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INCREASING AND IMPROVING AFTER-SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES

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

Findings Regarding Principals

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EVALUATION OF THE TASC AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

Year 1 Findings Regarding Principals

Policy Studies Associates (PSA), the evaluator of the after-school program supported by The After-School Corporation (TASC), has analyzed data collected during school year 1998-99 from the TASC after-school projects that were funded in Year

1 of the initiative. As discussed below, these analyses point to the importance of the principals' goals for the after-school program and the central role of the school principal in shaping the activities, staffing, scheduling, and general operations of TASC-supported after-school projects. Evaluation data also confirm that principals in host schools generally found the TASC after-school projects to be assets to their schools and students.

Principals' Goals for the After-School Program

In interviews, principals of the schools hosting projects in Year 1 expressed the following goals for the TASC-supported after-school projects in their schools:

- Improving students' homework completion and quality
- Improving students' literacy and math problem-solving on tests
- Providing a safe place for students to spend time after school
- Providing constructive opportunities for students to express themselves
- Providing enrichment opportunities that the school does not have the time or resources to provide

These goals were generally consistent with the goals expressed by other important stakeholders in the after-school program, including the sponsoring nonprofit organizations, parents, teachers, and students.

Focus and Scope of the Evaluation

In Year 1, the evaluation focused mainly on program start-up and initial implementation. In Year 2, the evaluation will also examine program quality. Throughout the five-year evaluation, PSA will collect information through surveys, interviews and observations conducted during site visits, and document reviews. In addition, PSA is obtaining data on participating and non-participating students through an agreement with the Division of Assessment and Accountability of the Board of Education of the City of New York (BOE). **Because the evaluation can only collect data from after-school projects in which the principal of the host school has consented to the evaluation, the principals' agreement to participate in the evaluation is essential to its success.**

Principals' Influence in the Governance of After-School Projects

Principals play a key role in governing the after-school projects and, according to interviews, have the power to make a project succeed or fail. Several site coordinators said in interviews, to paraphrase, "When the principal is happy, I'm happy," and emphasized that principals determine the extent to which the school supports the after-school project. Accordingly, several site coordinators described close monitoring of the project by principals. In many sites, for example, the principal made all final decisions about staff hiring, schedules, and after-school activities. As one site coordinator said and others implied, "I do not make a move until I consult with the principal. We are guests in the school and must respect the higher-ups. That is the chain of command." This level of principal influence is generally consistent with one of the central tenets of TASC, which is the importance of coordination between the after-school project and the school.

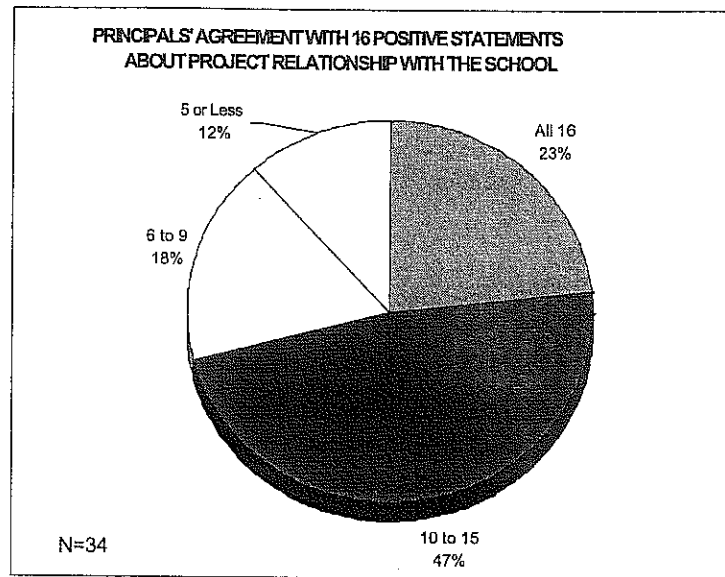
Principals' Roles and Reactions Related to Project Coordination

Interviews with site coordinators and project staff and current research on after-school programs reinforce the importance of coordinating and integrating after-school programs with the regular instructional program and activities of the host school. Virtually all Year 1 projects tried to achieve coordination and integration by (1) cultivating support from school principals and (2) hiring teachers from the school to work in the after-school project. Most elementary sites also wrapped around the schedule of Project Read, which serves many of the elementary-grade students participating in the TASC after-school program.

In a mid-year discussion, TASC staff recognized that principals, who typically are under pressure to improve their schools, are likely to support their after-school project if they think the project will help students meet school goals. However, TASC initially focused on building connections with site coordinators, rather than principals, and the Round 1 grantee organizations did not consistently collaborate with the principals at their sites. TASC staff's priority on strengthening linkages between after-school projects and their host schools made connections with principals a focus for continued attention during the start-up phases of subsequent grant rounds, during which principals are asked to participate in training sessions with site coordinators.

PSA's survey of principals asked whether principals agreed or disagreed with each of 16 positive statements about different dimensions of the relationship between the after-school program and the host school. Almost one-fourth of the responding principals (8 of 34) agreed that the relationship was positive on all 16 items. For all but one of the 16 positive statements, more principals agreed or strongly agreed that the relationship was positive than disagreed or strongly disagreed. An

additional 16 principals (47 percent) agreed with 10 to 15 the statements. The remaining 10 principals agreed with nine or fewer of the statements, including three who only agreed with three statements.



