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## AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN NORTH CAROLINA

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*"I believe, from what I hear in the community and from the kids that I know, that the kids are less likely to be in trouble. They are more focused. I am a real believer, especially with adolescent kids that the busier you keep them in structured supervised situations the less time they have got to get into trouble. Being a part of the drum corps is a source of pride for kids. One of the real positive outcomes of the program is that it gives kids a good focus and a source of pride in themselves and what they do."*

—Marsha Bate, President of the Youth Services Action Group, Asheville, NC

After-school programs are designed to help young people by deterring delinquency and improving their self-esteem and academic performance. UNC's Center for Urban and Regional Studies conducted a 16-month study of six after-school programs in North Carolina for the Governor's Crime Commission. The study focused on programs for middle school youth. The Crime Commission's Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Committee sponsored the study to learn more about the impact of after-school programs on young people and to gather information on the organizational characteristics of these programs. The goal was to identify practices that strengthen after-school programs and **increase** other positive differences they make in the lives of young people.

With input from the Crime Commission staff and the agreement of the program authorities, the research team selected six programs that shared five common attributes. Specifically, each program served young people ages 11 to 16 during the after-school hours for at least four afternoons a week and maintained open enrollment for at-risk youth. The programs also provided tutorial assistance and recreation and enrichment activities for young people.

The programs selected were the Boys & Girls Clubs of Pitt County, Robbinsville Middle School's After-School Program, Asheville Housing Authority's Hillcrest Enrichment Program, YMCA of Greater Winston-Salem Support Our Students program, Cleveland County Schools' Black Youth in Action and Rockingham County Support Our Students. The map of North Carolina on the next page shows the location of these programs.

Before presenting the research team's recommendations, the major findings of this research are outlined below.

- Programs that provided structured homework assistance, community-sites or regular transportation, and targeted enrollment/more volunteers were more likely to help participants to stay out of trouble or improve their academic performance.
- African-American students in programs with an African-American cultural enrichment emphasis were more likely to increase their self-esteem.
- The six programs studied spent, on average, \$9.13 per day on each program participant based on average daily attendance. Several institutional practices appear to be important in starting and maintaining after-school programs.

### **Program characteristics associated with delinquency deterrence**

One important way after-school programs prevent delinquency is to have three to four hours of adult supervision on weekday afternoons. Young people who are supervised by adult staff members at these programs lack the opportunity to commit delinquent acts. To see which program features are associated with more frequent attendance, the research team investigated 15 program characteristics. Of the

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program characteristics studied, only structured homework assistance, community based/regular transportation sites, and a high number of volunteer hours per child/targeted enrollment were associated with higher rates of frequent program attendance.

- **Structured homework assistance**—Seventy-four percent of the students reported that they attended the after-school program to improve their grades in school. Moreover, 80 percent of these participants at programs with structured homework attended their programs more than half of the program days, while only 39 percent of the study participants at programs without structured homework attended that often. Combining structured homework with recreation and other activities is an effective way to attract regular participation.

- **Community-based sites/regular transportation**—Study participants were also more likely to attend more than half of the program days at sites that were community-based or provided regular transportation, especially at programs without structured homework. Only 35 percent of the participants attended more than half of the program days at sites with no structured homework and no regular transportation or community location. In contrast, 56 percent of the participants attended more than half the days at sites that were community based or had regular transportation but no structured homework. Regular transportation or a community site had a much smaller effect on regular attendance among participants at sites with structured homework assistance. More than 75 percent of students attended these sites more than half of the time, and at community based sites or sites with regular transportation, this increased to 89 percent.



Buncombe County: Hillcrest Enrichment Program  
Cleveland County: Black Youth In Action  
Forsyth County: YMCA of Greater Winston-Salem  
Graham County: Robbinsville Middle School After-School Program  
Pitt County: Boys and Girls Clubs of Pitt County  
Rockingham County: Support Our Students (SOES)

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- **Targeted enrollment (and more volunteers)**—Because the same sites that targeted at-risk youth for enrollment also had high numbers of volunteer hours per child, the separate effects of these characteristics could not be determined. Study participants at sites with high numbers of volunteer hours per child (and with targeted enrollment) were nearly twice as likely to attend more than half of the program days than were study participants at programs with low numbers of volunteer hours per child (and without targeted enrollment). The researchers also observed that 70 percent of the study participants who attended programs with high numbers of volunteers per child (and targeted enrollment) said that attending their program helped them to stay out of trouble. Only 51 percent of the study participants who attended programs with low numbers of volunteer hours per child (and targeted enrollment) said that attending their program actually helped them to stay out of trouble.

