

What is Stakeholders' Understanding of Quality Before- and After-School Programs for

Students who are At-Risk?

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Abstract

The majority of the lowest performing schools are located in the poorest communities in the nation's largest cities. Research suggests that economically and otherwise at-risk children are less likely than their more-advantaged peers to have access to out-of-school or complementary learning opportunities and that this inequity substantially undermines their development and chances for school success (Weiss, Little, Bouffard, Deschenes, & Malone, 2009). By extending the school day for the most disadvantaged students, before- and after-school programs can be provided that will offer additional academic support, exposure to sports and cultural programs, and access to nutritious snacks and dinner. When examining the available resources, stakeholders can have access to cost efficient programs that benefit students, their families, and society as a whole, but are they aware that those resources exist and are obtainable?

Keywords: low-performing schools, at-risk children, before and after-school programs

What is Stakeholders Understanding of Quality Before- and After-School Programs for Students who are At-Risk?

The majority of disadvantaged, students who are at-risk face challenges such as dangerous neighborhoods, poverty, poor health and nutrition, language difficulties, and boredom which can lead to risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use, criminal activity, and dropping out of school, to name a few (Afterschool Alliance, 2010). Federal education legislation assumes that K-12 schools could operate alone to level the learning field for poor children (Anderson-Butcher, 2010). Research suggests that economically and otherwise disadvantaged children are less likely than their more-advantaged peers to have access to out-of-school or complementary learning opportunities and that this inequity undermines their development and chances for school success (Weiss, Little, Bouffard, Deschenes, & Malone, 2009).

In the 1990's, the country saw an increase in the number of federally- and privately-funded after-school programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2010). Impoverished communities saw a rise in crime after 3:00 PM and local government agencies realized that drug and alcohol use among school-age children was increasing. Too many children were left on their own before and after formal school hours and their time was being used unproductively. After-school programs began to take on a sense of urgency to keep children safe and well cared for (Neuman, 2010).

Today, more than eight million children in the United States are enrolled in after-school programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2010). Schools are the largest providers of these after-school programs, followed by YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, religious organizations, and private schools (Neuman, 2010). Such programs include simple after-school care services to support working parents, programs specifically structured to reduce problem behaviors, programs that reinforce academic achievement, and programs that offer access to sports, arts, crafts, and other activities. Local service providers may be a combination of community-based organizations, city agencies, and intermediary organizations (Bodilly, McCombs, Orr, Scherer, Constant, & Gershwin, 2010). Ultimately, the goal should be to provide quality before- and after-school programs, a combination of all of the above, to all at-risk youth who need and would benefit from them. Presently, in large urban school districts, there are not enough seats to fill the need that exists (Weitzman, Mijanovich, Silver, & Brazill, 2008).

According to a study by Hall, Williams, and Daniel (2010), students who are disadvantaged view before- and after-school programs as a place they know will be safe, where they can improve their academic and social skills. With the tremendous amount of public and private monies available for extended day learning opportunities, stakeholders, specifically, parents, administrators, teachers, taxpayers/community members, and students, can become empowered to assure these opportunities are available in their own communities.

Methods

Data Collection

To gauge the understanding of parents, teachers, administrators, taxpayers/community members, and students (stakeholders) of the difference between quality and inferior programs, the availability of quality programs, and how to create quality programs for their communities, if interested, the researcher used telephone and face-to-face interview data based on survey questions (see Appendices A - E). The questions were not pre-tested and were derived from the researcher's experience as a school administrator with extensive knowledge in organizing, creating, and funding successful, quality before- and after-school programs.

Data was collected from 10 known subjects to the researcher, two of each from the five different groups of stakeholders. All of the participants are associated with the New York City public schools either through direct involvement or live within the boundaries of New York City as a resident/taxpayer. Three participants (30%) were interviewed face-to-face and the remaining seven participants (70%) were interviewed by phone. The face-to-face interview data was recorded in vivo by hand directly onto the survey sheets. In vivo data were mostly gathered from the phone surveys but the researcher had to go back and fill in information after the interviews were completed. The two student participants were both under the age of 18, so parent permission for their interviews was obtained verbally over the phone from each of their mothers. Because the questions were not pre-tested, they were amended as interviews were conducted in order

to obtain the necessary information to gather results to answer the research question. The same questions were asked of each participant in each of the stakeholders' groups. The interviews lasted between 10 and 25 minutes each.

