RESEARCH for **ACTION**

Engaging Students at the End of the Day: An evaluation of EW/NSCC CIS & 21st Century after-school programs

Prepared for
EducationWorks

Prepared by
Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D.

August 2004

Engaging Students at the End of the Day: An evaluation of EW/NSCC CIS & 21st Century after-school programs

Prepared for
EducationWorks

Prepared by
Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

This summary highlights findings from evaluation research conducted for EducationWorks (EW) about their after-school programs funded by Children's Investment Strategy and 21st Century in the School District of Philadelphia. EW operates the National School and Community Corps (NSCC), an AmeriCorps program. The research data included 48 surveys of after-school program staff (EW/NSCC after-school program team leaders, corpsmembers and staff) from 12 after-school program sites; 34 interviews (of team leaders, corpsmembers, principals, teachers and parents) at five after-school sites; observations of after-school programs at five sites; and four interviews with key informants (staff from EW/NSCC, Children's Investment Strategy and the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania).

Overall, **both survey and interview data revealed a very positive picture of EW/NSCC after-school programs**. Across roles (parent, teacher, principal, team leader, corpsmember) and schools, interviewees affirmed the need for these programs and gave positive evaluations of how they worked.

At every school, parents, and staff members said that the **individual corpsmembers and the teamwork they exemplify were strengths of the program**.

Interviewees at every school mentioned **improved student behavior as an outcome of program participation**. At three schools, one or more interviewees noted that the desire to participate in the after-school program acted as an incentive and actually helped to improve behavior and that some children behaved differently (better) in the after-school program than in school. Seventy-five percent of those surveyed said that they had seen the behavior of those children participating in their after-school program improve either "a great deal" or "moderately" throughout the year.

Key Issues

<u>Staffing</u>:
After-school program staff members are perceived as a program strength. Corpsmembers pointed to the **need for full staffing starting from the beginning of the school year**. Past research about EW/NSCC programs has shown that it can be difficult to fully staff teams at the start of the school year and this often happens for reasons outside of EW/NSCC control.

<u>Space</u>:
After-school programs sometimes function without adequate space. Space is linked to staffing issues in that both enough staff and enough rooms are needed to divide children into smaller groups.

<u>Behavior, Discipline and Climate</u>:
Corpsmembers' ability to relate to children and to contribute to a positive climate, including constructive discipline, is seen as a strength of EW/NSCC at many schools. At the same time, corpsmembers identified behavior and discipline as an ongoing challenge. While the data indicate that EW/NSCC has an effective support structure and training program, this research points to **behavior and conflict resolution as key areas for ongoing and continued training**.

<u>Meeting Children's Academic and Developmental Needs</u>:
EW/NSCC supports four academic programs for its after-school programs. Three of the four programs (the 100 Book Challenge, Crafty Readers and Big Books) aim to support reading skills development. (The full report provides more comprehensive information about the implementation of these three programs and the fourth, Make and Take Math.) **Both interviewees and survey respondents named improvement in reading skills as a strong program impact.**

In addition to the four academic programs above, after-school programs also provide additional academic and enrichment programs. Philadelphia's Core Standards for after-school programs promote filling a range of children's needs, including academic, physical, social, and cultural. **Interviews indicated that EW/NSCC after-school programs offer some very effective enrichment programming for children.** These programs can integrate academic and non-academic learning, build social skills, strengthen student confidence, and generate high student engagement.

One concern expressed by many corpsmembers involved finding a good balance between academics, enrichment, and fun, both to engage students and to meet their developmental needs. Some team leaders wanted more freedom to judge whether a particular academic program was useful for their students. Others hoped to develop more enrichment programming that could draw upon both staff talents and students' needs at their sites.

Communication:
Communication between school and EW/NSCC staff appears strong at many sites but there were requests for improvement. The biggest issue is the degree of communication and coordination between the school and the after-school program. Some school and EW/NSCC staff request more coordination, particularly in relation to academics and supporting students' academic growth. **Interviews indicated that there are significant knowledge gaps among school staff and parents about the academic portion of the after-school programs.**

School-Program Relationship:
In general EW/NSCC after-school teams, school staff and parents **all seemed to view the relationship between the school and the after-school program quite positively.** There were almost no overt complaints about relationships between schools and the after-school programs in either interviews or surveys.

I. Introduction

Methodology and Research Questions

This report focuses on after-school programs run by EducationWorks (EW), which operates the National School and Community Corps (NSCC), an AmeriCorps program. These EW/NSCC after-school programs in the School District of Philadelphia are funded by either the Children's Investment Strategy (CIS) or 21st Century. The following research questions guided the study, which was conducted in spring 2004:

- How are the after-school programs being implemented?

- What are the perspectives of various program stakeholders (e.g., on successes, challenges, improvements needed)?

- What evidence is there that the academic portion of the program is being implemented as intended?

- How do corpsmembers assess the training, materials and support they receive?

- What is the relationship between the program and the school where it is housed?

- What kind of collaboration between EW/NSCC and schools exists and/or is needed?

The research generated the following data:

- Surveys of 48 EW/NSCC corpsmembers (CM), team leaders (TL) and staff from 12 after-school program sites. [1]

- Thirty-four interviews at five after-school sites. At each site, separate interviews were conducted with:

  o the team leader (5 total)

  o corpsmembers (13 total)

  o principals, teachers, and other school staff, e.g., dean of students, counselor, literacy specialist (8 total)

  o parents (8 total)

- Five observations of after-school programs at five sites.

- Four interviews with key informants knowledgeable about overall program goals and implementation (i.e., EW/NSCC, United Way, and CIS Staff).

Surveys were designed based upon preliminary interviews and fieldwork in order to look broadly across sites and to identify findings that stood out across school settings. Survey data represent the views of after-school program staff (team leaders, corpsmembers, and EW/NSCC staff). Interview data enabled us to delve more deeply into issues that influence the quality and efficacy of the after-school programs by creating a more contextualized understanding of program implementation, challenges, and successes. Interview data also gave us access to the perspectives of additional stakeholders (parents, administrators and teachers). Lastly, on-site observations provided a richer understanding of what the after-school programs looked like in action and of corpsmembers' relationships with children. The observations and interviews indicate both the diversity and commonalities of the after-school programs across sites.

Program Overview

EW/NSCC after-school programs provide services both to children who do not attend the District's academic Extended Day program and to Extended Day children at times Extended Day is not in session. [2] With the exception of one middle school, all of the 12 sites are either in elementary or K-7/8 schools. Although all of the sites provide similar program services, the 21st Century programs have additional staff which provide support to Extended Day, to the EW/NSCC after-school programs, and to parents. These programs also have a more extensive parent-involvement component, including monthly Family Nights. The United Way provides professional development and site visits to CIS programs.

---

[1] Surveys were administered to 48 people. In some cases, one to three individuals skipped a question so the N for the charts and other data depicted here ranges between 46 - 48. All survey respondents work in after-school programs but have different titles. This group as a whole will be referred to in the text as respondents or after-school staff.

[2] This includes after 4:30 p.m., on Fridays, after mid-March, and during school vacations.

These EW/NSCC after-school programs aim to achieve multiple goals. CIS mandates program compliance with the Philadelphia Core Standards. These standards highlight four areas: academic assistance, service learning,[3] arts and cultural enrichment, and physical activity. Programs also emphasize the importance of social skill building and strengthening students' life skills, e.g., conflict resolution.

