**BUILDING QUALITY, SCALE,
AND EFFECTIVENESS
IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

Summary Report of the TASC Evaluation

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Executive Summary

The After-School Corporation (TASC) has completed its sixth year of operations, working with public and private partners across New York City and the state to develop and operate school-based after-school services for public-school students in the elementary and secondary grades. Since its founding in 1998, TASC has emphasized twin goals of increasing the availability of after-school opportunities and enhancing the quality of after-school services.

To assess TASC's effectiveness, four foundations including the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the William T. Grant Foundation, and the Atlantic Philanthropies supported an external evaluation that answered questions about: quality and scale in program implementation, program effects on participating students, and program practices linked to student success. The evaluation collected data over four school years from 96 TASC after-school projects and their host schools in New York City. Its student sample numbered 52,000 after-school participants and 91,000 students who were enrolled in TASC host schools but not participating in TASC projects.

Are TASC Services Meeting High Expectations for Quality?

In 1998, TASC's developers designed a program model intended to demonstrate quality by: recruiting students likely to benefit from after-school learning experiences, promoting high levels of after-school enrollment and attendance, employing well-qualified staff, building strong relationships with host schools and parents, delivering activities that promote learning growth and expose students to positive new experiences, providing training and technical assistance to help staff improve their services, and encouraging fiscal independence.

Over the evaluation period, TASC programs became increasingly systematic in their operations and took many steps to improve their effectiveness. Examined altogether, these efforts provide evidence of program quality.

- ■ TASC projects recruited **large numbers of students** (approximately 50,000 students in 2003-04) from schools that enrolled high percentages of students at risk of educational failure due to poverty, low achievement, and other factors. In 2001-02, site-level after-school enrollments averaged 289 students.

- ■ TASC projects retained these enrolled students and encouraged **high levels of after-school attendance**, with a median attendance

rate of 85 percent among TASC participants in grades PreK-8. Projects strongly encouraged daily attendance. Among PreK-8 students who participated one year (and could attend a second year because they were in a school that hosted a TASC project), 63 percent also participated a second year.

■ Site-level **coordinators were well qualified** for their jobs, with 86 percent holding a bachelor's degree and 40 percent holding a master's degree. Eighty-five percent of coordinators had at least three years of work experience in social services, youth services, or education; 50 percent had held relevant management positions for three years or more; 21 percent were certified teachers. Other program staff (excluding site coordinators) were also qualified for their roles, with 80 percent reporting prior experience in social services, youth services, community organizations, or schools. Twenty-eight percent of after-school staff had a bachelor's degree, and another 29 percent were college students.

■ TASC projects played increasingly **important roles within their schools**, with 97 percent of principals reporting a strong relationship between the school and after-school program and 86 percent reporting alignment or coordination between the school and after-school program.

■ Program activities were most often **designed to build student skills in academic and cognitive areas, the arts, and social and cultural awareness**. In the academic/cognitive area, the most common activities involved homework assistance, organized reading (students reading together), recreational reading (students independently reading materials they selected by themselves), math games, word games, and organized writing.

■ TASC projects differentiated after-school activities from the regular school curriculum through the adoption of appealing activities that: were intended to result in a **performance** (97 percent of programs) or **written product** (82 percent), involved **groups of students** working together on an extended interdisciplinary project (77 percent), or brought together multiple learning experiences centered around a **common theme** (76 percent).

■ TASC and other training providers whom it hired provided **training and technical assistance** to all after-school coordinators and to 78 percent of after-school staff. In general, this training was intended to help inform and build skills among training participants and to engender a sense of professionalism. Site

coordinators particularly valued training that focused on the nuts and bolts of project management and operations, while other project staff most often valued training on how to engage and teach after-school participants. Over half of training participants (57 percent of coordinators and 53 percent of other staff) said that they had implemented ideas and strategies learned in training and that this information had improved their project operations.

■ Consistent with TASC guidelines, after-school projects gradually **increased the portions of their project budgets that they supported through sources other than TASC.** Projects reported an average of 37 percent of their budgets would be funded by non-TASC sources in 2001-02.

Do Students Benefit from Participating in TASC Projects?

School principals reported significant benefits for students who participated in TASC projects. Ninety-five percent said that TASC gave students access to activities not available during the regular school day, 79 percent said that participants' parents expressed more positive feelings about the school because of the program, and 66 percent said that after-school participants received special opportunities to hone literacy skills.

Analyses of data on **academic performance and school attendance** show that participation in TASC activities was linked to improvements in both areas, especially for students who participated regularly in TASC programming over two consecutive years. For largely technical reasons, benefits were clearer and more readily measurable at the elementary and middle grades than in high school.

At the elementary- and middle-grades level:

■ Analyses indicate **after-school benefits in mathematics achievement**, especially for those participants who attended TASC projects regularly and for more than a year (effect sizes of 0.13 for one-year active–or consistent–participants and 0.79 for two-year active participants). Comparable findings in reading and English language arts were not apparent, although participants in some projects consistently outgained comparable nonparticipants in this area.

■ Participants showed greater **gains in school attendance** than did nonparticipants, with the greatest benefits at grades 5-8. For example, the difference in the attendance gain of participants and nonparticipants measured from seventh to eighth grade was 1.5

percentage points or the equivalent of a net gain of 2.7 school days in a 181-day school year (effect size of 0.17).

At the high school level:

■ After-school participants **passed more Regents exams and earned more high school credits** than did nonparticipants, but conclusions from this evidence are limited by the fact that high school participants were already achieving at substantially higher levels than nonparticipants on average before entering a TASC project.

■ The difference that reflects the clearest association with TASC high school participation is in **improved school attendance**. When compared to nonparticipants with similar records of prior school attendance, TASC participants showed significantly more positive school attendance after a year of TASC participation (although the attendance of both participants and nonparticipants declined over grades 9-12).

What Practices Are Associated with the Greatest Benefits for Students?

The evaluation examined the practices and characteristics of TASC projects with varying records of student academic growth to identify those practices and characteristics that effective projects held in common. This analysis necessarily excluded the program features shared by *all* TASC projects. In rank order of statistical importance, the following program characteristics were linked with student gains in both mathematics and reading/English language arts:

■ High frequency and duration of **activities focusing on academics** and cognitive development

■ Employment of a project **site coordinator who is licensed to teach**

■ High frequency and duration of **activities focusing on fitness, sports, and recreation**

■ A requirement that after-school staff submit **activity plans** for advance review by the site coordinator

■ A project staff in which at least one out of four staff members has a four-year **college degree**

Together, these characteristics suggest that effective programs were likely to be staffed and managed with a clear intent to promote academic learning, often through project-based, interdisciplinary activities that engaged students in learning experiences that differed from those of the regular school day, as indicated in survey data. Effective projects also provided opportunities for exercise and fun after school. Information on these patterns can help after-school intermediaries like TASC decide whether to adjust their program models or their assistance and guidance to programs and whether to monitor certain elements of program operation with special care.

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In the end, however, we take full responsibility for any errors or omissions in this study or its reports.

The Authors

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Summary Report of the TASC Evaluation

In September 2003, The After-School Corporation (TASC) began its sixth year of operation in New York City, working with public and private partners across the city and the state to develop and support school-based services for public-school students in the elementary and secondary grades. From its founding, TASC has worked to advance two interrelated goals:

1. Increase the availability of after-school opportunities by providing resources and approaches for establishing new projects and expanding existing projects

2. Enhance the quality of after-school projects by incorporating research-based components that are associated with student success and program sustainability

These goals have led TASC to engage in rapid development and scaling up of after-school programming, in itself a major logistical accomplishment, and also the implementation of project monitoring, technical assistance, and professional development, along with the creation of special initiatives to address major needs and create new partnerships to enhance TASC's network of after-school projects.

Underlying TASC's goals is its central mission, which is to promote high-quality after-school programming as an appropriate public-sector responsibility. Historically, after-school programming has been seen as a private good, supported by private citizens and from which private individuals, especially children and their families, reap benefits. Although this view is not universal, a sense of public responsibility for after-school programs has generally characterized only those communities with high levels of both resources and public commitment to supporting children and families. And in these few communities, after-school programs are often the first public expenditures to be cut when budgets tighten.

Profile of TASC Projects

In school year 2003-04, TASC supported a total of 242 school-based after-school projects, including 186 projects in New York City and 56 projects located elsewhere in the state. TASC-affiliated projects in 2003-04 served approximately 50,000 students, 41,200 of whom were enrolled in the public schools of New York City.

TASC's mission, in effect, calls for it to demonstrate that high-quality after-school programs can be created, operated, and sustained in partnership with public schools and with other public and private partners. A central proposition of this mission is that after-school programs can attract significant numbers of children on a regular basis and can offer these children important developmental opportunities, all at no out-of-pocket cost to participants or their families. Finally, according to this mission, these programs and the opportunities they offer can increase the likelihood that participants will succeed in school and in life generally.

An important element in achieving TASC's mission is the dissemination and use of evidence produced and reported by evaluation. Through objective, third-party evaluation, TASC expects to demonstrate that it can create, operate, and sustain partnerships that support after-school services for significant numbers of children. To help achieve its mission, TASC has used evaluation findings to determine whether the program's after-school services can offer learning opportunities that benefit participants in measurable, significant ways.

Under the TASC approach, after-school services are provided through a partnership between a public school (known as the host school) and a local nonprofit organization with ties to the community served by the school. All students enrolled in the host school are eligible to participate in the after-school project, which provides services from the end of each school day to approximately 6 p.m. Services are free of charge and intended to supplement the learning experiences of the regular school day. Programming generally emphasizes academic enrichment, homework assistance, the arts, and recreation. The intent of this program approach is to combine community connections, child and youth expertise, cultural resources, and specialized foci of selected nonprofit organizations with the academic focus, facilities, and access to students provided by public schools.

The budget for the TASC initiative in the 2003-04 school year was $97.5 million, up from $14 million in Year 1, $36 million in Year 2, $61 million in Year 3, $76.8 million in Year 4, and $87.9 million in Year 5. The current budget mix reflects a growing concentration of resources from public sources. Approximately 75 projects receive funding as part of partnerships with New York State under its Advantage After-School Program and 60 projects participate in partnerships supported by the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, currently administered in New York by the State Education Department. Another five projects receive 21st Century funds directly as a result of proposals written by TASC. In addition, 39 TASC projects receive funding from the federal government's AmeriCorps program, 28 receive support through TASC's partnership with New York City Department of Youth and Community Development's Beacon program, and several other after-school projects benefit from grants received by TASC from New York State's Extended Day Violence Prevention Program and the city's Workforce Investment Act program.

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This evaluation sought to answer three central questions:

1.   Are TASC services meeting high expectations for quality?

2.   Do students benefit from participation in TASC projects?

3.   What practices are associated with the greatest benefits for students?

To address each question, the evaluation focused primarily at the level of the overall initiative, with the units of measurement focused at the student level for the second question, and at the project level for the first and third questions. Practically speaking, this meant that the evaluation examined the experiences of individual students and projects to reflect on the experiences of the initiative as a whole, not to report on projects individually.

The evaluation is grounded in the program's theory of change, as first described in Reisner, White, Birmingham, and Welsh (2001) and quoted below:[1]

1.   *The supply of affordable, high-quality after-school programs open to all children and youth is not adequate to meet the demand.*

2.   *The private sector and parents lack the resources and institutional access required to equitably meet the need for after-school services.*

3.   *Public sector investment can play a central role in expanding and improving after-school opportunities for children and youth.*

4.   *An intermediary organization, such as TASC, is necessary to promote, cultivate, coordinate, and support local partnerships that provide high-quality after-school programs. Strategies that the intermediary uses to provide support need to include training, technical assistance, and volunteer recruitment. These supports will promote program quality, including continuity in staffing.*

5.   *By developing strong local partnerships, TASC will identify and increase a wide range of public and private supports that can be effectively targeted to expand and improve after-school services, including training and technical assistance.*

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[1] Reisner, E.R., White, R.N., Birmingham, J., & Welsh, M. (2001). *Building quality and supporting expansion of after-school projects: Evaluation results from the TASC after-school program's second year*. Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates.