There was no systematic relationship between the program characteristics analyzed and study participants' school behavior. Similarly, the research team did not observe any systematic relationship between the program characteristics and the juvenile court records of study participants due to the small number of participants who had been adjudicated delinquent or undisciplined.

### **Program characteristics associated with academic achievement and self-esteem**

To assess the ways in which the programs might have other positive impact on participants' lives, the researchers examined homework completion, grades, North Carolina End-of-Grade (EOG) test scores, and self-esteem. The program characteristics that made positive differences in the lives of more study participants were structured homework assistance and an emphasis on cultural enrichment.

**Structured homework assistance**—Participants at these sites were more likely to attend their program to improve their grades, complete their homework, and improve their English and math grades and math EOG levels.

- **Homework completion**—The majority of study participants (82 percent) who attended structured homework programs to improve their grades in school indicated that they also finished all of their homework at the program. In contrast, only 58 percent of the study participants who attended programs without structured homework assistance, but who attended to improve their grades, indicated that they completed their homework at the program.
- **Improve grades**—The research team found that 28 percent of the study participants who attended programs with structured homework assistance increased their English grades from the previous year versus only six percent of the study participants who attended programs without structured homework assistance. The impact of structured homework assistance was not as dramatic with math grades. Thirty-one percent of the study participants who attended structured homework assistance programs increased their math grades while 22 percent of the study participants at the study programs without structured homework assistance also increased their math grades.
- **Improve EOG math test levels**—Almost twice as many study participants (35 percent) at structured homework assistance programs increased their EOG math level, compared to those (18 percent) who attended programs without structured homework assistance.

**Cultural enrichment emphasis**—African-American participants at sites with a cultural enrichment emphasis were more likely to increase or maintain their self-esteem scores than were African-American study participants at sites that did not have a cultural enrichment emphasis.

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- **Improve self-esteem**—A large majority of African-American study participants (71 percent) at sites with a cultural enrichment emphasis increased or maintained their self-esteem scores compared to only 47 percent of the African-American participants who increased or maintained self-esteem scores at sites without a cultural enrichment emphasis. Put another way, more than half of the African-American participants at programs without cultural enrichment emphases had lower self-esteem scores at the end of the study.
- **Lower cost than intervention and treatment programs**—Table 1 shows that the estimated cost of serving one child at the study programs was \$1,448 annually and \$9.13 per day. In contrast, North Carolina’s intervention and treatment programs ranged in annual cost from \$48,441 at training schools to \$8,510 at Multi-Purpose Group Homes. Overall, the estimated average daily attendance cost of the study programs cost less than four of the state’s intervention and treatment programs.

### Program finances and costs

The cost of serving young people at the study programs is quite low. The major findings about the study program costs are described below.

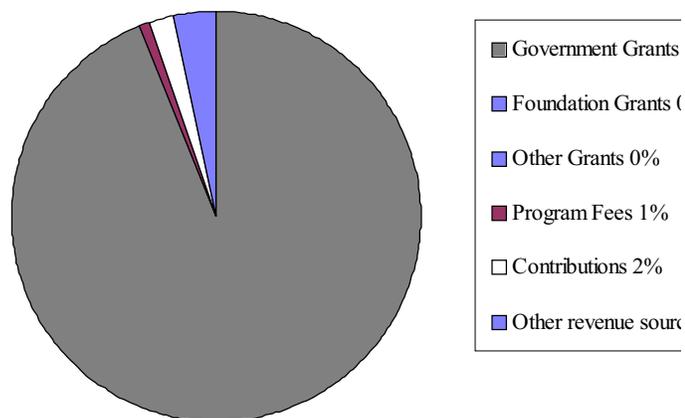
<b>Table 1: Program Cost Comparison<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Total annual cost per child</b>	<b>Average daily cost per child<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>NC Training School</b>	\$48,441	\$132.72
<b>NC Detention Center</b>	\$47,165	\$129.22
<b>Eckerd Wilderness Camp</b>	\$27,335	\$74.89
<b>Multi-Purpose Group Home</b>	\$8,510	\$23.32
<b>Estimated average daily attendance cost of study programs</b>	<b>\$1,448</b>	<b>\$9.13</b>

- **Lower costs at larger multi-site programs**—The research team found that the study programs were able to maximize their cost effectiveness by serving more young people at more sites throughout their counties. In general, the larger multi-site programs were approximately one-third as expensive per child as the smaller one-site programs.
- **In-kind support and contributions lower program costs**—The variation in program costs was also contingent on the amount of in-kind support and contributions collected by the study programs. Generally, programs that had been established in their communities for longer periods of time were more successful at pulling together resources.
- **High dependence on government revenues**—The study programs rely heavily on government grants to support program operations. Overall, the six study programs received 56 percent of their total revenues from government sources—none of which were from the local board of education or North Carolina’s Department of Public Instruction. Charts 1 and 2 show how revenue sources differed for government-sponsored and nonprofit-sponsored programs.