Teams of EW/NSCC corpsmembers work full-time in schools with students, teachers and administrators during the school day. They are familiar with the school, the children and the community. EW/NSCC staff provide training and support to corpsmembers year-round. EW/NSCC had several years experience running after-school programs and summer programs in Philadelphia schools prior to its affiliation with CIS and 21st Century.

Highlights

Both survey and interview data painted a very positive picture of EW/NSCC after-school programs. Across roles (parent, teacher, principal, CM, TL) and schools, interviewees affirmed the need for these programs and gave positive evaluations of how they worked. One potential reason for this success is that, even when introducing new program components or starting after-school programs at new sites, EW/NSCC could build on its extensive experience running after-school programs, both generally and at some of the current sites. Data highlights include:

- All of those interviewed (parents, school staff, principals, corpsmembers, and team leaders) want EW/NSCC to return to their school in fall 2004.

- Of after-school staff surveyed, 89% want the EW/NSCC after-school program to return to the school where they are placed.[4]

- All parents interviewed spoke very highly of the program.

- In interviews, adults across roles indicated that children like the program. At four of the five schools where RFA collected qualitative data, parents, school staff and/or CMs reported that children often don't want to leave at the end of the day or that parents use attendance at the after-school program as an incentive to encourage good behavior.

- Survey respondents also reported through open-ended responses that parents and students liked the after-school program at their school. Respondents were asked what they had heard from students and parents about the after-school program and all of the 45 written responses were positive.

- At every school, parents either said "change nothing" or gave a suggestion of something to add to the program.

- Principals and teachers interviewed had suggestions for additions with few complaints about the program.

---

[3] EW/NSCC after-school programs often focus service activities around days such as Martin Luther King, Jr's birthday or National Youth Service Day.

[4] Of the ones who said no, they did not want the after-school program to return to their school, the majority were located at one site.

II. Program Implementation and Impact

Strength of Implementation

Charts 1 and 2 below illustrate after-school staff members' responses to a survey question asking them to rate how well their site was doing in meeting a variety of possible program goals. They rated how their site was doing meeting these goals using a scale that ranged from "extremely well," "well," and "fair" to "somewhat poorly," "poorly" and "not important at my site." The charts below indicate what percentage of CMs said their program was meeting the goals "well" or "extremely well."

Helping children to have fun was rated as the most highly successful goal, with 96% of CMs saying their program did this either "well" or "extremely well." A high percentage of

respondents (63%) rated this item as going "extremely well." Also very highly rated (between 80 and 90% "well"/"extremely well") were the goals of providing a safe environment, improving fine motor skills, developing a love of reading, strengthening the children's social skills and strengthening the children's overall physical coordination. Building academic skills was not rated as highly, however 71% of respondents said this was being done "well"/"extremely well." Thus, after-school staff was somewhat more confident about the program's impact on the specific "love of reading" than on more general academic skills. The lowest-rated program element was increasing parental involvement (40% "well"/"extremely well").

Chart 1
How have after-school programs done in meeting program goals?

	increasing parent involvement	strengthening life skills/career goals	improving behavior	strengthening academic skills	promoting good citizenship	promoting self-esteem
Site did this 'extremely well'	4	9	6	19	23	23
Site did this 'well'	36	43	60	52	51	52
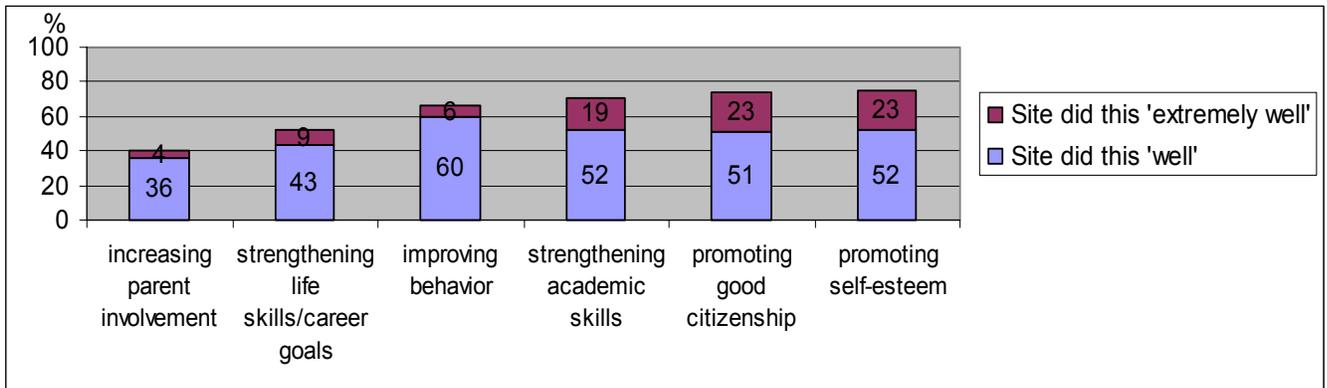
Chart 2
Cont.: How have after-school programs done in meeting program goals?

	strengthening social skills	developing love for reading	strengthening physical coordination	ensuring physical safety	strengthening fine motor skills	providing a safe haven	helping children have fun
Site did this 'extremely well'	15	25	29	40	30	40	63
Site did this 'well'	67	56	54	48	60	50	33
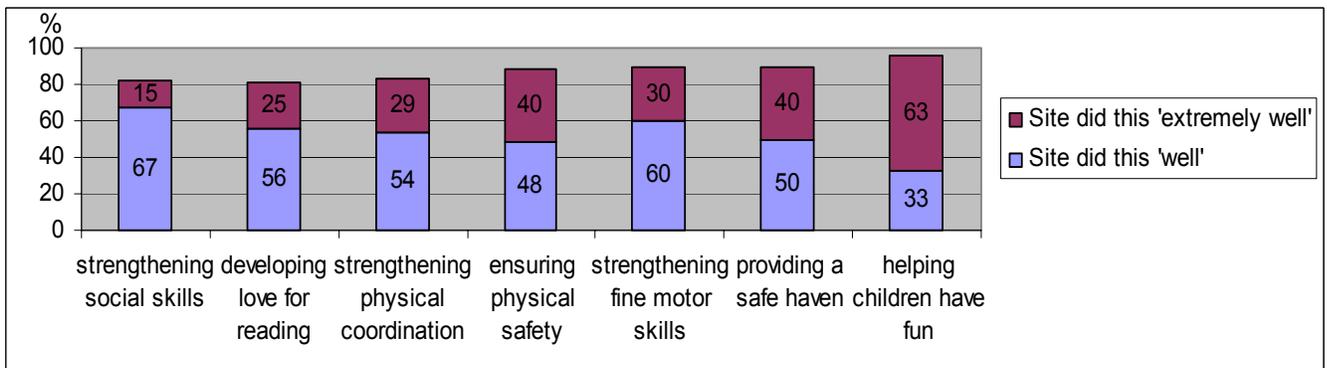
At every school, parents and school staff said that both individual corpsmembers and the teamwork they exemplify were strengths of the program. Comments included:

> *[A program strength is] the fact that they are a team. If you say something to them, they buckle up and get things done. The fact that they've been such a team and are eager to meet the needs of the students has been a plus. (principal)*

> *(What do you like best about the program?) The instructors. I like how they treat my children. (parent)*

> *We have a team that is so sharing and caring. The kids run up to them and hug them. The kids embrace them as an extended part of the family. (teacher)*

> *(What do you like best about the program?) That the corpsmembers are very open. They didn't have a problem with me coming in to sit in sometimes. If I didn't have the time they would still sit down with me and inform me of what was going on with my kids. (parent)*

Strength of Impact

After-school staff reported that the after-school program is having a strong impact on children in most areas. Respondents were asked to indicate how much improvement they had seen among after-school children in five skill areas using a scale of "a great deal," "moderately," "a little," and "not at all." Chart 3 below shows the percentage of respondents who said that the program caused moderate to a great deal of improvement for each of five different skill areas.

