their staff.

- 5. The administrative, fiscal, and professional-development support of the sponsoring organization:** The relationships between after-school projects and their sponsors built the foundation for the projects' success and sustainability. In each partnership, the sponsor gave the site coordinator the autonomy and flexibility to manage the after-school project day-to-day, while providing administrative and fiscal support to the project. Each site coordinator was then able to use his or her expertise to select activities and make staffing decisions.

These study findings can offer a guide to new and struggling after-school projects about program features that may be most important when developing or refining an after-school project. For established projects that find themselves under duress to increase their focus on academics or hire more academically focused staff, this study reinforces the viability of an after-school model that emphasizes a wide variety of compelling youth-oriented activities, a staff with diverse backgrounds and skills, an experienced site coordinator with strong ties to the community, the administrative and fiscal support of a committed sponsoring organization, and ongoing communication and relationship-building with the host school and participant families.

# Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Executive Summary .....	i
Study Overview .....	1
Selection of High-Performing Projects .....	1
Site Visits to High-Performing Projects .....	2
Context for the Analysis of Shared Features .....	5
Shared Features .....	5
Programs Offered a Broad Array of Enrichment Activities .....	5
Wide-Ranging Experiences Promoted Skill-Building and Mastery .....	7
Intentional Relationship-Building Was a Primary Focus .....	11
Programs Employed Strong Managers, Differentiated Staffing, and Supports for Line Staff.....	16
Partner Organizations Provided Support to Project Leaders and Participants.....	23
Conclusions.....	23
Appendix A: Selection of High-Performing Projects .....	A-1
Appendix B: Summary of Activity Observations and Domain Scales .....	B-1
Appendix C: Out-of-School Time Program Observation Instrument.....	C-1
Appendix D: Profiles of High-Performing Projects.....	D-1

# Shared Features of High-Performing After-School Programs: A Follow-Up to the TASC Evaluation

## Study Overview

This study examined high-performing after-school projects funded by The After-School Corporation (TASC), to determine what characteristics, if any, these projects shared. Evaluators reanalyzed student performance data collected during the multi-year evaluation of the TASC initiative to identify projects where the after-school program was especially likely to have contributed to improvements in academic achievement. Once these 10 projects were identified, evaluators visited each project to learn more about program structures and practices and whether these characteristics were unique to individual projects or whether the 10 high-performing projects shared common characteristics. The findings from these inquiries are reported here.

## Selection of High-Performing Projects

The study identified high-performing TASC projects in New York City based on changes in student achievement on New York's statewide mathematics and English Language Arts/reading (ELA) tests administered in grades 4 and 8 and on comparable citywide tests administered in grades 3, 5, 6, and 7.<sup>1</sup> Analyses measured changes in student achievement in math and ELA between the 2000-01 and 2001-02 school years, the most recent years for which data were available.

The goal of the analysis was to identify projects where the TASC program was most likely to have contributed to improvements in student achievement. To improve the

### The After-School Corporation's Service Delivery Model

After-school services at each TASC project site are delivered by a nonprofit organization that has established a partnership with a public school that may serve any of grades K through 12. After-school activities are provided at the school, and all students enrolled in the host school are eligible to participate. The after-school program is in session from the end of each school day to approximately 6 p.m. Projects provide services free of charge.

Each TASC project is led by a full-time, year-round, paid site coordinator who manages a diverse staff, including paraprofessional youth workers, arts specialists, certified teachers, and volunteers. Staff-student ratios are maintained at approximately 1:10 in the elementary school sites and slightly higher in the middle and high school sites.

Educational enrichment and homework help are provided in TASC projects, but projects also typically seek to nurture healthy youth development by encouraging positive adult and peer relationships and by exposing participants to a wide range of arts and recreational experiences. In addition, projects offer social supports such as health education, peer counseling, violence-prevention training, and opportunities to participate in community service, college preparation, and career training, as appropriate to the age of the youth served.

---

<sup>1</sup> The New York City Department of Education (DOE) provided the TASC evaluation with data from DOE's student-level administrative data files for school years 1997-98 through 2001-02, including student demographic characteristics, test scores, and school attendance.

focus on after-school program contributions, the analysis examined differences in gains between “active” participants (students who attended a TASC project for at least 60 days and 60 percent of the days it was possible for them to attend in 2001-02) and nonparticipants (students who attended the TASC host school in 2001-02 but never attended a TASC project in any year). Analyses further focused on active participants and nonparticipants who scored in performance level 1 (below basic) or performance level 2 (basic) in 2000-01, meaning that they performed below grade level.

To determine the relationship between TASC participation and achievement gains in each of the 76 host schools in the study sample, the study subtracted the 12-month difference in average gains for nonparticipants from the 12-month difference in average gains for active participants within each school. Each project’s ELA and math gains were averaged into a single measure. Projects were then ranked based on the size of the difference in gains between active participants and nonparticipants, using the combined ELA/math measure.

The top 20 projects based on these ELA/math rankings were determined to be the highest-performing TASC projects. To select the 10 study projects, evaluators asked TASC managers who work closely with the projects to comment on the current status and strengths of the top 20 projects. The TASC managers identified projects that were no longer operating in Spring 2005, or where significant changes had occurred in program quality, compliance with the TASC model, principal commitment to the program, or other factors that may have affected the project. Taking these comments into account, the 10 most promising projects were invited to participate in the study, and they all agreed to do so. All 10 of the projects serve students in the elementary grades, and three of the projects also serve middle-grades students.

Appendix A describes project selection in greater detail and lists the 10 study projects and the 10 projects from the top 20 that were not selected.

## **Site Visits to High-Performing Projects**

A two-person study team visited each of the 10 study sites for two consecutive days in Spring 2005. Each site visit included a two-part interview with the site coordinator that focused on the project’s process and content features (e.g., goals, activities) and structural and institutional features (e.g., staffing, supervision, resources). In addition, the study team conducted structured 15-minute observations of after-school activities for six hours over the two-day visit, for a total of 14 to 20 independent observations per site.

Site visitors used PSA’s Out-of-School Time Program Observation Instrument to capture and rate observable indicators of positive youth development. Developed for this study, the observation instrument builds on lessons learned through program observations in previous after-school studies, including the TASC evaluation (E.R. Reisner, R.N. White, C.R. Russell, & J. Birmingham, *Building quality, scale, and effectiveness in after-*

*school programs: Summary of the TASC evaluation*, Policy Studies Associates, 2004) and the Study of Promising Programs (D.L. Vandell, E.R. Reisner, B.B. Brown, K. Dadisman, D. Lee, & E.M. Pechman, *The study of promising after-school programs: Examination of intermediate outcomes in Year 2*, University of Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2005). The instrument is also grounded in the youth development framework developed by the Community Network for Youth Development (M.A. Gambone & J.P. Connell, Community action framework for youth development, *The Prevention Researcher*, 11(2), 17-20, November 2004).

The observation instrument allowed the study team to rate project activities on indicators addressing five key domains related to youth development. The five domains and their corresponding indicators are:

1. Youth-directed relationship-building
  - Youth are friendly to each other
  - Youth show respect for one another
  - Youth show positive affect to staff
  - Youth are collaborative
  - Youth assist one another
  
2. Youth participation
  - Youth are on-task
  - Youth listen actively and attentively to peers and staff
  - Youth contribute opinions, ideas, and/or concerns to discussions
  - Youth have opportunities to make meaningful choices
  - Youth take leadership responsibility/roles
  
3. Staff-directed relationship-building
  - Staff use positive behavior management techniques
  - Staff are equitable and inclusive
  - Staff show positive affect toward youth
  - Staff attentively listen to and/or observe youth
  - Staff encourage youth to share their ideas, opinions, and concerns
  - Staff engage personally with youth, beyond task-related conversation
  
4. Staff strategies for skill-building and mastery
  - Staff communicate goals, purposes, expectations
  - Staff verbally recognize youth's efforts and accomplishments
  - Staff assist youth without taking control
  - Staff ask youth to expand upon their answers and ideas
  - Staff challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency
  - Staff plan for/ask youth to work together
  - Staff employ two or more teaching strategies

5. Activity content and structure
  - The activity is well organized
  - The activity involves the practice/a progression of skills
  - The activity challenges students intellectually, creatively, and/or physically
  - The activity requires analytic thinking

Observers rated each indicator on a scale from 1 to 7, where a 1 meant that the indicator was not evident during the observation period, and a 7 meant that the indicator was highly evident and consistent. These ratings provided a systematic method for the study team to quantify its observations of the factors that contributed to high-performing after-school activities. A score of 5 meant either the exemplar was evident but inconsistent *or* that the desired behavior was generally present but not actively initiated and emphasized. For example, under youth-directed relationship-building, if youth relaxed together and enjoyed one another's company but the activity did not involve a high level of socializing, the rating for "youth are friendly with each other" would be a 5. Likewise, under staff-directed relationships, if staff treated all youth in an inclusive manner but there was no need for staff to reengage an isolated child or group because every child was comfortable and included, then the rating for "staff are equitable and inclusive" would be a 5.

The observation instrument was designed to include both indicators that were expected to be easily achieved in most after-school project activities, such as friendly relationships among youth, and indicators that were expected to occur less frequently, such as providing leadership roles for youth, or that were more challenging to implement, such as activities that require analytic thinking. To explore the presence of practices within each domain, the team created four scales that provided measures for examining the variation in each domain across types of activities.

In total, site visitors conducted 173 independent observations at the 10 study sites. In addition to the independent observations, the two site visitors co-observed three observations in each study site to assess inter-rater reliability on the observation instrument.<sup>2</sup> In total, 62 activities were co-observed, with an inter-rater reliability coefficient of 0.83.

Further description of the observed activities and the technical details about each of the scales are presented in Appendix B. Appendix C presents the updated edition of the Out-of-School Time Program Observation Instrument used for this study.

---

<sup>2</sup> In addition, prior to the site visits, the study team participated in an intensive internal training designed to achieve high inter-rater reliability in the field. During this training, team members discussed and arrived at a common understanding of the definitions of the observation-instrument indicators. Team members also observed and rated videotaped after-school activity segments, then discussed their ratings.



## Context for the Analysis of Shared Features

This study was not designed to contrast the features of high-performing programs with the features of typical programs or low-performing programs. However, we know from several sources that the shared features described here are not necessarily typical of all TASC after-school programs. Or, more precisely, the features highlighted here are displayed by most TASC programs some of the time, but few TASC programs display all of the features all of the time. Evidence for this is presented in the TASC evaluation (Reisner et al., 2004) and in a substudy of the TASC evaluation that focused on programs serving middle-grades students (C.R. Russell & E.R. Reisner, *Supporting social and cognitive growth among disadvantaged middle-grades students in TASC after-school projects*, Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2005). The following discussion cites applicable findings from those studies, as relevant.

This point raises a larger issue about future research needs in the field of after-school programming. In general, more systematic information across large, diverse program samples is needed to illuminate the particular practices and approaches adopted by those after-school programs that achieve the greatest developmental gains for students.

## Shared Features

Through interviews and observations at the 10 study sites, a consistent picture of structural and content features emerged. See Appendix D for more detail on each of the 10 TASC projects.

### Programs Offered a Broad Array of Enrichment Activities

*These after-school projects balanced responsibilities for supporting youth academically with a commitment to engaging youth in high-quality enrichment activities.* Activities in these projects occurred for almost three hours each school day in a safe environment that informally and constructively connected youth with a cross-age

"My philosophy is to provide a safe environment in which children can develop and enhance a positive attitude towards academic, intellectual, cultural and artistic pursuits. We offer appropriate experiences and learn about social interactions...."

Davon Russell  
Women's Housing and Economic  
Development Corporation (WHEDCO)

mix of peers and with positive adult role models. Project leaders felt strong external pressure to link their activities to school-day priorities and to ensure that participants finished at least some of their homework every day. But project leaders' primary goals extended beyond participants' academic learning. They were committed to exposing participants to a balanced array of new experiences that promoted healthy overall development. "We are focusing on the academics, but it's not the be-all and end-all of the program," one coordinator reported. "We're [really] focusing more on the humanistic

component,” another explained. When asked about their project goals, site coordinators said their mission was to create youth-centered, developmentally responsive activities first and academic support second. They sought to develop “holistic” learning opportunities that built “good and wholesome relationships” and “gave students a positive start in life.”

***Weekly schedules included homework help, project-based activities, arts, crafts, performing arts, and both structured and unstructured recreation.*** These high-performing after-school projects were safety zones where participants received homework help, explored new ideas and interests, and experienced long-term, supportive relationships with peers and adults. Occasionally—but not often—projects offered specialized academic support such as individual tutoring or small-group instruction. Academic and non-academic instruction was typically led by adult paraprofessionals or college students who were supervised by experienced program coordinators or certified teaching specialists.

***Arts and academic enrichment exposed participants to new experiences and gave them a sense of confidence to do things they had never tried before.*** “We’re interested in exposure,” a site coordinator explained. “We do not want to duplicate the day school.” For many participants, the after-school project provided their first exposure to learning opportunities such as dance, music, or a field trip outside their neighborhood. Site coordinators considered that their projects were helping participants “work toward [coordinator’s emphasis] mastery...learning through the process, and getting exposed to new concepts.” Thus, enrichment activities were designed to give participants the “broadest possible exposure” by introducing them to experiences that might spark their interests and expand their vision. Although they might not master every skill or content area, they were “exposed to everything,” and once they tried something, they could later choose to continue their involvement.

***Through sports and recreation activities, participants had time to run, play, interact in loud voices, and move freely with limited structure.*** These activities were the most informal part of the after-school project day and, for many participants, it was the first time every day that they could run freely in the gym or on the playground. Activity leaders sought a balance between structure and freedom so that participants could release a day’s worth of accumulated tension without getting out of control. In free-play activities, sports equipment was laid out and groups of participants chose their own games. In more structured sports, leaders set up the play area to give every participant an opportunity for practice and to play a key role. Activities included relay races, “double dutch” jump rope, volleyball, and other ball sports. Whether unstructured outdoor play activities or more structured activities in the gym, these recreational activities were friendly and fluid, giving staff and participants the time they needed to interact informally with one another in a relaxed, comfortable manner. This finding is consistent with analyses reported by Reisner et al. (2004) regarding higher levels of learning gains by participants in TASC projects that offered extensive opportunities for fitness, sports, and recreation. That report stated, “Evaluators speculate that these activities influenced participants both by drawing them into the after-school program and promoting high

attendance and also by providing the physical exercise needed for subsequent mental acuity” (page 43).

## **Wide-Ranging Experiences Promoted Skill-Building and Mastery**

Each project approached its skills-focused activities differently, but all ensured that participants took part in three to six enrichment activities per week and that these activities involved them in group processes in which they developed a performance or product. Most projects hired specialists to lead several activities a week, which helped build an orientation toward skill-building and mastery in literacy, arts, sports, or community service activities.

***Participants built literacy skills through formal curricula.*** Each after-school program created opportunities to build participants’ literacy skills through reading, story-telling, and writing activities. Younger children participated in shared reading time, in which they described to one another the books they had chosen by reading short passages or describing the story in pictures. One group of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten participants maintained “munchkin journals,” which were notebooks in which they recorded the alphabet and words they were learning to use. Older participants wrote poetry, rehearsed plays, and designed newsletters and yearbooks.

All 10 projects provided structure for some of these literacy activities by using formal curricula, such as the Developmental Studies Center’s *KidzLit* curriculum, Putamayo’s *Passport to Success*, and the Madison Square Garden Literacy Challenge. Participants in programs involved in the Literacy Challenge logged their reading activities and attended events at the Garden, which sometimes included a visit to the broadcasting booth and the opportunity to practice interviewing and broadcasting.

In reviewing the 10 project schedules, science and mathematics activities were the least likely to be included in the schedule, although several programs included *KidzMath* and a limited number of “kitchen science” experiments.