Participants

The two teacher participants are both White and female. Teacher A has been teaching self-contained Special Education classes in Coney Island, Brooklyn for the last 27 years in a school that is 100% Title 1. She lives in Brooklyn with one school-age daughter and her husband. She would be willing to work in a before- or after-school program in her school of employment. Teacher B teaches fifth grade in Long Island City, Queens for the last 15 years in a school that is 87% Title 1 and has a very large population that are English language learners. She lives on Long Island with her two school-age children and her husband. She was not willing to work in a before- or after-school program in her school of employment.

The parent participants are both female and the main "breadwinners" in their families. Parent A is African-American, lives in a rented apartment where she has resided for 24 years, does not have a college degree, and is 44 years old. She lives with her husband, who is home on permanent disability, and three children, two of whom are school-age. She lives near a large Title 1 school but has chosen to send her nine-year old son to a local private school where he is entering grade 4. Her 17 year old son attends a small New York City public high school and is entering 12th grade. She is unsure if it is a Title 1 school. Parent B is White, has an advanced college degree, and is 51 years old.

She has a 10 year child entering grade 6 in a non-Title 1 New York City public middle school. She lives with her husband, who is employed, her one child, and her mother in a single-family home that she owns.

The two student participants each live with both parents. Student A is a White, 10 year old female entering grade 5 in a New York City non-Title 1 public school located in Brooklyn. She is an only child and lives with both parents, and both sets of grandparents in a three-family home that is owned by her parents. Student B is a Multi-racial, 7 year-old boy entering grade 2 in a very large, New York City Title 1 public school in Brooklyn. He is the youngest of three children and lives with his mom, dad, 12 year-old sister, and 15 year-old brother in a family-owned, single family house. His siblings also attend New York City public schools.

The two administrators used in the study are both White, female assistant principals in elementary schools located in Brooklyn. Both women live on Long Island and each has one grown child who attended New York City public schools.

Administrator A is 60 years old and works in a large Title 1 school (93%) in Flatbush. She is divorced and owns her own home in a very diverse town. Administrator B is 50 years old and works in a non-Title 1 school (48%) in Park Slope. She lives in a racially segregated town with her husband.

The taxpayer participants are both White and live in different areas of Brooklyn. Taxpayer A is a female, age 56, who has lived in the same rented apartment in Bay Ridge with her husband for 30 years. She is a registered nurse and has no children. Taxpayer B

is a divorced male, 57 years old, and lives in the two-family house he owns. His two grown children attended local parochial schools. He works as a carpenter for New York City assigned to the Department of Education.

Data Analysis

This study employed a qualitative, grounded theory approach in the Straussian tradition (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) in order to develop an understanding of what stakeholders understand about quality before- and after-school programs for students who are at-risk. The researcher examined the data by transcribing the raw data onto a chart (see Appendix F) where it was easier to compare between stakeholders of the same group and among the entire data set. However, the use of the chart is limited. It is only useful for comparing two sets of data from the same data group because of its limited space to transcribe and/or take notes. The data was read several times. The data was then coded through open and axial coding, in order to find emerging themes and patterns of concepts. With repeated coding, saturation of the data was achieved and clear themes emerged. Relationships among the themes were identified by selective coding. Eventually a mid-range, grounded theory was developed.

The researcher bracketed out her own experiences as a school administrator during the interviews, especially with the teacher and administrator participants. It was critical for the researcher to be non-judgmental as each individual has different personal and professional responsibilities. Objectivity was sustained while coding as well. The themes and mid-range theory were evaluated for potential generalizability.