6.	*Using financial resources drawn from many sources and a program design based on core elements that promote good practice in both education and youth development fields, TASC will award grants to nonprofit organizations to operate after-school projects whose designs are research-based and comprehensive in scope.*

7.	*The TASC projects will extend after-school services to children and youth in their host schools, using the resources provided by TASC and others to support nonprofit sponsoring organizations. TASC grants will explicitly promote collaboration between schools and communities, with the after-school projects bridging these two cultures.*

8.	*In their first year of operations, projects will establish procedures, staffing, and schedules to permit the delivery of planned activities and services. In subsequent years, the projects will focus on refining the quality and effectiveness of their activities and services, as they enlarge their capacity to serve more students.*

9.	*As a result of effective program designs that address the needs of working parents and their school-age children, enrolled students will attend the after-school projects regularly as part of an extended learning platform supported by their schools.*

10.	*By participating regularly in after-school activities that are distinctive from but connected to the school day, students will improve their academic skills and knowledge, gain new experiences, take advantage of opportunities for recreation and artistic expression, and develop psychosocial skills that promote positive youth development.*

11.	*The increased availability of high-quality after-school services will: (a) provide participants with opportunities for educational enrichment and socialization; (b) increase parents' peace of mind regarding their children's safety; and (c) improve parents' ability to succeed in employment and/or their own education.*

12.	*Through the documentation of after-school activities, TASC's independent evaluator will collect evidence describing the delivery and effectiveness of after-school services from participating schools, parents, and students.*

13.	*The evidence, in combination with organized, broad-based advocacy, will persuade the public and policymakers that after-school programs are necessary, feasible, and affordable.*

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14.   *Support for the programs will become widespread, and public officials will increasingly invest in universally available and sustainable programs as a public-sector responsibility.*

The change theory has framed the evaluation in two respects. First, it pointed evaluators toward categories of data that were particularly important to collect in order to tell the story of TASC's operations and effects. Second, it guided data analysis, both in terms of highlighting the types of data that were most critical to understanding the initiative and also in helping evaluators to trace backwards from actual participant effects to program factors that may have played a role in producing those effects.

Data collection for virtually all evaluation purposes focused on the group of TASC projects in New York City that were first funded in the first two years of TASC's operations, 1998-99 (Year 1) and 1999-2000 (Year 2). This set of projects included all 50 projects first funded in Year 1 and all 50 projects first funded in Year 2. Ninety-six of these projects continued operation in Year 3, and 95 were operating in Year 4. These projects offered the longest period during which evaluators could observe change in program implementation. Similarly, at the student level, these projects offered the longest possible period to observe TASC participation patterns and associated changes in educational performance.

Evaluators collected data through surveys, site visits, and the review of administrative records. The evaluation's survey data collection is profiled below. Survey data were collected from projects first funded in Year 1 and Year 2, except that student survey data were only collected from projects first funded in Year 1. Because the full sample size was not attained until Year 2 for the site coordinator, staff, and principal surveys, most cross-time comparisons reviewed in the report span Years 2 through 4.

Profile of Survey Data Collected in the Evaluation, by the Year in Which Data Were Collected

Respondent Group	Year 1 (1998-99)	Year 2 (1999-2000)	Year 3 (2000-01)	Year 4 (2001-02)
TASC site coordinators	47 (94%)*	94 (94%)	95 (99%)	79 (83%)
TASC after-school staff	906 (86%)	1,155 (87%)	1,571 (92%)	1,369 (93%)
School principals	34 (68%)	66 (66%)	69 (72%)	65 (68%)
Students	1,584 (82%)	1,865 (87%)	2,103 (88%)	2,031 (98%)
Parents	1,292 (70%)	1,630 (91%)	0	0

* Information in parentheses indicates response rates for surveys of TASC site coordinators and school principals. For TASC staff, students, and parents, figures in parentheses indicate the percent of TASC projects providing one or more survey responses.

In each year of the study, the evaluation collected data through interviews, observations, and focus groups conducted in visits to a sample of TASC projects. Site-visit samples included 10 projects in Year 1, 15 projects in Year 2, 15 projects in Year 3, 14 projects in Year 4, and 14 projects in Year 5. In general, the evaluation used site-visit data to explore the relationships, issues, and tensions surrounding the design and implementation of TASC projects. Examples cited throughout this report are drawn from these visits.

In 1998, TASC and PSA developed a student tracking system to register the following: the date each student enrolled in TASC activities, the student's withdrawal date, and the student's daily after-school attendance during the period between enrollment and withdrawal. This system produced data on patterns of students' after-school enrollment and attendance. In addition, by using the identifying information supplied by the system, the evaluation cross-referenced TASC participants with the New York City Department of Education's student data. This effort yielded information on participants' biographical characteristics (date of birth, sex, race/ethnicity, eligibility for free or reduced price lunch, and whether the student was a recent immigrant), their eligibility for special instructional programs serving English Language Learners and students with disabilities, and their educational characteristics (grade in school, years of enrollment in a particular school, annual school attendance rates, and achievement on state and citywide tests of reading and math). Data on additional educational characteristics were obtained for high school students, including students' accumulation of high school credits and Regents test performance in English and math. In addition, by knowing the TASC participants in each school, evaluators were able to identify students who did not participate in TASC and to obtain the same information on these nonparticipants as it obtained on participants. (The evaluation defined a nonparticipant as any student who attended a TASC host school while a project was open and who did not participate in a TASC project in any year.) The final student sample for the evaluation contained information on 52,355 students who participated in TASC programming and on 90,806 students in the same schools who did not participate in TASC services.

Are TASC Services Meeting High Expectations for Quality?

Evidence gathered in the evaluation indicates that **the TASC program met expectations for quality in key areas, as local projects became more fully integrated into their host schools and as program operations became increasingly systematized over the evaluation period.** TASC's program model, its partnerships throughout New York City and state, and its provision of training and technical assistance are all intended to support high levels of after-school program quality. As outlined in the program's theory of change, TASC believes that high quality is essential to attract and retain students in after-school programs and also to promote concrete benefits for students, including improvement in their

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academic skills and knowledge, their exposure to new experiences, their enjoyment of recreation and artistic expression, and their development of psychosocial skills capable of promoting positive youth development. Accordingly, the evaluation has measured program quality through several distinct lenses, including the recruitment of students likely to benefit from after-school learning experiences, promotion of high levels of after-school attendance, development of strong relationships with host schools and parents, delivery of activities that promote learning growth and that expose students to positive new experiences, provision of training and technical assistance to help staff make their programs better, and encouragement of fiscal independence.

Student After-School Participants and Their Schools

TASC projects served large numbers of students during the evaluation period–approximately 50,000 students in 2003-04, with students drawn mainly from public schools that enrolled high percentages of students at risk of educational failure due to poverty, low achievement, and related factors. High levels of participation by these students are consistent with the program's theory, which is premised on the provision of services to children of families who are not able to pay for high-quality after-school services out of their own pockets. In addition, information on the student subgroups that derive the most academic benefit from TASC participation, as discussed later in this report, suggests that students at educational risk are especially likely to experience educational gains from participation.

Compared to New York City's public schools overall, the schools in the evaluation sample enrolled higher percentages of students from low-income families, low-achieving students, and black or Hispanic students. This difference was most pronounced for schools hosting PreK-8 projects and less pronounced for schools hosting high school projects.

Within PreK-8 host schools, about 32 percent of students in each school enrolled in the TASC project. At grades 9-12, 59 percent of students in each school enrolled, although that figure is misleading because several high schools automatically enrolled all students in the TASC program.

The PreK-8 students who participated in TASC programs within their schools closely resembled the nonparticipating students in the same schools, on measures of family income, gender, receipt of special education, status as English Language Learners and as recent immigrants, and prior educational performance. Although racial/ethnic characteristics were very similar across participants and nonparticipants, black students were more highly represented among participants (37 percent) than among nonparticipants (28 percent).

Overall, low-income students (as determined by eligibility for subsidized meals) constituted 91 percent of PreK-8 participants and 75 percent of high school participants–although this difference may be smaller than it appears, because high school students are generally reluctant to identify themselves as eligible for subsidized meals. Hispanic and black students accounted for 85 percent of participants at PreK-8 levels and 78 percent of grade 9-12 participants.

Students' Patterns of After-School Enrollment and Attendance

Trends in TASC program enrollment and attendance suggest that **TASC projects are serving large numbers of students on a relatively frequent basis and that both project-level enrollment and attendance have increased somewhat over time.** These patterns are promising with regard to program appeal to students and their parents and also with regard to the likelihood of program effectiveness. Findings presented in interim reports of this evaluation pointed to the importance of consistent after-school attendance in ensuring the level of program exposure that permits participants to benefit from high-quality after-school experiences.

Among the 75 projects serving grades PreK-8 for which adequate enrollment data were available for Years 2, 3, and 4, project enrollment remained relatively stable, increasing slowly across program years. A factor promoting enrollment stability was TASC's policy of adjusting grant amounts during the program year to align the amounts with actual project attendance. In Year 2, the average enrollment was 236 students, increasing to 278 in Year 3, an increase of 18 percent. In Year 4, the average enrollment in these projects increased slightly to 289, a 4 percent increase. From Year 2 to Year 4, project enrollment increased by an average of 22 percent.

In addition, the proportion of students who participated in the after-school project for an entire school year increased moderately between Years 3 and 4. In Year 4, 77 percent of participating students continued to attend the project every month through May, compared with 74 percent of students the previous year. Among PreK-8 students who participated one year and could attend a second year because they continued in a school that hosted a TASC project, 63 percent also participated a second year.

TASC's project structure and operations were premised on PreK-8 students attending the program regularly, preferably five days per week. To analyze students' level of TASC participation, the evaluation first categorized each participating student as an active participant or a nonactive participant. In grades PreK-8, an active participant was one who attended a TASC project at least 60 days during the school year (out of the typical 160 days of project operations) and also attended at least 60 percent of the days that it was possible for the student to attend, or an average of three days per week. Because of the

importance of regular, frequent attendance in the TASC program model, most of the analyses presented in this report compare active participants to nonparticipating students.

In 2001-02, 71 percent of PreK-8 participants in TASC projects met the criteria established for active participation. Among TASC participants in grades PreK-8 during the 2001-02 school year, a project attendance rate of 60 percent represented the 18th percentile of attendance rates among all TASC participants, and a project attendance rate of 80 percent represented the 40th percentile point. This means that 18 percent of all TASC participants at this grade span had a TASC attendance rate of 59 percent or lower, and 40 percent had an attendance rate of 79 percent or lower.

Average TASC attendance rates for PreK-8 students increased in each of the four years of TASC program operation that were assessed, as seen in the distribution of student attendance rates. The midpoint on the attendance-rate continuum increased from 78 percent in Year 1 to 80 percent in Year 2 to 83 percent in Year 3 and finally to 85 percent in Year 4.

The distribution of participating students based on the number of days attended during the school year showed a similar trend, leveling out in Years 3 and 4. The median days attended in 1998-99 were 80 days, in 1999-2000 the median was 99 days, in 2000-01 it was 109 days, and in 2001-02 it was 107 days. This calculation excludes attendance data from sites that submitted data for fewer than eight months in a school year and the sites that operated only a half-year in 1998-99 or 1999-2000.

For students in grades 9-12, TASC's project structure and operation were premised on students attending the project on a less frequent basis. Accordingly, evaluators established a different threshold for categorizing a student in grades 9-12 as an active participant: a minimum of 20 days over a school year and 20 percent of the days that it was possible for the student to attend, an average of one day per week. During 2001-02, 47 percent of participants in grades 9-12 met the criteria for active participation. Among TASC participants in grades 9-12 during the 2001-02 school year, a project attendance rate of 20 percent represented the 38th percentile of attendance rates among all TASC participants, and a project attendance rate of 60 percent represented the 90th percentile point. Average TASC attendance rates for students in grades 9-12 fluctuated slightly across the four years of TASC program operation.

Characteristics and Work Experience of Project Staff

Evaluators' analysis of project characteristics associated with learning gains for students underscore the importance of staff background and staff supervision in promoting service effectiveness for students, as discussed in a later section. The following discussion highlights the staff characteristics and experiences that evaluators found to be most closely related to student gains.

