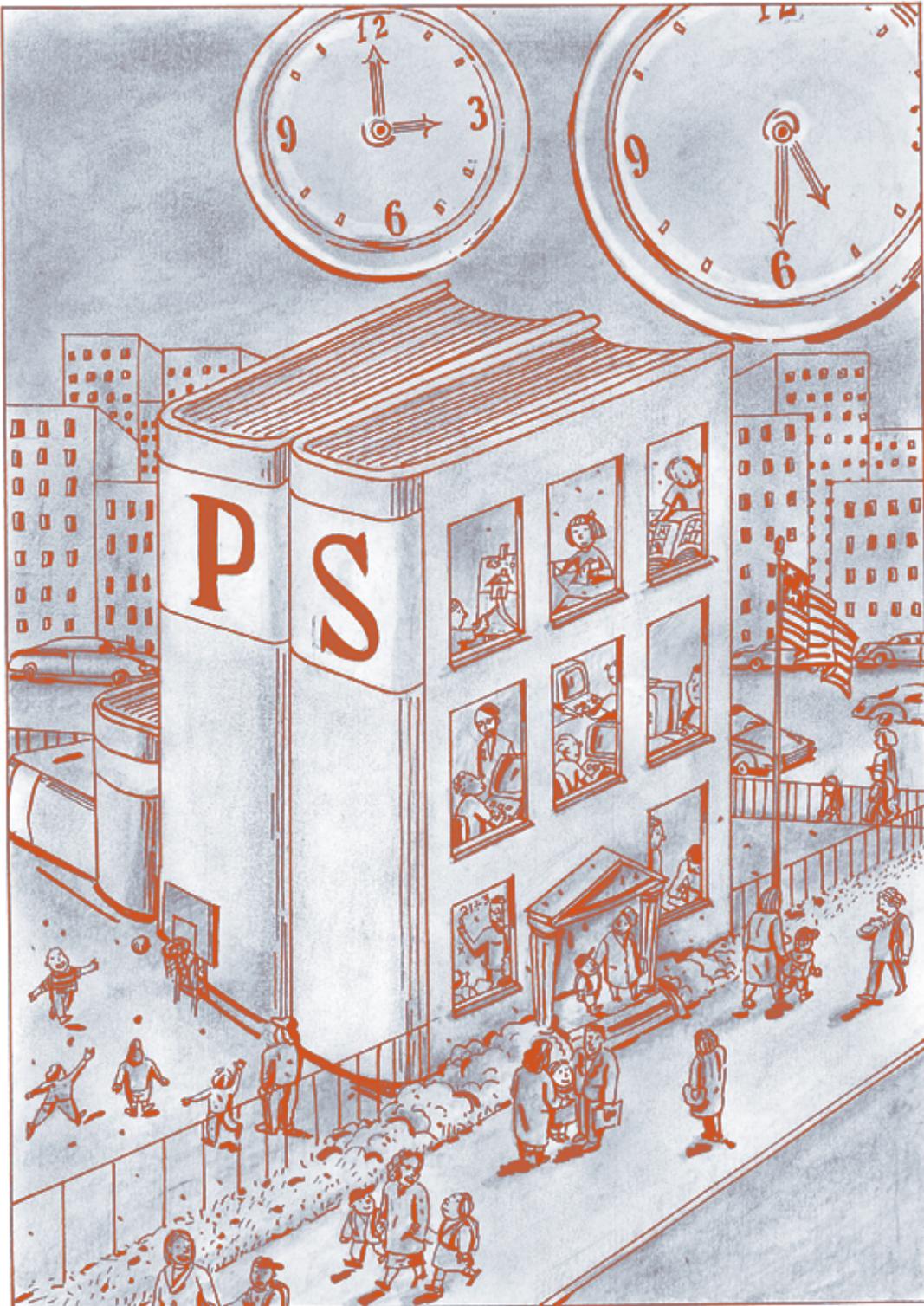


# IDEAS

## FOR AN OPEN SOCIETY

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### ADVOCATING FOR AFTER- SCHOOL PROGRAMS