Limitations

Several limitations of the study should be noted. One limitation was that all participants knew the researcher, either directly or indirectly. Responses might have been provided that were seen as desirable by the participants in order to please the researcher, especially by the student participants. However, this was not seen as a major concern due to the actual research question which required participants to share their own knowledge of their understanding about quality before- and after-school programs for students who are at-risk. Another limitation was that the number of participants was very limited and not a good sampling. For example, the parent participants were not a good representation of parents of at-risk students - neither parent had students who needed before- and/or after-school care or who were considered academically, socially, or emotionally at-risk. Greater credibility would be achieved had there been greater participation among all stakeholders' groups. Lastly, stronger survey instruments were needed to gauge perceptions and attitudes of existing programs by all stakeholders' groups. In addition, more measurable survey items will allow for more quantitative analyses to increase validity of the theory. Public/stakeholders evaluations of existing programs can create an awareness that can be instrumental in empowering stakeholders to enact change.

Findings

In analyzing and triangulating the data, three common themes emerged. The first theme easily evolved from all the stakeholders' groups. One hundred percent (100%) of the participants agreed that all school-age children should be in a safe and supervised

environment before and after school. Taxpayer A who had no connection to the New York City public schools other than being a taxpayer and resident, responded emphatically that, “Especially teenagers should have a supervised environment before or after school.” She felt that at present, teenagers do not have a safe and supervised place to go before or after school because she sees so many, “Hanging around on the streets in the afternoon.” The two student participants were supervised by family members before and after school and had no knowledge of ever feeling unsafe or unsupervised during those hours. Student B felt it would be “scary” to be alone and not feel safe before or after school. The parent, teacher, and administrator respondents overwhelmingly felt that all students, regardless of age, need to feel safe and be supervised before and after school hours.

In examining the data, the second theme materialized as strongly as the first. The researcher discovered that 100% of the respondents felt that academics should be included in before- and after-school programs but different stakeholders’ groups had varying opinions to the degree with which academics should be an emphasis. Both parent participants who had students who were not academically at-risk felt that academics should be included in a fun and engaging way. Parent B felt that, “Children should have different academic experiences than they have in school.” Parent A felt her child was a good student and therefore, she did not feel the need for academic support for her own child but stated that, “There are many at-risk students who would benefit from academic support before or after school.” The administrators and teachers felt academic

support for at-risk students was critical to their overall success and would improve their attitudes about school. Teacher A and Administrator B included phrases such as “self-esteem” and “increased self-confidence” respectively, to describe the effect of academics as a secondary outcome. Teacher A further explained that the school she presently works in is 100% Title 1 and there are no before- or after-school programs in place for students below grade three. The achievement levels in her school as measured by New York State assessments are very low. Less than 50% of students in grades 3 – 5 are achieving at proficient levels in reading and mathematics. Students in grades 3 – 5 are only exposed to academic instruction before and/or after school six to eight weeks prior to New York State exams. Administrator B, whose school is 48% Title 1, stated that “New York State assessment results are not strong at my school. All of the after-school programs at my school are enrichment. Not one is academically-based and the students-in-need are suffering because of it.” Teacher B shared, “My school has a very large ELL population. More programs are needed to address their reading and writing skills. We only have academic programs for students in testing grades right before the exams. The other programs we have after school are sports and recreational programs. They are important for our students but they need to learn to read and write English. Their parents cannot help them at home.” Administrator A felt that she had quality before- and after-school programs at her school. When asked, “What do you think the components of a quality before- and after-school program should be?” She responded, “Quality programs have academics, sports, and arts, all taught by qualified personnel and

provide opportunities for students to form relationships with adults. Occasionally, we even take our students on trips after school to experience things they would not normally do during the school day.” When prompted for examples, she explained that they have gone to college sporting events at local colleges and universities and drama and musical productions also at local colleges and universities and small theaters in downtown Brooklyn.

As axial coding, striking, and memoing continued, a third theme emerged. Ninety percent (90%) of the participants deemed that parents of at-risk students should not have to pay for before- and/or after-school programs. The same respondents believed that it is the responsibility of the school as a representative entity to make quality before-and after-school programs available to at-risk youth. The one participant who disagreed, Taxpayer B stated, “My tax dollars should not have to do the job of every parent in our city. People should not have children if they are not prepared to take care of them.” When posed with the question, “Don’t you think all children have a right to attend a quality before- and/or after-school program even if their parents or guardians cannot afford it? Children don’t pick their parents.” The respondent softened a bit and responded. “Yes, I guess we don’t want kids on the streets.”