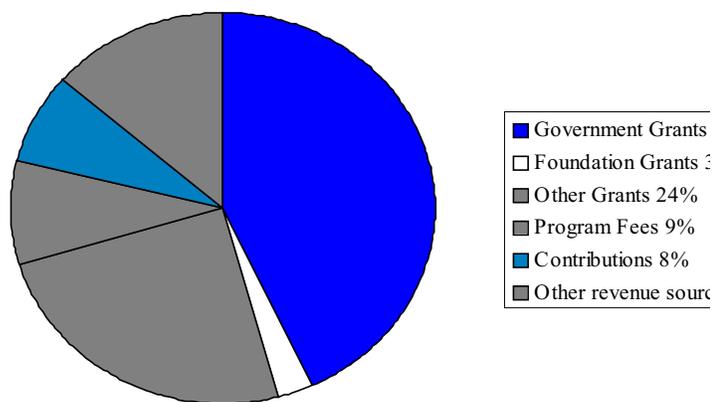
<sup>1</sup> The annual costs for the above intervention and treatment programs are from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Youth Services 1996-97 Annual Report, pp. 17-20.

<sup>2</sup> The average daily and hourly cost of the training school, detention center, Eckerd Wilderness Camping Program, Multi-Purpose Group Home, Governor’s One-on-One Volunteer Program, and the CBA program were prorated for 155 days which was the average number of days the study programs operated.

**Chart1: Revenue Sources for Publicly Sponsored Programs**



**Chart 2: Revenue Sources of Nonprofit Sponsored Programs**



Note: The percentages above may not reflect a total of 100%.

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- **Low parent fees**—Three of the programs charged no fees. At the three programs that charged fees, parents paid a minimum average hourly fee of \$0.08 and a maximum average hourly fee of \$0.71. In contrast, the National Study of Before- and After-School Programs (NSBASP) found that after-school programs that served low-income families in 1991 charged parents a minimum average hourly fee of \$1.69 and a maximum average hourly fee of \$2.05.<sup>3</sup> The maximum hourly fees charged by the three study programs are approximately twenty times lower than the average fees charged by after-school programs nationwide.

### Effective institutions and practices

Effective institutional practices helped the study programs to achieve their goals.

- **Advisory boards**—Programs with advisory boards were able to maintain high levels of community involvement, utilize the expertise and knowledge of board members, and access valuable community resources.
- **Appropriate sponsoring organizations**—Programs need sponsoring organizations that can obtain funding and locate facilities, manage operations, form collaborations with community agencies, and evaluate program operations.
- **Diversified funding sources**—By not relying exclusively on one or two funding sources, programs with diverse funding sources were in a better position to sustain long-term stability and growth.
- **Qualified and committed program management, staff, and volunteers**—Programs with qualified and committed program management, staff, and volunteers were able to maintain more positive staff and participant interactions and reduce staff turnover.

- **Program evaluation**—Programs that conducted ongoing evaluations were able to demonstrate the worthiness of the program to funders and, most importantly, use evaluation findings to improve the quality of program services and activities for young people.

### Limitations of the study's findings

The above findings are strongly suggestive but are not conclusive. They should be viewed with caution. The six study programs may not represent all effective after-school programs. Moreover, the research team has not made statements about the absolute impact of programs on young people, because a control group of non-participants was not available. All of the youth participants in this study were enrolled in an after-school program. Due to time and funding restrictions, the researchers were not able to include a control group. Without a comparison group of non-participants, the research team cannot be certain observed improvements in young peoples' self-esteem, school grades, and conduct are due to their participation in an after-school program. Rather, we have identified differences among participants that are systematically related to program differences expected to affect students' lives. When we observe that more students in programs with a special feature—such as structured homework assistance—are more likely to have, say, higher grades, we conclude that the structured homework helped improve the grades for some students. Additional research is needed to further investigate the impact of after-school programs across the state.

### Study recommendations

Based on the above findings, the research team offers the following state and local-level recommendations. The state-level recommendations are for the Governor's Crime Commission and other state policy makers. The local-level recommendations are for county and school government officials and after-school program managers and boards.