Site coordinators' background and job satisfaction. In general, **TASC site coordinators were well educated,** with 86 percent holding at least a bachelor's degree and 40 percent holding at least a master's degree. Although average education levels of site coordinators were high, they declined (but not significantly) over Years 2, 3, and 4. An explanation for the decline is that over time projects promoted assistant site coordinators into lead positions. These individuals had not needed the higher education levels to be hired as assistant coordinators, but they proved themselves to be effective in subordinate positions and were eventually promoted based on their work experience and performance.

**Average Educational Level of Site Coordinators,
1999-2000, 2000-01, and 2001-02**

Educational Level	Year	Percent of Coordinators	*N*
Graduated from four-year college or higher	Year 2	94	*73*
	Year 3	90	*69*
	Year 4	86	*70*
Master's degree or higher	Year 2	53	*73*
	Year 3	45	*69*
	Year 4	40	*70*

Coordinators demonstrated high levels of relevant prior work experience. In Year 4, 85 percent of site coordinators reported at least three years of experience working in social services, youth services, community organizations, or educational organizations before working in a TASC after-school project; this level remained stable over time. In the same year, 50 percent of site coordinators reported at least three years' experience in managing social services, youth services, community organizations, or educational organizations prior to working in a TASC after-school project; this level also remained fairly stable. Site coordinators in Year 4 were very likely to have at least three years of experience providing direct services to youth, with 78 percent reporting this level of direct youth-serving experience, a level that remained stable over the data collection period.

About a fifth of site coordinators (21 percent) reported that they held some type of state teaching certification from New York or another state. Of these site coordinators, 20 percent held a regular license to teach in New York

City, 20 percent held a New York State certificate, and others held provisional certificates of various types, with some site coordinators holding more than one type of teaching certificate.

Based on a scale constructed from items on the site coordinator survey, the evaluation rated site coordinators' overall satisfaction with their jobs. The results showed that **95 percent of site coordinators reported a high level of job satisfaction.** This level of job satisfaction has been a consistent feature of site coordinator reports since program inception.

Project staff background and job satisfaction. As in previous years, **staff (excluding site coordinators) reported relatively high levels of prior education,** with 40 percent holding a two-year college degree or higher. Nineteen percent of responding staff had not yet graduated from high school.

TASC Project Staff with Various Levels of Education, 2001-02, in Percents *(N=1,208)*

Education Level	Percent of Staff
Less than high school	19
High school or GED	16
Some college	25
Completed two-year college degree	12
Completed four-year college degree	9
Some graduate work	5
Master's degree or higher	14

Over half of project staff (57 percent) who were not working as site coordinators were themselves enrolled as students while working in a TASC project. This pattern was not surprising. The part-time nature of many TASC jobs made after-school employment compatible with course enrollment. Most TASC staff who were enrolled in education programs were college students.

Staff Enrollment in Educational Programs, 2001-02, in Percents *(N=1,208)*

Education Enrollment Level	Percent of Staff
College	29
High School	17
Graduate program	8
Other educational programs	3
Not enrolled in educational programs	43

In survey questions about their work experience, **staff respondents reported extensive experience in relevant fields before becoming a member of the after-school staff,** as shown below.

Types of Work Experience Reported by Staff, 2001-02, in Percents
(N=1,259)

Work Experience	Percent of Staff
Social services, youth services, community organizations, or education	80
Work in a school	67
Three or more years in social services or education	53
Three or more years providing direct services to children	43
Teacher certification	18

Almost a third (32 percent) of staff reported that they worked in the host school in some capacity during the school day. Thirteen percent said that they worked as classroom teachers during the school day, 9 percent worked as classroom assistants, and 10 percent worked in other positions, such as instructional specialist, pupil support staff, and administrator. In general, after-school staff who also worked in the host school during the school day reported that their dual role was a positive experience, as seen below.

Reactions to Dual Role by After-School Staff
Who Worked in the School during the Regular School Day, 2001-02,
in Percents *(N=274)*

Staff Response	Percent Who Strongly Agree
My relationships with some students have improved because I get to work with them after school	50
I get a chance to try new activities and teaching strategies	36
I have changed some activities or teaching strategies in my regular classroom	22
I am worried about getting burned out on teaching	7
I have less time for my regular teaching responsibilities	4

Interviews with after-school staff and site coordinators revealed many unexpected benefits of hiring teachers from the regular school day. Perhaps most beneficial was the fact that regular day teachers brought insights into after-school participants' academic and developmental needs, and gained insight into their current and future students by meeting them in a more relaxed setting. Also, regular day teachers were more likely to have access to school resources, either in their own classrooms or when using a colleague's classroom. In addition, regular day teachers who worked in the after-school project often served as advocates for it, encouraging other teachers to share space or refer students.

The same interviews, however, revealed some negative consequences of hiring regular day teachers:

■ Projects wanting to offer an experience different from the regular school day sometimes had difficulty shaping the tone of student-staff interactions, particularly when site coordinators did not have full control over which teachers they could hire.

■ Some teachers were exhausted by the end of the school day or found themselves short on planning time for the next day. At one school, the principal limited the number of hours a teacher could work at the after-school project. This policy allowed more teachers to earn extra income, while providing students with after-school staff familiar with curriculum that the regular school day and the after-school program shared.

■ Certified teachers were typically more expensive to hire.

■ Teachers were unavailable during the regular school day for TASC training, and, correctly or not, teachers perceived their education and classroom experience as too advanced for them to benefit from TASC training.

Irrespective of personal and professional background, **project staff reported high levels of job satisfaction,** with 95 percent of responding paid staff indicating that they were "highly satisfied" with their work in the after-school project.

As in previous years, almost two-thirds (65 percent) of project staff in Year 4 reported that they intended to return to their jobs in the upcoming year. Ten percent said that they would not return, and 25 percent said that they weren't sure whether they would return. Among those not returning or not sure, the main reason was needing to work more hours or full-time.

Staff supervision. Site coordinators were asked whether their projects held staff meetings at least once a month, with 87 percent reporting that staff

meetings were held at least that often. This represented an increase in reported staff meetings from prior years. In addition, 71 percent of site coordinators reported that they held meetings of subgroups of staff at least once a month. The typical staff-meeting agenda included discussion of new activities, upcoming staff development, policy changes (most often regarding student attendance), and the sharing of lesson plans.

Eighty-two percent of site coordinators said that they required activity or lesson plans from at least some staff. Half (41 percent) of these site coordinators said that they regularly required activity plans from most or all staff. At some projects, the site coordinator kept activity plans on file, so that staff could borrow ideas from each other and ask the creator of a lesson plan for help in implementing it.

Relationships with Host Schools

Both after-school projects and their host schools placed a high value on creating and nurturing close ties between after-school and regular school day programs, or at least they did so in most instances. These efforts were visible in the engagement of principals and school staff with the after-school project staff, the level of coordination and integration between the after-school program and the regular school day, projects' access to school space and facilities, and, ultimately, projects' progress in building positive relationships with the host school. When ties between school and after-school created tight webs of support for children, these relationships were especially strong, and contributed significantly to program quality.

In separate interviews during site visits, the principal, the site coordinator, and the executive director (or other senior representatives) of the sponsoring organization were asked about the collaboration between the host school and the after-school program, including how decisions about after-school programming and space were reached. A consistent picture emerged across the sites visited by evaluators. While the site coordinator communicated regularly with the principal, the coordinator had the leeway to hire and supervise staff as well as determine program activities and the weekly schedule. The principal typically acted as an after-school advocate (with the regular day staff) and a leader in logistical brainstorming around such issues as sharing space and wrapping around non-TASC after-school activities. The supervisor of the grantee organization helped launch the project, oversaw the budget, and responded to TASC compliance requirements (e.g., annual cost reports, quarterly narratives).

In surveys in Year 4, **virtually all principals of host schools (97 percent) reported a strong partnership between the school and the after-school project.** This level of affirmation represented an increase from prior years, with 87 and 90 percent of principals reporting a strong partnership in Years 2 and 3,

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respectively. In addition, 86 percent of principals reported that the TASC project was aligned or coordinated with the school in some way. Principals reported a variety of means by which this alignment or coordination occurred, as shown below. While the use of all of these strategies increased between Years 2 and 4, according to principals, the integration of school themes and the identification of skill needs increased most during the period.

**Strategies for Augmenting the Regular School Day,
as Reported by Principals, 2001-02, in Percents** *(N=49)*

Strategies	Percent
The after-school program solicits input from the principal and teachers on skills in which students need help, and incorporates these topics into after-school activities	86
The after-school program adopts school themes for special projects	65
The after-school program uses school administrators (e.g., deans, assistant principals) to advise or monitor activities	61
After-school staff coordinate homework assistance with classroom teachers	51
The coordinator of the after-school program serves on a school planning team	51
Other	10

A factor that increased the coordination and integration of the after-school project with the regular school-day program was the employment of one or more of the school's teachers in the after-school project. Principals were especially likely to note the positive effect of this cross-staffing on the alignment of curriculum and instruction.

At a very tangible level, **host schools demonstrated their acceptance of and engagement with the TASC after-school project by sharing space and facilities.** In general, after-school projects had good access to most school spaces and facilities in Year 4. Analysis of trends over time indicated that host schools increased the extent to which they shared many school spaces and facilities. One exception, however, was that they decreased the extent to which they shared their schools' computers. Significant changes between Years 2 and 4 included the following:

Increased access to:

■   Playground/outdoor activity space, especially among elementary-grades projects

- ■ Telephone
- ■ Auditorium, especially among elementary-grades projects
- ■ Storage space
- ■ Fax
- ■ Copier
- ■ Gymnasium, among elementary-grades projects only

Decreased access to:

- ■ Computer lab, although access rose for high school projects
- ■ Classroom computers, although access rose for high school projects

On several survey items assessing the relationship between the school and the after-school project, principals' responses turned significantly more positive between Years 2 and 4 of the program. The following measures showed significant increases after Year 2:

- ■ After-school staff reach out to teachers in the school to identify the needs of students

- ■ After-school staff follow through with the commitments they make to the principal and other school staff

- ■ After-school staff take care of the space the school provides the project

- ■ Students are properly supervised by after-school staff

Perhaps reflecting the growing popularity and demand for TASC services, the percent of principals' positive responses decreased significantly on one measure:

- ■ The after-school project has enough capacity to serve all interested students

Principals noted several program elements that in their view needed attention, as shown below.

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Principal Reports of Program Elements Needing Attention, 2001-02, in Percents *(N=64)*

Program Elements	Percent
Qualifications of program staff other than the site coordinator	56
Quality of homework help	52
Quality of academic enrichment activities	44
Coordination/integration with the school curriculum	41
Coordination with the school	31
Number of staff	22
Staff turnover	20

Concerns about staff qualifications may be linked to many principals' preference that the after-school project employ as many teachers from the regular school day as possible. While sponsoring organizations were keenly aware of principals' hiring preferences, according to interviews with site coordinators, they still balanced these with the need to hire staff with an array of credentials and work experience. Their aim was to (1) keep staffing costs within budget, (2) offer a wide range of programming to students, and (3) meet goals of increasing opportunities for youth development during after-school hours.

Relationships with Parents and Community

In addition to building relationships with the host school, **TASC projects were expected to reach out to parents and the broader community and to build strong relationships with these groups.** During site visits, site coordinators reported that parent and community outreach presented challenges, however. By virtue of having to pick up their children at 6 p.m., parents of elementary school students were likely to be connected to the projects. Elementary school-based projects were also more likely than other projects to engage in after-school community service activities (e.g., park cleaning), sometimes also involving parents. This may be attributed to the fact that AmeriCorps members, who were required to lead a community involvement project, were almost exclusively placed in elementary school projects.

Site coordinators reported in surveys that they sponsored various types of activities to involve parents and families in the after-school project, with the most frequently sponsored activities being recreational and cultural events.

**Project Sponsorship of Activities for Parents and Families,
as Reported by Site Coordinators, 2001-02, in Percents** *(N=77)*

Activities	Percent of Projects
Opportunities to attend cultural or recreational events in the community	72
Parenting classes (e.g., classes to help parents learn about the school system and communicate with the school, how to help their children with schoolwork and prepare for tests, etc.)	37
Opportunities to hear from and talk with representatives from local agencies or other organizations (e.g., health, police, employment and training programs)	36
Classes to help parents develop their own skills (e.g., GED preparation or computer skills, etc.)	24
English as a Second Language classes	18
Other events and activities	14

Analyses demonstrate increases in all of these activities across years. The increases in "opportunities to hear from and talk with representatives from local agencies or other organizations" and "opportunities to attend cultural and recreational events in the community" were significant.