***Homework help occurred in small groups, often managed by knowledgeable college students, with the assistance of teaching specialists or experienced after-school leaders.*** In many projects, high school students served as peer mentors and assistant activity leaders. At least four days per week (with Friday often being the exception), project group leaders oversaw small groups of participants working on homework assignments. Leaders tried to organize homework activities to engage participants when they were most alert and could benefit from assistance. Although many projects offered homework immediately after snack, the scheduling of homework for all groups at that time was not always feasible. One project worked around that problem by conducting homework activities all afternoon on the fifth floor of the school. Each group of after-school participants was scheduled for a 45-minute slot on the homework floor, where noise from other after-school activities could not be heard.

During homework sessions, group leaders were available to answer questions, help participants with assignments, and monitor participants in completing their homework, but rarely did they check participants' homework for accuracy. One project motivated participants to be diligent in completing homework by offering time to play interactive logic and board games such as chess, scrabble, and checkers when participants finished their homework.

At homework sessions, group leaders typically had books and academic games available that they distributed to participants who did not have homework or completed homework early. Although homework was largely directed by youth workers and not by certified teachers, site coordinators developed strategies for monitoring homework so that group leaders could turn to teachers if participants needed help that the group leader could not provide. Several site coordinators assigned certified teachers to circulate among groups during the homework period, while other coordinators directly monitored activity leaders' lessons, recruited teachers from the partner school to mentor the program leaders, or asked their assistant coordinators to circulate during homework times to ensure an orderly working environment and to determine that participants were completing their assignments.

***Participants worked toward mastery in varied arts, recreation, literacy activities, and hands-on projects.*** In many instances, arts activities gave participants the opportunity to practice and master new skills in preparing for performances or exhibitions. Dance, music, and drama enabled participants to express themselves in new ways and were vehicles for creating cultural connections between the after-school project and its community. "I think for kids who are not academically successful, [arts activities] are another area in which they can be successful," observed a project coordinator who is a former professional dancer. In her view, the learning that participants experience in arts and academics are "very parallel." The value of experiential and hands-on learning after school in promoting cognitive growth was underscored in Russell and Reisner (2005), which compared the characteristics of after-school projects in which participants displayed high or low ratings on certain outcome measures.

***In the majority of activity observations across the projects, evaluators observed staff using one of three primary instructional strategies to promote skill-building and mastery.*** Observers examined the proportion of activities in which each indicator in the skill-building and mastery domain was rated as "evident" or higher (rating of 5 or higher on the seven-point scale). The following instructional strategies emerged as most evident in the activities that were observed:

- Program staff, either explicitly or implicitly, communicate the goals, purposes, and expectations of the activity in which youth are engaged (76 percent of activities).
- Program staff assist youth without taking control of the activity, for example, by coaching or employing scaffolding techniques to help youth

gain a better understanding of a concept or complete an action on their own (66 percent).

- Program staff verbally recognize youths' efforts and accomplishments (58 percent).

Not all after-school activities that evaluators observed were intended to build specific skills. Many intentionally provided youth with less structured opportunities to explore new experiences and develop relationships. Of the activities observed by evaluators, only 53 percent were designed to build specific skills. Among those activities, there was even stronger evidence of the three instructional strategies described above. In the skill-focused activities, staff communicated activity goals clearly in 88 percent of these activities, assisted youth without taking control in 79 percent of the activities, and verbally encouraged youth in 69 percent. In addition, in a majority of these activities, observers rated the following instructional strategies as a 5 or higher:

- Program staff challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency through constructive feedback (59 percent of activities).
- Program staff employ two or more teaching strategies to engage youth, including a combination of direct instruction, coaching, modeling, demonstrating, or other strategies (55 percent).

In activities where instructional strategies promoting skill-building and mastery were evident, staff members provided specific individual feedback and encouragement to youth. For example, in a homework help activity for third-graders at the after-school project sponsored by Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center, the group leader regularly praised youth who were concentrating on their work, and reminded others to stay on task. The staff also emphasized accuracy, checking youths' completed homework and providing feedback. Group leaders coached individual students through math problems and encouraged high standards in students' expository writing.

***The use of instructional strategies that focused on skill-building and mastery varied by activity type.*** Evaluators combined several indicators from the skill-building and mastery domain of the observation instrument to create a continuous scale score, ranging from one to seven, to analyze variation in the emphasis on skill-building/mastery between different activities. This scale is described in detail in Appendix B. Evaluators conducted an ANOVA analysis to examine differences in instructional strategies, as measured by this scale, between types of activities. On average, staff in academic activities (scale score of 4.27) and visual and performing arts activities (score of 4.24) used skill-building instructional strategies more frequently than did staff in sports activities (score of 3.28). These differences were statistically significant.

Programs provided numerous access points to the arts. For example, the program sponsored by the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families structured the after-school experience around theme-based arts activities. Throughout the year, each group of

participants researched a theme related to the history and culture of New York City, then integrated their learning into a culminating performance through visual arts, drama, and music activities. A group of fifth-graders that investigated the role of a famous Puerto Rican leader wrote and choreographed a musical theater piece based on his life and work. Similarly, a group of kindergarteners at the same program designed a mural about the Bronx zoo and memorized a song about the animals they learned about. Elsewhere, performing artists came to after-school programs to teach various musical instruments (e.g., violin, drums, guitar) and dance forms (e.g., hip hop, African dance, capoeira). The content and focus of these activities depended on the resources available to the program sponsor, the schools, and the site coordinator. However, where sites could budget for professional artists and specialists to lead such activities, participants tended to benefit from a greater degree of skill-building and mastery-focused instruction. Observations showed that activities led by specialists had a mean scale score of 4.15 on the skill-building and mastery scale, which is a statistically significant difference from the mean scale score of 3.63 for activities that did not include these specialist staff. For example, one sponsor linked both the after-school program and the school with arts activities conducted by Dream Yard, a group of professional artists in New York City who go to urban classrooms to help children and youth learn to express, write, and perform their own stories.

***The projects demonstrated common elements within activity content and structure.*** In three-quarters of the activities observed, evaluators saw strong evidence that the activity was well organized (75 percent were rated 5 or higher). Evaluators also saw evidence that the activity challenged students intellectually, creatively, and/or physically in 58 percent of activities.

An example of a well-organized and challenging activity that developed skills and required analytic thinking was a science enrichment activity observed at the program sponsored by the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families. The specialist leading the activity established a clear structure to integrate the development of science skills and deductive thinking into an exciting detective activity. Youth built on knowledge and skills presented at the beginning of the lesson and in previous lessons, and used analytic thinking to find clues. The specialist first gave an overview of fingerprint dusting, the focus of the day's activity, then introduced participants to the materials they would be using, and walked them through the process of using their content knowledge to discover the clues for a crime they were solving, by matching printouts of fingerprints to those on pre-printed laminated cards. As participants worked, staff circulated around the room to pose questions, check on participants' understanding, and help as needed.

ANOVA analyses showed differing quality ratings based on activity type. Evaluators combined indicators measuring activity content and structure into a scale, and conducted ANOVA analyses to examine differences in scale scores by activity type. Analyses indicated that the average scale score for both academic enrichment activities (5.07) and arts activities (5.05) was significantly higher than for sports activities (3.60). In other words, sports activities were not as well organized and did not offer as many opportunities to develop specific skills or challenge participants' thinking as did

academic enrichment and arts activities. In addition, activities that were categorized as intentionally skill-building had significantly higher scores on this scale than did activities that were not intended to be skill-building (5.27 compared to 3.33). That is, skill-building activities were consistently better organized, required more analytic thinking, and provided more appropriate challenges for participants than did non-skill-building activities.

## **Intentional Relationship-Building Was a Primary Focus**

*After-school projects had close working relationships with host schools.* Strong partnerships with the leadership and staff at host schools helped determine whether a project ran smoothly or not. Essential ingredients of the most effective partnerships were: mutual respect between the project coordinator and the principal, shared teaching and paraprofessional staff members, appreciation that students benefited from the after-school experience, and flexibility among schools' teaching, custodial, cafeteria, and security staff. "Everything is in the relationship with the school," a site coordinator explained. "If they need something, we provide it," another site coordinator offered. A principal made clear the symbiotic character of the after-school and school-day partnership: "We couldn't exist without [the after-school project], but, then, the [after-school project] wouldn't exist without us!" she explained.

In the view of several coordinators, the absence of a rigid definition of project-to-school relationships enabled each project's leader and staff to "invent solutions and create new ways of looking at the partnerships." Among the study sites, seven had tight partnerships with their host schools. The three weaker partnerships were a result of recent changes either in school or project leadership, and coordinators were actively working to relieve any tensions. All projects scheduled regular planning times with the principals of their host schools, but there was no standard frequency of meetings or list of key individuals involved. Three project coordinators were on the leadership teams of their schools; another leader was about to become a member of her school's leadership team. Six projects had a formal feedback mechanism for teachers to register concerns that arose when the after-school project used classrooms; other projects promoted informal connections among the teachers in whose rooms they worked and with the project leaders who managed groups. All projects elicited information from the school about homework assignments. The same types of close relationships between after-school staff and staff of the host schools were found by Russell and Reisner (2005) to promote high levels of school attendance on the part of after-school participants.

Projects also aligned their expectations for youth behavior with the school's expectations, allowing for greater informality in the after-school project. Hiring teachers and school aides from the school-day program ensured continuity between the norms of the school-day program and the after-school project. In addition, several projects called on school-based counselors to conduct group sessions on being friends, sexual awareness, healthy living styles, bullying, and reducing risk behavior. Because youth knew the

counselors, they could talk with those individuals about personal issues and express themselves freely.

Among the most successful strategies undertaken by after-school projects to align academic priorities across the day-school and after-school projects were the following:

- Hiring a teacher from the day school whose job it was to keep the after-school project apprised of what the principal and teachers in the day school were doing
- Using literacy and mathematics materials that were used during the school day to help focus after-school academic support
- Observing in classrooms and talking informally with regular teachers about participants' learning needs and behavior
- Pooling resources to hire arts and recreation specialists to work in the school day as well as in the after-school project
- Arranging for classroom libraries, manipulatives, and games to be available to support homework and other after-school academic activities
- Hiring school-day paraprofessional aides to coordinate the academic records of student progress between the school-day and after-school project
- Sharing the school's parent liaison to facilitate connections between the school and families

Finally, and significantly, joint celebrations and tangible appreciations were exchanged between the after-school and day-school projects. Projects allocated some of their own resources to provide the school staff with beginning-of-the year "care bags" and thank-you gifts and to host joint celebration and appreciation days. Teachers received materials they could use in their classroom, school staff received project T-shirts, and everyone school-wide was invited to come to all after-school performances, celebrations, and parties.

***Projects' successes pivoted on the constructive relationships that project staff nurtured among participants.*** Coordinators measured their success by the "feeling of calm, respect, openness, and honesty" conveyed in activities and in informal exchanges, when "people just talk to each other." They also judged their success by the degree to which participants acted and felt like a community, in the respect they gave one another, and in the relationships staff developed with families and community members. This perspective was echoed in findings reported by Russell and Reisner (2005); that study reported that, "in projects where coordinators reported offering a full roster of social development activities, including conflict resolution, peer discussion, and life skills



instruction, students were more likely to report a strong sense of community than were students in other projects” (page 14).

Coordinators talked often with staff about “the importance of making every child and parent [know] they have a stake in what we do.” Coordinators described “re-teaching everyone” that when they come into the project, they “drop whatever baggage you’re coming in here with,” and treat people with decency, respect, and concern. They emphasized to their staff that it “is very important to talk to kids.” When behavioral issues arose, the first response was to “have a conversation and find out what’s going on” and then encourage youth to reflect on their behavior and its consequences with their project leaders, or with staff who had counseling training and could help sort out the root causes of hostilities.

Managing behavioral tensions and teaching conflict resolution did not come easily to all staff, so site coordinators brought social workers and experienced youth specialists into projects in some instances to conduct relationship-building activities with staff and participants. One leader distributed a written description of “loveable things to say and do,” giving examples of words and actions that show participants that they were valued and respected.

Periodic focused training, along with conversations during staff meetings, taught staff to conduct conflict-resolution activities and to strengthen peer relationships using written curricula such as *Adventures in Peacemaking*, *Global Kids*, and *Resolving Conflict Peacefully*. The curriculum materials suggested role-playing ideas and conflict scenarios with alternative endings for participants to work out, and activities from these curricula were included in each week’s schedule. In addition, group leaders used some of their activity time to: engage participants in discussions of behavioral norms; teach constructive ways of expressing anger, frustration, and dissatisfaction; and instill accountability for one’s own behavior.

***Staff were deliberate in their approaches to creating environments that fostered positive relationships.*** In more than three-quarters of the observations, evaluators rated the following indicators of staff relationships with youth at 5 or higher:

- Staff were equitable and inclusive with all youth, encouraging the participation of all and engaging any students who appeared to be isolated (90 percent of activities).
- Staff used positive behavior-management techniques, such as setting appropriate limits and communicating clear expectations for behavior (83 percent).
- Staff showed positive affect toward all youth, using a caring tone and positive language (82 percent).

- Staff attentively listened to and/or observed youth, paying attention as they completed a task and responding to what they said (82 percent).

In one activity at the project sponsored by CAMBA, a trained social worker guided a group of seventh- and eighth-graders in a discussion about drug prevention. After acknowledging that it was a difficult topic, the staff member asked youth, “Why would a friend get involved in drugs? Why is it hard to stop them?” As the conversation proceeded, youth acknowledged they knew people who were trying drugs and that it was hard to resist peer pressure. Through her questioning, the staff member created an environment in which youth felt comfortable expressing their ideas and experiences on this difficult topic. She did not need to employ much active behavior management, because she had established a tone of respect in the activity. The leader worked to include all students in the discussion, and her respect for students was repaid by their openness.

As with the other domains, evaluators combined indicators measuring staff-youth relationships into a scale to analyze patterns of variation. Academic enrichment activities had significantly higher scores on the staff-youth relationships scale than did homework help activities (4.99 scale score, compared with 4.16 scale score). In other words, in academic enrichment activities, staff tended to build more positive relationships with youth than they did in homework or tutoring sessions.

Similarly, in the subset of activities that were skill focused (e.g., dance or drama rehearsals), observers saw significantly stronger staff-youth relationships than in activities that were not skill focused (e.g., games or open recreation time) (4.73 scale score, compared with 4.41 scale score).

***Participant norms and expectations were clearly established at the beginning of the project year.*** During project start-up, leaders worked in small groups to develop common expectations for participant interactions. They made their expectations clear and defined the consequences when those expectations were not met. New and returning participants worked together, and some projects hired project graduates who knew how to work with youth in ways that reflected the project’s values and commitment to establishing an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaboration. At the WHEDCO project, the year began with a week-long period in which the staff and returning participants worked through a series of community-building and “peacemaking” activities to “build relationships and make sure that expectations are clear” among staff and returning students. Using cooperative games from the Educators for Social Responsibility curriculum, *Adventures in Peacemaking*, the staff worked with returning students to determine “how our group is going to function from now until June,” as described by coordinator Davon Russell:

Peer mediation is very important. [When there are conflicts,] we try to have the children address the situation or problem, and we try to offer them a different way of looking at things.... We encourage the staff to say, “Here’s another way of looking at it ... talk it out or let a teacher know.” When leaders speak with the kids, they

make a habit of asking, “What are your feelings?” Words need to be put to their feelings ... so I work with them on making a pact about taking constructive actions to avoid conflict as much as possible.

In the activities observed across sites, youth demonstrated these positive relationships in various ways. In more than three-quarters of all the activities, observers saw evidence of positive youth participation, as measured by the following indicators:

- All or most youth were friendly to each other, demonstrating relaxed interactions with each other (rated 5 or higher in 93 percent of activities).
- All or most youth showed respect for one another, refraining from causing disruptions and considering each other’s viewpoint (86 percent of activities).
- All or most youth were on task (84 percent).
- All or most youth showed positive affect to staff, as demonstrated through friendly interactions (82 percent).
- All or most youth listened actively and attentively to peers and staff (76 percent).