Eighty-three percent or more of respondents said that children's reading skills, math skills, confidence and ability to get along with other children had improved "a great deal" or "moderately" after being in the program. Respondents felt slightly less confident about the program's impact on behavior, but 75% still said that behavior had improved "a great deal" or "moderately." Both academics and behavior will be discussed in greater detail below.

Interviewees at every school also mentioned improved behavior as an outcome of program participation. This data is more nuanced than that provided by the survey. At three schools, one or more interviewees noted that the desire to participate in the after-school program acted as an incentive and actually helped to improve behavior and that some children behaved differently (better) in the after-school program than in school.

Chart 3
How much have after-school children improved in 5 skill areas?
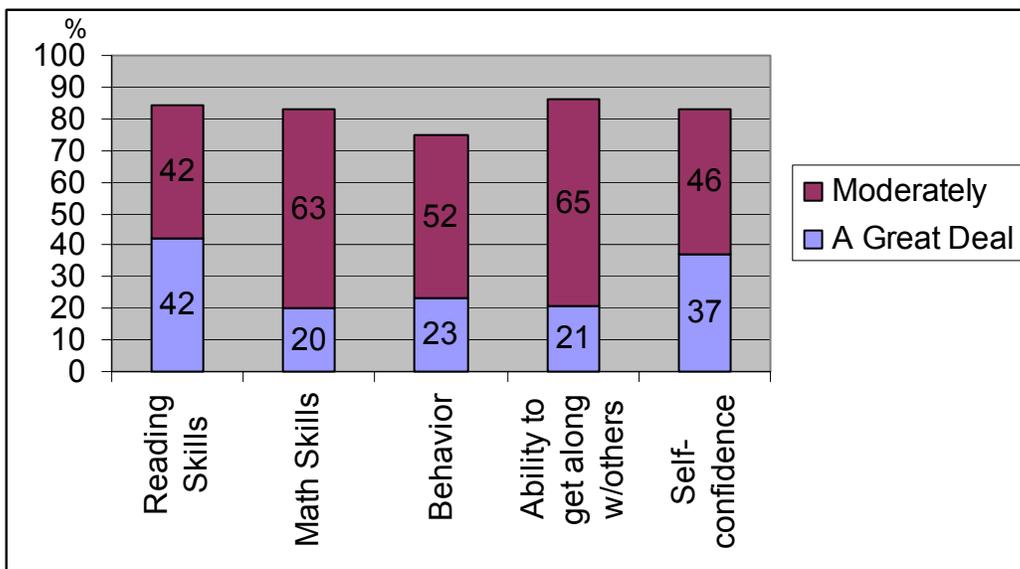
[Explaining that she sees improved behavior in some of the children.] Working with them here, I see a lot of children that are usually misdirected. The children that usually have behavioral problems; they come and listen [in the after-school program] because they know what is expected of them. (parent)

I have seen a lot of kids improve in conflict resolution. You know some of them no longer automatically want to fight. It is not instinct anymore, sometimes it is 'maybe I should think about it because I don't want to get kicked out of the program' or 'I want to go on the field trip next week.' There are consequences now. (CM)

Kids are choosing to follow rules because they want to be a participant. There's consistency, pattern. We give some directions. They respect us. (TL)

[Children] want to change their behavior so they're not excluded because they like it [after-school]. Is it 100%? No. But there is growth. (principal)

III. After-school Academic and Enrichment Programs

Academic Programs

Overview

This section draws on program observations, interview data and the following survey questions.

- How often were the following academic programs offered at your site's after-school program?

- How well do you think the academic portion of the after-school program worked at your site? (each program was listed)

- Were you able to run the following academic programs at your site as they were described to you in training?

Respondents were invited to explain their answers to the last two questions.

EW/NSCC supports four academic programs for its after-school programs. They provide materials and training for the 100 Book Challenge, Make and Take Math, Crafty Readers and Big Books.

We were not able to observe many of the academic programs in action. Because our program visits took place close to the end of the school year, they did not provide a representative view of all aspects of the school-year program. We observed four instances of homework help and one use of the 100 Book Challenge. We also observed several examples of academic-related activities generated by teams at different program sites. These included a spelling bee, math activities, and word games. Enrichment activities included arts and crafts, singing and practice for a performance, and outdoor play.

According to survey data, there was a range in how frequently programs were implemented at different sites and whether they are used at all. See Chart 4 below for an overview of these data about program use.

Chart 4
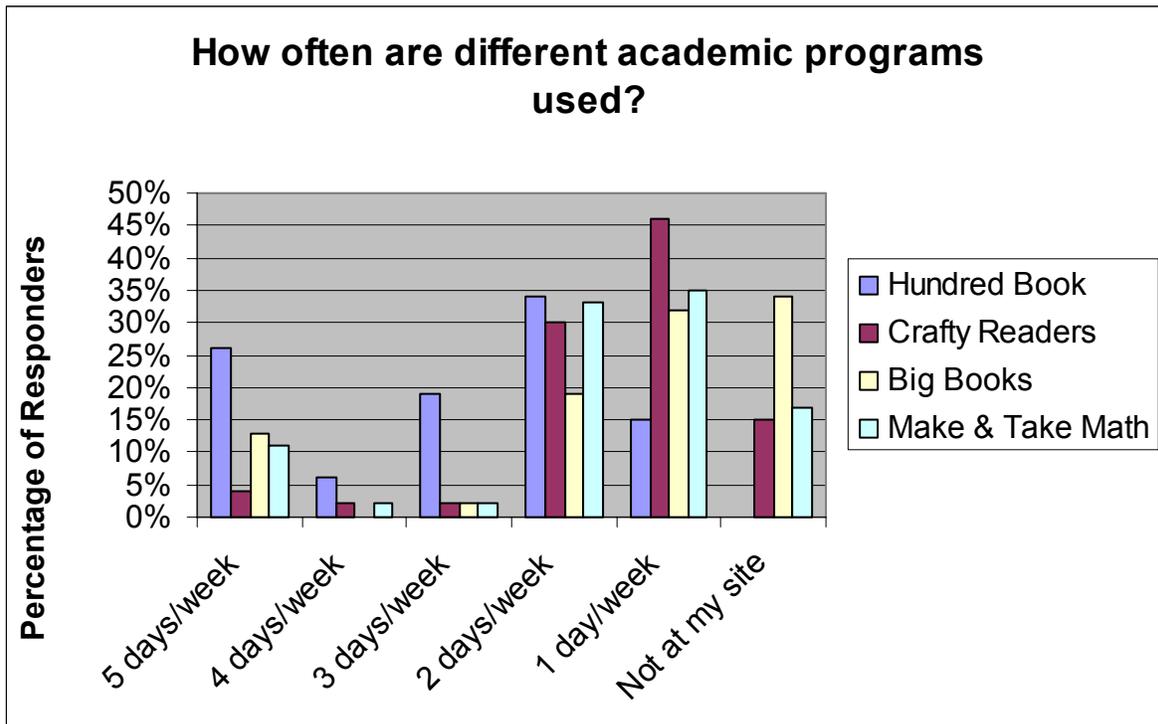
These findings stand out from the above survey data about program use:

- Overall, it is most common to use the academic programs one or two days/week.