In most instances, **projects engaged with the local community primarily through their sponsoring organization, which in every case was a private nonprofit organization.** Most of these organizations were local community-based organizations whose main purpose was supporting or improving some important service or function (e.g., youth services, health care, housing, culture). Even when the sponsoring nonprofit was a cultural or other institution serving a citywide mission (e.g., a museum), it either had or desired a strong link to the community in which the after-school project was located. For this reason, TASC projects' engagement with the community was grounded in their sponsoring organizations' ongoing community outreach and engagement. According to site coordinators, people in the neighborhoods surrounding their projects were generally aware of them, with 86 percent reporting that the surrounding neighborhood was either very aware or somewhat aware of the project. High school projects were especially likely to engage with the community through development of internships for participants.

Training and Technical Assistance

Evaluation evidence suggests that **projects' participation in training and technical assistance was important in promoting project quality.** Indeed, a distinctive feature of the TASC initiative is its commitment to training and technical assistance. Working through New York City-based training providers, TASC offered varied types of training to after-school project staff, with training opportunities tailored to specific subject areas and trainees. The evaluation examined these opportunities through data provided by TASC site coordinators and other staff. When asked what types of training were most valuable, project staff identified topics that were most closely related to their core day-to-day responsibilities, especially how to involve and teach after-school participants, as being of greatest relevance to them. For site coordinators, these topics centered on the nuts and bolts of project management and operations. Other staff were most interested in learning how to design activities to engage, involve, and teach after-school students.

All site coordinators participated in TASC training. Examined across three years of staff responses, the percent of other after-school staff who said they participated in after-school training as part of their job increased steadily, from 62 percent to 68 percent to 78 percent in Years 2, 3, and 4, respectively. One reason for this increase was that sponsoring organizations developed and began to lead one- to two-week training and orientation sessions as part of the annual routine of many TASC projects. All of the sites visited in the evaluation opened their program year with a one- to two-week staff orientation that covered topics such as child-abuse detection, classroom management, and group cohesion-building, as well as specific instruction in leading arts and academic enrichment activities.

Those staff members who did not participate in training were mainly staff who worked in the TASC project 10 or fewer hours a week (47 percent of all staff not participating in training), staff who were 21 years old or younger (17 percent), and staff who worked in the school during the regular day and also worked more than 10 hours a week in the after-school project (7 percent).

An important measure of the effectiveness of training is the satisfaction expressed by training participants and their reports of using what they learned. The evaluation addressed questions on these topics to both site coordinators and other paid staff of the TASC projects. Site coordinators in Year 4 expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their training. This level of satisfaction reflected a steady upward shift, with site coordinators who reported that the services served their purposes completely increasing from 18 percent in Year 2 to 22 percent in Year 3 to 38 percent in Year 4. In interviews, site coordinators were equally positive about the training. At one project, the site coordinator commented that staff came back from sports training motivated to organize a Special Olympics for their students with special needs. Responses from other paid staff in Year 4 were consistent with feedback from site coordinators.

Both site coordinators and other paid staff responded positively, and similarly, to questions about whether they had implemented the ideas and strategies presented in the training and technical assistance. Most notably, over half of each group reported that they had implemented ideas and strategies from the training and technical assistance and that the implementation had improved the TASC project. Another third of each group was in the process of implementing ideas and strategies gleaned from the assistance. While responses from site coordinators became more positive after Year 2, staff responses remained about the same.

After-School Project Resources and Expenditures

The total TASC award in 2001-02 to 84 TASC projects for which expenditure information was available was $15,758,800. These grants for annual operating expenses were computed at $1,000 per student for projects that began operation in 1999-2000 and $980 for projects that began operation during 2000-01. In addition, TASC paid sites $20 per student from the BOE allocation of $80 per enrollee, bringing total awards to $1,020 and $1,000, respectively. TASC allocated resources to projects by borough and grade level, as follows:

Expenditures by the TASC After-School Projects, 2001-02 *(N=84)*

Project Category	Total Amount Expended	Number of Projects	Average Expenditure per Project
All Projects Providing Data			
All	$ 15,756,800	84	$ 187,581
By Borough			
Bronx	$ 3,891,357	20	$ 194,568
Brooklyn	$ 4,064,948	24	$ 169,373
Manhattan*	$ 3,906,486	17	$ 229,793
Queens	$ 3,196,603	19	$ 168,242
Staten Island	$ 697,406	4	$ 174,351
By Grade Level**			
Elementary	$ 13,357,513	70	$ 190,822
Middle	$ 4,464,470	23	$ 192,087
High	$ 1,139,418	6	$ 189,903

* The high average for Manhattan includes TASC's post-9/11 programming in the neighborhoods around Ground Zero in lower Manhattan. These projects provided services tailored to these students' special needs, including supplementary therapeutic care.
** Indicates the grades served by the host school. A host school serving both elementary and middle grades (e.g., K-8) appears in both categories.

In order to encourage the gradual independence of TASC-supported after-school projects, TASC requires individual grantees to raise matching funds from sources other than TASC. As part of the overall plan for implementing the TASC

initiative, TASC grantees were expected to provide 30 percent of their total operating funds from non-TASC sources during 2001-02. Eighty-three projects reported on the amounts expected to be raised in matching funds during that year. Overall, **sites reported that they would raise $5,704,544 in matching funds in Year 4, representing 37 percent of project expenditures.**

Major Project Activities

Objectives and intensity of after-school activities. **TASC projects undertook activities intended to meet many objectives but most often to help students build academic skills and to expose students to positive new experiences.** These activities were consistent with objectives reported by project coordinators, parents, and principals. As seen in the following table, site coordinators and principals were fairly congruent in their objectives, while parents (as reported by site coordinators) were especially likely to want the after-school program to provide opportunities for their children to finish their homework.

Most Important Objective of After-School Projects, 2001-02, in Percents

Objective	Site Coordinators (N=74)	Parents* (N=72)	Principals (N=56)
Provide academic enrichment	41	19	41
Enhance social or civic development	26	0	13
Enhance artistic development	12	4	7
Facilitate homework completion	7	67	13
Provide sports/recreation	0	0	16
Other	15	10	11

* As reported by site coordinators.

To measure the extent to which participating students actually experienced particular types of activities, the evaluation measured the intensity of service in each major area, using an index developed for this purpose. The intensity index used a formula to incorporate site coordinators' reports of the frequency and duration of specific activities and the proportion of students participating in the activity. Index values ranged from 4 at the highest level of frequency, duration, and coverage to 0 at the lowest level. This analytic tool permitted evaluators to rank activity areas by intensity, to compare average intensity levels over time, and to compare intensity levels across grade spans.

Focusing on project averages in Year 4, three activity areas clustered together with very similar levels of intensity (2.79 to 2.71). They included artistic development, academic/cognitive/literacy development, and social/cultural awareness and exploration.

Average Intensity of Activities Offered,
According to Site Coordinators, 2001-02 *(N=78)*
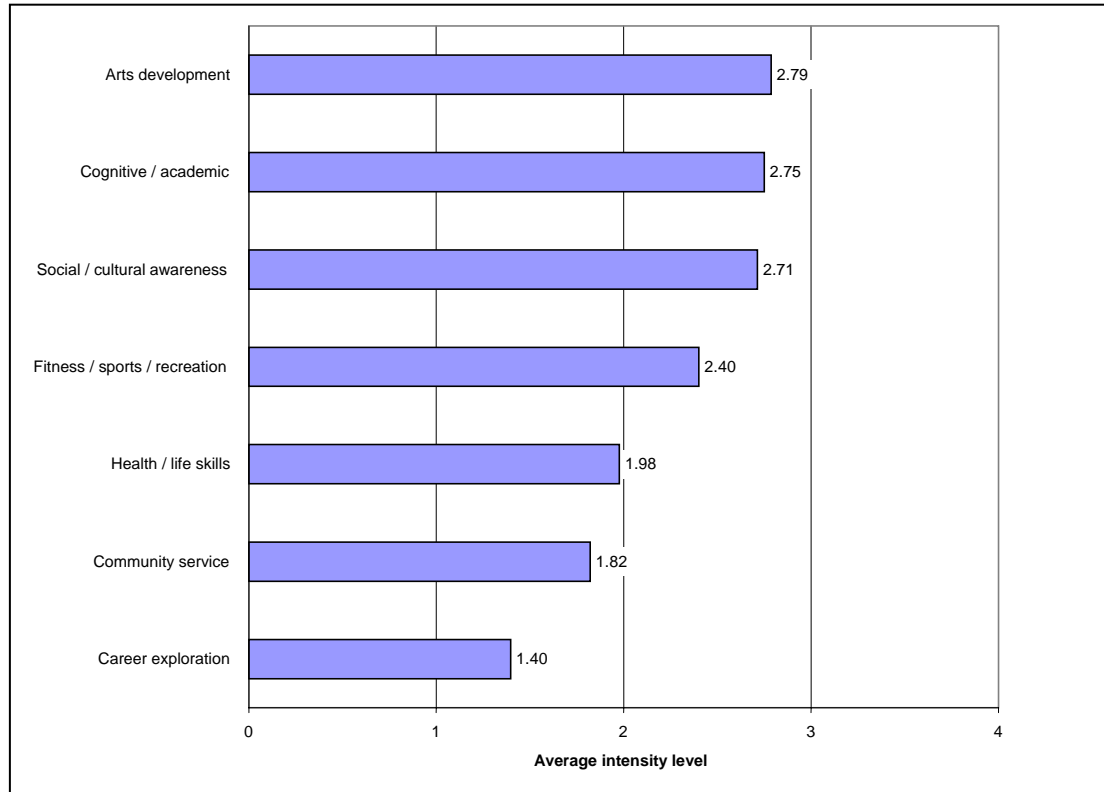
Projects for which comparable data were available in all three years remained fairly stable in intensity levels. The greatest increase appeared in the intensity of social and cultural awareness activities and the greatest decrease in fitness/sports/recreation activities.

Evaluators examined the intensity of activities intended to promote academic and cognitive development with particular interest, given the high priority assigned to these activities by parents, principals, and after-school coordinators. Analysis of the intensity of activities in this area indicates that six activities were implemented with relatively high intensity in Year 4, including homework help, organized reading, recreational reading, math games, word games, and organized writing. A review of changes in the intensity of these and other academic/cognitive activities indicates small but noteworthy increases in

organized reading and tutoring, suggesting more focused efforts to improve participants' academic achievement. Noteworthy declines in the period appear in organized writing, group instruction, computer training (likely due to projects' reduced access to computers), and study skills activities.

Intensity of Academic/Cognitive Development Activities, 1999-2000 through 2001-02

Activity	Year 4 (N=68)	Year 3 (N=69)	Year 2 (N=72)
Homework help	3.96	3.95	3.96
Organized reading	3.34	3.28	3.26
Recreational reading	3.34	3.42	3.18
Math games	3.19	3.28	2.88
Word games	3.10	3.28	3.01
Organized writing	3.06	3.25	3.28
Problem solving	2.98	3.20	2.94
Group instruction	2.97	3.06	3.15
Tutoring	2.58	2.57	2.39
Computer training	2.19	2.37	2.46
Study skills	1.78	1.81	2.00
Field trips	1.28	1.28	1.10

Average intensity level

Methods for delivering program activities. An important issue addressed by the evaluation centered on the materials and methods used by projects to deliver services. To learn more about this issue, evaluators asked questions that sought, among other things, to determine how participants' after-school experiences provided learning opportunities that differed from conventional school-day experiences and that sparked interest and engagement on the part of participants.

A particularly popular type of program activity was designed to result in a final performance, such as a speech, oral report, play, or other artistic performance. Although these activities sometimes involved groups of students working together, they could be implemented as individual efforts as well. In

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Year 4, almost all projects (97 percent) employed culminating performances, indicating a popularity that has remained steady over time. Overall, about two-thirds of projects (67 percent) said that most or all students in the after-school project participated in activities culminating in a performance. Eighty-seven percent of projects involved students in one to four such activities a year, with the typical annual number of such activities increasing since Year 2.