In one activity at the project sponsored by Maspeth Town Hall, a small group of youth created a yearbook. While youth worked on the parts of the yearbook that most interested them, they also collaborated on other tasks in this ongoing activity. Three youth, using one computer, worked together on the yearbook’s layout, while another pair used a laptop to write a yearbook article. Youth were friendly and respectful of one another and of the teacher leading the activity, intently following the teacher’s demonstration of how to insert digital pictures into a template that the students had designed.

As with the other domains, evaluators combined indicators measuring youth relationship-building and youth participation into a single scale. The analysis revealed statistically significant differences in the scale scores for arts activities, as compared with homework activities. On average, arts activities showed stronger youth relationships and participation than did homework activities (4.67 scale score, compared to 4.13 scale score). Homework activities were typically more structured and offered fewer informal opportunities for youth to work with each other. Analyses also showed significantly higher scale scores on the youth relationship-building and participation scale in activities that did not target academic skills. On average, activities that targeted physical, artistic, interpersonal, or other types of skills had a significantly higher scale score than activities that targeted academic skill-building (4.60, compared to 4.30).

***Families were included in the life of the project in various ways.*** Coordinators regarded the connection with families to be vital to their success, although few families had

the discretionary time to become deeply involved in the after-school hours. Most projects were staffed with parent coordinators who were the primary point of contact between the family and the project; often, they were also employed by the school as its parent coordinator.

At the beginning of the school year, project staff met with families in orientation sessions in which parents received information about program philosophy and approach, and they learned about the resources they could access through the project or through the program sponsor. Projects adopted policies that established a tone of welcome, respect, and inclusion. The policies also established project attendance requirements, behavioral expectations, and the consequences for participants who did not meet the behavioral expectations.

Site coordinators and group leaders maintained regular contact with family members who picked children up at the end of the afternoon. This was an important time for sharing participants' successes and news of forthcoming events. Newsletters and flyers went home to announce parenting workshops, ESL classes for adults, and community-oriented service activities and to alert parents to participant performances and projects. These activities gave parents with limited time the opportunity to participate in the project to the extent they could. Several projects periodically wrote reports on participants' behavior and performance in activities either to parents or to the school, and this information was, in turn, included in teachers' reports to parents.

Families of children in after-school projects were also connected with the social-service resources of the program sponsors. The supportive resources available from sponsors was generally available to families at no cost, and the projects typically benefited from professional social workers, job counselors, and youth staff, often also at no extra cost. In some cases, the after-school project became the school's connection to the sponsoring nonprofit organization's services for families, even on behalf of students who were not enrolled in the after-school project.

### **Programs Employed Strong Managers, Differentiated Staffing, and Supports for Line Staff**

*These high-performing projects were led by site coordinators with five or more years of experience working for the grantee organization or for similar organizations; all 10 had strong ties to the communities where they worked.* Some site coordinators had grown up in the same neighborhood as the host school; others had raised their children there or even sent them to the same host school. Virtually all of the site coordinators used such phrases as, "These are my children," or "We're family here," when referring to their project participants, and a few had nieces and nephews who were enrolled in the after-school project. Most coordinators spoke Spanish fluently.

*Coordinators had a vision of what they were trying to accomplish, and they set goals and hired staff to achieve that vision.* They understood that they were charged

with two pressing responsibilities: to promote positive cognitive development and to establish an emotional and developmental safety net that motivated participants to broaden their experiences and make a commitment to achieving personal and academic success. Leaders articulated their own vision of how to balance the potentially competing pressures of academic and social attentiveness, and they concentrated on convening a team of professionals, paraprofessionals, activities specialists, and community-based staff who shared a common belief in youth and in their capacity to achieve. “It’s about your vision and your dream being actualized, seeing it coming to fruition,” one site coordinator explained.

***Projects began their year with intensive mandatory orientation sessions, ranging in length from several days to a full work-week.*** At these meetings, staff members met and interacted with one another, learned project policies and procedures, contributed to planning the activity schedules, and discussed common behavior-management techniques. They typically received their assignments during orientation and made plans with their co-leaders. In four sites, staff were also introduced to the school-day curriculum, so that each group leader developed an awareness of the curriculum of the grade with which they would be working.

Site coordinators led sessions cooperatively with their sponsoring organization’s mental health staff, host school principals, and assistant principals, and met with developers of curriculums they used. They distributed manuals that set out the project’s vision, defined standard approaches to motivating and disciplining youth, and explained policies and procedures for constructively managing student behavior and interactions with families.

Meetings focused on interactions with children and infused members of each site’s after-school team with the understanding “that when children are here they come first.” According to coordinators, it usually took some effort to bring activity leaders, security staff, principals, and teachers alike on board with the idea that children are at the front and center of all they do, but the common training experience was a crucial first step in this process.

***Training continued throughout the year in periodic full-staff meetings that took place after the project afternoon was over, and in day-long in-service sessions that focused on using curricula or managing children with developmental sensitivity.***

Seven of the 10 projects conducted regular, paid staff meetings. Four projects conducted one- to two-hour meetings each week; three projects met about once a month. The remaining three projects held staff meetings on an as-needed basis only.

Scheduling meetings with part-time staff was never easy, but project coordinators in these sites met the challenge by extending the work day one hour, reducing the program day for students by an hour, or holding meetings on days when school—and therefore the project—was not in session. Weekly meetings varied in length from a half hour to two hours; sites without regular meetings emphasized direct one-on-one mentoring between the site coordinators and activity leaders; in several cases, the site

coordinator and the assistant coordinators conducted periodic classroom observations. Two sites supplemented their staff meetings with brief memos or more extended newsletters. One site conducted their meetings on Friday afternoons, making them “rap” sessions and extending them to include a social hour and dinner.

Most sites used staff meeting time to discuss logistics or scheduling changes and to exchange ideas on how to support specific participants more fully or to convey messages from families or from the school-day staff to the program staff. Often, in addition to logistical matters, internal staff or external consultants offered specialized training sessions.

Site coordinators valued the contribution of teachers from host schools who would periodically conduct strategy workshops for staff. “There’s nobody better to teach my staff how to do homework and math literacy help than the literacy and math coaches for the teachers at the school,” reported one coordinator. In addition to informing project staff about what was happening during the school day, they brought feedback from the after-school staff sessions to their sessions with their colleagues.

***Mentoring, guidance by managers, lesson planning and open dialogues among staff continued to strengthen professionalism.*** Long-time staff mentored new staff, and older staff mentored younger staff to develop common strategies for managing behavior positively and for motivating participants through hands-on experiences, games, and projects. In sites with assistant coordinators or certified teaching personnel, trained staff were paired with the less-experienced staff to learn how to plan and write lessons and to work with teaching curricula such as *KidzLit* and *KidzMath*, *Junior Achievement*, and *Adventures in Peacemaking*.

About half of the projects required leaders to plan and submit lesson plans. In addition, in many projects site coordinators and classroom teachers helped the paraprofessional leaders develop plans. Lesson plans, when they were required, were simple outlines, and did not require staff to go into great detail. “I don’t ask staff to make it very intricate,” one site coordinator reported. “Just something that will get them from point A to point Z. I try to have them write out a realistic idea of what is going to happen.” The TASC evaluation found that requirements for activity or lesson plans were associated with higher test-score gains (Reisner et al., 2004). The report also stated, “Evaluators speculate that the preparation and review of written plans occurred mainly in projects in which student learning was a high priority” (pages 43-44).

Additional mentoring occurred through both formal and informal evaluations. Six projects conducted routine one-on-one staff evaluations at least once a year; in four projects evaluations were less systematic. Two projects asked staff to submit a self-evaluation checklist to the site coordinator every six to eight weeks so the staff and coordinator could discuss strengths and weaknesses. Other projects had unit leaders and teachers observe activities and provide either structured or informal feedback to the activity leaders they observed, but not to the project coordinator. All of the projects

conducted year-end staff assessments in preparation for rehiring and planning training for the following year.

***Staff also accessed training from TASC and others.*** In addition to bringing trainers on site to customize staff training, site coordinators were alert to training sessions offered by external vendors, and they notified staff who would benefit from such training. When staff members volunteered to attend these outside training sessions, they were usually paid an hourly stipend, and several coordinators asked participants to report back to their colleagues about what they learned.

"The key to running the project well is to be nurturing to your staff. Have your staff know you have a vested interest in what happens to them. I want my staff to use this as a growing experience.... They know that [I] care about what goes on in their lives. I call them 'my kids.'.... I feel like they're my kids. I celebrate with them when they do something good; I worry when something bad happens; and I grieve for them when they [face a serious loss]."

Jan Vasquez  
Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation

In New York, training courses are available from TASC and others on numerous topics, including "adult fundamentals," which provides "basic after-school training," such as activity planning, managing group and individual behavior, and responding to the developmental needs of participants. Different levels of courses are available to staff with different levels of preparation, so that courses for experienced professionals differ from courses for high school and college youth workers. TASC also offers in-service programs about how to support a range of academic and nonacademic learning through literacy, mathematics, and other traditional school subjects. Curriculum developers conduct periodic intensive in-service programs on using their curricula, and site coordinators encourage staff to attend these programs because they tend to be "more of an informational and inspirational type of training" than the briefer training sessions that were integrated into the project's staff development routine.

***Leaders used informal networks to identify potential new staff.*** Coordinators reported a very high staff return rate, as much as 75 to 80 percent per year. They believed the care they took in hiring staff, despite part-time hours and low wages, contributed to high retention rates. Site coordinators managed their own hiring, and they turned to members of their community, including paraprofessionals who worked in their partner schools and community people who worked with the program sponsors, to identify good matches for project openings as they occurred. Three projects created training opportunities that allowed them to "grow our own" staff by giving older students a chance to work within the project during their high school years, eventually hiring them after they were 16 years old and eligible for paid employment.

Coordinators were intuitive about which staff were the right fit for their project. As one site coordinator said, "I can read between the lines when I am hiring someone.... [I look for] passionate, committed young people. The way they walk into the building, the way they look at the kids, if they notice the work on the wall." They also favored

staff who had special interests and talents, such as coaching, videography, arts and crafts, and directing choirs or plays. Significantly, they looked for “high-energy people who have fun with kids.” Referring to the important balance between informality and positive, disciplined leadership, one site coordinator said, “Not everyone gets it.”

Coordinators interviewed prospective hires in depth, and they relied on the recommendations of staff they respected. Two projects also asked potential new hires to spend a day with the project before either the project or the new staff member committed to one another. Seven coordinators had adopted formal application and interview processes; the three others recruited and hired informally, and were always on the lookout for candidates who “see the vision” and are a good match for their project. They said that the success of these strategies depended on identifying community-based staff and, once they came on board, providing them with continuous training. The two elements, community staffing and training, worked together: “When you have one and not the other, [something is missing,]” said a coordinator.

Site coordinators regularly described their work with children as a calling, and they sought personnel who came with commitment to hard work and a willingness to grow. One site coordinator began her annual staff orientation by addressing her staff’s sense of calling to work in education and youth development: “If you think you want to be a teacher, you will either know it or be cured of it before leaving here; and, believe me, we have sent on a lot of teachers and I’ve cured a few people of the illusion that they wanted to be teachers.”

***Differentiated staffing structures reflected project priorities, available talent, and relationships with host schools and program sponsors.*** Site coordinators, who had many years of experience within their after-school project, knew how to take advantage of the services offered by their nonprofit sponsor, and how to forge connections with leaders and teachers in their host schools. Projects worked from a “strength-based perspective” by convening teams to implement their dual academic and humanistic vision. Each project was led by a small management team, typically including the site coordinator and one or two assistants, which had the independence and flexibility to hire and train staff and to manage day-to-day operations and activities. Staff based in the sponsoring nonprofit organization worked flexibly with the site coordinators, providing the administrative structure for hiring, evaluating, and paying staff and, in some cases, for providing training and professional development.

Site coordinators supplemented their own skills as leaders with assistants and professional educators who oversaw project content and quality, supported activity implementation, and, in some cases, helped mentor staff as they planned and carried out structured lessons. Sites recruited two to five certified teachers—typically with specializations in literacy, math, or science instruction—who had demonstrated that they could work informally with paraprofessional and youth staff and with participants, many of whom were struggling academically. In addition, staff structures included either parent coordinators or social workers who maintained contact with families and



connected families to social services resources that were available to the project through the project sponsor.

Because few activity leaders or their assistants were experienced teachers or professionals, site coordinators recruited certified teachers to work side-by-side with the activity staff. Certified teachers might write lesson plans and demonstrate how these could be used to develop academic activities that actively engaged participants, or they might offer demonstration lessons or lead activities with the regular group leader assisting. One program director coordinated with the school-day literacy coaches to identify materials that the after-school project could use that were aligned with instructional materials employed during the school day. This director also hired a certified language arts teacher to direct language arts skill-building activities for kindergarten through second grade while providing academic enrichment, test-taking skill-building, and literacy development for older students. Two projects identified school-day science or math coordinators to “link with the school day.” Another project recruited three “skill developers” from outside of the school to supplement academic activities offered by project leaders. Several projects hired certified teachers to circulate around work areas during homework time to help provide support (e.g., classroom management, instructional) and supervision to leaders.

***Visiting artists and recreation specialists brought expertise in arts and sports to vary and strengthen the quality of project offerings.*** Every after-school project in the study offered three to four opportunities a week for students to participate in varied arts and sports activities. In some projects, staff with special skills in these areas were hired as group leaders who took on special initiatives within the project. Other projects hired teachers from the regular school day who were looking for opportunities to teach something new and creative, and some made connections with past participants and hired them to assist in the project. Teachers from the school hosting the project of the Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation became impresarios and led theater productions each year. Other projects contracted with professional artists or recreation specialists from community arts and recreation organizations. Specialists were often accomplished performers who brought both a discipline and a passion for their work. Arts specialists included musicians, visual artists, actors, dancers, while recreation specialists included skilled athletes who were coaches and players on community teams.

***Projects provided strong support for line staff.*** Salaries in after-school projects are modest, and quality performance and success with youth are rarely rewarded financially. Most staff in these projects were students or school-based paraprofessionals. Salaries began as low as \$7 to \$10 an hour for high school students and inexperienced college students; school aides, paraprofessionals, and older college students were typically paid \$10 to \$12 per hour; arts specialists (who were not certified teachers) earned as much as \$20 to \$30 per hour. Certified teachers, whose contract allowed them to earn an after-school per-session rate of upwards of \$35 per hour, sometimes volunteered to work for slightly less (e.g., \$25 to \$30 per hour).

Projects compensated for low salaries by providing opportunities for staff to receive mentoring and in-service training and by offering a collegial community. As a group, they took communication very seriously. Each coordinator found a unique communication strategy that supported the staff members in his or her setting, but some common themes arose across projects. Leaders began the year with start-up training sessions and regular staff meetings that included all staff. They also conducted periodic job-embedded staff development, mentoring, and off-site training opportunities.

As with other features of effective after-school programming, both formal and informal structures and the flexibility to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances developed line staff skills. “We spend as much time on our employees as on our kids,” a site coordinator explained. “They feel like they’re growing and gaining, so it’s not just an after-school job.”

***Site coordinators relied on good communication and collegiality to maintain the quality of their projects.*** In the face of low salaries, small salary increases, and professional advancement only with additional schooling, site coordinators relied on the power of their relationships to maintain stable, committed staffs. Communicating praise and encouragement went a long way toward building collegiality and commitment to the project. “In our meetings, I say thank you all the time. I always begin by saying, ‘Thank you for everything you do,’” said one coordinator. Another coordinator reported: “I tell [the staff], ‘You’re doing much more work than I can ever pay you for,’ I’m very up-front with them.”

Coordinators included staff in project planning in a number of ways. In addition to the planning done in staff meetings, some site leaders formally and informally surveyed staff so they could anonymously report their thinking about project quality issues. A site coordinator said, “I take the time to put things in writing and to have people respond, and then we have a relationship where we’re all doing something [together]. I respect their opinions...and everybody feels like they have something to do with the project’s success.”