Of the five stakeholders’ groups, only 20% of the participants, Administrator A and Parent A, had a full understanding of how quality before- and after-school programs are funded. They were both aware of the participation of non-profit organizations,

private funding, and the involvement of community-based organizations. Both stakeholders have or had direct involvement in the implementation and organization of quality before- and after-school programs in a school setting. Administrator A currently runs one in her school and Parent A was a former PTA president in her older child's public school and was on a planning committee to create before- and after-school programs.

Lastly, based on the collected data, 70% of all the stakeholders interviewed would be willing to assist in creating programs of quality for students in the communities in which they work or live. The one stakeholders group that had no interest at all was the taxpayer group. They had no established interest in the New York City public schools and would not give of their time. The other stakeholder was Teacher B who lived on Long Island and has her own school-age children unsupervised at home after school.

Discussion

The analyses provide strong evidence that all stakeholders have some degree of awareness of school-based before- and after-school programs, although all are not aware of what components should be included to create quality programs for at-risk students. As recommended by Lauer, Akiba, Wilkerson, Apthrop, Snow, and Martin-Glenn (2006), quality extended day programs need to have a balance of academics and social supports through the arts and sports in order to address the developmental needs of the whole child. They further concluded that achievement was increased when one-to-one tutoring in reading and small group math instruction was included.

It was evident that only through direct experience would one have knowledge of how to fund a quality before-or after-school program. There are many layers of funding involved in extended day programs and only those who have worked to create them have the background knowledge to obtain funding for programs of quality for at-risk youth. Administrator B has many after-school enrichment programs in her school but did not know how the free programs were funded.

An interesting relationship that began to surface was where teachers who work in Title 1 schools in New York City reside and how where they live impacts their perception of the importance of before- and after-school programs for at-risk students. Teacher A who works in a school that is 100% Title 1, lives in New York City, would willingly work in a before- or after-school program in her school, and has a school-age child who does not need before- or after-school care, was passionate when she discussed the urgency of extended day quality programs for at-risk students. Whereas, Teacher B, who lives in a suburb outside of New York City, was much less concerned. According to Hall, Williams, and Daniel (2010), after-school programs are important in the lives of economically disadvantaged children. It appears that Teacher B cannot relate to the children or the families of the children she teaches. Teacher B has never lived in an urban environment. Both administrator participants also live in the suburbs but raised their children in New York City and both have been living in the suburbs for less than 10 years. It is public perception that suburban streets and schools are safer than urban streets and schools. Perhaps Teacher A and the administrator stakeholder participants have a

better understanding of the urgency for quality programs because they live or have lived in an urban environment and can better empathize with the needs of urban parents. A further study in this area is suggested.

Finally, 70% of all stakeholders surveyed would volunteer to assist in creating before- and after-school programs for the community in which they live or work. The parent group was the most outspoken of the stakeholders groups when asked, "Would you be interested in working with your local school to help develop programs at your child's school?" The two parents, both not in need of before- or after-school care, were excited about the possibility of making this contribution to their school community and wanted to know how to get started. Parent A responded, "Yes, I would help. I love this community." Parent B replied, "Yes, I would help. I think it's important for all children to be well-rounded. This might be a nice neighborhood but you don't know what kids are exposed to or not exposed to." Both students, although not disadvantaged or at-risk, would like to attend an after-school program if one were available to them. They were both interested in the social aspect of after-school activities with their friends. Those with a more vested interest, such as parents, administrators, students, and in this case, one teacher who lives in New York City, seem more willing to get involved. They also appear to have a greater sensitivity to the need for these programs for at-risk youth. The taxpayers had no interest in assisting or even discussing their possible involvement. The relationship between direct involvement in the public school system and a lack of

willingness to fill a need in one's own community involving other people's children seems to exist.

Application

As indicated by the analyses of the data, all stakeholders are aware that before- and after-school programs exist in their communities. The urgent need, also evidenced by the data, is to have a seat available in a quality before- or after-school program for every school-age child who is at-risk. As Weitzman et al., (2008), point out, there is a difference between childcare and quality before- and after-school programs. If parents are aware of the difference and/or the availability, they will utilize the option that they feel is in their child's best interest. This applies to children of all ages.

