



# EVALUATION BRIEF

BUREAU OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

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## *Examining after-school programs in HISD: Perspectives from parents and students*

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*At the beginning of the 2009–2010 school year, an after-school evaluation plan was designed to investigate the effectiveness of several after-school programs in the Houston Independent School District (HISD). One component of the evaluation plan was to gather program perceptions from parents and students. This research brief includes a short summary of survey results of parents and students who participated in the district's four largest after-school programs. The second component of the evaluation will incorporate a matched-design comparison study of the academic performance of student participants as compared to similar school peers who did not attend after-school programs. These results will be available in the full after-school evaluation report in the fall of 2010.*

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### **Background**

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Approximately, 126 HISD campuses provide after-school program activities sponsored by one of the following after-school programs. First, the Mayor's After-School Achievement Program (ASAP), managed by the City of Houston, provides after-school opportunities for Houston youth. Through ASAP, funds are distributed to local agencies and schools for extended-hour programming in an effort to provide children with structured activities after-school, reduce juvenile crime, and victimization between the hours of three and six o'clock in the afternoon (City of Houston, 2009). Second, the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program is funded under Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 2003. This program distributes funding for school districts to develop and operate 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers. The focus of these centers is to expand the academic enrichment opportunities for children attending low performing schools. Tutorial services, academic enrichment, and other youth development activities (such as recreation, art, drug prevention) are included in the program to complement the academic components (James-Burdumy & et al., 2005). Third, Cooperative for After-school Enrichment (CASE), which is sponsored through the Harris County Department of Education, implements a variety of after-school

programs to serve children in HISD. CASE is the source of funding for several 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers throughout the district as well as all of the Partnership Project programs (Harris County Department of Education, 2009). Finally, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) sponsors after-school programs that offer structured programming for HISD students, nearly identical to those of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

On a typical day at an HISD after-school program, students are provided a small snack, academic enrichment or homework help activities, and at least one recreational/leisure activity. The extended program lasts at least two and half hours following the regular school day and operates a minimum of five days a week. This typical schedule is utilized across all programs.

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### **Data and Methods**

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Parents of students attending one of the aforementioned after-school programs in HISD were asked to complete a brief survey about their child's after-school program. Surveys were distributed to parents via their child and returned to after-school program staff upon completion. The survey was compiled using research questions from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning

Centers Surveys (Dodson & McCann, 2006; Reed, Van Egeren, & Bates, 2009).

After-school program staff administered the student surveys to second through twelfth-grade students during the after-school program. Two surveys were designed, one for second and third-grade students and one for all students in grades four and higher. The surveys were designed to capture perceptions from after-school participants about opportunities and activities available in their programs. The children surveys were modeled after the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers Surveys (Reed, Van Egeren, & Bates, 2009).

Parent and student survey data were entered and analyzed from 25 randomly selected schools distributed throughout HISD. Given the quality of data from the younger children, this report will only include the perceptions from students in grades four through twelve. Percentages were based on the total number of responses.

**How do parents rate the after-school program activities at their child’s school?**

A total of 1,140 parents completed the *After-School Parent Survey* from the selected schools. Sixty-two percent of the parent respondents noted that their child attended the after-school program for five or more days a week. When parents were asked to rank the importance of various reasons that influenced them to enroll their child in the after-school program, 85 percent noted that they enrolled their child because they hoped the program would help their child do better in school.

Parents were also asked to rate the activities provided by their child’s after-school program. **Table 1** displays the responses of the parents (in percentages). Exactly, 57.2 percent of the parent respondents rated the recreational and sports activities of their child’s after-school program as excellent and 51.8 percent rated the fine arts (art,

theatre, dance, and music) activities as excellent. In addition, 46.2 percent of the parents rated the tutorials and the homework assistance that their child received in the after-school program as excellent.

**To what extent have parents seen a change in their child’s behavior since they started participating in an after-school program?**

Parents were also asked to what extent had their child changed his/her behavior as a result of participating in the after-school program. **Table 2** (see page 3) displays parents’ responses (in percentages). The data show that 61.2 percent of parent respondents felt that their child’s academic achievement had improved since attending the after-school program, while 11.2 percent of parents noted that they had not seen a change in their child’s academic achievement. Interestingly, 27.0 percent of parents responded that their child needed no improvement in academic achievement.

Nearly 58 percent of parent respondents noted that their child was going to class more motivated since participating in the after-school program; while 12.9 percent responded that they had not noticed any change in their child’s motivation. Further, 1.3 percent of parents indicated negative change in their child turning homework on time and getting along with other students.

**How do students rate their experiences in their school’s after-school program?**

A total of 1,123 students in grades four through twelve completed the *After-School Student Survey* from the selected schools. Several questions were asked to ascertain how they felt about the learning activities provided in the after-school program. All of the students’ response rates to questions about their after-school program are included in **Table 3** (see page 3).