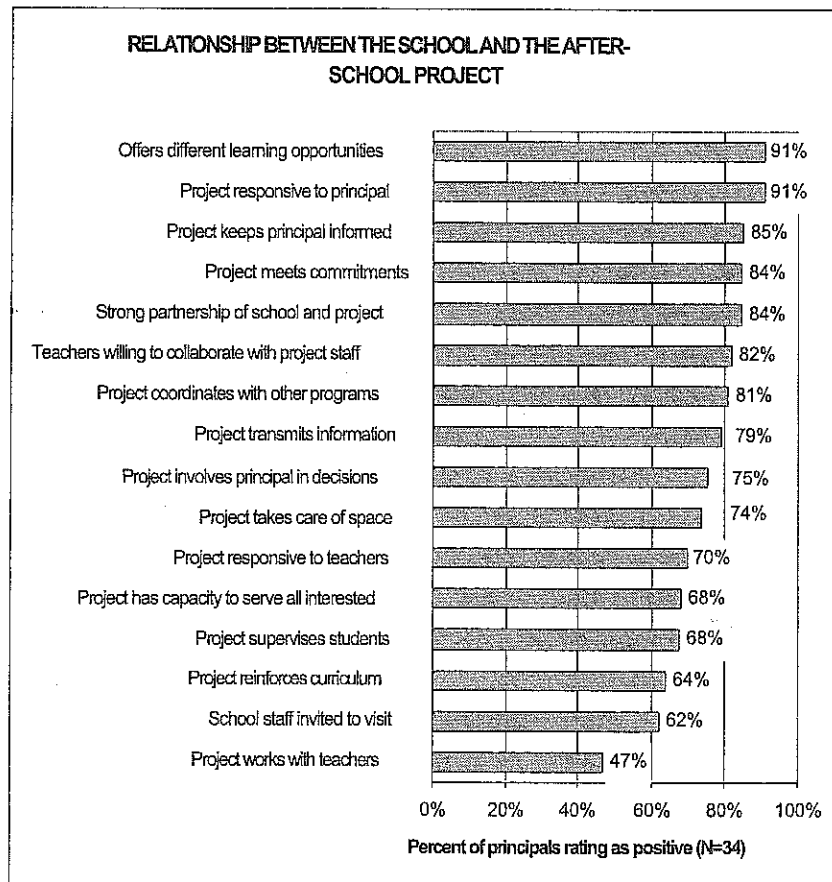
Principals responded most positively to the following statements:

- The after-school project provides students with learning opportunities not available during the regular school day (29 strongly agreed or agreed, 3 disagreed or strongly disagreed)
- After-school project staff are responsive to my ideas and suggestions (29 strongly agreed or agreed, 3 disagreed or strongly disagreed)
- The after-school project keeps me informed of important decisions and issues (28 strongly agreed or agreed, 5 disagreed or strongly disagreed)
- After-school staff follow through with the commitments they make to me and other school staff (27 strongly agreed or agreed, 5 disagreed or strongly disagreed)
- There is a strong partnership between the after-school project and the school (27 strongly agreed or agreed, 5 disagreed or strongly disagreed)

The principals' responses indicated that the relationship between the host schools and the after-school projects was least positive in the following areas:

- After-school staff reach out to teachers to identify the needs of students (17 strongly disagreed or disagreed, 15 agree or strongly agreed)
- Students are properly supervised by after-school staff (10 strongly disagreed or disagreed, 23 agreed or strongly agreed)

- The after-school staff has enough capacity to serve all interested students (10 strongly disagreed or disagreed, 21 agreed or strongly agreed)
- School staff are encouraged to visit the project (9 strongly disagreed or disagreed, 21 agreed or strongly agreed)
- Curriculum and instruction in the after-school project reinforce concepts being taught during the day (8 strongly disagreed or disagreed, 21 agreed or strongly agreed)



Principals' Views of the Contribution Made by the After-School Project

Most principals who responded to the survey indicated that the after-school program had gained their support. Twenty-three of 34 respondents reported that, overall, the benefits of hosting the program very much outweighed the costs. Seven principals indicated that the benefits somewhat outweighed the costs. Similarly, most of the principals who responded to the survey (27 of 34) offered moderately to strongly positive assessments of the relationship and collaboration between the school and the program.

Principals were asked whether they agreed that the after-school project had enhanced any of seven components of the school environment: student attitudes toward school, overall effectiveness, student motivation to learn, student attendance, reading skills, math skills, and school safety. Fifteen of the 34 principals agreed or strongly agreed that the after-school project enhanced each of these components. One-third of the principals (11 of 34) reported that the after-school project made only mildly positive contributions or made no change to three or fewer of these components, but said the project had made a moderate or strong positive contribution on the remaining components. Almost one-quarter of the principals (8 of 34) reported that the after-school project made only mildly positive contributions or no change on four or more of these components, including one principal who responded this way about all seven components.