Projects also adopted activities that were designed to result in some type of written product, such as a story, report, or newspaper. Like culminating performance activities, these were sometimes arranged as group efforts and sometimes as individual undertakings. In Year 4, 82 percent of site coordinators said that their project engaged students in activities that culminated in a written product. When asked about the rough proportion of students who participated in such activities, 68 percent of site coordinators said that some students participated; 14 percent said that most or all students participated.

From the beginning of the TASC program, **a favored student activity has been participating in extended group activities**. In addition to the fact that students consistently expressed enjoyment of group work, site coordinators liked these activities because group pressure tended to encourage members of a group to attend regularly in order to complete their responsibilities on the project and not let their group members down. In Year 4, 77 percent of site coordinators said that students engaged in group activities that were tied in some way to one or more academic subject areas, that extended over a single day, and that involved research, writing, and discussion. This percent of projects involved in group work reflected an increase from Year 2, when 62 percent of TASC sites reported that they used group efforts. In Year 4, 24 percent of coordinators said that most or all of their participants had completed at least one group activity. Among this subgroup of coordinators, 63 percent said that most students participated in three to four group activities during the school year.

Another method for engaging students in after-school activities was to adopt a theme that ran across and connected the project's activities. Such themes might be related to a focus of the sponsoring organization (e.g., prehistoric life as a theme used in a project supported by a natural history museum) or a focus of the school, or the theme might be unique to the after-school project. In Year 4, 76 percent of site coordinators reported that their TASC project used one or more themes to link activities across different program components, a percentage that had remained stable since Year 2. Thirty-five percent of Year 4 projects said that the project's themes were coordinated with those used by the school.

A little over a third of site coordinators (36 percent) reported in Year 4 that they used curricula developed outside the project or school. This percent had increased somewhat since Year 2. Those site coordinators who reported using such curricula listed the following curricular programs as being used in their projects:

- ■ After-school Literature Project (Kidzlit)
- ■ Resolving Conflicts Creatively program
- ■ Putumayo "World Playground" Program
- ■ *Scholastic* magazine
- ■ Passport to Success
- ■ Bronx Zoo curriculum
- ■ Foundations, Inc. Literacy
- ■ Radio City Club Carnivale
- ■ Touchstone Discussion program
- ■ American Museum of Natural History's natural sciences curriculum
- ■ Junior Achievement
- ■ After-school Math Project (Kidzmath)

TASC and its partners provided training to project staff on many of these curricular packages.

Do Students Benefit from Participation in TASC Services?

Evaluators approached this question from several directions, using evidence from surveys, test scores, and school attendance records. **Taken together, these sources suggest certain types of real benefit for students.** The discussion of student benefits first considers students' own reports of their reactions to the after-school activities in which they participated, followed by principals' reports of benefits to students and the school. The discussion of academic growth associated with TASC participation is separated into discussions of gains at the PreK-8 levels and at 9-12, consistent with the differing programming and effectiveness measures targeted at younger and older participants. Similarly, the discussion of changes in school attendance is presented separately for grades PreK-8 and 9-12.

Student Reports of Responses to After-School Activities and Services

Evaluators measured student reactions to many types of stimuli provided by TASC activities and services. In particular, it asked students to assess the degree to which the TASC project had fostered positive social interactions, built a sense of community within their projects, given them opportunities to grow, exposed them to new experiences, engaged them in learning, and given them an overall satisfying experience. The evaluation used separate survey forms for students in grades 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12. Analyses of survey responses categorized the mean student response to a given item as high if students rated the items in the

scale, when combined across all the items included in the scale, at 75 percent of the possible maximum rating or higher (e.g., on a scale where the possible scores ranged from 4 to 16, a mean response of 14 or higher was classified as high).

Students Indicating High Mean Levels of Agreement with Scales, 2001-02, in Percents

Student Scale	Percent of Students with High Levels of Agreement
Positive Social Interactions	
Positive peer interactions (elementary grades)	58
Positive staff interactions (middle and high school grades)	48
Trust of staff (elementary grades)	59
Trust of staff (middle and high school grades)	44
One-on-one adult interactions (middle grades)	18
Adult support (middle grades)	24
Sense of Community	
Program connections (all grades)	53
Project as a community (elementary grades)	44
Project as a community (middle and high school grades)	30
Youth Opportunities to Grow	
Opportunities to learn life skills (middle grades)	56
Opportunities for leadership (middle grades)	3
Sense of autonomy in the project (elementary grades)	11
Exposure to New Experiences	
Opportunities available through the TASC project (all grades)	51
Opportunities for mastery of performance skills (middle grades)	49
Engagement in Learning	
Academic self-esteem (all grades)	62
Importance of school (middle grades)	84
Academic benefits of TASC participation (elementary grades)	55
Academic benefits of TASC participation (middle grades)	54
Academic benefits of TASC participation (high school grades)	64

Given the high threshold used in the analysis of these scores, it is noteworthy that students responded as positively as they did. **The significant**

levels of educational risk represented among TASC participants make their positive reactions about engagement in learning especially noteworthy. Altogether, these patterns suggest that students may derive educational benefits from TASC participation. When considered in light of the efforts made–through the selection of program content and through staff training and technical assistance–to engage students in appealing, cognitively stimulating activities, it is reasonable to ask next if students showed evidence of academic learning associated with TASC participation.

Principal Reports of Benefits of the After-School Project

The tenor of the preceding findings is reflected in principals' responses to questions about the benefits of having a TASC after-school project in their school. **Principals perceived the primary benefits of the after-school project in terms of both the nonacademic and academic dimensions of the opportunities offered to students and families,** as seen below.

Principals' Reports of Primary Benefits of the After-School Project, 2001-02, in Percents *(N=61)*

Primary Benefit	Percent
Students have opportunities to participate in activities not available during the regular school day	95
Parents express more positive feelings about the school because it provides a safe place for their children after school	79
Students receive additional opportunities to develop literacy skills	66
Teachers from the school have opportunities to work with children outside the classroom	54
Other	5
None	5

Over time, these reports of primary benefit increased on every dimension noted. The greatest increase was in principals' reports of benefits in additional opportunities to develop literacy skills.

In Year 4, as in previous years, principals attributed high levels of positive changes within the school to the after-school project.

**Principals' Reports of Effects of the TASC Project,
2001-02, in Percents** *(N=64)*

TASC Project Effects	Percent Reporting "Very Much"
Enhance students' attitudes toward school	56
Enhance the overall effectiveness of the school	45
Improve student attendance	42
Improve students' safety	41
Enhance students' motivation to learn	34
Increase parents' attendance at school events	31
Contribute to improved student skills in math	24
Contribute to improved student skills in reading	23
Reduce vandalism at the school	17
Increase parents' attendance at parent-teacher conferences	15

Principals' reports of benefits "very much" enhancing students' attitudes toward school and improving student attendance increased to a significant extent between Year 3 and Year 4. As in previous years, the vast majority of **principals (90 percent) said that the benefits of hosting the after-school project either "very much" or "somewhat" outweighed the costs.**

Academic Gains Associated with TASC Participation at PreK-8 Levels

To assess academic change associated with TASC participation, evaluators created longitudinal data files for every student participant and nonparticipant in the TASC evaluation sample who met minimal criteria regarding data availability. Evaluators then computed changes in performance on the city and state English Language Arts/reading (ELA) and math achievement tests for each TASC participant by subtracting the standardized scale score in the year prior to the student's first enrollment in a TASC after-school project from his or her standardized scale score after participation in the program.[2] That is, for an estimate of the changes in student performance after one year of exposure to TASC programming, evaluators computed the difference in the proportion of

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[2] Information on the standardization of scale scores is available in a technical paper. Standardization of scale scores is necessary to permit individual-level analyses across years and across grade levels. With standardization, differences in scale scores across grade levels represent changes in student performance that are independent of the differences in the particular scale applied to scores at each grade level.

possible scale-score points that a student earned in one grade level compared to the proportion of possible points earned at the next. Evaluators repeated the procedure to assess the change in student performance after participation in the TASC program for two years, computing the difference in the standardized scale score in the year prior to exposure to the TASC program and the standardized score after two years of exposure, two grade levels later.[3]

For nonparticipants, evaluators computed change in performance on the ELA and math achievement tests by subtracting the nonparticipant's standardized scale score in the year prior to enrollment in a school hosting a TASC project from his or her standardized score after a year of nonparticipation.

Evaluators took steps to make the comparison of participants and nonparticipants as fair as possible by first considering the differences in factors associated with students' test performance across participants and nonparticipants. Factors included in this analysis included family income, gender, race, and eligibility for specialized educational services, such as special education and classes for English Language Learners. Evaluators created a statistical model, described in a separate technical paper, to estimate the change in performance on the ELA and math achievement tests that would have been expected for each type of participant, *had they not participated in the program.* The comparison between this predicted change and each participant's actual change in performance then represents the study's estimate of the effect of the TASC program.

This approach to analyzing achievement change associated with participation in TASC-supported projects corrects for self-selection bias represented in the student characteristics included in the regression equation and for differences in performance during the year prior to first enrolling in a TASC project. Evaluators also considered how to take into account differences in unmeasured characteristics of students and their families that may be associated with different levels of student achievement. Examples of possible differences include the student's motivation to do well in school or the importance the family places on success in school. In developing the study's approach, evaluators assumed that the differences on the unmeasured characteristics associated with differing performance on achievement tests or frequency of school attendance were controlled for by including the prior-year test scores in the equation for predicting expected gains on test scores and also by including the prior-year school attendance rate in the estimate of gains in school attendance.

Aggregate test score gains. **On average, participants made greater gains in math than did similar nonparticipants. Students who participated in TASC the most consistently and for the longest period of time experienced**

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[3] Only participants and nonparticipants who had a normal grade progression (i.e., were not left back and did not skip grades) and for whom the evaluator had a test score in the year prior to exposure to TASC and in the target year (i.e., after one and/or two years of exposure to the TASC program) were included in this analysis.

the greatest gains. In particular, students participating actively in TASC projects for more than a year showed significantly greater gains in math than did their nonparticipating classmates, and students participating for two or more years showed even more substantial improvements in performance than nonparticipating students. In order to compare the magnitude of the change in performance of participants compared to similar nonparticipants, the evaluation computed the effect size, as the difference between the true change in participants' performance and their expected change, dividing the difference by the standard deviation of the nonparticipants' predicted change in performance. Evaluators considered an effect size of 0.10 or larger to be substantive.

Among all TASC participants, the average change in scores on the mathematics test was 1.4 standardized scale-score points more after two years of participation than would be predicted from students' characteristics. This indicates that students gained an amount equivalent to 1.4 percent more of the full range of possible standardized scale-score points in math after two years than did similar nonparticipants. The difference between this change in performance and that of nonparticipants was statistically significant with an effect size of 0.42, indicating that participation in TASC was associated with a substantial change in performance. Participants earned 0.2 percent more of the possible points than similar nonparticipants after one year of TASC participation, which was statistically significant but not substantively different from nonparticipants' change in performance.

Difference in Change in Mathematics Standardized Scale Scores for All Participants, Grades 3-8

Years of Participation	Difference from Expected Change in Performance	Expected Change in Performance	Effect Size	N
1 Year	0.2*	-2.0	0.06	*11,409*
2 Years	1.4 *	-3.9	**0.42**	*2,666*

* Indicates significance at p<.05 level.
Effect sizes greater than 0.10 are in bold type.

After one year of exposure to TASC, students who were active participants in TASC after-school projects (attending at least 60 percent of the possible days while enrolled and attending at least 60 days during the school year) in every year they participated gained more in math performance than expected based on their characteristics. Students who were active TASC participants also experienced gains in math scores that were significantly larger than expected after two years of exposure to TASC. The effect size characterizing this two-year difference was approximately 0.79, which indicates a substantive difference.

After one year of participation, active participants gained 0.5 standardized scale-score points more than would be predicted from students' characteristics.

This indicates that students gained an amount equivalent to 0.5 percent of the full range of possible scale-score points in math after one year than did similar nonparticipants over the same period. After two years of participation, active participants earned 2.6 standardized scale-score points than did similar nonparticipants.