Table 1. Response Rates of Parents about After-school Programming at their Child’s School, 2009

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A
	%	%	%	%	%
Recreation and sports (Health and fitness)	57.2	30.0	7.5	0.9	4.4
Fine arts (art, theatre, dance, and music)	51.8	32.5	7.4	1.3	7.0
Character education (development of values and positive conduct, citizenship)	48.0	37.6	9.1	0.5	4.8
Technology activities (computers)	48.0	33.1	7.8	1.1	10.0
Tutorials (extra instruction in reading, math, TAKS, etc.)	46.2	35.2	7.3	0.6	10.7
Homework assistance	46.1	34.6	10.4	1.6	7.3
Youth services learning projects	43.2	37.1	9.4	0.8	9.5
Test preparatory skills (SAT/ACT, PSAT)	32.7	28.2	9.6	0.5	29.0

Table 2. Response Rates of Parents Concerning to What Extent After-School Program Changed Their Child's Behavior, 2009

	Positive Change	No Change	Negative Change	No Change Needed
	%	%	%	%
Academic achievement	61.2	11.2	0.6	27.0
Coming to class motivated	57.9	12.9	0.6	28.6
Turning in homework on time	53.5	13.1	1.3	32.1
Behaving well in class	52.0	13.5	0.9	33.5
Getting along well with other students	51.7	12.2	1.3	34.7
Attending class regularly	43.7	13.1	0.5	42.7

Approximately, 34.4 percent of student respondents strongly agreed with the statement, 'I get a chance to try new things.' Nearly 36 percent of students strongly agreed that the after-school activities challenged them to learn new skills and 28.5 percent strongly agreed that the program afforded them opportunities to be a leader. In addition, 45.0 percent of students responding noted that they strongly agreed with the statement 'I really like coming to this program.'

#### To what extent has participating in the after-school program changed students' behaviors and thoughts about school?

Students were asked to think about how their school-related behaviors had changed since they started attending the after-school program. The response scale used for these questions was a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 'Not at all' to 'A lot.' The students' response rates are presented in **Table 4** (see page 4).

Table 3. Response Rates of Students about After-school Programs at Their School, 2009

How much do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	%	%	%	%
I really like coming to this program.	45.0	34.8	8.8	11.4
The activities challenge me to learn new skills.	35.9	42.3	12.3	9.6
I get to do things I like to do.	35.0	38.2	13.4	13.4
I get a chance to try new things.	34.4	50.3	8.9	6.3
I trust the staff.	33.3	41.9	15.1	9.7
After-school teachers notice when I have done something well.	31.6	43.2	13.1	12.0
I feel safe.	30.8	45.2	12.7	11.3
I have opportunities to be a leader.	28.5	44.4	17.1	10.0
I miss being at this program when I don't come.	26.5	34.0	20.8	18.6
This program helps me turn my homework in on time.	25.1	38.0	21.1	15.8
Students in this after-school program follow the rules.	21.2	45.1	20.0	13.8
After-school teachers punish students here without finding out what really happened.	15.0	19.4	28.3	37.2
At this program, the activities can get out of control.	14.9	26.2	30.5	28.4
The program space is not kept clean.	12.7	21.3	32.2	33.8
I get left out or ignored by other students.	8.3	13.4	32.3	46.1

Table 4. Response Rates of Students to What Extent After-School Participation Changed their School-related Behavior and Thoughts, 2009

<b>Think about HOW YOU FEEL ,THINK, and ACT NOW that you have attended this after-school program</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
<b>How much do you .....</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Current Activities</b>			
Care about getting good grades.	84.3	10.6	5.1
Look forward to coming to school.	64.0	26.5	9.5
Want to get along well with other students.	62.8	29.0	8.2
Turn in your homework on time.	60.9	31.4	7.7
Behave well in class.	60.4	33.6	6.1
<b>Future Activities</b>			
Look forward to graduating from high school.	86.8	9.5	3.7
Want to go to college.	85.1	10.3	4.6
Think that graduating from high school leads to a good job.	81.9	13.5	4.5

The data reveal that 84.3 percent of students responded that they cared a lot about getting good grades; 64 percent of students noted that they looked forward to coming to school a lot, while 60.9 percent felt that they turned in their homework on time a lot since participating in the after-school program.

Several questions asked students to rate how much they thought about future activities since being a part of an after-school program. Approximately, 86.8 percent of students reported that they looked forward to graduating from high school a lot and 85.1 percent thought a lot about wanting to go to college since attending the after-school program.

**Conclusions**

This preliminary report provides the first examination of HISD’s after-school programs from the perspective of parents and students at four of the largest HISD-based after-school programs. Based on respondents’ feedback, the after-school programs within the district are meeting their main objective, which is to provide additional learning opportunities that help students increase their academic behaviors, such as turning in homework on time and going to school more motivated to learn. There may be indirect benefits for students who participate in after-school programs, including increasing students’ thoughts about graduating from high school and going to college; however, further investigation is needed.

**Future Reporting**

The full evaluation of the effectiveness of HISD after-school programs will be completed in the summer of 2010. The evaluation report will include student participation numbers throughout HISD, a summary of after-school staff members’ perspectives, and an analysis of the academic performance data for students who participated in HISD after-school programs during the 2009–2010 school year as compared to comparable groups of students who did not participate in after-school programs.

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