Coordinators also used social events to strengthen informal ties. They celebrated birthdays and special occasions with cakes and gifts. They periodically hosted pot-luck meals for staff or convened over pizza, and sponsors included after-school staff in neighborhood celebrations and holiday parties.

Coordinators made clear that their projects worked best when they functioned “like a family.” They know there is much they must do to maintain their project quality. But all the management and training go only as far as the quality of relationships they have been able to nurture within their staffs and among staff, students, schools, and families. Finally, program strength lies in the success of the team and in its capacity to function effectively together. “We’re very proud to work with the project,” a site coordinator reported. “My organization, the [advisory] committee—they know that we have been accomplishing a lot. But they know it’s not my project. It’s teamwork.”

## **Partner Organizations Provided Support to Project Leaders and Participants**

*Sponsoring nonprofit organizations actively supported after-school projects across all sectors of their operations.* The relationships between after-school projects and their partners built the foundations of the projects' success and sustainability. Site coordinators at the high-performing projects enjoyed autonomy to make programming decisions, and there was mutual respect between them and their supervisors. Along with the relationship with the host school, this partnership "sets the stage for everything else," one site coordinator noted. "I spend a lot of energy doing the right thing to keep these relationships healthy."

In these partnerships, the sponsoring organization gave the site coordinator the autonomy and flexibility to manage the after-school project day to day, while providing administrative and fiscal support to the project. Site coordinators were then able to use their expertise in selecting activities and in making staffing decisions. Regular communication between the sponsor and the site coordinator kept both parties up to date. This communication often took the form of weekly updates, monthly reports, meetings, or telephone conversations.

In addition to linking families and participants with its services, the sponsor provided resources for the project itself in the form of staff professional development. Some sponsors ran more than one after-school project, and site coordinators drew on the experiences of their colleagues to solve problems within their own projects. Other sponsors developed extensive, in-house training that all new staff attended at the beginning of the year. Some experienced site coordinators shared their own knowledge by leading professional development sessions within and outside the sponsor organization.

Strong financial and managerial support from the sponsors freed site coordinators to concentrate on creating thriving after-school projects. The sponsors identified and secured resources to ensure the sustainability of the after-school project. These projects also benefited from the shared funding streams available to them through the sponsors' resources. For instance, while an after-school project awaited a grant payment, its sponsoring organization used other fiscal lines to pay for staff salaries and needed supplies. Site coordinators at these high-performing sites described their sponsoring organization as creative and flexible in locating financial resources for the projects.

## **Conclusions**

While these high-performing after-school projects were identified through their participants' gains on math and ELA state and citywide tests, the projects did not share a targeted focus on academics. Rather, projects contributed to their participants' learning gains by providing a broad base of opportunities and supports. Across the projects,

shared characteristics around programming, staffing, and support systems emerged. These include:

- 1. A broad array of enrichment opportunities:** For many participants, the after-school project provided their first exposure to new learning opportunities in areas such as dance, music, art, and organized sports. Enrichment activities introduced participants to experiences that could spark interests and expand their goals for their own schooling, careers, and hobbies.
- 2. Opportunities for skill building and mastery:** Each after-school project created opportunities to build participants' literacy skills through reading, story-telling, writing activities, and use of formal curricula, such as *KidzLit* and *Passport to Success*. In addition, these after-school projects integrated a focus on mastery into arts-based activities. Because arts activities involved practicing new skills in preparation for an exhibition or a performance, participants gained experience in practicing a skill to the point of mastery.
- 3. Intentional relationship-building:** This process began with each project fostering positive relationships with the host school, followed by steps to set a positive tone with staff through orientation, training, and establishment of participant norms. Throughout the year, the site coordinator worked on relationships with the project's primary stakeholders through ongoing classroom-management training for staff, conflict resolution classes and team-building activities for participants, and regular communication with and the provision of support services to families.
- 4. A strong, experienced leader/manager supported by a trained and supervised staff:** First and foremost, the site coordinators at these high performing projects brought with them experience in youth development and a strong connection to the community, the children, and the families they served. Through orientations at the beginning of the project year, ongoing staff meetings and supervision, and consistent feedback on what worked and what didn't work, all 10 site coordinators made efforts (and budgeted the time) to communicate and reinforce their vision of effective programming with their staff.
- 5. The administrative, fiscal, and professional-development support of the sponsoring organization:** The relationships between after-school projects and their sponsors built the foundation for the projects' success and sustainability. In each partnership, the sponsor gave the site coordinator the autonomy and flexibility to manage the after-school project day-to-day, while providing administrative and fiscal support to

the project. Each site coordinator was then able to use his or her expertise to select activities and make staffing decisions.

These study findings can offer a guide to new and struggling after-school projects about program features that may be most important in developing or refining an after-school project. For established projects that find themselves under duress to increase their focus on academics or to hire more academically focused staff, this study reinforces the viability of the TASC model: together, a wide variety of compelling youth-oriented activities, a staff with diverse backgrounds and skills, an experienced site coordinator with strong ties to the community, the administrative and fiscal support of a sponsoring organization, and constant communication and relationship-building with the host school and participant families can contribute to gains in school performance for after-school participants.

## **Appendix A**

### **Selection of High-Performing Projects**

The study identified high-performing TASC projects based on changes in student achievement on the statewide mathematics and English Language Arts/reading (ELA) tests administered in grades 4 and 8 and on the comparable citywide tests administered in New York City in grades 3, 5, 6, and 7.<sup>1</sup> Individual gains in reading and math scores were aggregated to the project level. Project-level gains in ELA and math scores were then averaged and ranked.

Analyses focused on changes in student achievement in math and in ELA between the 2000-01 and 2001-02 school years, the most recent years for which data were available. Because the scaling of student achievement test scores for the New York City and state tests does not follow a regular progression across grade levels, and does not provide a standard for the expected gain between grade levels, the study first transformed each student's scale score at each grade level into a standardized scale score that could be used to compare students' change in achievement across grades.<sup>2</sup> Using this method, differences in the standardized scale scores across grade levels are expressed as differences in the proportion of possible scale-score points that a student earns in one grade level compared with the proportion earned at the next.

The goal of this analysis was to identify specific projects where the TASC program was most likely to have contributed to improvements in student achievement. Therefore, the analysis examined differences in gains between active participants (students who attended a TASC project for at least 60 days and 60 percent of the days it was possible for them to attend in 2001-02) and nonparticipants (students who attended the TASC host school in 2001-02 but never attended a TASC project in any year). For each site, analyses focused on active participants and nonparticipants who scored in performance level 1 (below basic) or performance level 2 (basic) in 2000-01, meaning that they were performing below grade level and hence most in need of academic improvement. The analysis was also limited to TASC sites with at least 25 active participants and 25 nonparticipants for whom test score data were available in both 2000-01 and 2001-02, and who therefore could be included in the change analysis. Together, these constraints helped to ensure that the analysis of gains compared nonparticipants and active participants with similar initial achievement levels, and helped to increase the

---

<sup>1</sup> The New York City Department of Education (DOE) provided the TASC evaluation with data from DOE's student-level administrative data files for school years 1997-98 through 2001-02, including student demographic characteristics, test scores, and school attendance.

<sup>2</sup> The approach used in this study was to standardize the scale scores across grades, so that the range of possible test scores extended from 0 to 100 at each grade level and the mid-point of the possible scale scores for each grade level were always 50. The formula used to transform each student's scale score at each grade level into a standardized score is  $\{[(\text{scale score} - \text{minimum possible scale score}) / (\text{maximum possible scale score} - \text{minimum possible scale score})] \times 100\}$

chances of identifying TASC projects that contributed to improved achievement for participants who attended regularly.

For each student in the 76 TASC host schools who met these requirements, the study computed changes in performance on the city and state ELA and math achievement tests by subtracting the standardized scale score in 2000-01 from his or her standardized scale score in 2001-02. That is, for an estimate of the changes in student performance, the study computed the difference in the proportion of possible scale-score points that a student earned in one grade level compared with the proportion of possible points earned at the next. Student-level changes in ELA and in math were then aggregated to the site level separately for active participants and for nonparticipants. To determine the relative effectiveness of TASC participation on achievement gains in each of the 76 schools, the study subtracted average gains for nonparticipants from average gains for active participants within each school. Projects were then ranked based on the size of the difference in gains between active participants and nonparticipants, in ELA and in math. In order to identify the overall high-performing TASC projects for the purposes of this study, each site's ELA and math gains in rank were averaged into a single ranking.

The top 20 projects based on these average ELA/math rankings were determined to be the highest-performing TASC projects. To select the 10 study sites, the study asked TASC managers who work closely with the projects to comment on the current status and strengths of the 20 projects. The TASC managers identified projects that were no longer operating in Spring 2005, or had experienced significant changes in program quality, compliance with the TASC model, principal commitment to the program, or other factors likely to have affected the program. Taking these comments into account, evaluators invited the 10 most promising projects to participate in the study. All 10 of the selected study projects serve students in the elementary grades, and three of the projects also serve middle-grades students.

The following exhibits describe the 10 study projects (Exhibit A-1) and the 10 projects that were identified as high-performing but not included in the study (Exhibit A-2).

**Exhibit A-1**  
**High-Performing Projects Selected for the Study**

<b>Nonprofit Sponsor</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Borough</b>	<b>Grade levels served</b>
Church Avenue Merchants Block Association (CAMBA)	PS/IS 25	Brooklyn	K-8
Committee for Hispanic Children and Families (CHCF)	PS/MS 279	Bronx	K-8
Cypress Hills Neighborhood Development Center	PS 7	Brooklyn	K-4
East Side Settlement House	PS 220	Bronx	K-8
Maspeth Town Hall	PS 229	Queens	K-6
Ralph Lincoln Service Center	PS 12	Brooklyn	K-8
Samuel Field Y	PS 115Q	Queens	K-5
Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation	PS 122	Queens	K-8
Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center	PS 198/ PS 77	Manhattan	K-5
Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDCO)	CES 218	Bronx	K-8

**Exhibit A-2**  
**High-Performing Projects Not Included in the Study**

<b>Nonprofit Sponsor</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Borough</b>	<b>Grade levels served by school</b>
ASPIRA	MS 143X	Bronx	6-8
Brooklyn Chinese-American Association	PS 160	Brooklyn	PreK-5
Children's Aid Society	PS 152	Manhattan	K-5
Children's Aid Society*	PS 146	Bronx	K-5
Church Avenue Merchants Block Association*	PS 109	Brooklyn	PreK-5
East Side House	PS 43	Bronx	K-6
Greater Ridgewood Youth Council	PS 71	Queens	K-5
New York University School of Education, Metro Center*	PS 123	Manhattan	K-6
Police Athletic League	PS 80	Staten Island	K-12
Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation	IS 125Q	Queens	5-8
YMCA of Greater New York/Brooklyn Central YMCA/Henry Street Settlement	PS 20	Brooklyn	K-6

\* Project no longer open



## Appendix B

### Summary of Activity Observations and Domain Scales

#### Activity Content

Site visitors intentionally observed various project activities in each study site in order to capture a diversity of activity structures and instructional approaches. To the extent possible, given the schedule of project activities in each site, site visitors were encouraged to observe at least two activities of each of the following types:

- Homework help, tutoring, and test-preparation activities
- Content-based academic enrichment activities (e.g., literacy, numeracy, science, or newspaper)
- Arts activities (e.g., visual and performing arts, including dance and drama)
- Sports activities (e.g., open sports/movement, and structured athletics, including martial arts)
- Other enrichment activities (e.g., outing club, girls' group, investment club, college club)

In total, site visitors conducted 173 independent observations across the 10 study sites. Overall, visual and performing arts activities were most frequently observed (30 percent of total observations), followed by homework help (22 percent), academic enrichment activities (20 percent), and sports activities (12 percent). The specific types of activities observed are illustrated in Exhibit B-1.

**Exhibit B-1**  
**Types of Activities Observed, Spring 2005**

Activity	Percent of Observations (N=173)
Homework help/tutoring	23
Dance, music, drama	20
Academic activities	13
Arts and crafts	12
Open, unstructured time	12
Sports—playing physical games	11
Other activity type	9
Story reading/listening	8
Teacher-assigned learning games	5
Clean-up/transition	4
Cultural awareness clubs/projects	3
Sports—practicing/learning a skill	2
Community service	1
College/career development	1
Computer skill development	1

Note: Observations could include more than one activity type. Therefore, the total percent exceeds 100.

Exhibit reads: Homework help or tutoring activities were present in 23 percent of observations conducted in the study.

Of the activities observed, 36 percent were classified as targeting specific academic skills, such as reading and literacy skills, and mathematics/numeracy skills.

## Activity Context

The study observed activities serving a wide range of grades, and grade level was the primary means by which youth were grouped for activities (75 percent of observations). In 17 percent of the observed activities, youth selected to attend the activity based on their interest. The grade-level distribution of observations is shown in Exhibit B-2.

**Exhibit B-2**  
**Grade Levels Observed, Spring 2005**

Grade Level	Percent of Observations (N=173)
Kindergarten	14
1	21
2	32
3	24
4	25
5	27
6	14
7	8
8	7

Youth from more than one grade could have been present during an activity. Therefore, the total percent exceeds 100.

Exhibit reads: Kindergarteners were present in 14 percent of activities observed.

Overall, the staff-youth ratio was extremely low in the activities observed. On average, across the activities observed in each of the 10 study sites, there were eight girls and six boys present in an activity. Evaluators observed an average of two staff members in each activity, leading to an average staff-youth ratio of one to six. The activities observed were staffed by combinations of high school and college students, other adults, certified teachers, and specialists such as musicians and dancers. Most often, college students or other adults were present (in 51 percent and 54 percent of activities, respectively.) High school students were present in one third of the activities (33 percent), while specialists instructed students in 25 percent of activities. Eleven percent of activities were supervised by certified teachers. (Percentages do not add to 100 because more than one type of staff was present in most activities observed.)

The environmental context was consistently appropriate to the activities observed. In 97 percent of observations, evaluators observed a level of supervision appropriate to the activity and age of the students. Activities most frequently took place in classrooms. In addition, evaluators observed activities that took advantage of a range of facilities in the host school, as illustrated in Exhibit B-3.

**Exhibit B-3**  
**Types of Space Used in Activities Observed, Spring 2005**

<b>Types of space</b>	<b>Percent of Observations (N=159)</b>
Classroom	47
Gym	15
Cafeteria	15
Auditorium	13
Outside playground	4
Other	3
Library	1
Hallway	1
Music room	1

Exhibit reads: 47 percent of activities observed in this study occurred in classrooms.

**Scales Created from the Observation Instrument**

These scales reflect each of the five key youth development domains listed in the main report. However, indicators from the youth-directed relationship-building domain and the youth participation domain were combined into a single scale, strengthening the scale both conceptually and statistically. Thus, analysis of these observation data combined ratings on individual indicators into four scales, which are described below. Within each of these domains, the scales include specific indicators that were expected to be prevalent in most after-school activities, as well as some indicators that the study hypothesized would be harder for projects to implement and therefore more rarely observed. Like the individual indicators within the domains, each scale was computed on a scale of one to seven.

Evaluators conducted ANOVA analyses to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in scale scores between different types of activities (e.g., homework help, academic enrichment, arts, sports). A Bonferroni post-hoc test was used to determine whether there were significant differences between pairs of activity types (for example, homework help and arts). Similarly, evaluators conducted analyses to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in scale scores for activities that targeted academic skills compared with those that did not.