To empower willing stakeholders to enact change in their own communities a series of steps must be put into place. First and foremost a need must be ascertained and the thinking of those involved must shift to embrace the understanding that quality extended day programs are the right of every child. The data indicate that 90% of the stakeholders interviewed felt that the school is responsible for providing these extended day services to children. Whether it be parents, administrators, teachers, or students, it is important for all stakeholders to understand that the principal is the gatekeeper for all extended day programs in a school. Having the principal on board will make the process a smoother one. The principal is the obvious conduit to all parties needed to implement before- and after-school programs of quality.

Community outreach is crucial to getting stakeholders involved and to make parents aware that a bit of knowledge can help make a difference for all children. Forming a committee is a viable way to put all interested stakeholders together to help facilitate the process. Stakeholders then must be made aware that there are billions of dollars spent each year to create and maintain before- and after-school programs for at-risk youth and this money is obtainable. Understanding what makes a program an effective one – one that will meet the needs of the community is tremendously important. Gaining an understanding of funding sources will help to address program quality and the quality of the personnel involved. For example, James-Burdumy, Dynarski, and Deke (2007), note that 21st Century Community Learning Centers Programs are the largest federally funded after-school programs in the nation. Increasing stakeholder awareness of the amount of funding available, especially in marginalized urban communities, and the information available regarding successful before and after-school programs, more and more programs of quality can be developed.

Federal monies such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Programs are usually filtered through community-based organizations or local non-profit agencies, such as Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCA's. Contacting a local agency is the easiest step in starting the process. Local agencies and non-profit organizations such as the After-School Corporation, The New York Junior Tennis League, The Flatbush Youth Initiative, etc., have access to private funding sources. In addition, there are organizations dedicated to creating extended school day programs for all children. An excellent

resource is the Afterschool Alliance. The Afterschool Alliance is a group of public, private, and non-profit organizations that are committed to raising awareness and expanding resources for before-, after-, and summer-school programs for all at-risk youth including teenagers and English Language Learners.

With the amount of resources available, wonderful things can happen for all children, especially those who need it most, when we empower all stakeholders.

Conclusion

The researcher believes that by educating all interested stakeholders about quality before- and after-school programs for students who are at-risk, they will be empowered to have a voice and provide our students with what they are entitled to in order to grow and reach their greatest potential. Using a collaborative approach, quality before- and after-school programs are very much within reach for at-risk students as long as stakeholders are aware of what they need to help create them.

The data concludes that the majority of stakeholders who are directly involved with the New York City public schools would advocate for quality before- and after-school programs if they knew how.

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Appendix A - Parent Survey - Extended School Day Programs

How many school-age (K-12) children do you have?

Please specify?

Do you need childcare before and/or after school or in the summer? Please specify

How many people live in your household?

Do you own your home?

Do you pay for childcare?

Where does your child attend childcare?

Are you happy with your childcare arrangements?

Do you think your community addresses the need for quality childcare for at-risk students?

Please explain

Are you aware that there are free quality afterschool programs available to children in your community?

If your child's school were to have a free daily before and after school program from 7:00 AM – 6:00 PM, would you participate?

Would you be interested in working with your local school to help develop one at your child's school?

What do you see as the important components of an after-school program, especially for at-risk youth?

Tutoring. Homework help. Sports. Drama/music/art.

Socialization. Community service. Computer activities. Board games

What would you hope the outcome(s) to be for your child if they attended an after-school program at your local school?

Increased achievement in reading. Increased achievement in math.

Feeling of safety. Completed homework. Improved social skills

Exposure to music/art/drama. Participation in sports activities

Who should work in the program? (check all that apply)

Teachers. Other school personnel. Parents. Outside personnel

Local HS/college students

How should the after-school program be funded?

Federal government/government grants

Local government

School district

Community Based Organizations

Parents should pay based on a sliding scale

Appendix B - Teacher Survey - Extended School Day Programs

Number of years teaching? Subject? Grade?

Location (District) of school? ELL's? %?

Title 1 School? %?

Are you a parent? Do you own your home? Where?

What do your own children do before and after school?

Do you think your students would benefit from a before or after school program in your current school of employment? Explain

Does your school of employment have any before- or after-school programs? Explain

Do you think it is the school's responsibility to provide before and after school care for working parents of students who are at-risk?