- The 100 Book Challenge is used at every site.

- Big Books is the least used program; 34% of respondents said it was not used at their site, while only fifteen to seventeen percent of respondents said that they do not use Crafty Readers or Make and Take Math.[5]

In almost every case, when a survey respondent said a program was not used at their site, one or more other respondents from the same site reported that it *was* used. It may be that after-school staff members were responding only about the sub-group they worked with, but this data bears further investigation.

For each program, there are some respondents who say that they use it five days per week at their site. However, with the exception of possibly the 100 Book Challenge, it seems unlikely that after-school programs would implement any of these programs five days per week. The most likely interpretation of this data (supported by team leaders) is that a program was offered to different groups on different days so could have been in use each day by some of the children.

Corpsmembers responded positively about how all four academic programs worked on-site. Crafty Readers and the 100 Book Challenge stood out, with 93% and 90% of corpsmembers respectively reporting that they worked "extremely well" or "well" at their site. Eighty-four percent of corpsmembers said that Big Books worked "well" or "extremely well." Corpsmembers gave Make and Take Math the lowest scores, although almost three-quarters of CMs still rated it highly; 72% said it worked "well" or "extremely well."

---

[5] When the program use data is analyzed by school site (rather than overall percentages of respondents), it presents a similar picture. Again, all sites use 100 Book Challenge. Big Books is used least (staff from seven sites say they don't use it). Crafty Readers and Make and Take Math fall somewhere in between (In each case, staff from four sites say they did not use these two programs.)

Some sites seem to divide up programs among different groups, e.g., only 1st graders do 100 Book Challenge and only 3rd and 4th graders do Make and Take Math. Some CMs commented that some programs are a better fit for particular age groups.

Reading

The 100 Book Challenge stands out in a number of ways.

- It is the most fully implemented program. Survey data indicated it is the only academic program used at all of the sites.

- Survey respondents were pleased with program implementation. 90% said it worked well or extremely well.

- CMs also reported that, of all the academic programs they worked with, their use of the 100 Book Challenge most closely approximated the model provided in training; 78% said they were able to run it "totally" or "a great deal" as it was described in training.

- There were many written survey comments referring to the children's enjoyment of reading generally and their enjoyment of the 100 Book Challenge in particular.

- The 100 Book Challenge was also the after-school academic program most well-known to staff and parents. This is not surprising given its simultaneous in-school presence. Both parents and staff were very positive about its use in after-school.

- There were many open-ended survey responses that referred to children's enjoyment of reading in general and of the 100 Book Challenge in particular. In survey responses, after-school staff indicated that the incentives (prizes) play a key role in high student engagement in the 100 Book Challenge:

The children began to look forward to reading and earning money (i.e., play money they can use to buy prizes).

The children in the program love to read. They are rewarded for reading which encourages them.

The children looked forward to reading because the step-up was fun and there were prizes.

100 Book Challenge was enjoyable to them because they looked forward to the incentives.

Amidst the strong data about the 100 Book Challenge, there was mixed opinion on the use of the 100 Book Challenge during both school and after-school. Some people saw this as a plus because it was familiar to children and its dual use may have improved impact, enabling the in- and out-of-school programs to build on each other. Others saw it as a drawback because children became bored with it. These views arose in both survey and interview data.

Everything [all academic programs] works well but 100 Book Challenge works very well because the kids use it in regular school all day. (survey)

[The TL] worked closely with me to do the 100 Book Challenge. [The TL] made sure they spent ½ hour doing it [in after-schoo]). The parents don't do it. She is supporting the academic portion like no one else. (literacy specialist interview)

I feel the 100 Book Challenge worked extremely well for this site because the students were very familiar with it. (survey)

100 Book works, but because they do it in school, it's sometimes difficult to settle down. Incentives help. (CM interview)

The children do 100 Book Challenge during the day and are tired of it by the end of the school day. (survey)

Because the children are already participating in most of the programs in their classrooms, they had little patience doing it all over again after classroom sessions were over. (survey)

Crafty Readers was used once or twice a week by 76% of respondents. Fifteen percent said it was not used at their site. Corpsmembers surveyed also rated it very highly in terms of how it works. Ninety-three percent said it works well or extremely well. Corpsmembers interviewed also spoke highly of the program and reported that children enjoy the arts and crafts activities.

We do Crafty Readers and it is good because they don't have art classes here….They [the children] really enjoy the art part. (CM)

Crafty Readers is wonderful. It's OK for the older kids too. We give them more leeway. (TL)

The little ones love Crafty Readers. (TL)

In general there were very few complaints about materials. Though the numbers are small, it is worth noting that two survey respondents indicated that Crafty Readers either came without craft instructions or that the instructions were hard to follow.

Big Books is the least implemented program and, according to CMs surveyed, also looks least like the model presented in training when implemented. Thirty-four percent of respondents said Big Books was not used at their site. Fifty-one percent of the respondents, however, said that they used it once or twice per week; 13% said they used it five days per week.

Those who did use Big Books rated its implementation highly, with 84% saying it worked "well" or "extremely well."

Overall, after-school programs can offer three academic programs to support reading skill development. In interviews, improved reading skills was the academic impact mentioned most frequently by CMs and TLs.[6] In surveys, after-school staff also indicated that they had more often seen a great deal of improvement in reading skills (42%) than in math skills (20%) (See Chart 3). There is little hard data to support these assessments of impact on reading skills, however the very positive data about the 100 Book Challenge (a reading program) is consonant with this view. Because in-school and classroom use of the program work to reinforce each other, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the effect of the after-school program's reading emphasis in isolation. It may, however, boost the impact of the in-school 100 Book Challenge. The other 2 reading programs were also drew largely positive reviews.

Some after-school sites also do additional work with reading, including reading aloud, poetry workshops or drama linked to reading. The following survey comments relate to more general work with reading.

The kids really like when I read to them every day and they also read to me.

---

[6] A few interviewees also mentioned improved math skills and more general academic impacts such as help with homework and writing poetry.

Children wanted to read again and again and were having fun.

Most of the children enjoyed the reading. We let them take turns reading to the group. We let them act out a lot of the stories. We made reading fun for them.

All children were given the opportunity to read aloud, role play, do follow up activities.

We sometimes modify it – having older children read to younger and vice-versa to increase enthusiasm for reading in the students.

Math

Make and Take Math is the EW/NSCC-supported math program. **While there was significant CM enthusiasm about the program, it was used less frequently than two of the three reading programs and was also rated as working not as well as those two reading programs.** Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents said they used Make and Take Math once or twice per week. Sixty-two percent said it worked "well" or "extremely well;" thus, respondents rated it as working somewhat less well than 100 Book Challenge or Crafty Readers and about the same as Big Books. Comments by after-school staff below indicate the range of opinions about the math program. While one person thought the kits worked better with older children, another thought the opposite. One person said the advance planning required for the kits made them hard to use, while another noted that having kits eased the burden on after-school staff so that they do not have to come up with their own lessons. In part these differences illustrate the different contexts, histories (i.e., at one site CMs had experience planning their own lessons) and uses of the programs. These variations also bear further investigation.