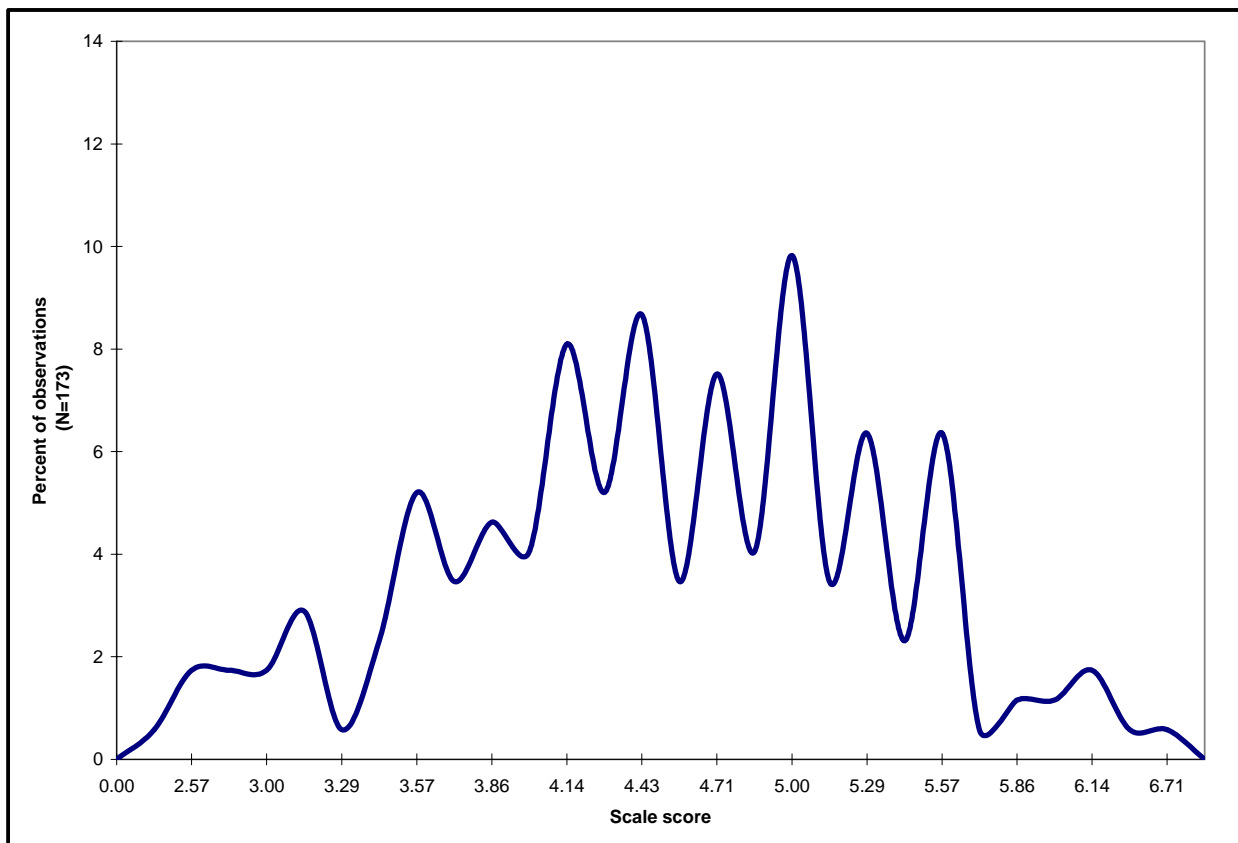
## Youth Relationship Building and Participation

The youth relationship building and participation scale combines ratings from the following indicators:

1. All or most youth are friendly to each other.
2. All or most youth show respect for one another.
3. All or most youth show positive affect to staff.
4. All or most youth are on-task.
5. All or most youth listen actively and attentively to peers and staff.
6. All or most youth have opportunities to make meaningful choices.
7. All or most youth take leadership responsibility/roles.

### *Descriptive Statistics:*

Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	25 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	75 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	Maximum
.73	4.49	0.85	2.29	3.93	5.00	6.71



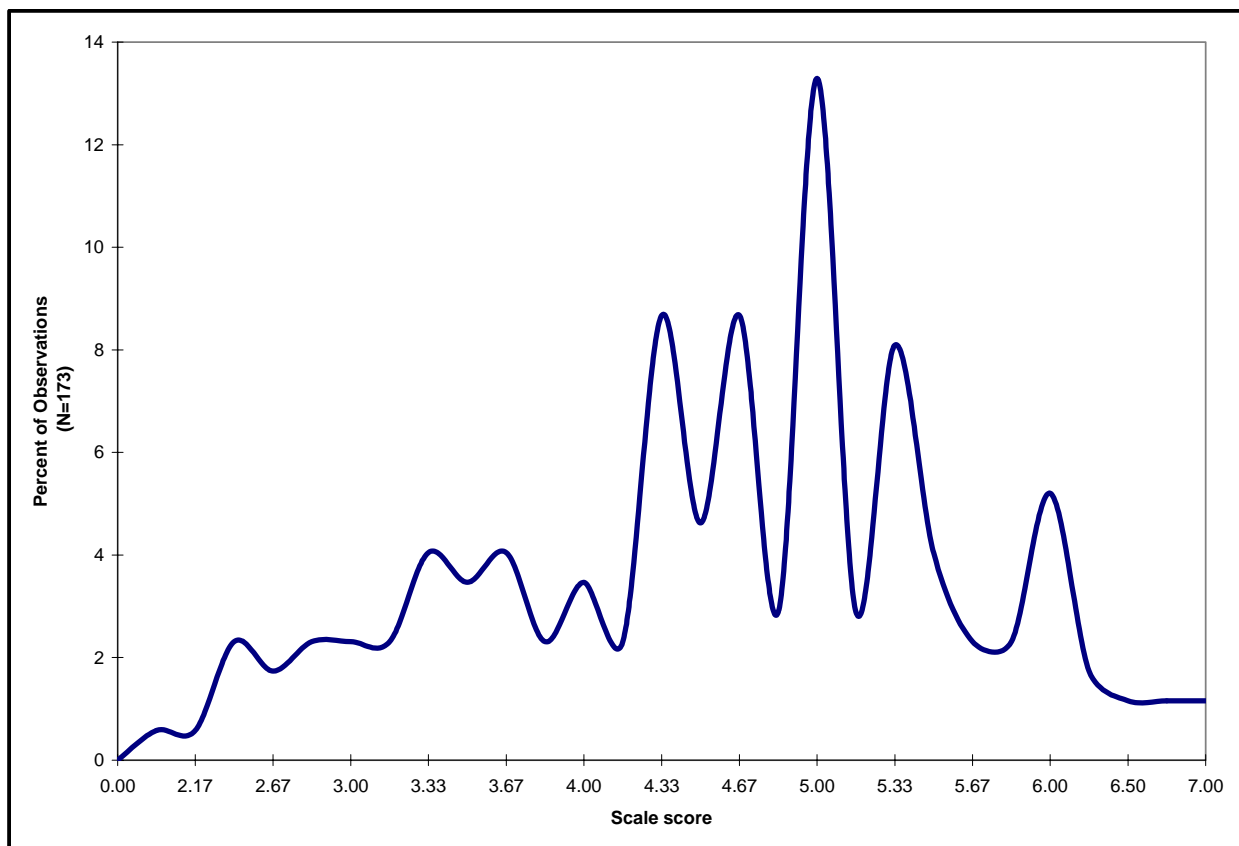
## Staff-Youth Relationships

The staff relationship building scale attempts to quantify the efforts of staff members in their interpersonal relationships with youth. The study created this scale by combining ratings from the following indicators:

1. With all youth, staff use positive behavior management techniques.
2. With all youth, staff are equitable and inclusive.
3. Staff show positive affect toward youth.
4. Staff attentively listen to and/or observe youth.
5. Staff encourage youth to share their ideas, opinions and concerns.
6. Staff engage personally with youth.

### *Descriptive Statistics:*

Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	25 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	75 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	Maximum
0.79	4.58	1.04	2.00	3.83	5.33	7.00



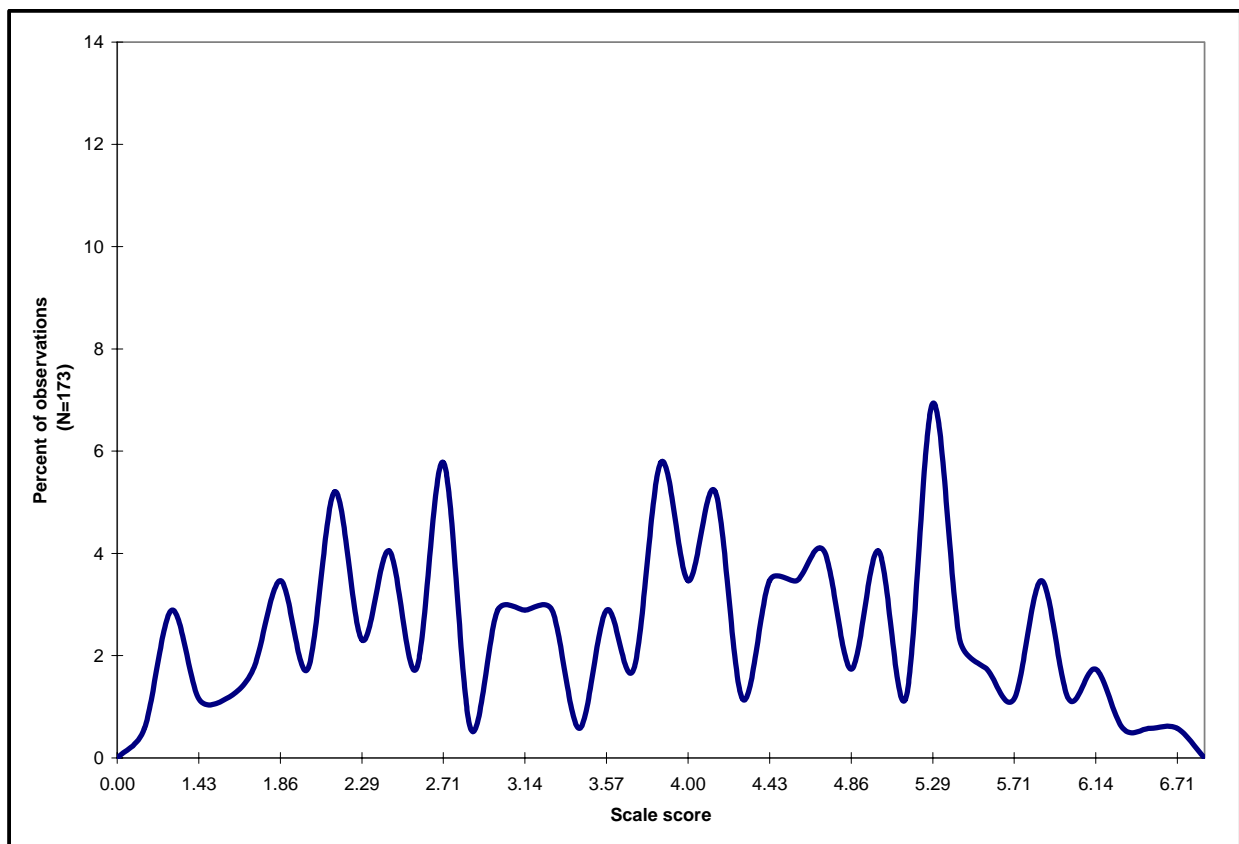
## Skill Building and Mastery

The Staff Skill Building and Mastery scale measures the efforts of after-school staff to promote learning and build proficiency in youth. Staff were evaluated based on the following items:

1. Staff communicate goals, purposes, expectations.
2. Staff verbally recognize youth's efforts and accomplishments.
3. Staff assist youth without taking control.
4. Staff ask youth to expand upon their answers and ideas.
5. Staff challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency.
6. Staff plan for/ask youth to work together.
7. Staff employ two or more teaching strategies.

### *Descriptive Statistics:*

Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	25 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	75 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	Maximum
0.83	3.77	1.40	1.00	2.57	5.00	6.71



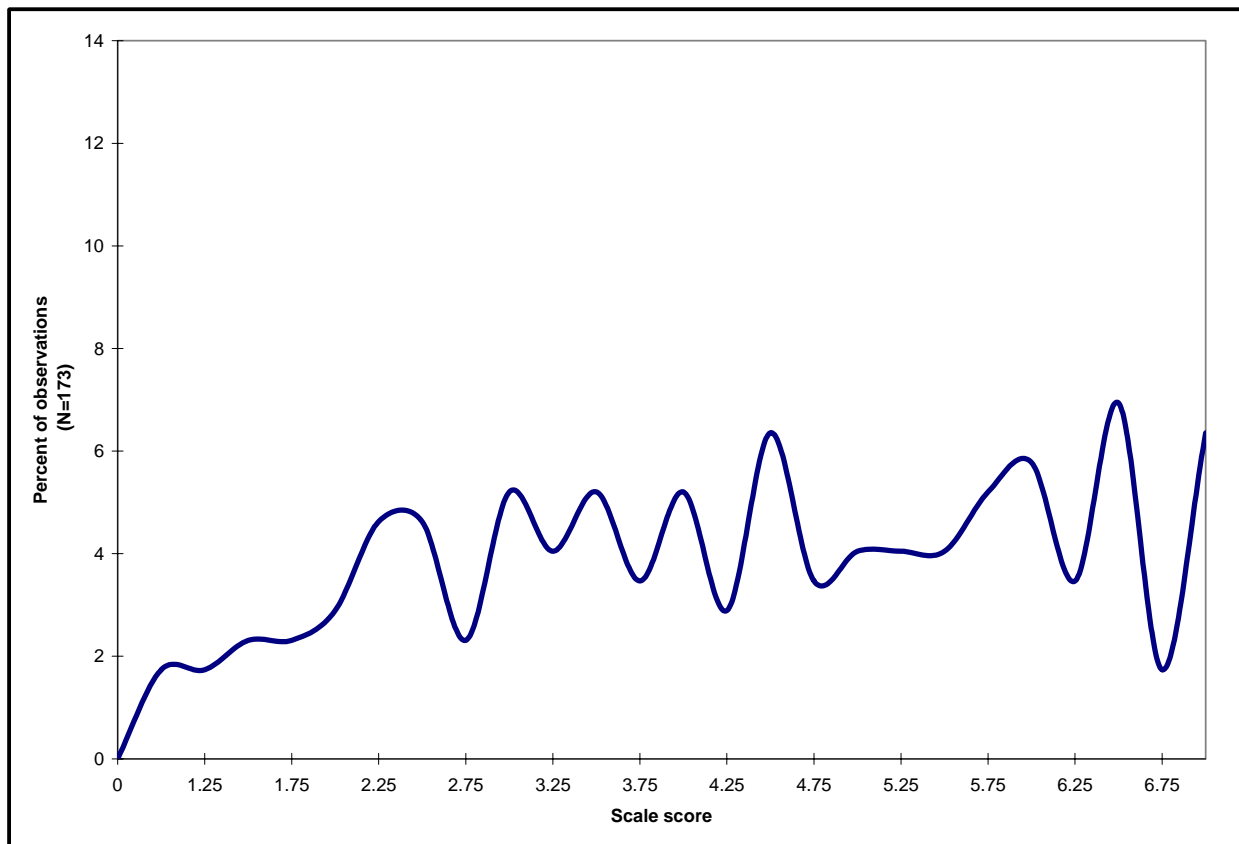
## Activity Content and Structure

The observation team used the items in the Activity Content and Structure scale to measure an activity's overall quality. The scale includes the following items:

1. The activity is well organized.
2. The activity involves the practice/a progression of skills.
3. The activity challenges students intellectually, creatively, and/or physically.
4. The activity requires analytic thinking.

### *Descriptive Statistics:*

Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	25 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	75 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	Maximum
0.88	4.35	1.69	1.00	3.00	5.75	7.00



**Appendix C**  
**Out-of-School Time Program Observation Instrument**



# **POLICY STUDIES ASSOCIATES, INC.**

1718 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, N.W. • SUITE 400 • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20009  
(202) 939-9780 • (202) 939-5732 FAX • [WWW.POLICYSTUDIES.COM](http://WWW.POLICYSTUDIES.COM)

## **OUT OF SCHOOL TIME (OST) OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Edition  
December 2005**



# OUT OF SCHOOL TIME (OST) OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT Observer Procedures

## *The Observation Instrument: An Overview*

The observation instrument provides site visitors at the out of school time program sites with a framework to capture and rate essential and observable indicators of positive youth development.