*After-school  
programs are  
educationally  
valuable,  
socially  
responsible, &  
economically  
sound.*

Lucy Friedman



EXTENDING THE SCHOOL DAY

# Making *the case* for after-school programs

A

t a time when budget axes are falling on city, state, and federal expenditures, services for young people like after-school programs may seem a luxury. But they aren't. After-school programs are educationally valuable, socially responsible, and economically sound. Children do better in school, risky youth behavior diminishes, and parents are more productive on the job when they know their children are engaged in safe, enriching activities. It would be short sighted — both economically and socially — to sacrifice these services for the sake of cost cutting.

The fact is that latchkey kids have become a phenomenon of life in the twenty-first century. When the final school bell sounds at 3 p.m., millions of children and youth exit the schoolroom for an afternoon spent at home alone. Estimates put the total at anywhere from five to seven million kids. In New York City, there are over 200,000 latchkey kids between 6 and 13 years old. At least 78% of mothers work out of the home. Nearly 20% are single heads of household. The 1996 welfare reforms forced millions of parents off public assistance and into the workforce. Usually employed in low-paying jobs, these parents are precisely the ones who need after-school support for their kids. They are often living in communities without any of the support mechanisms needed to balance work and family. And they have no disposable income for this need. Knowing that their children are well cared for is beneficial to the children, to the parents,

and to employers. In this current economic climate, these parents are the ones who are most vulnerable — and most in need of assistance with their children and teenagers. Not only are more parents working, they are working longer hours. The end result is a growing gap estimated between 20 to 25 hours a week between parents' work schedules and students' school schedules.

For some, television — the babysitter of last resort — fills the hours. For others,

BY LUCY FRIEDMAN



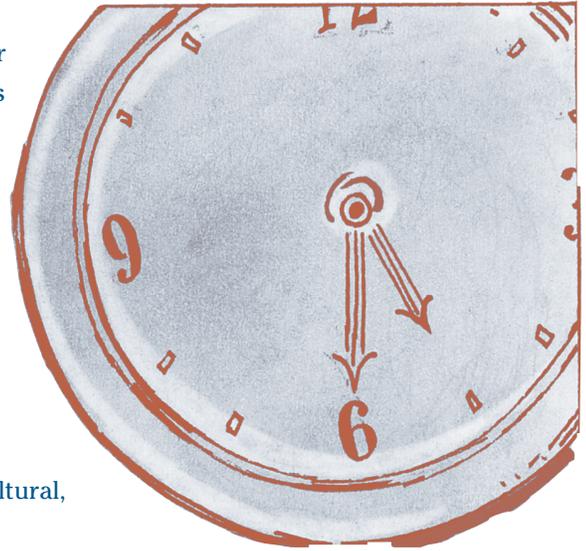
afternoons and early evenings may include risky, unhealthy behaviors, such as drug and alcohol use. But for most of these young people, this time of the day won't include learning, nor will it contribute to their development as healthy, well-rounded individuals.

But this doesn't have to be the case. Addressing this issue presents both challenges and opportunities for parents, educators, communities, and the young people themselves. All have a stake in whether the after-school period is wasted time or a chance to engage young people in creative, affirmative activities. Across the country, communities have responded with structured programs that provide a safe haven.

But more than just keeping youth out of harm's way until their parents get home, after-school programs pay off for the kids in enhanced learning. Study after study has revealed that after-school programs can be crucial for improving children's experience in school—from attendance and attitude, to academic performance and graduation rates. A 2001 evaluation of California's after-school initiative found that over a two-year period, students improved in math and reading tests at twice the rate of all students statewide. The study also found improved attendance and reduction in grade repetitions. As schools increasingly employ standardized testing and higher standards for promotion, after-school programs can provide necessary tutoring and

homework assistance to help students reach their potential. Young people's interactions with their peers and adults at the programs help build emotional stability, self-esteem and better family relationships. Such unambiguously favorable findings hold true for varied programs—recreational, cultural, and academic.