I would have to say it [Make and Take Math] was more effective with the big kids than the little kids. Because in here we have kindergarten through third graders and it is such a wide range of what they can do. You know we are trying to teach the third graders and the kindergarteners are lost, so that is hard. (interview, CM)

Some of the Make and Take Math [kits] were too easy for the older children. (survey)

The children loved the Make and Take Math because they asked to do it everyday. (survey)

The math lessons require planning and getting items in advance. We never seemed to have enough time to plan ahead. (survey)

They (math kits) make it easier for the corpsmembers; they don't have to think of different things. We need to have variety so that we don't lose the kids. (interview, TL)

Enrichment Programs

In addition to the four academic programs supported by EW/NSCC, after-school programs also provide additional academic and enrichment programs. [7] Some of the programs we visited offered initiatives coordinated by the EW/NSCC central office. These included fieldtrips, a nutrition program offered in partnership with Drexel University and a series of poetry workshops culminating in a coffee house performance. Other after-school programs offered activities organized by the individual school site. These programs included girl scouts, a newspaper, sports teams and programs, journal-writing, drama, choir, mentoring programs, and talent shows.

Site visits indicated a range of intensity in terms of the enrichment offerings at each site. All sites offered activities in addition to the four academic programs; some stood out in terms of the diversity and range of programs for children. For example, at one site corpsmembers built on a tradition of developing their own programming. At that site, corpsmembers frequently developed academic activities for their groups by utilizing the Internet or other resources. They had weekly science exploration and projects. During February, there were activities and projects related to African-American history. They had a poetry and coffee house project, a nutrition program and activities and the team started a program to mentor older boys and girls. Cheerleading, dance, and choir programs were led by corpsmembers and/or parent volunteers and were open to after-school and other children.

Across roles, interviewees appreciated enrichment programs and the important ways they enrich children's lives. Parents and teachers see these programs as an opportunity for children to expand their horizons, to learn skills

---

[7] Data about enrichment programs comes largely from interviews. The survey was not constructed to probe this area.

and to be exposed to experiences and ideas that they would not necessarily get at school or at home.

> *It's an opportunity for them to show their creative side. They get to be individuals while learning about teamwork. The teamwork is across disciplines, and both academic and social. (teacher)*

> *[The program gives] the kids a variety of experiences…. experiences kids normally wouldn't get. (teacher)*

> *It made me feel good when he would come home and actually start talking about the things that they did ... I knew that I may not have been able to do those things with him, but through the program he got to experience things. Even if they never actually went somewhere, they went to places through books or through their imagination. And that, right now I'm finding out, is really important. He's so inquisitive. Sometimes he'll have conversations with me and I wonder where he learned those things ... I believe that it is the fact that the staff take time to really answer their questions. (parent)*

> *The program is the reason my children are here; this will be the first time that my children will be in the same school for two consecutive years. The other schools didn't have any reading and after-school programs. …I'm from [a distant neighborhood]. They'll be here as long as this program is here. You have to explore….Children need to be exposed. That helps them know what they like. Expose them to lots of things. (parent)*

One strength of the Drexel-supported nutrition program is that it includes program components for both parents and children.

> *We have a partnership with Drexel and we'll have them, they have a nutrition specialist and they'll come out and they had a whole month or two to work with our kids every Monday. And they come out and work with our parents, about what is important for their students to eat and what is healthy….We had a newsletter every week given to the parents so that they'll know what their kids learned about eating habits and [other areas] ….The parents….thought that the students were very excited about [the nutrition program]. (TL)*

> *One program that they did that really got my kids excited was the nutrition class. I think it was once or twice that folks came out to talk to them about balanced meals and they brought samples of fruit. They were taught how to make their own smoothies and the kids really got a kick out of it and brought the*

recipes home. That was one class where I really followed up and put the recipes on my refrigerator. And the parents who showed up that evening [to a parent night about nutrition] were really involved. (parent)

In the interview data, the Coffee House project stood out as a powerful integration of building academic skills, engaging children, supporting children to take risks and learn intellectually and emotionally, as well as involving parents. Three sites participated in the Coffee House project and we visited one of those sites for observations and interviews. During this eight-week project, a poet came to the after-school program and led poetry-writing workshops with children. They developed their poetry, created a book of their poems and presented a coffee house for staff and parents at which they shared their writing. These quotes from interviewees at one site illustrate the depth of this project.

> *Well they did that poetry workshop which was targeting the upper grades 3 through 6 and it was a coffee shop setting. They made a classroom into a coffee shop, table cloths, candles, smell of coffee, and the kids displayed their poetry….Getting the kids to express their feelings and some beautiful poetry writing, which kids would never tap into. So they have opened up a whole other world. (teacher)*

> *We…focus on academic attainment. [The team leader's] projects coordinate and blend nicely - 100 Book Challenge and the coffee house writing program….the writing project was unbelievable in terms of results. [The project leader] was here six weeks. She got to know them. They went out into the community. They took pictures. Then they started writing about their lives. They turned a room into a coffee house. The writing that came out of children had parents in tears. I will never forget about it. It took place in early April. I'd like to see more activities that would have that sort of impact. (principal)*

> *It [after-school program] has been really great for my kids. It brought a lot out of my son that he'd been holding in….He told me he wrote poems. They brought tears to my eyes. It helped him, because of all that he had bottled up in him; he was able to bring it out…. My son was very shy….But he got up at the Café event, read his poem. (parent)*

> *That [coffee-house project] was awesome. …The older kids wrote poetry and the younger ones took pictures. They could take pictures of anything they want. And you would think that it was like a coffee table book. It was a great experience. (parent)*

IV. Materials, Training, and Support

The after-school programs seem to have adequate materials and supplies. While a few individual survey or interview responses focused on the need for particular academic materials or arts and crafts materials, these comments were fairly isolated. In general, most after-school staff did not emphasize this; they reported having good access to materials. All team leaders interviewed were satisfied with materials.

After-school staff members rated feedback and support from EW/NSCC staff very highly. Survey respondents rated feedback from team leaders, operations managers or literacy/math specialists as more useful than trainings for their after-school program work. Also, when respondents were asked to rate support received from different groups (principal, teachers, parents, EW/NSCC staff, United Way staff, and 21st Century staff), respondents rated support EW/NSCC staff the highest. Eighty-nine percent said that this support was either totally or generally positive.

Discipline and conflict resolution also stood out as areas where training was particularly useful and where both survey and interview respondents felt more was needed. CMs interviewed described the following trainings as most useful: bullying, conflict resolution, anger management, and trainings for specific academic programs (100 Book Challenge, Crafty Readers, etc.) When after-school staff was surveyed about what further training would be useful, they most frequently responded that they did not feel the need for additional training. However, when after-school staff requested additional training, conflict resolution and behavior modification were requested most frequently.

In terms of training format, in both the survey and interviews, after-school staff requested more on-site and on-going training (i.e. more than one-time) during the school year.

V. Key Issues

Staffing

After-school program staff are perceived as a program strength (see Strength of Implementation section). Corpsmembers and team leaders also identified staffing as an area for further development.

All the programs we observed in the spring met and often greatly exceeded the desired child/adult ratio. But **CMs pointed to the need for full staffing starting from the beginning of the school year.** At three of the five schools we visited, CMs said that they had needed more adults when the programs began in September. Planning for staffing is challenging because it is difficult to predict how many children will sign up for after-school and, thus, how many adults will be needed for the program. Sometimes programs want to be able to give children more attention than a ratio of 12 or 15 to 1 allows.