Difference in Change in Mathematics Standardized Scale Scores for Active Participants, Grades 3-8

Years of Participation	Difference from Expected Change in Performance	Expected Change in Performance	Effect Size	N
1 Year	0.5*	-2.0	**0.13**	*5,543*
2 Years	2.6*	-3.8	**0.79**	*1,148*

* Indicates significance at p<.05 level.
Effect sizes greater than 0.10 are in bold type.

No corresponding achievement differences were evident in ELA/reading tests. The reason for the disparity in reading and math effects may lie in one or both of the following explanations:

- ■ The systematic nature of math learning, in which each skill builds on the preceding skill, may benefit from opportunities for students to complete their homework every day and to get help with it. By contrast, literacy-related learning builds on more complex skills and experiences, and hence may be less closely linked to homework completion.

- ■ Literacy-related learning may depend on the student's immersion in a literacy-rich environment from an early age, as further augmented through instruction by a trained reading specialist. As a result, literacy skills may not be susceptible to immediate improvement through the informal enrichment activities that, along with homework help, make up the content of most TASC after-school activities.

Gains for subgroups. In addition to examining aggregate achievement change, evaluators also considered whether all TASC participants experienced similar benefits from project participation. The evaluation addressed this question by repeating its analyses of test-score changes for varied categories of students. As in the overall analysis, the comparisons examine the changes in standardized test scores expected for participants if they had not been part of the TASC after-school program, compared to the changes in test scores actually observed for different participant groups. Because of the consistent evidence of overall benefit in mathematics, reporting on the subgroup analyses is confined to math. The analysis examined results for subsets of participants who met the active

participation threshold and who possessed known characteristics in each of the following areas: prior performance on the citywide assessments, free lunch eligibility, race/ethnicity, special education status, English Language Learner status, recent immigrant status, and gender. **For most of the analyses, greater math gains were found among students whose personal characteristics indicated greater educational risk.**

Participation in the TASC after-school program provided additional benefits to students who initially scored at or above grade level in math, and also benefited students who initially scored below grade level and participated actively in TASC for at least two years.

- **Students who scored at or above grade level in math (proficiency levels 3 and 4)** in the year prior to enrolling in a TASC project had significantly larger gains than predicted after both one and two years of active participation.

- **Students who scored below grade level in math (proficiency levels 1 and 2)** in the year prior to enrolling in a TASC project had mixed results in math. They gained significantly less than predicted after one year of active participation but significantly more than expected after two years of participation.

Students from families who were at or below the poverty level also showed larger than expected gains on the math exams after participation in a TASC project.

- **Participants who were eligible for free lunch** in the year prior to TASC participation gained more points than expected in math after both one and two years of participation.

- **Participants who were not eligible for free lunch** in the year prior to TASC participation gained fewer points than expected after participating in TASC for one year but more points than expected after two years.

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Number of Standardized Scale-Score Points
Gained in Math Above Similar Nonparticipants
by Active Participants, Grades 3-8, by Proficiency Level
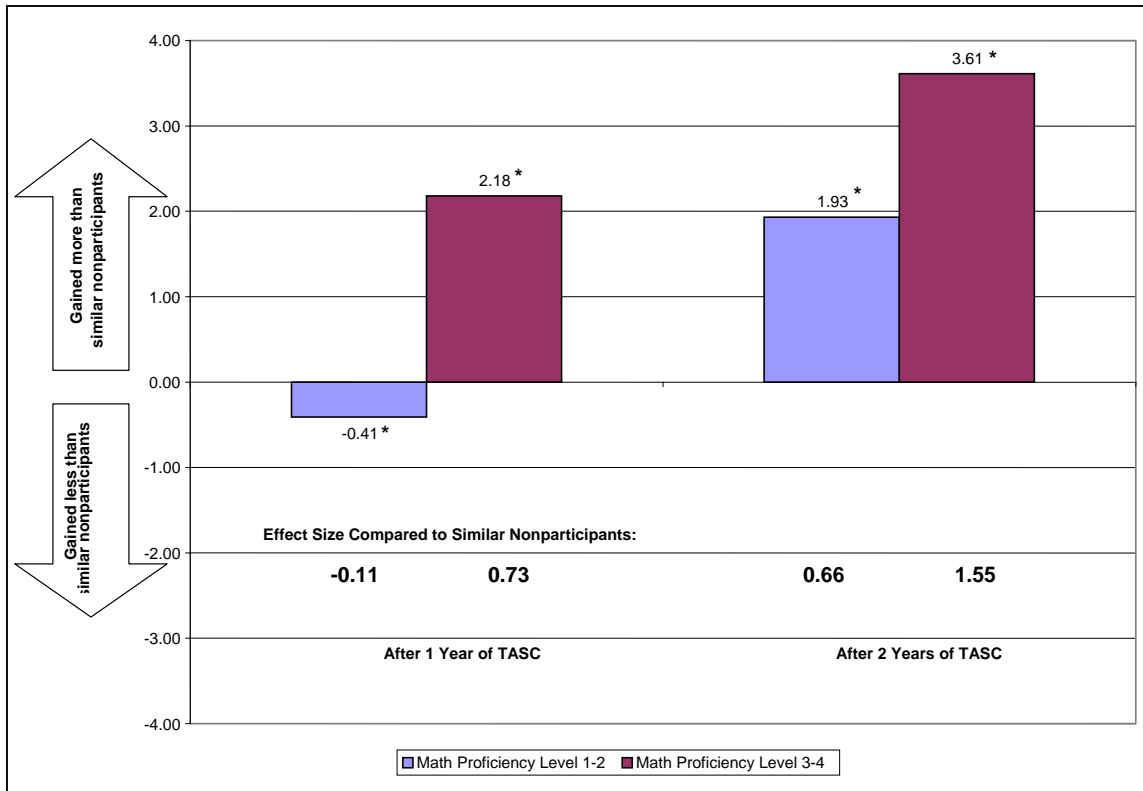
*   Indicates a test score gain that is significantly different (p<.05) from similar nonparticipants
    Effect sizes greater than 0.10 are in bold type.

Ns for Each Analysis Group	After 1 Year	After 2 Years
Proficiency Levels 1 and 2	3,535	703
Proficiency Levels 3 and 4	2,008	445

Participants' outcomes varied by racial group, with black and Hispanic participants showing greater gains over similar nonparticipants than did white and Asian participants. (Findings for different groups cover varying time periods, depending on sample sizes.)

■   **Black students** who regularly participated in TASC gained more points than expected in math after one and two years of exposure to TASC (with effect sizes of 0.10 and 0.58, respectively).

Number of Standardized Scale-Score Points
Gained in Math Above Similar Nonparticipants
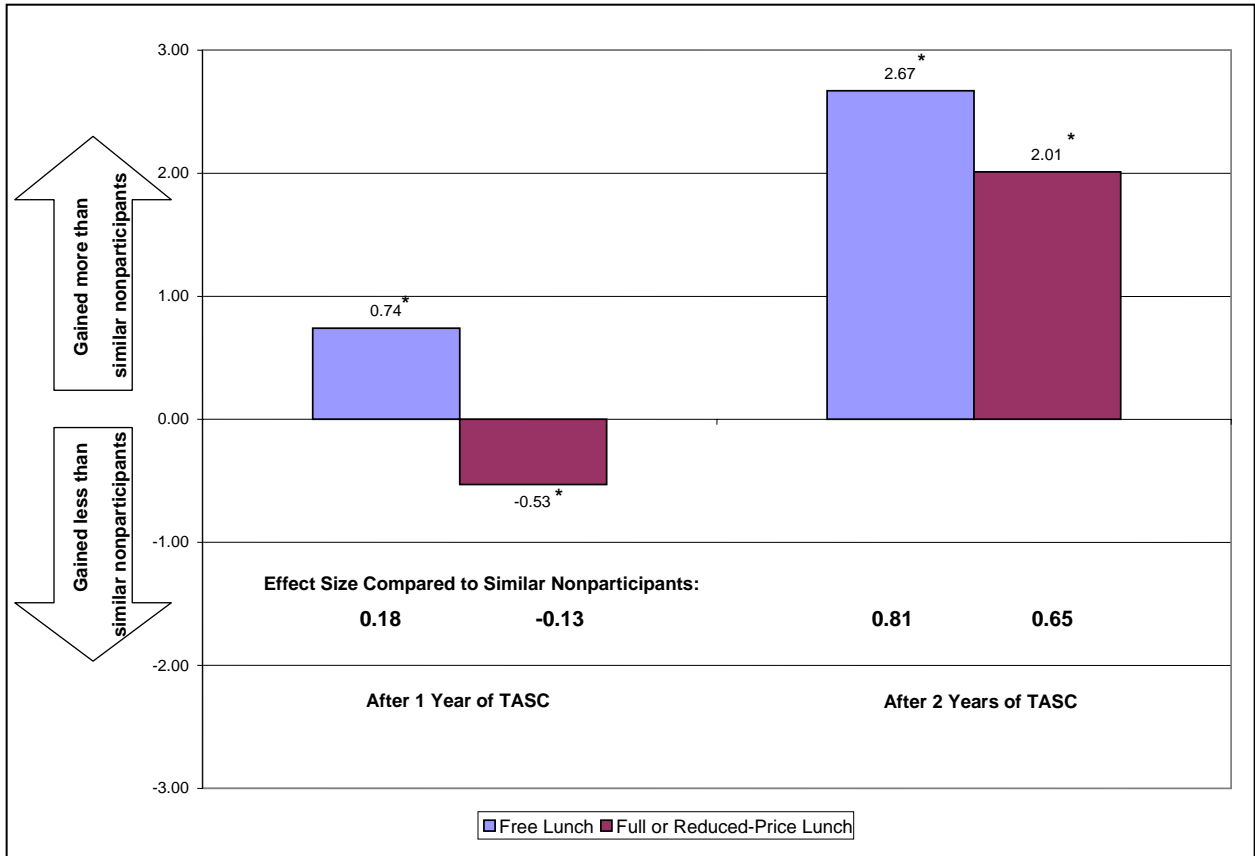## by Active Participants, Grades 3-8, by Free-Lunch Eligibility

* Indicates a test score gain that is significantly different (p<.05) from similar nonparticipants.
Effect sizes greater than 0.10 are in bold type.

Ns for Each Analysis Group	After 1 Year	After 2 Years
Free Lunch Eligible	4,592	979
Not Free Lunch Eligible	951	169

- ■ **Hispanic students** who participated regularly gained more points than expected after one and two years of exposure to TASC (with effect sizes of 0.19 and 0.95, respectively).

- ■ **White and Asian students** gained only the expected number of points in math after one year of exposure.

Participants who qualified for certain special-needs categories in the year prior to attending a TASC project and who attended TASC regularly performed better than similar nonparticipants, although participants in a third category did

not. (Changes are only reported for a single year of participation because of small sample sizes in the second-year data for these subgroups.)

- **Special education students** who attended TASC projects gained more points than expected on math tests after a year of participating in TASC (effect size of 0.24).

- **English Language Learners** gained more points than expected in math after a year of TASC participation (effect size of 0.11).

- **Recent immigrants**, in contrast, gained fewer points than expected in math after a year of TASC participation (negative effect size of 0.20).

Male and female participants' outcomes were similar to those of all participants who attended the program regularly. Both boys and girls who attended TASC regularly gained more points than expected on the math tests after one and two years of exposure to TASC.

Academic Gains Associated with TASC Participation at Grades 9-12

The analysis of academic gains at the high school level is more problematic than at the earlier grades because of the following conditions:

- The sizable pre-existing differences between TASC participants and nonparticipants in the high school grades, with TASC participants displaying fewer indicators of educational risk before enrolling in TASC projects than nonparticipants

- The absence of comparable annual measures, which would make it possible to assess change from one year to the next

  This difference, among other things, precluded the use of the regression-based controls used to equalize the pre-existing characteristics of TASC participants and nonparticipants in the earlier grades.

- The presence of only six high school projects in the evaluation sample, each with very different after-school enrollment policies and TASC activities

  Project-level variations, including the differing availability of student data across sites and differing after-school enrollment policies, persuaded evaluators to examine student academic growth

on a project-by-project basis, rather than as summed and averaged across all projects.