The observation instrument includes the following:

**Cover Sheet:** a checklist for capturing basic facts about the observed activity, such as activity type, staff roles, number of participants, and grouping patterns.

**Observation Notes:** for recording observation notes within five youth-development domains, such as youth-directed relationships and participation and staff-directed relationships.

**Domain Item Ratings:** a list of items under the five different domains. Observers rate each item on a scale of 1-7.

**Environmental Ratings:** three questions regarding the context of each activity, such as the activity space and materials used.

**Observer's Synthesis:** for each domain, observers write 1-2 sentences describing the overall quality observed.

## **Completing the Observation Instrument**

**STEP 1:** Each activity should be observed for 15 minutes. Site visitors begin their observations by orienting themselves to the activity setting, scanning the activity space against the items on the coversheet. However, only the introductory items (e.g., location, observer, date, time) should be completed at the onset of the observation.

**STEP 2:** After sufficient orientation, the site visitor begins to take notes on what he or she observes within five broad quality domains. On the 'Observation Notes' page, site visitors describe the types of interactions, strategies, etc., that are observed for each domain. These descriptions should include SPECIFIC EXAMPLES of activities, QUOTES of youth and staff comments, and descriptions of the general affect in the setting. Comments should be brief, but in sufficient detail that they support the item ratings. Observers may use the back of the note sheet, if more recording space is needed.

While taking notes, observers should periodically scan each of the five domains and their indicators to verify that examples of all observable events are captured. In some observations, not all items within the domains will occur.

**After 15 minutes of observation, while still in the activity setting, complete Steps 3-5.**

**STEP 3: Return to and complete the observation instrument's coversheet.** Then turn to the final page of the instrument and complete the three Environmental Context questions.

**STEP 4: Complete the "Observer's Synthesis" section on the final page of the instrument.** Write one or two sentences that describes or synthesizes the overall quality of each domain.

**STEP 5: Finish the observation by giving each domain item a rating of 1-7.** The ratings are:

- 1 = Exemplar is not evident
- 3 = Exemplar is rarely evident
- 5 = Exemplar is moderately evident, or implicit
- 7 = Exemplar is highly evident and consistent

To select a rating, first move to the ODD NUMBER that most closely reflects how evident and pervasive an item is. If that number does not precisely reflect the level of evidence observed, then move down or up to the adjacent even number that more accurately reflects the item's level of presence within an activity.

**Neutral Items:** The "5" rating is also used in cases where the exemplar is implicit in the activity. For instance, if youth are generally friendly to each other throughout the observation, but most do not go beyond the casual, friendly interaction, the rating would be a "5".

**What if I am observing more than one staff in an activity?** If there is more than one staff working in the room, ratings involving staff should be balanced across staff interactions. For instance, if one staff member uses effective behavior management techniques while the other resorts to threats and put-downs, then the rating would reflect an average of the two approaches (e.g., a rating of '3' or '4').

**HELPFUL HINT:** When you are rating an item, first read its definition and underline those things that you were able to observe. This will help highlight how much of an item's full definition was captured. Then determine the prevalence of the definition (or portion thereof).

## Sampling

**How to organize your observations on site.** Site visitors should review the program's activity schedule during prior to the program start on the day of their visit. Site visitors should select activities to be observed from the project schedule, being mindful of the following:

1. Ensure that the broadest scope of activities is observed by selecting activities across five activity types: (1) Homework Help/Tutoring/Test Prep, (2) Academic Enrichment, (3) Arts Activities, (4) Fitness, and (5) Other Enrichment (e.g., Girls Group). A sample observation matrix is below. *Please note that while snack can be an important part of an after-school project, observations should be geared toward more substantive activities.*
2. Observe across grade levels as well as activities.
3. Verify with the program coordinator that each scheduled activity will be occurring in the location stated.
4. Verify the staff who will be present in each activity, noting level of education or special skills (e.g., high school student, certified teacher, arts specialist).

**How many observations should site visitors conduct?** If you are testing for inter-rater reliability, for each visit, three observations should be co-conducted. The two site visitors should observe these three activities and complete the observation instrument as described above. Be sure to check "Yes" in the co-observed checkbox and enter both observers' initials.

If you are co-observing with another site visitor, once you are out of the activity space, take 5-10 minutes to compare your ratings. The purpose of this comparison exercise is to get to a more mutual understanding of the definitions, ratings and quality of activities and interactions observed. **DO NOT CHANGE YOUR RATINGS**, even if you ultimately agree with how your co-observer has rated an item. Also, you do not need to reconcile your ratings on another copy of the form.

In addition to the three co-conducted observations, each site visitor should observe eight to ten after-school activities over two afternoons (or approximately 5-6 hours). This is a total of 11 to 13 observations per site visitor, which is the equivalent to six or seven observations each per day, or just under two hours of observing per 2.5 - 3 hour after-school session.

Following the above plan, each site visit team should return 22 to 26 completed observation instruments at the end of each two-day visit.

## Activity Observation Matrix

If a two-person site visit team is conducting a two-day visit, this is an example of how visitors can organize their observations. The matrix below serves as a guide for selecting activities.

During the two-day site visit, each visitor should conduct a total of 11 to 13 observations, including 3 co-observations and 8-10 individual observations. Each visitor should aim to visit one activity in each of the 13 cells in order to observe a range of activities and of grade levels.

Activity Type	Younger Group (grades K-2 or 6/7)	Older Group (grades 3-5 or 7/8)	Co-Observation
<b>Homework help, tutoring, test preparation</b>			1.
<b>Content-based academic enrichment</b> (e.g. literacy, science, newspaper)			
<b>Arts:</b> Visual; Performing (including dance)			2.
<b>Fitness:</b> Open Sports/Movement; Structured Athletics (including Karate)			
<b>Other Enrichment:</b> (e.g. Outing Club, Girls' Group, Venture Club, Investment Club, College Club)			3.

### Additional Instructions:

- If no content-based academic enrichment activities are offered, visit additional homework help/test preparation activities. If no “other enrichment” activities are offered, visit a mix of additional fitness and arts activities.
- Visitors should co-observe **either** a homework help or content-based academic enrichment activity and **either** an arts or fitness activity, as well as an “other enrichment” activity, and should plan to see activities that include both the older and younger students in the program.
- If activities are limited, site visitors should still observe the required 6-7 activity segments per day, observing an activity more than once, if necessary.
- Observe all scheduled activities planned for that day, regardless of the quality. If a planned activity has been replaced or is not occurring, note this on the observation recording form and move on to the next selected activity. You will need to replace this activity with another one from the day’s schedule.

**OUT OF SCHOOL TIME (OST) OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT  
DEFINITIONS FOR OBSERVATION CATEGORIES**





# OST OBSERVATION DEFINITIONS

<b>ACTIVITY NAME</b>	The title of the activity, as given by the project
<b>ACTIVITY OVERVIEW</b>	1-2 sentence description of activity
<b>ACTIVITY TYPE</b> (check all that apply)	
<b>Homework help and/or test preparation</b>	Check this category when youth work on homework or specially assigned skill drill. If youth participate in academic activities that are not homework, mark "Academic activities." If youth are working on an in-depth, expanded academic assignment, but it IS homework, MARK THIS category.
<b>Tutoring</b>	Tutoring refers to skill-focused academic assistance to individuals or small groups with common learning needs. It is distinguished from homework or other activities in that it aims to strengthen or remediate specific academic skills.
<b>Academic activities (not homework)</b>	This item refers to an activity that develops broad-based conceptual/cognitive learning; it may or may not be directly related to school content, but it includes enriched supplementary instructional content that goes beyond homework, tutoring, and rote skill practice. Examples could include purchased literacy or numeracy curriculum, research, science, social studies, newspaper club, poetry club, or school store. If supplementary activities are offered but are not in-depth, or cognitively rich, do not mark this activity type.
<b>Story reading/listening</b>	Reading or listening to a story.
<b>Visual and Textile Arts</b>	Specialized visual arts-based activities such as painting, drawing, clay/sculpture, photography, knitting, sewing, etc. that include structured lessons in appropriate use of techniques, materials, and design elements to create products. Often the activity involves creating projects in multiple stages that may take several days, weeks or months to complete.
<b>Dance</b>	Dance lessons, practices, or performances. This area does NOT include athletic types of movement such as cheerleading or martial arts, which are marked in one of the "Sports" categories.
<b>Music</b>	Instrumental or vocal lessons, practices, or performances.
<b>Drama</b>	Drama lessons, practices, or performances.
<b>Crafts</b>	Non-specialized arts activities, using crayons, paints, yarn, etc. Involves creating a product for fun, but does not involve basic instruction in design or technique. Often is a short-term project, involving a product but requiring only the activity period or a few days to complete.
<b>Sports—practicing or learning a skill</b>	Preparation and training in a sport or athletic skill of any kind, including basketball or baseball skill clinics, martial arts, gymnastics, weight lifting, yoga, cheerleading practice.
<b>Sports—competitive or non-competitive physical game</b>	Supervised or non-supervised games using athletic skill, indoors or outdoors, such as basketball or baseball games.
<b>Open, unstructured time (e.g., table games, internet, free play)</b>	This category refers to focused activity, freely chosen by youth and not structured (but may be supervised) by adults; typically, youth have invented, selected, or identified a task and are implementing it without adult direction.
<b>Community service</b>	Planning or assisting with projects that support the quality of community life or foster program-school or community-school linkages.
<b>College/career planning/preparation</b>	Activities directly involved in career or college planning or preparation.
<b>Cultural awareness clubs/projects</b>	Activities/projects that develop cultural, religious, or ethnic awareness, understanding, or identity.
<b>Conflict resolution</b>	Activity specifically designed to impart conflict resolution skills, such as positive communication, tolerance (e.g. ethnic, religious), peer mediation, diffusing anger, etc.
<b>Other</b>	Describe here activities observed that cannot be categorized or grouped above, e.g. chess club or student government.

<b>TYPE OF SPACE</b> (Check only one)	<b>Classroom</b>	Check the <u>one</u> location in this category that <u>best</u> applies to the setting in which the activity takes place. If “other” is marked, specify the type of space used.
	<b>Gym</b>	
	<b>Computer lab</b>	
	<b>Library Outside</b>	
	<b>Cafeteria</b>	
	<b>Auditorium</b>	
	<b>Music room</b>	
	<b>Outside playground</b>	
	<b>Hallway</b>	
	<b>Art room</b>	
<b>Other</b>		
<b>TOTAL STAFF</b> Count and record in the space on the right the NUMBER of staff in each activity. The number should correspond to staff levels/skills. Do not count middle school students.	<b>High School Student</b>	“High school students” are in grades 9-12.
	<b>College Student or Young Adult</b>	“College students or young adult” refers to staff who have finished or left high school and are approximately 18-24 years of age.
	<b>Certified Teacher</b>	“Certified teachers” are classroom teachers from the host school OR another school.
	<b>Specialist/Other Professional</b>	A “Specialist” has skills or talents which are the focus of the activity, such as a musician, artist or chess instructor. “Other professional” include social workers, guidance counselors, or other staff with professional degrees.
	<b>Other Adult</b>	“Other adult” refers to staff approximately 25 years of age or older; these staff are school aides, paraprofessionals, parents, community members, etc. who may or may not have an undergraduate degree.
<b>TOTAL PARTICIPANTS</b> Count and record the number of girls and the number of boys in the activity.	<b>Total Number of Girls</b>	If in doubt about gender, make an educated guess rather than disrupting the class.
	<b>Total Number of Boys</b>	
<b>GRADE LEVELS</b> (Circle all that apply)	<b>Grade Level Observed</b>	Circle the all grades that are represented in the classroom or activity space. More than one category can be circled, if appropriate.
<b>PARTICIPATION TYPE</b> (Check one)	<b>By age or grade</b>	Indicate the predominant way that youth are selected to participate in this activity.
	<b>By interest (child’s choice)</b>	
	<b>All attendees (in the project)</b>	

<b>SKILLS SECTION</b> (Check one)	<b>Skill building</b>	Check “Skill-building”, if youth are engaged in an activity that builds upon a previously learned skill and <u>is intended</u> to help youth reach the next level of mastery, or if a new skill is learned and built upon.  An example may be a new piece of dance choreography, rehearsing the next scene in a play, revising a piece of writing, or continuous practice and improvement of a recital piece.
	<b>Skill practice or reinforcement</b>	Check “Skill Practice”, if youth are using or reinforcing a skill already learned but the activity <u>is not intended</u> to help youth reach the next level of mastery. An example might include completing a math skills sheet.
	<b>Neither</b>	Check “Neither”, if activities do not build or reinforce skills already learned.
	<b>This is a homework activity.</b>	Check “This is a homework activity”, if youth are working on homework.
<b>PRIMARY SKILL TARGETED</b>  Only complete this area if SKILL BUILDING or SKILL PRACTICE were checked in the Skills Section above.	<b>Physical/athletic</b>	Athletics, games, skills of physical sport (including martial arts, yoga, step, cheerleading, gymnastics, etc.).
	<b>Artistic</b>	Artistic skills, working in any medium (visual, musical, dance, dramatic, photographic, video, etc.).
	<b>Math/numeracy</b>	Mathematics learning, skill development, practice.
	<b>Reading/literacy/writing</b>	Reading/language arts learning, skill development, practice.
	<b>Decision making/problem solving</b>	Developing skills in making practical or conceptual decisions or solving practical or conceptual problems.
	<b>Interpersonal communication</b>	Developing skills that involve self or group reflection, negotiating, interaction, and/or improvement of connections/relationships among people.
	<b>Other</b>	Check this category AND DESCRIBE here specific other content areas (e.g., science, social studies, foreign language) or skills developed that are not listed above.

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT QUESTIONS

<p>1. Is the level of adult supervision appropriate to activity and age group?</p>	<p>Mark “Yes”, if the number of adults in the room allows for safety, activity implementation, and individualized attention to youth.</p> <p>Mark “No”, if there are too few adults to ensure participant safety, to implement the activity, or to provide adequate support to individual participants; also mark “No” if there are too many adults, which is deterring youth interactions and/or leadership. Provide an explanation of the “no” response in the space provided.</p>
<p>2. Is the workspace conducive to the activity?</p>	<p>Mark “Yes”, if the physical work space is conducive to the group size and activity type.</p> <p>Mark “No”, if the physical work space has evident hazards, is not conducive to the group size, or is inappropriate for the activity type. Provide an explanation of the “no” response in the space provided.</p>
<p>3. Are necessary materials available and in sufficient supply?</p>	<p>Mark “Yes”, if participants have an adequate supply of the materials/tools they need to make progress on tasks or activities, and if the quality or condition of the materials is adequate (materials/equipment are in working order, i.e., they are not piecemeal or broken) and activities/tasks can be completed with what is available.</p> <p>Mark “No”, if materials are in poor working condition, or if there is an inadequate supply, to the extent that the activity is not effective for youth. Provide an explanation of the “no” response in the space provided, such as “Not enough instruments for all youth.”</p>

# OUT OF SCHOOL TIME (OST) OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

## COVERSHEET

CO-OBSERVED?