For many of these children, the after-school period can be a twilight zone fraught with dangers to their well being. Statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention show that juvenile violence and crime jump in after-school hours. Juvenile violence is four times greater than during the 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. period. After-school is also a prime time for youth to engage in sexual activity, risking pregnancy and exposure to sexually transmitted disease. A 1995 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study found that youth were 37% more likely to become teen parents if they were not involved in extracurricular activities. Similarly, drug and alcohol use have a direct relationship to young people's status as their own caretakers after school: Those



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who spend more time home alone unsupervised are more likely to abuse alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

Americans understand these dangers and have even expressed a willingness to pay more for after-school programs, understanding their benefit in the long term. Despite Americans' supposed aversion to increasing taxes, a 1999 national poll conducted by the Washington, D.C.-based group *Fight Crime: Invest in Kids* found that 74% of those surveyed would support higher taxes or forego a tax cut in order to support such programs. A recent national poll conducted for OSI by Peter D. Hart Research Associates found that 77% of the public support after-school programs as an important crime prevention tactic.

It is precisely at times of economic hardship that families with children most need what after-school programs provide. Low-income families and their communities in particular will be challenged as government resources are shifted and diminished in a climate of austerity. Funding for after-school programming not only should be kept away from the budget cutters; it should be increased substantially as an effective strategy for educating children and creating safe communities. After-school programs should be integral to all strategies at the federal, state, and local levels to improve the academic success and experience of young people. As educational policy, as community building policy, and as the ultimate investment in youth, after-school programs have already passed every test with the highest scores.

Lucy Friedman is the president of The After-School Corporation, an independent nonprofit organization launched by OSI in 1998.

## The After-School Corporation A New York City

When terrorists struck New York City on September 11, 2001, thousands of children were touched by the disaster — either through the loss of parents, family members, or a profound routing of their sense of peace and security. After-school programs throughout the five boroughs responded to the emotional and psychological needs of New York City's young people. With resources provided by The After-School Corporation (TASC), more than 80 community-based groups operating after-school programs were able to provide information and resources to program staff helping children to cope with the trauma and fear created by those extraordinary events.

The importance of after-school programs came into sharp relief during that crisis. But every day of the school year, TASC and its community-based partners provide programs for youth. More than just offering supervision, though, TASC-supported after-school programs are designed to compliment classroom learning with academic enrichment and creative activities not normally offered in school.

The Open Society Institute launched TASC in 1998 as an independent nonprofit organization. TASC now funds 217 programs in New York State, with 157 of them in New York City. The programs are operated by 130 community-based organizations, which are as diverse as the youth they serve. For example, Alianza Dominicana, a Manhattan nonprofit, operates a program at Intermediate School 143, which has a large Dominican student body. And in the Bronx, the American Museum of Natural History runs a program for elementary students at P.S. 42. In four years, enrollment in TASC-supported programs has soared from 7,000 to 49,000. TASC works in close collaboration with the New York City Board of Education, both as a funding and as an organizational partner.

Grantmaking to community-based organizations is only one part of TASC's comprehensive approach to implementing the policy and practice of after-school programs.

# y Model

Funding is made within a context of TASC's agenda of promoting quality programs that achieve desired outcomes. To that end, TASC has a clear philosophy on the necessary components for an effective program. After-school programs should offer homework help and enrichment activities, such as literacy, community service, arts, computer education, and health and nutrition education. Staffing should represent a cross-section of the community, including teachers, adult volunteers and high school and college level students. Engaging parents in program planning and activities is also critical and has been shown to translate into increased parental involvement with their children's schools. Programs are required to have a full-time, year-round coordinator on site. The full-time coordinators and part-time workers are trained through the Partnership for After-school Education, Bank Street College, Studio in a School, and numerous other organizations.