> *In the beginning of the year, we had to situate ourselves and split up because there weren't enough adults. (interview)*

> *We were inadequately staffed in the beginning so we had all of these programs, but we didn't have anyone to run them. We basically did homework and we all read together because we couldn't break down into groups. (interview)*

> *Because of the ratio with the children in the beginning it was hard. Because we were steadily enrolling, it was hard to hire enough people quickly enough to get them through training so that they can come here. So in the beginning it was really tough; we started with 0 and then we had 100 children in one day….And sometimes, the 1:12 ratio is not enough for homework time so we are always looking for alternatives with parent volunteers and other alternatives to get that done. (interview)*

Nowhere in our research did respondents differentiate or indicate problems between the EW/NSCC AmeriCorps members and the EW/NSCC full and part-time after-school staff who are not AmeriCorps members, which indicates that supplementing teams in this manner has been an effective staffing strategy. Although part-time staff may not work with children throughout the school day, their place on teams does not appear to hinder the creation of successful team dynamics for the after-school programs.

Forty-three percent of CMs' recommendations in the survey for next year relate to staffing. Many people suggested simply adding more staff.

Space

EW/NSCC after-school programs take place in urban schools with aging infrastructure and where space is often at a premium. **Thus, after-school programs sometimes must function with inadequate space**. Some programs needed to use classroom space and thus could not make the space their own. Others did not have adequate storage for supplies. At two schools, all after-school program children met in the lunchroom, along with other children who were serving detention or participating in the start-up of Extended Day. The need for better space came up at three of the five sites visited. Space is linked to staffing issues in that both enough staff and enough rooms are needed to be able to divide children into smaller groups.

Behavior, Discipline and Climate

The data paints a complex picture with regard to children's behavior, discipline, and school/after-school program climate. Corpsmembers' ability to relate to children and to contribute to a positive climate, including constructive discipline, was seen as a strength at many schools. Past evaluation research about EW/NSCC has shown that CMs are very effective in building relationships with and mentoring students and that they often play a constructive role in dealing with behavioral issues during the school day. At the same time, this year's interview and survey data, as well as previous research, underline the significant skill and knowledge this work requires as well as the challenges of doing this work in the context of urban schools. Corpsmembers continued to raise questions about how to meet these challenges and to ask for further support.

In many schools, CMs played a unique role in terms of their relationships with children. They are neither teachers nor parents. The after-school program can function as an in-school environment with both links to and key

differences from children's school-day world. As mentioned above, some parents and corpsmembers believed that the particular structure of the after-school program, and the dedication and compassion of corpsmembers, along with children's desire to participate, helps some children get better control of their behavior.

> We've noticed a [positive] change [in children's behavior] overall....It's nice to see the rules that we enforce carried over to the Extended Day program. With consistency, the kids are responding to the standards and the expectations. (principal)

> It [the after-school program] makes the bad kids good and the shy kids open. It normalizes everyone. (parent)

> There is consistency in terms of mentors [CMs] that are here. They have a real relationship [with students]. We can capitalize on some of the [CMs] relationships with more difficult kids during the [school] day. (principal)

At the same time, 44% of survey respondents identify behavior and discipline as a challenge. The following comments responded to: "What is your biggest challenge in your job with the after-school program?"

> My biggest challenge is getting the children to settle down when they first come in so that we can get started. Getting them to stop fighting each other so much. Time outs don't help.

> The anger management between kids.

> Parents that do not back you when it comes to the discipline.

> Getting the students to calm down.

> Behavior issues! I say this because a lot of our students talk back and hit the other kids.

During interviews, CMs consistently identified trainings related to behavior and discipline issues as among the most useful. These included trainings on bullying, anger management and conflict resolution. In the survey, of those respondents who had specific requests for additional training, 39% asked for training related to discipline for children with behavior problems, conflict resolution, and anger management.

Balancing Academic and Developmental Needs

One concern expressed by many after-school staff involved finding a good balance for the after-school program in terms of academics enrichment, and fun, both to engage students and to meet their developmental needs. They are concerned that children have already had a full day of school. While they want to support children's academic learning, they also want children to have plenty of play time and enrichment activities. Also, because the amount of funding after-school programs receive directly relates to the number of children enrolled, there is also financial pressure to find ways to engage children who may be resisting academic work. In open-ended responses, survey respondents also emphasized their desire to take children on more fieldtrips and to engage them with new activities next year.

> The children should have more play-time. [corpsmember answer to a survey question about what to change for next year]

> We just try to make a positive environment for the kids. It has to be different from school because they have been in school all day. So it is a tough time. They don't want to sit down and be in the classroom. They just did that for 8 hours. So we try to make it fun and try to make them learn stuff. So we do our best to try to keep a positive atmosphere.

> They're already going to school. We don't want them to say they don't want to go because it's like school. It should be fun.

> Kids sometimes complain about having to read and write in after-school. We want to do academic things with them but they're in class all day long; they're restless. We want to keep them in the after-school program.

Relationship with Extended Day Programs

The need for after-school programs to coordinate with Extended Day programs is a complicating factor. EW/NSCC after-school programs provide a valuable service for families by offering after-school programming for siblings of Extended Day children. They also offer more extensive hours of care for all children, e.g., after 4:30, on Fridays, and some school holidays. EW/NSCC often provided care for Extended Day children during snack-time and the transition from school to Extended Day. While children are in Extended Day, EW/NSCC

works with smaller groups in their program. Challenges of the relationship with Extended Day include:

- Sometimes staffing is more difficult, i.e., additional staff is needed for the late afternoon when Extended Day students join in.

- Programming can be challenging; it's difficult to include Extended Day children in the special offerings and events the after-school program provides.

- Sometimes after-school and Extended Day students share the same space which can be very chaotic.

Last year we [already] had Extended Day....[This year] with the [21st Century] grant, [and the EW/NSCC after-school program] we are able to open after-school up to other students, siblings. [When it was limited to students mandated to attend for academics] this was a problem for some parents because some mandated to attend last year had responsibility for younger siblings. (principal)

It was really hard because we were on one side of the room and Extended Day was on the other ... even though they leave for their classrooms, they're in the lunchroom for about half an hour while they wait for their teachers to come and get them. That's a major distraction for our students, because they know some of them and try to get their attention. We were trying to stay separate, but it was really hard to do that. (CM)

There were two programs downstairs in the cafeteria ... ours and then the Extended Day kids. When both of those programs were down there, it was awful and there was a lot of frustration going around down there. Now [that Extended Day is over] it's much better! It's nice and quiet and mellow, and kids come in and do what they have to do. (CM)

Yes, it's different. It was hard. When...people [offering special programs] were here, the children would come down when it was just about over. The children missed out on some of the program because of Extended Day. [But] to me the Extended Day was more important. (TL)

## Program Autonomy vs. Standardization

One key issue is how prescriptive the overall after-school program design is/should be. In practice, there is variation in how and to what degree sites implement the academic programs. Some TLs interviewed felt that they did not really have much control over their program. One said that she would like to be able to plan her own trips, rather than having the EW/NSCC central office arrange them, "*I would like to plan lessons around a trip....I would like to drop [one of the academic programs]; they [students] don't want to be bothered with it.... I would like more outside involvement and visitors – to have them once a week. To have storytellers. I can't do that.*" A different team leader did not feel restricted in this manner and spoke about programs her team had developed or planned to develop and about lesson plans her corpsmembers developed.

In addition to larger questions about how much programs can/should differ by site, other important factors shape program possibilities. Questions that might be useful for EW/NSCC to consider and clearly communicate to teams and sites include: What resources do programs have to provide enrichment and other activities? How does EW/NSCC support enrichment activities? What other community or school-based resources are available? Additional questions related to issues of school and team capacity to support programs include: Is there enough space to house multiple activities? What experiences, skills and goals do the team and team leader bring?

School-Program Relationship

In general EW/NSCC teams, school staff and parents all seemed to view the relationship between the school and the after-school program quite positively.