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<sup>3</sup>Seppanen, Patricia. John Love. Dinne Kaplan deVries. and Lawrence Bernstein. 1993. "The National Study of Before- and After-School Programs: Final Report to the Office of Policy and Planning U.S. Department of Education." RMC Research, Portsmouth, NH, pg. 107.

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### State level recommendations

After-school programs offer policymakers a lower-cost strategy for meeting the needs of young people who are at risk for juvenile delinquency than the treatment strategies listed in Table 1. The research team advises the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Committee to consider the following strategies:

- **Support program features that show promise of helping more students**—Increase the likelihood of improving students' attendance and academic performance by supporting programs that provide regular transportation in rural areas or use community-based sites that provide structured homework assistance.
- **Collaborate with the Governor's Support Our Students initiative**—The Committee should consider working collaboratively with the Department of Health and Human Services' Governor's Support Our Students (SOS) initiative in establishing grant priorities, sharing information and resources, and conducting program evaluations.
- **Collaborate with the public schools**— Work with the public schools to develop and evaluate model school-based after-school programs to deter students from juvenile delinquency.
- **Support programs that have the capacity to expand**—The Committee should consider funding well-established study programs that have the capacity to expand to additional sites in their counties in order to serve more students.
- **Conduct structured homework assistance**— After observing structured homework assistance, the researchers observed five essential components to structured homework assistance including adequate work areas and supplies, consistent implementation, tutors, and communication about homework with parents and teachers.
- **Provide regular transportation in rural areas**— In order to serve young people from low-income or single-parent families, after-school programs— particularly those in rural areas—need to provide safe and reliable transportation for participants to and from the program every day.
- **Conduct targeted enrollment**—A program's enrollment criteria should be consistent with its overall goals and objectives and should outline recruitment procedures. Programs that choose to focus on "at-risk" youth must clarify what they mean by "at-risk."
- **Recruit qualified and committed program management, staff, and volunteers**—One of the most frequent pieces of advice given by the adult interviewees to other communities was to hire experienced and skilled staff members who genuinely care about young people to serve as positive adult role models.
- **Identify local funding sources**—The long-term viability of the study programs is contingent on developing diverse funding sources to support program operations.
- **Form partnerships with local governments, juvenile courts and law enforcement agencies**— The goods and services provided to the study programs through these arrangements benefited them in a number of ways.
- **Provide a comprehensive array of enrichment activities and field trips**—Effective after-school programs need to offer participants more than just structured homework assistance. The study interviewees advised program managers to carefully plan a wide range of activities for young people.

### Local and program-level recommendations

The direct beneficiaries of after-school programs are the young people who participate in the program and their parents. The community as a whole also benefits from these programs as young people stay out of trouble and grow up to be more productive and informed citizens. These local recommendations are written for local government decision makers and school officials and program staff and organizing committee members. The research team recommends that they consider implementing the following practices and strategies:

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### Conclusion

The staff members at the six after-school programs faced significant ongoing challenges to encourage young people to attend their programs on a regular basis. In fact, 33 percent of the study participants attended their programs less than half of the total number of days the program was offered over the study period.

If after-school programs are going to make a positive difference in the lives of participants and help reduce delinquency, then it is critical participants attend regularly. The programs struggled with limited funds for regular transportation in rural and urban areas. Their participants felt conflicts with other after-school activities such as band and sports. The programs sometimes encountered limited support and resources from the public schools and wavering commitment levels of participants and their parents throughout the school year.

In response to the needs of after-school programs and youth, state policy makers need to more effectively coordinate resources to support local programs that encourage regular attendance. On the basis of this study, attendance is likely to be higher in programs that target at-risk youth, provide regular transportation in rural areas, use community-based sites, and conduct structured homework. Similarly, local community leaders and program supporters need to develop and support programs that provide structured homework assistance, regular transportation, and targeted enrollment; and have qualified and committed program staff. Supporting expansion of programs that are already successfully serving young people can be a lower cost way to increase the number of youth served. Building diverse funding bases and strong collaborations with other local agencies can help assure continued program operation. Together these state and local strategies can help better meet the academic and behavioral needs of young people by providing supervised programs for them during the after-school hours.

### Acknowledgements:

This article was prepared by **Dr. Gordon Whitaker, Professor of Public Administration and Government, Principal Investigator; Kyle Gray, research associate, Center for Urban and Regional Studies; and Barbara Roole, research assistant.**

## SYSTEMSTATS

A Publication of the  
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