Public schools are the natural sites for after-school programs given the population they reach and the availability of facilities. Programs operate from 3 to 6 p.m. on school days and are open to all students. Normally 30% of a school's students participate, with the average program serving 200 to 300 youth. Holding these programs within schools has another important purpose: to integrate the activities and staff of the after-school program with the functioning of the school itself. Community-based organizations seeking TASC funding must team up with a school and have the active cooperation of its principal in order to be eligible. Site coordinators are based in the school and develop partnerships with school staff. Such requirements are aimed at insuring that

programs offer activities that differ from but compliment the school curriculum.

Measuring the achievements of TASC after-school programs in just four years of operation provides both encouraging evidence of success and clear indicators that much more is needed. An independent evaluation conducted for TASC in 2001 found that parents overwhelmingly were satisfied with after-school programs—86% believed that it improved their children's academic work. Half of those surveyed said the existence of the programs meant they missed fewer days at work and helped their job performance. Among school principals, 45% said TASC-supported programs had increased parent attendance at school events. Students offered praise, too, with 75% feeling positive about themselves, their peers, and the nature of program activities. The vast majority of students in all grades said the programs had improved their reading comprehension.

The model of TASC after-school programs has proved to be effective and relatively easy to replicate in New York schools. The cost per student averages \$1,500 annually, which includes operational costs, staff training, curriculum development and evaluation. Subsidies from the U.S. Department of Agriculture of up to \$320 per student annually provide a snack or meal for program participants. To date, TASC-supported programs

*“After-school programs should offer homework help and enrichment activities, such as literacy, community service, arts, computer education, and health and nutrition education.”*

have spread to 12% of New York City's public schools. In addition to the OSI grant, TASC has garnered more than \$20 million in funding from corporations, foundations, and individuals. But the need far outweighs the availability of programs. In the next five years, TASC intends to lay the foundation so that more than 300,000 students in 900 schools will benefit from after-school programs. The ultimate goal for this important initiative, however, is to see TASC firmly rooted in the educational culture of New York as an ongoing venture with broad public-private support. As it moves into a fifth year, TASC has surely constructed a solid foundation upon which its future successes can be squarely built.

# A window on after-school at PS 24

**M**arisol Ramos, site coordinator for the PAZ (Peace from A to Z) after-school program at P.S. 24 in Brooklyn's Sunset Park, patrols the school's gymnasium, waiting for the next performance in the end-of-the-year talent show. It hasn't been easy to get this far.

The show was originally scheduled to take place in the school's newly renovated auditorium, but the 5th grade graduation exercises took precedence so, at the last minute, Ramos was forced to move to the gymnasium. And, since the gym could only accommodate half of PAZ's 380 students, she had to make the performance a two-day event.

Ramos raises her hand to signal for silence as a group of third graders, led by their counselor, takes the stage. There's a burst of applause. And then, the sound of a jack hammer cuts through the room. For months, construction crews have worked on the building, repairing structural weaknesses in place

BY ANDY MIARA

since the elementary school was built three years ago.

Without hesitation, though mostly inaudible, the kids belt out Leann Rimes's "I Believe." When the song ends, Ramos steps outside, has some words with the construction workers, and then the kids sing the song again—this time without interruption.

"She approaches every challenge with a problem-solving spirit," says Tom Roderick, executive director of Educators for Social Responsibility Metropolitan Area (ESR Metro), which partnered with P.S. 24 in the fall of 1999 to create the PAZ after-school program. The program is funded by The After-School Corporation (TASC).

For the PAZ staff, problem-solving is not simply a management term. It's the philosophy upon which the after-school program was founded.

Since 1985, through its Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program (RCCP), ESR Metro has used interactive techniques to teach children skills in communication, anger

management, negotiation, mediation, cooperation, intercultural understanding and confronting bias.

When P.S. 24 opened in 1998, principal Yvette Aguirre, who had worked with ESR Metro at her previous school, enlisted Roderick and his staff to help make conflict resolution and peace education a core component of the school.

"It's a life skill that we need to teach the kids," says Aguirre. "It was important to us that our school not just focus on academics, but that it be balanced in terms of focusing on needs for kids to solve issues in their lives and make responsible decisions and be good civic people."