These issues raise questions about the interpretation of the overall finding regarding comparative academic gains for high school participants. This finding is that **TASC participants in projects serving the high school grades passed more Regents exams and earned more credits toward high school graduation than did nonparticipants in the same schools.** The finding and the caveats that surround it are discussed in this section.

Performance on Regents exams. Evaluators examined participants' and nonparticipants' performance on Regents exams using several types of comparisons, including percent of students passing each major exam and the grade level at which students passed the exam. The culminating analysis examined the percent of students passing five or more exams by grade level. This analysis demonstrates that, in the four sites for which fairly complete Regents data are available, participants passed more exams earlier in their high school career than did nonparticipants, with active participants (i.e., those high school students participating in the TASC project 20 percent or more of the available days and at least 20 days during the school year) especially likely to pass five exams by the end of twelfth grade in two of the four schools.

Credits earned toward high school graduation. In the sites for which sufficient data on high school credits earned were available, the average number of credits earned among participants was significantly higher than the average for nonparticipants. Again, this pattern is not surprising given the higher incidence of educational risk factors among nonparticipants.

To hold one of the major risk factors constant across participants and nonparticipants, evaluators analyzed credits earned by the end of ninth grade in light of students' prior achievement levels. In this analysis, evaluators categorized participants and nonparticipants by their eighth-grade proficiency levels. In the two projects for which this analysis was possible, **participants across seven out of ten cluster comparisons had earned more credits at the end of ninth grade than had nonparticipants with the same eighth-grade proficiency level in the subject.** Because of the controls for prior performance included in this analysis, the pattern revealed here lends weight to a conclusion of benefits accruing to high school TASC participants.

Attendance Changes Associated with TASC Participation

Two characteristics of school attendance rates create challenges in analyzing the relationship between program participation and changes in school attendance. First, the relatively high rate of attendance citywide establishes a ceiling on attendance-rate improvement, since for most students there is little

opportunity for substantial increases in school attendance to occur. Second, the varying pattern in attendance rates across grade levels, combined with the differences in the distribution of participants and nonparticipants across grade levels, requires adjustments to the raw attendance data through weighting. The weights constructed in the evaluation control for the differences in participants' and nonparticipants' distribution across grade levels. All of the findings presented for school attendance were computed using weighted data.

Change in attendance patterns at grades PreK-8. On average, participants attended school more frequently than nonparticipants in the year prior to enrolling in TASC. The average weighted attendance rate for nonparticipants in grades PreK-8 was 91.73, while for participants it was 92.88 percent. Students who were active participants in their first year in TASC services attended school 93.47 percent of the time in the year before they enrolled in the project.

To estimate the relationship between participation in a TASC project and students' school attendance, analyses focused on determining whether the gap between participants and nonparticipants increased over time. Evaluators found that the gap between the attendance rates of TASC participants and corresponding nonparticipants grew slightly after one year of participation in a TASC after-school project. **After one year of TASC exposure, the average attendance rate among all participants increased by 0.53 percentage points, compared with an increase of 0.11 percentage points for nonparticipants, for a net difference of three-quarters of a day over a 181-day school year.** The corresponding increase among active participants was 0.75 percentage points, yielding a net difference in gains in school attendance of 1.2 days over the school year.

School Attendance Rates and Change in Rates
After One Year of Exposure to TASC, PreK-8, Weighted

Student Group	School Attendance Rate		Average Individual Percentage Point Change	Statistical Comparison to Nonparticipants	
	Average In Base Year	Average After 1 Year		Significant at p<.05	Effect Size
Active Participants *N=10,895*	93.47%	94.22%	0.75	Yes	0.09
All Participants *N=32,941*	92.88%	93.41%	0.53	Yes	0.05
Nonparticipants *N=44,827*	91.73%	91.84%	0.11	--	--

Because attendance rates vary by grade and because participants and nonparticipants are distributed differently across grades, the evaluation weighted the school-attendance data to equalize the proportion of participants and nonparticipants enrolled at each grade.

The gap in school attendance between the students who participated in a TASC after-school project for two years and corresponding nonparticipants also grew significantly. **After two years of participation, the school attendance rates for all TASC participants increased by 0.68 percentage points, compared with 0.38 percentage points for nonparticipants, the equivalent of attending an additional half-day of school per year, compared to nonparticipants.** Over the same period, the school attendance rates of active participants increased by 0.80 percentage points, for an additional three-quarters of a school day per year, compared to nonparticipants.

School Attendance Rates and Change in Rates
After Two Years of Exposure to TASC, PreK-8, Weighted

Student Group	School Attendance		Average Individual Percentage Point Change		Statistical Comparison to Nonparticipants	
	Average in Base Year	Average After 2 Years	Base to First Year	Base to Second Year	2 Year Change Significant at p<.05	Effect Size
Active Participants N=5,965	94.08%	94.83%	.92	.80	Yes	0.06
All Participants N=11,259	93.59%	94.27%	.95	.68	Yes	0.04
Nonparticipants N=20,605	92.46%	92.85%	.68	.38	--	--

Because attendance rates vary by grade and because participants and nonparticipants are distributed differently across grades, the evaluation weighted the school-attendance data to equalize the proportion of participants and nonparticipants enrolled at each grade.

     The attendance advantage associated with active TASC participation through the middle grades is particularly noteworthy. Although the attendance rates of nonparticipants in the host schools consistently declined between the fifth and eighth grades, this pattern did not characterize the school attendance of either TASC participants generally or active TASC participants. After one year of TASC participation, school attendance rates of all participants and of active participants declined between fifth and sixth and between sixth and seventh grades, but increased between seventh and eighth grades. **For each of grades 5-8, the difference between participants and nonparticipants was positive and significant, and the effect sizes were greater than 0.10.** For example, the difference in the attendance gain of participants and nonparticipants measured from seventh to eighth grade was 1.5 percentage points or the equivalent of a net gain of 2.7 school days in a 181-day school year.
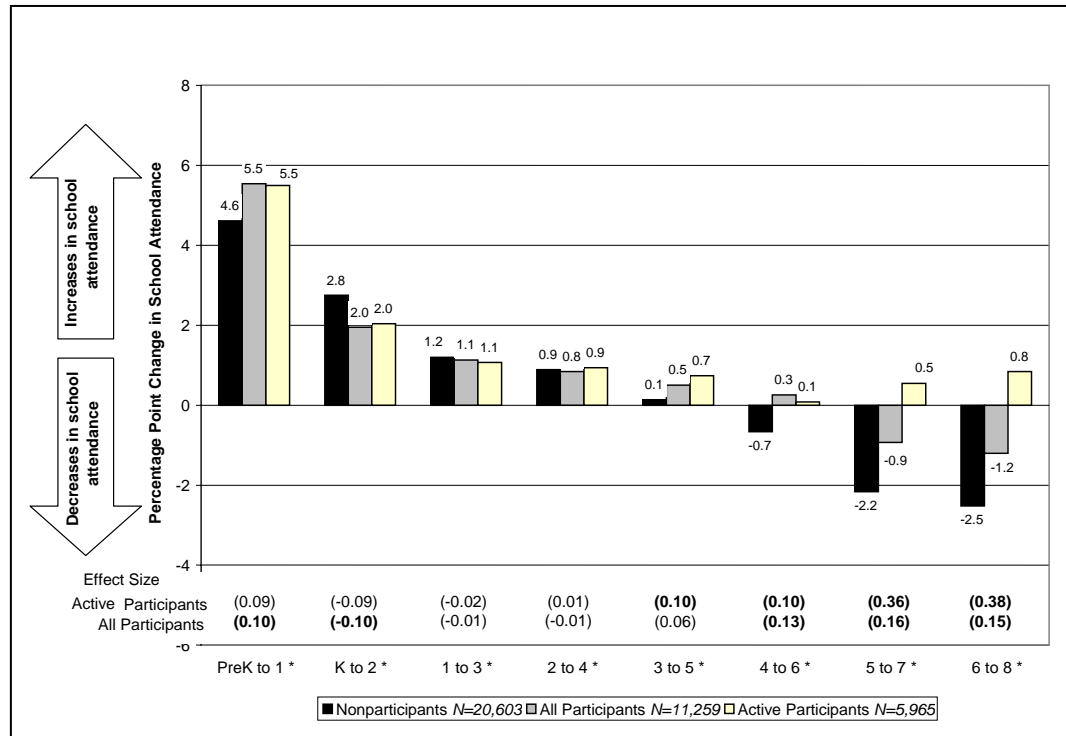
Change in School Attendance from the Year Before Enrollment to the First Year After Exposure to TASC, by Grade, PreK-8, Weighted
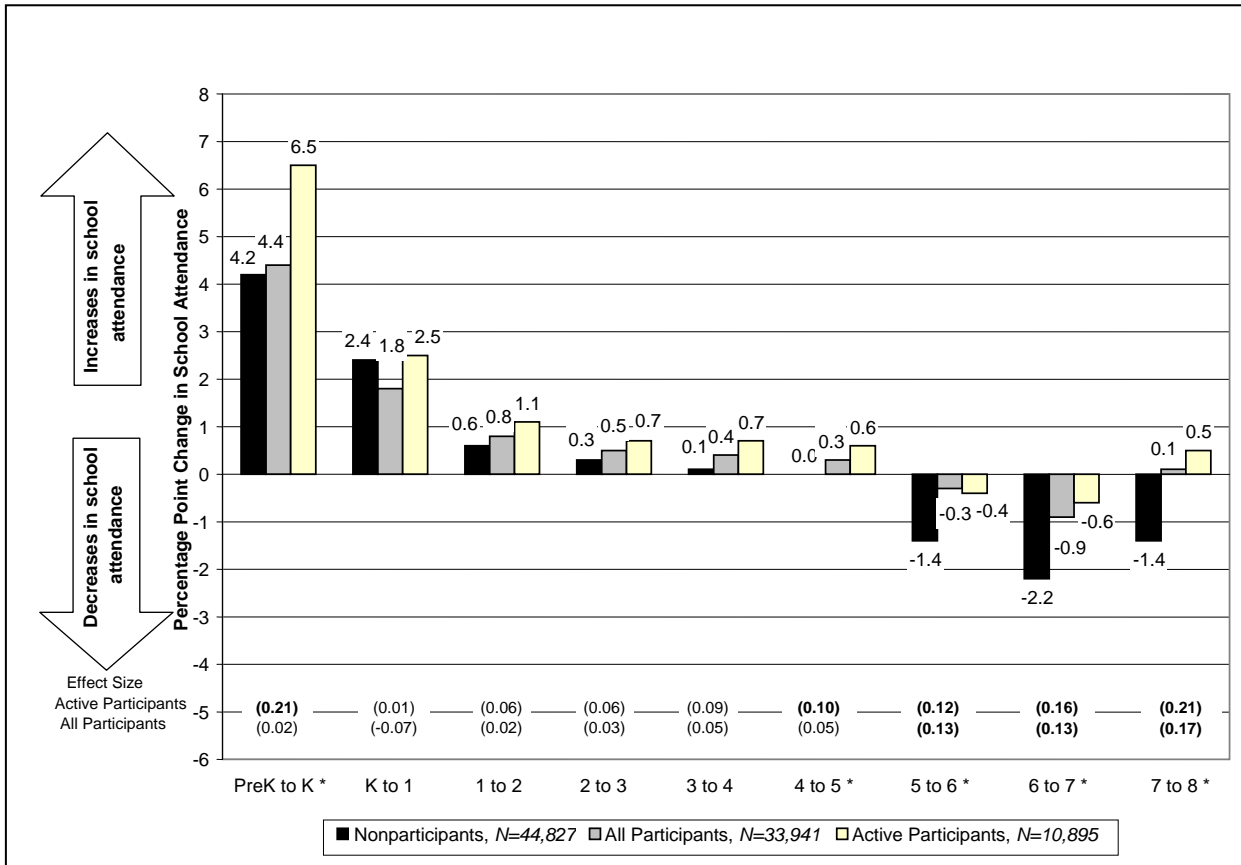
* Indicates an attendance rate change that is significantly different (*p*>.05) from similar nonparticipants.
Effect sizes are noted in parentheses. Effect sizes greater than 0.10 are in bold type.