What do you think the components of a quality before or after-school program should be for students at-risk?

If given the opportunity, would you be willing to work in a before or after school program in your present school of employment?

Are you aware that there are a lot of government and private monies allocated for before and after school programs? What do you know?

Would you be willing to help organize one for your school? Explain

Do you think the community you work in addresses the need for quality childcare?
Please explain

Are you aware that there are free quality afterschool programs available to children in your school's community?

What would you hope the outcome(s) to be for your students if they attended an after-school program at your local school? Explain

Increased achievement in reading. Increased achievement in math.

Feeling of safety. Completed homework. Improved social skills

Exposure to music/art/drama. Participation in sports activities

Who should work in the program? (check all that apply) Explain

Teachers. Other school personnel. Parents. Outside personnel

Local HS/college students

How should the after-school program be funded?

Federal government/government grants

Local government

School district

Community Based Organizations

Parents should pay based on a sliding scale

Appendix C - Administrator Survey - Extended School Day Programs

Number of years as an administrator Position held Location

Is yours a Title 1 school? % Title 1?

%ELL?

Do you currently have any before or after school programs? Explain

How many students enrolled? Do you need additional seats to accommodate additional need?

What is the main source of funding?

Do teachers work in the programs? At their contractual per session rate?

Do you think your students would benefit from a before or after school program in your school? Explain

Do you think it is the school's responsibility to provide before and after school care for working parents of students who are at-risk?

What do you think the components of a quality before or after-school program should be?

If given the opportunity, would you be willing to run a before or after school program in your school?

Are you aware that there are a lot of government and private monies allocated for before and after school programs?

Do you currently work with any CBO's? Explain

Would you be willing to organize a program for your school? Explain

Do you think the community you work in addresses the need for quality childcare?
Please explain

Are you aware that there are free quality afterschool programs available to children in your school's community?

What would you hope the outcome(s) to be for your students if they attended an after-school program at your local school?

- Increased achievement in reading. Increased achievement in math.
- Feeling of safety. Completed homework. Improved social skills
- Exposure to music/art/drama. Participation in sports activities

Who should work in the program? (check all that apply)

- Teachers. Other school personnel. Parents. Outside personnel
- Local HS/college students

How should the after-school program be funded?

- Federal government/government grants
- Local government
- School district
- Community Based Organizations
- Parents should pay based on a sliding scale

Appendix D - Student Survey - Extended School Day Programs

Grade

Age

Who do you live with?

What language do you speak at home?

Do you live in a house or an apt?

How many people live with you?

How do you get to school? Explain

What do you do after school? Explain

Does your school have any before- or after-school programs?

Do you like what you do after school? Explain

If you could go to a before school/breakfast program at your school, would you go?

If you could go to an afterschool program at your school, would you go?

What do you think you would like to do at an after school program at your school?

Would you eat dinner there if you could?

Who would you like to see working with you in an after school program?

(HS students) Would you volunteer in an after school program to work with younger students if you had the opportunity? Why?

Taxpayer Survey - Extended School Day Programs

Do you presently have children in your local K-12 schools?

Please specify?

Do you own your home?

Are you still working or retired?

How many people presently live in your household?

How would you describe your community as a safe place to raise your family?

Excellent. Very good. Good. Fair Poor

Do you feel that all school-age children have a safe place to go before or after school?
Explain

Should all school-age children have a safe place to go?

What safety issues concern you in your community?

Gangs. Drugs. Delinquency. Racial/ethnic differences.

Inadequate lighting. Unsupervised youth before/after school hours. n/a

other

How would you rate the availability of recreational facilities, activities, and programs for youth in your community?

Excellent. Very good. Good. Fair. Poor

How would you rate the quality of education in your community?

Excellent. Very good. Good. Fair. Poor

What attracted you to this community?

Do you feel the schools are responsive to the needs of the community? Please explain

Would you be willing to allocate tax dollars to support quality before or after school programs in your community?

Would you be willing to assist in organizing a quality before or after school program in your community?

Overall, is this an issue that concerns you?

Appendix F – Coding Chart

Parents	Teachers	Students	Administrators	Taxpayers/Community Members
A	A	A	A	A
B	B	B	B	B