In 1999, a team of Columbia University researchers presented the results of a two-year study that showed ESR Metro's Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program is an effective tool for teaching valuable life lessons. The research showed, among other things, that RCCP promotes academic achievement. Students who are more comfortable with their environment, the study concluded, become more capable learners.

Interestingly, the study also found that when teachers who had received RCCP training failed to implement the curriculum properly—generally because they taught too few lessons—their students performed worse in the analyses than students who had received no instruction at all.

When TASC offered P.S. 24 the chance to team with ESR Metro to create an after-school program that could augment the RCCP education already taking place in the school, it seemed like a practical solution to this problem.

Besides conflict resolution, PAZ's two other components—cooperative games and sports, and academic help—also address soft spots in the school's regular curriculum.

Like many New York City public schools, P.S. 24 has no physical education program. However, twice a week, students in the PAZ program have an hour of cooperative games and sports. According to PAZ's cooperative games instructors, the exercises, which stress teamwork over competition, both fulfill a need for physical activity and

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help promote RCCP values.

“The kids start to get the program’s buzzwords,” says one instructor. “Feelings, community, challenging themselves and taking risks.”

For the parents in the low-income Latino neighborhood, most of whom have only limited English language skills, the main concern was that their children have the opportunity to complete their homework in a supervised environment. Accordingly, PAZ scheduled an hour of homework into every afternoon. After the program’s first two months, however, many students were still returning home with assignments incomplete, and the parents came forward to complain.

What followed was a study in effective mediation.

The PAZ staff began by examining its own practices and determined that one problem lay with the organization of the homework-help sessions. Students were grouped according to grade level, but not by teacher, which often left the supervising counselor (who generally attended to 20 students per period) without time to deal with the range of assignments.

While this situation was easy enough to remedy, Principal Aguirre, who describes herself as “not a big homework promoter,” identified a larger problem. The after-school program had afforded her an opportunity to survey the homework given by her teachers. She found that, for the most part, the assignments were repetitive and labor-



intensive, designed to teach responsibility rather than address students’ individual weaknesses.

“Many of the students live in small apartments with a lot of people,” she explains. “They don’t really have enough control over their environment to be able to quietly do something independently. They can’t

carry the full responsibility for completing homework if their parents take them out that night or do not provide the right environment to do homework.”

As an alternative, Aguirre proposed that homework be completely individualized. Each assignment would be tailor-made to address the student’s particular weakness. The teachers, however, thought that large class sizes made this too difficult.

In the end, an agreement was reached. First, teachers were asked to carefully think through all their homework assignments. Then, the amount of homework that could be given was standardized within grade levels so it could be completed with the allotted after-school hour. Finally, discussions were opened about the types of assignments that could be given, with less emphasis placed on memorization and repetition.

“After we reached that agreement,” says Ramos, “we had very few complaints. And by the second year, we had no complaints.”

*(continued on back page)*

Andy Miara works in the Communications Department of the Open Society Institute’s U.S. Programs.

# IDEAS

FOR AN OPEN SOCIETY

## Advocating for After-School Programs

(continued from page 7)

And while Ramos celebrates this achievement, she knows complaints can never be totally avoided. Nor should they be. In fact, PAZ's success in its first two years can be measured by its ability to turn potential problems into opportunities to enact

"win-win solutions" that, often, bring about positive change.

As the talent show draws to a close, the students file out, rushing to loosen their neatly-tucked dress shirts as they receive congratulations from parents, teachers and coun-

selors. And, as they laugh with each other, recapping their favorite parts of the show and proudly displaying the certificates they received for completing the program, it's difficult to imagine that they would have been any happier in the newly-renovated auditorium.

The Open Society Institute is a private operating and grantmaking foundation that promotes the development of open society around the world. OSI's U.S. Programs seek to strengthen democracy in the United States by addressing barriers to opportunity and justice, broadening public discussion about such barriers, and assisting marginalized groups to participate equally in civil society and to make their voices heard. U.S. Programs

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