Chart 5

How would you rate the relationship between your school

and the afterschool program?

[Bar chart. Y-axis labeled "Frequency" from 0 to 50. X-axis categories: Extremely Good (18), Good (15), Fair (6), Somewhat Poor (7), Poor (1).]
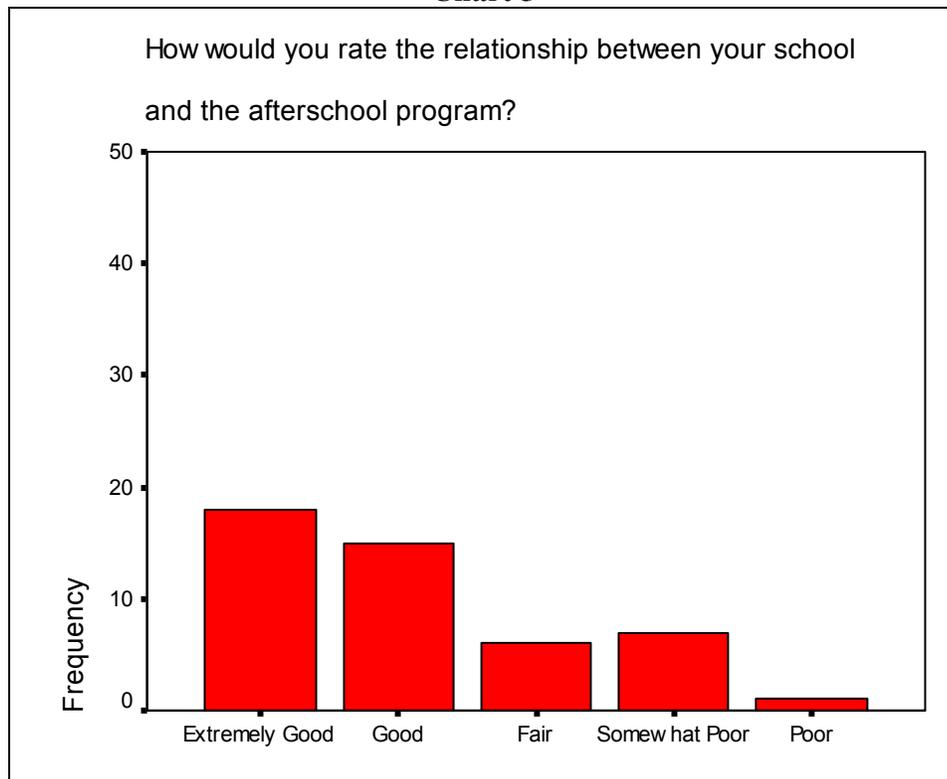
In the survey data depicted above, 70% of survey respondents rated the relationship "good" or "extremely good."

In interviews, both school staff and parents were largely positive; there were some requests for increased communication and closer coordination (see below). There were almost no overt complaints about relationships between school and after-school in either interviews or surveys.

> *[The relationship between the school and after-school is] fantastic. It really is. I mean they are here all the time. It is not like it is someone who comes in at the end of the day and just runs an after-school program. I mean they come…when we have a meeting and some of the people come in to see what is going on with our meeting. When you talk about [name of school], NSCC is [the school]. It's not like a separate thing. (school counselor)*

> *The teachers are really supportive of the NSCC and the after-school program. They are very helpful; it is a good school to work at. (CM)*

> *I think they [school and after-school] work great together. (parent)*

Communication

Communication between school and EW/NSCC staff seems strong at many sites but there were requests for improvement. The biggest issue was the degree of commun-ication and coordination between the school and the after-school program. Some school and EW/NSCC staff request more coordination, particularly in relation to academics and supporting students' academic growth.

This more nuanced data about communication stems from interviews. At four of the five schools, EW/NSCC and/or school staff spontaneously offered positive assessments of communication at their school.

> *We get support from teachers and the principal. There's a lovely art teacher. What we need, she gives us. We can use the gym teacher's equipment if we need something for that level. (CM)*

> *People communicate very well. That's what keeps it going. They all get along with us. (CM in response to above statement)*

We invite team members to meetings at times. We want there to be transfer of information between the school and the program. There is a lot of open communication. (teacher)

A few school staff described the school and EW/NSCC as largely independent entities. When asked about the relationship between school and after-school, one principal said, *"It's a program unto itself. I don't see a link."* At another school, a teacher said:

Well, I would say that we are pretty segregated from each other. Most of the teachers are not here after school so they wouldn't interact with them. But I think on the other side that some of the NSCC members work in the classroom so that is where the teachers do interact with them. I mean as far as I can tell it has been positive.

Interviews indicated that there are significant knowledge gaps among school staff and parents about the academic portion of the after-school programs. Teachers and parents interviewed tend not to see the after-school program as primarily academic; rather, they see it as providing a safe place for children and extra-curricular programming. When they do refer to academics, they are likely to talk about homework help. The 100 Book Challenge is the most frequently mentioned program; it is very recognizable since it is also used in school. Although many school staff seem to have a feeling that the after-school program provides general academic support, they do not know specifics. One principal said that she was "pleasantly surprised" when the interviewer mentioned the four academic programs and that the after-school programs are required to have an academic component. In some cases, school staff suggested activities which the after-school program already provides.

I've only heard of 100 Book Challenge ... my kids really love that and want to read more. I haven't heard about the other literacy or math programs at all. (parent)

I'd like to see them do something in literacy. Get read-aloud books – rich literature. Read to them. They need books at different levels. (principal)

I don't [know about the academic programs] in great detail. If I'm teaching something and kids can share information, they were probably exposed in [after-school program]. I know that if the kids give me something before I give it to them, then it probably came

from the [after-school program]. I see them with books a lot. (teacher)

Some EW/NSCC after-school staff wanted more coordination about students and their work between teachers and EW/NSCC staff. A teacher requested that CMs learn more about core standards and curricula so that they could better assist students. One team leader wished that teachers and corpsmembers could work together more closely to support individual students' academic growth. She explained:

I would like to have more of an effect on academics. I would like to know more about what's happening in the classroom. I did request that from teachers but unfortunately I don't think they really have time….One time a student was crying when she came to after school so we talked to the teacher. To go to each teacher and ask: what are you on and what level is the child on [is too much to do].

Paperwork

EW/NSCC anticipated that the increased paperwork for parents and after-school staff might be daunting so our interviews explored this issue. To apply for the after-school program, parents must fill out a number of forms, provide a health assessment for the child and provide information that some parents are hesitant to share, e.g. social security number. **Although some parents and EW/NSCC staff found the paperwork for the after-school program challenging, it did not prove to be a significant concern. However, it is possible that the parents who were discouraged by paperwork dropped out or simply chose not to enroll their children.** Both parents and CMs indicated that, though the paperwork was overwhelming at first, they adjusted to it and/or felt it was worth it for the program they were getting. One team leader indicated that they sometimes received different guidelines from different offices (e.g. EW/NSCC and United Way) about the paperwork requirements. CMs also did not mention paperwork as a significant challenge or item for change in the survey.