Yes  No

CO-OBSERVERS' INITIALS:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Program ID/Location:	Observer Initials:	Observation Number:	Room Number:	Date (MM/DD/YR):	Start Time:	End Time:				
<b>ACTIVITY NAME:</b>										
<b>ACTIVITY OVERVIEW (1-2 sentence description):</b>										
<b>ACTIVITY TYPE</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ata*	<b>TYPE OF SPACE</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> one	<b>TOTAL PARTICIPANTS</b>		#				
Homework Help/Test Prep		Classroom		Total Number of Girls						
Tutoring		Gym		Total Number of Boys						
Academic activities (not homework)		Computer Lab		<b>GRADE LEVELS</b> (circle all that apply)						
Story reading/listening		Library		K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Visual arts		Cafeteria		7	8	9	10	11	12	other
Dance		Auditorium		<b>PARTICIPATION TYPE</b>						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> one
Music		Art Room		By age or grade						
Drama		Music Room		By interest (child's choice)						
Crafts		Hallway		All attendees (in the project)						
Sports—practicing/learning a skill		Outside Playground								
Sports—playing competitive or non-competitive physical games		Other:		*ata = all that apply						
Open, unstructured time (e.g., table games, internet, free play)		<b>TOTAL STAFF</b>		#						
Staff-assigned learning games (dominos, chess, etc.)		High School Student								
Community service		College Student or Young Adult								
College/career preparation		Certified Teacher								
Cultural awareness clubs/projects		Specialist or Other professional								
Other: _____		Other Adult								
<i>At the end of the observation, please indicate what type of skill development, if any, took, place in this activity.</i>				<b>PRIMARY SKILL TARGETED IN SKILL-BUILDING</b>						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> one
<b>SKILL DEVELOPMENT</b>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> one		Physical/Athletic						
				Artistic						
Skill-building		Complete skills area		Math/Numeracy						
				Reading/Writing/Literacy						
Skill practice/reinforcement		Complete skills area		Decision-making/ Problem-solving						
Neither		Do not complete skills area		Interpersonal Communication						
This is a homework activity		Do not complete skills area		Other: _____						

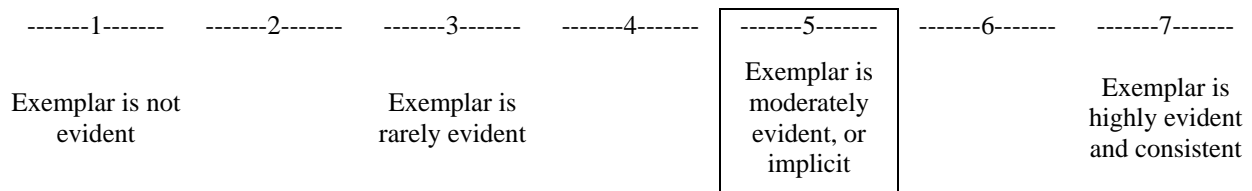
# OST OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT DOMAIN ITEM RATINGS

The following are five youth development domains that include four to seven indicators of youth development practices within each. The purpose of the observation instrument is to measure the extent to which these indicators – also called “items” – may or may not be present in each 15-minute observation segment. necessarily negative.

After 15 minutes of observation, assign a rating of 1 (not evident) to 7 (highly evident and consistent) for each item below. To select a rating, first move to the ODD NUMBER that most closely reflects how evident and pervasive an item is. If that number does not precisely reflect the level of evidence observed, then move down or up to the adjacent even number that more accurately reflects the item’s level of presence within an activity. Note that each item/indicator may not be present/applicable in each observation; therefore, a rating of “1” is not necessarily negative.

The “5” rating is also used in cases where the exemplar’s presence is implicit within the activity. For instance, if youth are generally friendly to each other throughout the observation, but most do not go beyond the casual, friendly interaction, the rating would be a “5”.

## RATINGS:



<b>RELATIONSHIP BUILDING : <u>all or most YOUTH</u></b>		<b>PARTICIPATION: <u>all or most YOUTH</u></b>	
A	<b>Are friendly and relaxed with one another.</b> Youth socialize informally. They are relaxed in their interactions with each other. They appear to enjoy one another’s company.	F	<b>Are on-task.</b> Youth are focused, attentive, and not easily distracted from the task/project. They follow along with the staff and/or follow directions to carry-on an individual or group task.
B	<b>Respect one another.</b> Youth refrain from causing disruptions that interfere with others accomplishing their own tasks. When working together, they consider one another’s viewpoints. They refrain from derogatory comments or actions about the individual person and the work s/he is doing; if disagreements occur, they are handled constructively.	G	<b>Listen actively and attentively to peers and staff.</b> Youth listen and respond to each other and staff. They appear interested in what others have to say. They look at peers and/or staff when they speak, and they provide concrete and constructive feedback about ideas or actions.
C	<b>Show positive affect to staff.</b> Youth interact with the staff, and these interactions are generally friendly interactions. For example, they may smile at staff, laugh with them, and/or share good-natured jokes.	H	<b>Contribute opinions, ideas and/or concerns to discussions.</b> Youth discuss/express their ideas and respond to staff questions and/or spontaneously share connections they’ve made. This item goes beyond basic Q&A and refers to sharing that is part of the activity and within the class norms. Calling out – or disruptively talking out of turn – is not part of this item.
D	<b>Assist one another.</b> One or more youth formally or informally reach out to help/mentor peers and help them think about and figure out how to complete a task. This item refers to assistance that is intentional and prolonged, going beyond answering an incidental question.	I	<b>Have opportunities to make meaningful choices.</b> <u>Within this activity</u> , youth choose what they do, how they do it, and/or with whom they collaborate, and they experience the consequences of their choices. This item refers to genuine options, not simple choices such as choosing between two types of games, or two sets of homework pages.
E	<b>Are collaborative.</b> Youth work together/share materials to accomplish tasks. This item is different from item D (above), as in collaboration, youth are equal partners in the work (rather than one student assisting/mentoring/tutoring another). This item can include working together on assigned teams, if youth are working together to get a better result.	J	<b>Take leadership responsibility/roles.</b> Youth have meaningful responsibility for directing, mentoring or assisting one another to achieve an outcome; they lead some part of the activity by organizing a task or a whole activity, or by leading a group of youth within the activity.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: with all youth, <u>STAFF...</u>		INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES: <u>STAFF...</u>	
K	<b>Use positive behavior management techniques</b> that allow for youth to accomplish the activity's objectives. They set consistent limits and communicate clear expectations for behavioral standards, and these are appropriate to the age of the youth and the activity type. When disciplining youth, they do so in a firm manner, without unnecessary accusations, threats, or anger.	R	<b>Communicate goals, purpose, expectations.</b> Staff make clear the value and purpose of what youth are doing <u>and/or</u> what they expect them to accomplish. This item goes beyond how youth are expected to behave (which would be captured in item K).
L	<b>Are equitable and inclusive.</b> Youth are provided equal opportunity to participate in an activity and are rewarded/disciplined similarly for like actions. Staff encourage the participation of all youth, regardless of gender, race, language ability, or other evident differences among students. They try to engage students who appear isolated; they do not appear to favor a particular student or small cluster of students.	S	<b>Verbally recognize youth's efforts and accomplishments.</b> Staff acknowledge participation and progress in order to encourage youth.
M	<b>Show positive affect toward youth.</b> Staff interact with youth, and these interactions are generally friendly. For example, their tone is caring, and/or they use positive language, smile, laugh, or share good-natured jokes.	T	<b>Assist youth without taking control.</b> Staff may coach, demonstrate, or employ scaffolding techniques that help youth to gain a better understanding of a concept or complete an action on their own. Staff refrain from taking over a task or doing something on behalf of the youth. This assistance goes beyond checking that work is completed.
N	<b>Attentively listen to and/or observe youth.</b> Staff look at youth when they speak and acknowledge what youth have said by responding and/or reacting. They pay attention to youth as they complete a task and appear interested in what they are saying/doing.	U	<b>Ask youth to expand upon their answers and ideas.</b> Staff encourage youth to explain their answers, evidence, or conclusions. They may ask youth 'why', 'how' and 'if' questions to get them to expand, explore, better clarify, articulate, or concretize their thoughts/ideas. This item goes beyond staff-elicited Q&A.
O	<b>Encourage youth to share their ideas, opinions and concerns.</b> Staff <u>actively elicit</u> youth ideas, opinions and concerns through discussion and/or writing. This item goes beyond basic Q&A.	V	<b>Challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency.</b> Staff give constructive feedback that is meant to help youth to gauge their progress. Staff help youth determine ways to push themselves intellectually, creatively, and/or physically.
P	<b>Engage personally with youth.</b> Staff show interest in youth as individuals, ask about youth's interests, and engage about events in their lives.	W	<b>Employ varied teaching strategies.</b> In order to engage students and/or reach those with different learning styles, staff diversify instructional strategies, which may include the use of two or more of the following: direct instruction, coaching, modeling, demonstrating, or others. Varied instructional strategies can occur simultaneously <u>and/or</u> sequentially within the observation period. This item does not include coupling a staff-directed instruction with youth working together, as described above.
Q	<b>Guide for positive peer interactions.</b> Staff intentionally encourage positive interactions and/or directly teach interpersonal skills. They teach these skills through planned activity content or through intervening constructively and calmly to address bullying or teasing behavior, redirecting youth and/or explaining or discussing why negative behavior is unacceptable. This item does not refer to behavior management, as described above (see item K).	X	<b>Plan for/ask youth to work together.</b> Staff plan for and/or ask youth to work together, solve problems, and/or accomplish tasks. The focus of the activity is youth to youth, rather than youth to staff. This item goes beyond staff assigned teams for competitive games and sports. In the case of staff assigned teams, staff would also need to be directing youth to collaborate, plan, devise, etc., in order for this item to be rated as staff asking youth to work together.

## CONTENT AND STRUCTURE: ACTIVITY

Y	<b>Is well organized.</b> Activity has clear goals/objectives; there is evidence of a clear lesson plan and process(es), and tasks can be conducted in the timeframe available. If special materials are needed, they are prepared and available.	AA	<b>Involves the practice/a progression of skills.</b> Activity involves the progressive development, learning OR practicing of skills needed to complete tasks or to participate.
Z	<b>Challenges students intellectually, creatively, developmentally, and/or physically.</b> Activity's level of challenge is not so difficult that youth have trouble participating successfully and not so easy that youth master skills quickly and become bored.	BB	<b>Requires analytic thinking.</b> Activity calls on students to think about and <u>solve meaningful problems</u> and/or juggle multiple activities or dimensions to accomplish a task. For example, the activity requires youth to hold two or more ideas constant at the same idea, and/or understand and apply sequencing or patterns.

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

<b>1. Is the level of adult supervision appropriate to activity and age group?</b>	Yes	No
If no: →Why not?		
<b>2. Is the work space conducive to the activity type?</b>	Yes	No
If no: →Why not?		
<b>3. Are necessary materials available and in sufficient supply?</b>	Yes	No
If no: →Why not?		

## OBSERVER'S SYNTHESIS

Before leaving the activity setting, please provide a 1-2 sentence description of the overall quality of each domain within this activity.

DOMAIN	OBSERVER'S DESCRIPTION
<b>Youth-directed relationships:</b> youth are supportive and respectful of one another and staff.	
<b>Youth participation:</b> youth exhibit engagement in the activity; there are opportunities for their input and leadership. They appear to enjoy the activity content.	
<b>Staff-directed relationships:</b> adults provide guidance and emotional support; they take interest in the youth and their ideas.	
<b>Instructional strategies:</b> staff strategies are geared towards encouraging youth to push beyond their present level of competency.	
<b>Activity content and structure:</b> activities are planned and well organized; challenge level is appropriate to age; there are opportunities for problem solving.	



# OBSERVER'S NOTES

Observer's Initials:	Observation #:	Activity Name:
<b>RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: all or most <u>YOUTH</u></b>		<b>PARTICIPATION: all or most <u>YOUTH</u></b>
<b>RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: with all youth, <u>STAFF</u></b>		<b>INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES: <u>STAFF</u></b>
<b>ACTIVITY CONTENT AND STRUCTURE</b>		

<b>RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: all or most <u>YOUTH</u></b>	<b>PARTICIPATION: all or most <u>YOUTH</u></b>
<b>RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: with all youth, <u>STAFF</u></b>	<b>INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES: <u>STAFF</u></b>
<b>ACTIVITY CONTENT AND STRUCTURE</b>	

**Appendix D**  
**Profiles of High-Performing Projects**

# CAMBA KIDS AFTER-SCHOOL PROJECT

## Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn

### Project Overview

Project Start Date: 2000  
Grades Served: K-8  
2004-05 Budget: \$208,000  
Enrollment: 165  
Attendance Rate: 75%

### Population Served

Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch: 99%  
Recent Immigrants: 5%  
English Language Learners: 1%  
Eligible for Special Education Services: 8%

According to site coordinator Charmaine Noel, the project's goal is to expose participants to a diverse program of academic, artistic, recreational, and developmental learning opportunities. Academic activities include homework help and activities selected from Developmental Studies Center's *KidzLit* and *KidzMath* and Scholastic Publishers' *Math and Reading Laboratories*. Theme-based and project-based learning and selected curricula on conflict resolution teach students to take responsibility for their own actions and to assume leadership. Older students participate in YouthLink, a dialogue guided by a social worker about navigating risks such as gang affiliation and drug use. Activities available on Friday Club Days and Fun Wednesdays are based on participant surveys. In a typical week, CAMBA Kids activities include: homework; *KidzLit* and *KidzMath*; science projects; library time; dance, drums and recorders, or band practice; basketball or other sports; art activities such as self-portraits, collages, and masks; conflict resolution or peer dialogue on risk avoidance; cooperative games; and indoor or outside open play.

Staff are mainly youth development paraprofessionals and young adults, although two group leaders are certified teachers. Several staff also work as aides in the partner school. Assistant leaders are college students, AmeriCorps staff, and adults from the community, some of whom have had children in the project. The arts program is staffed by a professional dancer and a musician. Ms. Noel assigns group leaders and assistants according to their grade preferences, skills, and interests. Leaders remain with their groups all year long, but artists rotate so that each group has at least one arts activity each week. The librarian and the mathematics coach from the host school work part-time in the after-school project to shape academic enrichment activities so that they are content-based and coordinated with school-day curricula.

An essential part of the project's success is its strong communication with the day-school staff, including the principal, teachers, custodians, cafeteria staff, and security guards. Ms. Noel and the principal meet bi-weekly and more often if necessary, and she serves on the school's leadership team.

# COMMITTEE FOR HISPANIC CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

## South Bronx

### Project Overview

Project Start Date: 1999  
Grades Served: K-8  
2004-05 Budget: \$285,000  
Enrollment: 244  
Attendance Rate: 78%

### Population Served

Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch: 99%  
Recent Immigrants: 4%  
English Language Learners: 36%  
Eligible for Special Education Services: 7%

The after-school schedule in this project changes approximately four times a year, as students' school schedules and needs change. In winter, the focus is on teaching students academic skills in preparation for state and city achievement tests. "We ensure that they are reading and that they are studying for the test," said site coordinator Helena Yordan.

A project-wide theme unites activities from January to June. Groups of participants select aspects of the theme to research on-line and in the library. In May and June, they engage in outside activities and field trips as well. Participants then integrate their research into the project's culminating performance. This might involve choreographing a dance, writing and acting in a play, or creating props and scenery in visual arts activities.

The project is highly structured and participants have little down-time; every activity supports students' academic or social development. Three times a year, the site coordinator asks regular school-day teachers to report on the academic progress of each project participant. An educational specialist, who is also the school's science developer, helps align after-school activities with the school day curriculum, identifies instructional materials, provides professional development, and supports group leaders in other ways as needed.

At the start of each project year, staff participate in 15 hours of required training that helps them understand the academic standards and content in the grade level at which they will be working. Staff also receive an annual project planning calendar that includes the project's activity goals and schedule, as well as the school calendar and instructional goals. Within these parameters, staff select activities for their groups.

Group leaders submit lesson plans and keep logs of completed activities. They are expected to have their activity plans up-to-date, along with back-up activities should a specialist be absent or a scheduled activity end sooner than expected. Each group leader keeps his or her lesson plans and materials in a box so that substitute leaders have easy access to them. Staff also attend weekly (paid) staff development meetings to review the week's activities and to address programmatic topics and the needs of particular students.