After two years of participation in TASC, corresponding nonparticipants experienced decreases in school attendance between fourth and sixth grades, fifth and seventh grades, and sixth and eighth grades. Among TASC participants, school attendance rates increased between grades 4 and 6, and decreased less than among nonparticipants between grades 5 and 7 and grades 6 and 8.

Change in School Attendance from the Year Before Enrollment to the Second Year After Exposure to TASC, by Grade, PreK-8, Weighted

Effect Size	PreK to 1 *	K to 2 *	1 to 3 *	2 to 4 *	3 to 5 *	4 to 6 *	5 to 7 *	6 to 8 *
Active Participants	(0.09)	(-0.09)	(-0.02)	(0.01)	**(0.10)**	**(0.10)**	**(0.36)**	**(0.38)**
All Participants	**(0.10)**	**(-0.10)**	(-0.01)	(-0.01)	(0.06)	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.15)

Nonparticipants *N=20,603* All Participants *N=11,259* Active Participants *N=5,965*

* Indicates an attendance rate change that is significantly different (*p*>.05) from similar nonparticipants. Effect sizes are noted in parentheses. Effect sizes greater than 0.10 are in bold type.

The evaluation also examined students' change in attendance rates in light of their school attendance rates prior to TASC enrollment, on the theory that, all things being equal, students were most likely to continue to attend school at the same rate that they had attended before. To facilitate this analysis, evaluators categorized students' attendance rates in the year prior to their TASC participation into quartiles. This method permitted evaluators to compare the attendance rate changes of participants with those nonparticipants who displayed the same attendance history. **This analysis, which controlled for students' prior level of school attendance, indicated attendance improvement for TASC participants at every quartile.**

Change in attendance patterns at grades 9-12. The evaluation also examined students' high school attendance rates. Although TASC participants attended at consistently higher rates than nonparticipants, this pattern was not surprising, given TASC high-school participants' lower incidence of risk factors, compared to nonparticipants. Because of this difference, evaluators analyzed change in high-school participants' attendance in light of their attendance rates in the year prior to their TASC participation, using the method described above. **Although analyses that organized students by prior attendance quartile**

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found generally decreasing high-school attendance at each quartile, the attendance-rate declines were smaller or even reversed among participants but not nonparticipants.

Summary of Patterns in Educational Performance Associated with TASC Participation

Viewed from the most cautious perspective, it is safe to say that involvement in TASC-supported after-school activities and experiences supported participants in improving their educational performance relative to nonparticipants. This finding is evident across grade levels and in both test score performance and school attendance. Whether these differences were driven by after-school participation itself or by measured or unmeasured differences between participants and nonparticipants is a harder question to answer. However, considering information on all the program and participant factors available to the evaluation and the steps taken to account for pre-existing differences across participants and nonparticipants, the evaluation team concludes that, **at the PreK-8 level, the combination of (1) the similarity of participants and nonparticipants on all measured demographic and prior-performance variables, especially following statistical adjustment, and (2) the sheer size of the mathematics differences suggests the likelihood of real after-school benefits for participants, especially for those who participated the most regularly and for more than a year. Similarly, the attendance gains, especially for participants in the middle grades, are also noteworthy. At the 9-12 level, the team concludes that after-school involvement supported participants in making greater gains than they otherwise would have made especially in school attendance.** Although the suggestion of academic gains at the high school level is intriguing, problems in measurement, sample size, and participant/nonparticipant comparability preclude conclusions in this area.

Even taking the worst case regarding selection bias, however, students who enrolled in and attended TASC-supported after-school projects enjoyed the experience enough to attend on a regular, sustained basis. They also used their after-school experience as an opportunity to build skills and personal assets that engaged them more fully with their schooling and improved their educational performance.

What Practices Are Associated with the Greatest Academic Benefits for Students?

An important question for the evaluation concerned the extent to which specific project-level characteristics may have exerted particular influence on participant outcomes. Answers to this question are important because they can help TASC determine whether to modify the program model, to emphasize or deemphasize particular program components, or to monitor certain elements of project implementation with special care. They can also help sponsoring organizations and project site coordinators to make decisions about project characteristics that may shape after-school effectiveness.

Evaluators approached this question using the program theory of change as their central tool. Using an approach that the evaluators termed "backward-mapping," they looked for critical project-level characteristics by tracing backward through the change theory to identify program components that figured prominently in the hypothesized causal chain. With certain characteristics identified as being possibly influential in shaping participant outcomes, evaluators examined a series of relationships between specific project activities, program practices and relationships, staff qualifications, professional development opportunities, and other factors to determine the ways in which project design and implementation affected participant outcomes. On the outcome side of this analysis, evaluators used test data from nonparticipants to build a model that predicted change in test scores based on student characteristics. They then ran each participant through the model to compute both their actual and predicted test-score changes. Next, they compared predicted test score changes to actual changes. Finally, they conducted tests to determine whether the average of the differences between participants' actual and predicted test-score changes were significantly different and to compute the effect size. Because of the absence of test-score comparisons at PreK-2 levels, the limitations of the educational performance measures at the high school grades, and the small Ns for TASC participants in grades 9-12, the analyses were confined to grades 3-8.

Another limitation of this analysis is the narrow band of variation across projects on many important variables of interest. This project-level similarity is due in part to the specificity of the TASC after-school model, which requires, for example, a full-time site coordinator and an expectation of regular after-school attendance in projects serving grades PreK-8. The similarity is also driven in part by the generally uniform pressures on host schools, all of which experience significant external and internal pressure to improve student academic performance. A third factor promoting project similarity is TASC training and technical assistance, which has encouraged certain types of program activities that projects and program monitors have found to be effective in stimulating student, parent, and host school interest and support; examples of such activities include culminating performances, group activities, and the use of regular-day teachers as educational advisors to less experienced after-school staff. However, despite

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similarities across project activities and staff configurations, evaluators found certain project characteristics that both varied across projects and also were associated with positive participant outcomes in both subject areas.

An especially important set of associations, based on participant outcomes compared across projects, focused on the activities that projects selected as their focus, as assessed using the evaluation's measure of activity intensity. Findings regarding project activities are:

■ Participants made more positive one-year gains in both ELA and math test scores in **TASC projects that offered a high intensity of academic and cognitive development activities** (effect size of 0.26 in math and 0.15 in ELA). Information collected through surveys and site visits makes it clear that projects achieved high intensity in academic and cognitive activities without necessarily making after-school an extension of the school day. Instead, projects used extended, multidisciplinary activities, often involving groups of students working together and also often culminating in performances or major products or publications.

■ Participants also made more positive one-year gains in **TASC projects that offered high intensity in activities focusing on fitness, sports, and recreation** (effect size of 0.14 in math and 0.20 in ELA). 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.

Certain staffing and supervisory practices were also associated with participant learning. These practices included the following:

■ In **TASC projects in which the site coordinator had a teaching certificate**, participants performed better than participants in other sites (effect size of 0.13 in math and 0.26 in ELA). This difference may represent two types of influences exerted by site coordinators with teaching qualifications: (1) their relatively greater ability to promote high-quality after-school teaching through coaching and demonstration and (2) the likelihood that they established positive professional relationships with the host school and hence that after-school learning activities were well coordinated with participants' learning experiences during the regular school day.

■ In **TASC projects where the site coordinator required project staff to submit lesson or activity plans,** participants made greater gains on tests than in programs where the site coordinator did not require lesson plans (effect size of 0.14 in math and 0.17 in ELA). Evaluators speculate that the preparation and review of written

plans occurred mainly in projects in which student learning was a high priority.

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■   In **sites where at least 25 percent of project staff had a four-year college degree,** participants had more positive changes in test scores than in TASC sites with a lower proportion of school staff members with such degrees (effect size of 0.14 in math and 0.13 in reading). Staff with college degrees may be better able to see and to exploit the varied learning opportunities embedded within themes and topics adopted by after-school projects.

Positive relationships with one-year student gains in reading and math were also found in three additional types of staff characteristics. These included the employment of staff who: worked in the host school in some capacity (with associations found when more than 25 percent of staff reported this characteristic), spoke a language in addition to English (when more than 50 percent of staff reported this characteristic), and were under the age of 35 (when more than 75 percent of staff reported this characteristic). These associations underscore the importance of staff capacities and staff interactions with participants in shaping student learning outcomes.

The preceding findings must be understood in light of the qualifications noted at the beginning of this section: **Because all TASC projects shared certain key characteristics, the backward-mapping analysis could not assess the impact of those program features on student outcomes.** Qualitative evidence suggests that certain features were especially important, including:

■   The partnership between nonprofit sponsoring organizations and host schools

■   The location of after-school services within participants' own schools

■   The employment of a full-time project site coordinator

■   The expectation that participants would attend the after-school project almost every day

Future evaluation of the TASC program model should be designed to permit assessment of the student impact of these project features.

What Do These Evaluation Findings Imply for TASC?

Taken altogether, the evaluation findings reported here indicate that **TASC is indeed implementing its enriched model of after-school services and that these services are meeting with success** in at least three crucial areas. First, the nonprofit sponsoring organizations and host schools have proved fully capable of administering the TASC model essentially as intended. Second, the projects are meeting a market test of popular appeal, as evidenced by their proven capacity to attract and retain their targeted customers. Third, the projects are supporting improvements in educational performance by participants, especially those who attend a TASC project on a regular basis and for more than a year. Looking forward, TASC's challenge will be to consolidate and extend these successes in a tight fiscal environment.

Project sponsors and host schools are administering the TASC model as intended. Although sponsors and project staff adapt their TASC projects to meet the needs of their students and their host schools, projects are being administered in conformity with the intended program model. In particular, projects offer varied academic and nonacademic services to students, in order to engage them in positive learning experiences that differ from the regular school day but complement it. Even in an environment of tight budgets and the need to secure funds from sources in addition to TASC, projects are staffed with people who are well qualified for their duties and who take positive advantage of the professional development opportunities offered to them.

Projects are attracting and retaining participants. Despite the attractions of urban life outside project walls, TASC projects are sufficiently appealing and effective in reaching out to students, parents, and educators such that they attract and retain large numbers of students. In general, these after-school participants display many characteristics of educational risk and hence appear likely to benefit from the types of enriched learning opportunities that TASC projects provide.

Projects are supporting improvements in participants' educational performance. With the conditions and caveats described in this report, TASC projects are supporting meaningful improvements in participants' educational performance, especially in math achievement and school attendance. Despite projects' extensive opportunities for students to use reading skills, existing evidence does not point to student growth in literacy that can be linked to after-school participation.

TASC's challenge is to consolidate and extend these successes in a tight fiscal environment. TASC's overall strategy for sustainability has been to form partnerships with institutions and funding sources that value TASC's focus on high quality and service expansion. While that strategy has resulted in fairly

rapid growth in the number of projects and the number of students served, TASC may find itself increasingly challenged to retain the more costly elements of its enriched model (e.g., full-time site coordinator, varied activities that respond to student interests, extensive opportunities for staff training) as it also reduces the proportion of project costs that it covers. Findings of this evaluation suggest that, in making the inevitable tradeoffs that this dilemma will pose, TASC will do well to lean toward retaining its special focus on quality even if this strategy requires cutbacks in numbers. TASC's quality focus makes it a national leader as a provider of high-quality after-school services, and this role may be the only reliable route to long-term program success.

A step in consolidating its successes will be for TASC to examine why its projects are not experiencing positive growth in students' literacy skills and then to adopt new policies and supports that can promote such growth. A possible initial inquiry to support this examination will be to identify those projects where participants' literacy growth outpaces that of nonparticipants. Analysts can then look in-depth at these projects to learn more about how these projects differ from other projects–whom they hire and how staff are supervised and trained, what activities staff undertake with students, how students are matched up with activities, and how after-school learning experiences relate to the literacy instruction provided in the regular school day. Findings of this work can then be shared with other TASC projects to support their improvement efforts in the crucial area of literacy learning.

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More information on the following topics is available in supplementary papers that report additional information and findings from the evaluation:

1.   Overview of the TASC program, including the program model and special initiatives launched to increase program quality, reach, and sustainability

2.   Characteristics of schools and students participating in the TASC program

3.   TASC activities and students' reaction to them

4.   Analysis methods and findings regarding change in participants' educational performance and school attendance