From the standpoint of the parent…that application can be a little daunting and intimidating. Most times we have to work with them to get them to fill it out….So that has been a stumbling block for some parents and they will look at that and say no, because it is so much information….I think a couple of teachers have mentioned it and the principal

has mentioned it, there is a lot of paper work for such a short program. (TL)

The paperwork was a little overwhelming, but once you really think about it it's clear that the more information they have, the better they can respond to any situation that comes up. (parent)

No it wasn't burdensome….I have 3 children [so had to fill out 3 copies of each form]. It wasn't that bad. Not for the experience you're getting all year long. (parent)

Yes [it was a burden]. My husband and I wondered about all the forms. Now I see we need another health assessment for camp. It's a hassle, even for the nurses. They say, 'Weren't you just here?' (parent)

A lot of administrative things like paperwork have been very challenging. In the NSCC you have to have a certain number of kids attend

the after-school program and have a certain attendance rate to be rewarded so we are always working towards that. Also to get money to do the things we want to do, we have to fill out forms….Honestly we don't usually get our paperwork in on time, because we always weigh which one is more important. Is it more important to deal with this child who is standing in front of me and needs my immediate attention versus this paperwork that is due in 30 minutes? And the child always wins. (CM)

[Forms are] no problem for us. CIS is wonderful. It just seems like more of a babysitting service because we're being licensed as a childcare….It took some adjusting [to new requirements]. Now, everyone loves the program. It was just a shock – paperwork, all this must be done. (TL)

VI. Recommendations and Implications

Below are eight items for further consideration that arise from this study.

1. This study raises questions about which after-school program components are absolutely required and which are optional. Some team leaders wanted more freedom to judge whether a particular academic program was useful for their students and wanted to be able to engage in more program planning for their site. Currently, team leaders do not have a uniform understanding of how much latitude individual teams have to develop programming.

    Having standardized program components helps ensure that children across sites receive certain key services. It also makes it easier to offer support and training and means that after-school staff can draw on existing curricula and programs, rather than having to invent each day's plans from scratch. However, it is also important to draw on staff strengths (e.g., a musician can lead a choir). Encouraging site-based program development can result in stronger programs and more motivated staff. In addition, enabling teams to fine tune programs to meet particular school-based concerns will help to maintain and strengthen school-NSCC relationships.

    How can EW/NSCC keep an overall shared structure but also provide programs with flexibility to respond to local needs, context and strengths? When program pieces are required, is there flexibility in terms of implementation?

2. After-school staff, along with many parents and educators, recognize the need for after-school programs both to support students academically and to offer children something very different from their in-school experience. The Core Standards for after-school programs also promote filling a range of children's needs, including academic, physical, social, and cultural. Finding a productive balance between meeting children's academic needs and seeing the whole child is important, both in order to engage children and to meet their developmental needs. EW/NSCC should continue efforts to help after-school staff understand and respond to the wide range of children's developmental needs.

    This report provides limited data on the balance of activities which EW/NSCC after-school programs provide, since that was not a major focus of data collection. We do know that sites' space and facilities may limit the kinds of physical activity they can provide for children. The data show some examples of strong cultural/arts programming and some complaints that this emphasis is diminished by an academic focus. In survey and interview data, respondents affirm that these after-school programs are helping to develop children's social skills; they also emphasize the need for more work in this area.

    Striking the best balance among different program emphases is an area that invites further investigation and work. NSCC might facilitate this by helping programs' self-assess their work in the different Core Standard areas or by involving NSCC staff or outside evaluators in such an assessment. This assessment could indicate areas of strength, possibilities for different program sites to learn from each other, and also areas where further training or program development is needed.

3. This study also raises questions about the degree to which educators and parents need to be informed about the academic portion of the after-school programs. While both parents and educators have positive impressions of the academic support offered, many lack specific knowledge. At the least, it would be helpful for school staff to have more knowledge about the academic supports children are receiving. NSCC staff also needs to be more aware of what skills students gain from and are expected to learn from the various academic programs that they implement. One EW/NSCC

team leader had a vision of EW/NSCC coordinating much more closely with teachers to support children's academic growth. What kind of communication and coordination goals does EW/NSCC want to set?

4. Interviews indicate that EW/NSCC after-school programs offer some very effective enrichment programming for children. These programs can integrate academic and non-academic learning, build social skills, and generate high student engagement. A more systematic look at this area could encourage interchange and learning across after-school program sites and teams and could guide EW/NSCC in developing and supporting additional programs of this kind. The ability to bridge this academic and emotional gap for students during programming is potentially one of the strongest assets of EW/NSCC after-school programs and should be nurtured.

5. Past research about EW/NSCC programs has shown that it can be difficult to fully staff teams at the start of the school year; often this happens for reasons outside of NSCC control, including the planning and implementation process of a large and bureaucratic school system. Planning for the start-up phase of after-school program staffing is a challenge since EW/NSCC does not know how many staff will be needed until students actually sign up for the program after the start of the school year. This task may be slightly easier as programs enter their second year and can use the previous year's enrollment numbers as a guide. The initial weeks are important, because they establish routines and structures for students and staff. EW/NSCC could explore ways to creatively respond to this challenge. For example, could there be a list of part-time staff that would be available or a team of centrally based staff available for deployment to after-school programs as needed until numbers settle down or additional staff persons are hired? Could the part-time staff pass through a pre-hiring and training process in order to be assigned immediately as the need arises?

6. Space limitations in aging buildings are not easily solved. The after-school programs we saw did the best they could with the space available. Greater access to a wider variety of space gave some programs the opportunity to provide more numerous and varied activities. Where TLs report space is inadequate, perhaps TLs, Operations Managers and other EW/NSCC staff can work together with school administrators to find creative solutions. At least one school reported a lack of secure storage space for after-school supplies; where this issue exists, it could be prioritized and solved relatively easily.

7. After-school teams can learn much about best practices and effective strategies from each other. This research indicates some areas to explore including how best to work with Extended Day students and structures, dealing with behavior challenges and conflict resolution, and how to support parents in completing the extensive enrollment process. EW/NSCC staff and teams could generate additional productive possibilities by sharing ideas to maximize program successes.

8. The data indicate that EW/NSCC has an effective support structure and training program. EW/NSCC can continue to refine and strengthen both support and training. This research points to behavior and conflict resolution as key areas for ongoing training. Feedback to teams about particular issues and on-site training also are potential areas of emphasis, since CMs and other staff found those formats particularly useful. As particular training needs or program challenges arise within and across sites, EW/NSCC can respond flexibly by continuously gathering information about site needs, providing visits and consultations and designing training as needed for one or more schools.

About the Author

Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D., Senior Research Associate, has worked in a range of educational settings, particularly adult literacy programs. Her dissertation examined a literacy program that sought to enact participatory approaches in the classroom and in program management and administration. At RFA, she has served as team leader on a number of projects, including: a three-year evaluation of the Reduced Class Size/Balanced Literacy initiative; a multi-year assessment of the implementation and effectiveness of the GEAR UP program in Philadelphia middle and high schools; and an evaluation of the work of the National School and Community Corps in Philadelphia public schools.

Acknowledgements

NSCC Team Leaders provided invaluable assistance by both setting up school visits and facilitating administration of the after-school surveys. We are also grateful to the parents, corpsmembers, teachers and administrators who generously shared their time and ideas during interviews.

Gretchen Suess played a critical role in this research and it benefited greatly from her insights. Among other things, she helped to conceptualize and plan the research, carried out part of the qualitative fieldwork, and oversaw the creation of the survey and an accompanying database, as well as the survey administration.

Jessica Gillespie ably assisted with fieldwork at several sites, serving as a notetaker at interviews and conducting several observations.

Sara Allender transcribed interviews, scanned surveys, worked with the database and participated in qualitative data analysis. Brett Alvare also provided assistance with analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. Their contributions and willingness to jump in where they were needed greatly facilitated the analysis and writing process.