# CYPRESS HILLS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION KIDS CLUBHOUSE Cypress Hills, Brooklyn

## **Project Overview:**

Project Start Date: 1999  
Grades Served: K-4  
2004-05 Budget: \$285,000  
Enrollment: 289  
Attendance Rate: 81%

## **Population Served**

Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch: 97%  
Recent Immigrants: 7%  
English Language Learners: 28%  
Eligible for Special Education Services: 1%

The goal of Kids Club is to strengthen participants' academic skills and develop a strong sense of social and civic responsibility among participants. Each afternoon from 3:00 p.m. until 5:45 p.m., participants engage in 45 minutes of supervised homework, followed by two enrichment activities, which are coordinated with supplementary academic activities offered by the host school.

*KidzLit* and *KidzMath* curricula, hands-on science and social studies projects, and supervised homework help build reading, math, and thinking skills through activities such as read-alouds and dramatizations of books and, for math and science, through counting games, experiments, and investigations. Project-based activities and active learning games, such as Jeopardy, academic trivia, and geography bees, are infused into academic enrichment. Other ventures involve the production of an after-school project newspaper, self-governing activities, and field trips to local museums, cultural festivals around the city, and foreign embassy offices. On these visits, participants decide on questions to ask, and everyone keeps a journal about their experiences. Groups may also study a country by visiting a restaurant to sample its food, cooking native recipes, and creating a recipe book for their parents. Under the direction of AmeriCorps staff, some groups become involved in service learning and fund-raising activities.

The project encourages a family-like structure. Participant groups remain together for a full year. This gives leaders a chance to get to know parents and to develop strong relationships with participants' day-school teachers. Site coordinator Lee Arroyo also builds staff relationships by organizing informal social events such as pizza parties and bowling outings. When staff are out because of illness or family needs, she writes a note making clear the individual is missed. If staff are not pulling their weight in the project, she addresses the problem firmly but positively.

The after-school project maintains a solid relationship with the principal and faculty of its host school. Ms. Arroyo reported that she speaks with the principal every day. Shared school and project staff also add continuity and communication. One group leader is the school's parent coordinator; another school-day paraprofessional helps maintain Kids Club participants' academic records.

# EAST SIDE HOUSE AFTER-SCHOOL PROJECT

## Mott-Haven, Bronx

### Project Overview

Project Start Date: 1999  
Grades Served: K-8  
2004-05 Budget: \$290,000  
Enrollment: n/a  
Attendance Rate: n/a

### Population Served<sup>1</sup>

Eligible for Free-Reduced Price Lunch: 99%  
Recent Immigrants: 7%  
English Language Learners: 23%  
Eligible for Special Education Services: 7%

Meeting from the end of school at approximately 3:00 to 5:45 p.m., participants engage in three 45-minute activities each day. Academic enrichment includes homework help and exposure to content-based exploratory curricula, such as *KidzLit*, *Voyager*, and Junior Achievement programs. Participants also choose from a menu of arts and recreational activities, including dance, arts and crafts, structured recreational games and free play, theater, mask-making, ceramics, choir practice, movement/dance, and instrumental music. Kindergarten through eighth-grade participants work in grade-level groups led by an activity leader and an assistant. Occasionally, arts activities bring several grades together or older participants assist younger ones with homework and recreational pursuits.

“For a lot of kids, this is their first dance class or art class,” noted site coordinator Pleshette McKnight. Some students “breathe through drawing or [do very well] creating a sculpture. When you’re learning academically, there’s an artistic side such as planning, decision-making, and follow-through. The two worlds are very parallel.”

Other project priorities are conflict resolution and community-building through cultural understanding. The project has adopted two different conflict resolution curricula, one sponsored by Global Kids and the other by Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). Both these organizations train staff in confronting and reducing tensions among cultures and groups. The ESR curriculum, *Resolving Conflict Peacefully*, draws on scenarios in which students role-play conflicts and solutions, and talk about traditions in their native countries.

Leaders come largely from the nearby community, and most speak the children’s native languages. East Side Settlement House also offers social services to participants’ families, providing them with extra guidance, job counseling, or access to other resources they or their children may need. Staff receive regular training in how to identify and recommend help for neglected or abused students. Together, the training and the social services partnership with East Side increases the likelihood that families who need these services have access to them.

---

<sup>1</sup> This project moved from one Bronx school to another after the student data were collected and analyzed but before this study’s visit to the program. The population data shown here characterized the program participants who achieved the learning gains. The narrative description is drawn from the site visit.

# **MASPETH TOWN HALL AFTER-SCHOOL PROJECT**

## **Woodside, Queens**

### **Project Overview**

Project Start Date: 2000  
Grades Served: K-6  
2004-05 Budget: \$450,000  
Enrollment: 431  
Attendance Rate: 73%

### **Population Served**

Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch: 73%  
Recent Immigrants: 11%  
English Language Learners: 25%  
Eligible for Special Education Services: 9%

Maspeth Town Hall partners with its host school to offer academics, recreation, and arts activities in a safe, healthy after-school environment that gives participants opportunities to grow and thrive. Site coordinator Steven Powers aims to give participants a broad exposure to a range of activities. The formal academic enrichment period consists of 90 minutes of structured and supervised activities and 45 minutes of unstructured, informal interaction. In a typical week, participants select from homework, computers, literacy and math enrichment, yearbook development, drama, arts and crafts, board games, soccer, playground activities, Junior Achievement, chorus, and clubs.

Staff encourage young leaders to take ownership of their ideas by organizing groups with common interests. Girls who wanted a dance program, for example, worked with the site coordinator to develop that activity. Other participants worked with staff from AmeriCorps to organize blood drives and other service projects.

An assistant principal who works during the day in a nearby high school supervises academic activities and coordinates the remediation program with the school. Certified teachers help youngsters who need academic assistance. A lower staff-to-student ratio than in the project overall gives special education participants extra support. These participants are also eligible for supervised transportation home at the end of the day.

School-day teachers and academic coaches provide much of the on-site staff training. In addition, special education teachers regularly talk with staff about inclusion practices. At other times, the project may draw upon expertise in its community, as it did when local nurses trained staff in adolescent health issues.

Most often, current staff recommend new recruits for open staff positions, a system that builds strong bonds between established and new staff and contributes to an atmosphere of friendliness. The project also hires staff from area high schools. A number of these staff have gone on to study education.



# **RALPH-LINCOLN SERVICE CENTER'S MALCOLM X ACADEMY Crown Heights, Brooklyn**

## **Project Overview**

Project Start Date: 2000  
Grades Served: K-8  
2004-05 Budget: \$225,400  
Enrollment: 229  
Attendance Rate: 46%

## **Population Served**

Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch: 100%  
Recent Immigrants: 3%  
English Language Learners: 0%  
Eligible for Special Education Services: 5%

The Malcolm X Academy, operated by Brooklyn's Ralph-Lincoln Service Center, works to create an after-school environment so compelling that participants will attend school in order to go to the project after school. From 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. each school day, the Academy offers, in addition to homework help and tutoring, dance, arts and crafts, drama, theater, and other enrichment opportunities. The safe environment and a healthy meal are designed to keep participants away from unsupervised streets, says site coordinator Barton Adams.

Participants hone their talents in activities that interest them and show them off in year-end performances and exhibitions. These culminating performances and exhibitions, attended by parents and community members, develop a sense of accomplishment that participants rarely experience during the school day, according to Mr. Adams.

The project offers Young Men's and Young Women's programs to middle-grades youth. These programs give youth the opportunity to talk informally about personal issues that are on their minds. Youth also participate in physical activities, such as yoga for girls and two-hand touch football for boys. With this program, Mr. Adams believes he has found activities that middle school youth like and will commit to attending.

By taking advantage of programs in the community, the project offers a wider range of activities than it can provide on its own. Some participants recently attended an architectural workshop offered by the Brooklyn Center for Urban Environment in which they documented design features in their community through photography. Participants also spent ten weeks on environmental projects, such as cleaning and planting a nearby community garden.

Keeping school-day conflicts from spilling over into the after-school project is an important part of staff training. Two activities, in particular, have been instrumental. Ramapo's *Youth Workers as Leaders* teaches strategies to staff for dealing with behavior problems, especially among students with special educational or social needs. In addition, the Crown Heights Mediation Center conducts conflict resolution training using simulations in which staff practice diffusing conflicts before they get out of hand.

## **SAMUEL FIELD Y Bayside, Queens**

### **Project Overview**

Project Start Date: 1999  
Grades Served: K-5  
2004-05 Budget: \$216,000  
Enrollment: 157  
Attendance Rate: 65%

### **Population Served**

Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch: 52%  
Recent Immigrants: 18%  
English Language Learners: 10%  
Eligible for Special Education Services: 8%

Samuel Field Y takes a holistic approach to creating an environment that nurtures participants' psychosocial development. Staff use structured curricula but employ them flexibly so that activities suit participants' developmental levels. According to site coordinator Iris Shaw, by the end of the school day, students are "saturated" and "don't have any more to give," so the project aims to foster strong relationships between youth and staff as preparation for participants' eventual transition to middle school.

Youth participate in three activities each day, including structured homework help and project-based academic enrichment. On Friday Club Days, participants select from a menu of activities, including dance, arts and crafts, Girl Scouts, cooking, movies, board games, and Comic Book Club, in which they write and draw their own theme-based comics on leadership, the environment, and similar topics. They also take field trips.

Ms. Shaw looks for young leaders who have a "true calling to work with children," and relies on training and mentoring, along with the staff's own hard work, to develop effective after-school workers. Staff development takes place all year long as younger, inexperienced leaders pair with more seasoned ones. In addition to their on-site training, staff participate in TASC-sponsored training programs in their areas of interest.

Formal job evaluations have given way to more informal but continuous conversations about performance. The site coordinator routinely gives staff verbal and written feedback and asks staff to respond to her comments. More formal staff meetings take place monthly.

Recent years have brought challenges. The host school is pressing the project to offer more academic and fewer developmental activities. Declining school enrollment has reduced the pool of eligible after-school participants. The project is addressing these challenges through increased dialogue with the host school and stepped-up outreach and recruitment.

# **CHAMPIONS CLUBS OF SPORTS AND ARTS IN SCHOOLS FOUNDATION Astoria, Queens**

## **Project Overview**

Project Start Date: 1999  
Grades Served: K-8  
2004-05 Budget: \$293,000  
Enrollment: 299  
Attendance Rate: 64%

## **Population Served**

Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch: 83%  
Recent Immigrants: 13%  
English Language Learners: 26%  
Eligible for Special Education Services: 1%

Although Champion’s Club began in 1999 across a number of New York City schools and emphasized sports, its arts activities—and most notably its musical productions—now draw increasing attention, especially as New York City schools have curtailed in-school arts programs.

Sports and arts activities wrap around structured homework, which, to minimize distraction, takes place four days a week on a separate floor. Half the groups start the afternoon with homework, while the other half finishes up that way. This enables homework sessions to serve no more than 10 participants per group. Activities in the arts and in sports reflect the talents of staff and interests of participants, and are designed to give every interested youngster a chance to explore new avenues for success. The project’s musical performances give participants a chance to sing and dance to Broadway show tunes with complex choreography and to create elaborate set designs. Sports offerings are aligned with professional sports seasons, so that project staff can take participants to related sports events. Inter-mural sports activities, together with community-wide competitions, motivate participants and encourage family and community support.

The community joins the after-school project each year on Make a Difference Day. Participants donate toys or clothing to a nearby shelter for homeless families, or take part in food drives, penny drives, charity Olympics, and walk-a-thons. These community events usually involve parents in planning and in directing activities.

The project is staffed by a stable mix of certified teachers, adult leaders (many who have specialized sports or arts expertise), AmeriCorps members, and high school students. About one third of the staff has been with the project for four or more years; five staff have been with the project since its inception. Using internal staff rather than contracting with specialists from outside helps keep costs down and gives staff opportunities to explore and stretch their own talents in areas of interest.

Mentoring is a most powerful training and professional development strategy. Site coordinator Jan Vazquez pairs new staff “with someone who knows the ropes,” so veteran staff can coach newer ones. Site-based training programs cover topics such as creating quality activities, supporting participants who are experiencing family stress, and minimizing classroom behavior problems.

# STANLEY M. ISAACS NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER AFTER-SCHOOL PROJECT Central Park East, Manhattan

## Project Overview

Project Start Date: 1999  
Grades Served: K-5  
2004-05 Budget: \$212,000  
Enrollment: 193  
Attendance Rate: 75%

## Population Served

Eligible for Free-Reduced Price Lunch: 99%  
Recent Immigrants: 4%  
English Language Learners: 8%  
Eligible for Special Education Services: 7%

The building in which this after-school project is located houses two very different schools: one is a high-achieving magnet school that admits students through an application process, the other is a low-performing school with many poor students. After-school services are open to everyone. The center also operates a Beacon program from 6 to 10 p.m. in the same space. Some students participate in both the TASC after-school project and the Beacon program.

Site coordinator Autumn King says about the after-school project operated by the Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center, "It's about empowering [youth] and letting them understand what they can do and who they are." Staff urge youth to set goals and maintain high expectations for behavior. At the start of the year, youth make "promise wheels" that spell out behaviors they promise to use. They set their own consequences for breaking these promises. The project uses the center's curriculum, *Helping Everyone Live Peacefully* or *HELP*, to discourage teasing and bullying.

Aside from doing homework, students participate in sports and physical exercise, arts, and enrichment activities such as chess, drumming, and dance, all led by specialists in their respective fields. Monthly themes, ranging from historical events to personal health, unify the program. For example, a science activity highlighted a woman scientist during Women's History Month. Friday clubs break from established curricula and allow staff to create their own activities that they think participants will enjoy. When staff design activities, the site coordinator asks them "what it satisfies" within literacy, math or history so that the after-school project supports school-day learning.

Group leaders, all high school and college students, work with the specialists and with a master teacher who works in the regular school during the day and serves as a liaison between the school and the after-school project. The project places a great deal of emphasis on staff development for its young staff. Two staff development meetings take place each week, often including workshops or talks by outside speakers. The Isaacs Center provides scholarships for training and education, and often offers other career opportunities for more experienced group leaders.

# **WOMEN'S HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION AFTER-SCHOOL ENRICHMENT PROJECT South Bronx**

## **Project Overview**

Project Start Date: 1999  
Grades Served: K-8  
2003-04 Budget: \$371,000  
Enrollment: 409  
Attendance Rate: 76%

## **Population Served**

Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch: 100%  
Recent Immigrants: 5%  
English Language Learners: 32%  
Eligible for Special Education Services: 4%

Participants in this project are organized into three cluster groups: grades K-2, 3-5, and 6-8. At least one adult and an assistant lead each group of 15 to 20 participants, with the help of specialists—often professionals from these fields—who connect the school-day and after-school programs and conduct most arts, academic enrichment, and sports activities.

Helping participants to make healthy choices is a dominant theme in this after-school program. Middle-grade students, in particular, have an added focus on building self-esteem and relationships, avoiding risk-taking behaviors, and conflict resolution. A seventh- and eighth-grade “daily living skills” club, directed by social workers, works to prevent teenage pregnancy, using tools of dialogue, information about pregnancy prevention and healthy life styles, and action planning. In addition, drama classes involve participants in Teen Advocates Theater, which uses peer educators in interactive theatrical productions to educate young people on sexual health and pregnancy prevention.

High achieving middle-school students in the school’s Education Career Guidance Center work with teaching specialists after school to strengthen their academic skills and to prepare for the high school application and admission process. Activities involve research to select high schools that are academically strong in the areas in which youth have career interests.

The after-school project serves the entire family, inviting parents and guardians to participate in WHEDCO services such as homeless prevention, welfare-to-work job training, family day care, fitness and nutrition, and a complete range of social and clinical services. Through two full-time WHEDCO social workers who work in the school, teachers may refer students for services who are not enrolled in the after-school project.

The project’s parent coordinator encourages parents to volunteer and participate in project events, which occur several times a year. The project surveys parents annually to assess their satisfaction and to generate recommendations for improvements. A small parent council convenes periodically to advise leaders about successes and needs from the community’s perspective.