

AFTER-SCHOOL GROWS UP



New York City: The After-School Corporation By Tony Proscio

How Four Large American Cities Approach Scale and Quality in After-School Programs



Photographs courtesy of TASC

New York City

The After-School Corporation (TASC)

BY TONY PROSCIO

CREATING A CITYWIDE NETWORK of after-school programs in New York — the nation's largest city and therefore its largest public school system — means, almost by definition, embarking on the biggest municipal after-school enterprise in history. As if that weren't daunting enough, starting such an attempt in 1998 would be like building a house in a whirlwind.

As the '90s were drawing to a close, the decades-long war between New York City mayors and the city's independently elected school board was entering a round of decisive battles. Within three years, the city would have a new mayor, three schools chancellors in quick succession, a new state law abolishing the board and granting mayors control of the schools, a new Department of Education in new headquarters, a historic legal battle in state courts over equitable funding of city schools, and a completely reorganized school hierarchy — all as the city headed into the worst fiscal crisis since its near-bankruptcy in the 1970s. Amid the ensuing political drama over how the schools would now be run, and by whom, and at what cost, the prospect of bold city leadership on after-school issues was close to zero.

Yet 1998 was the year that one of the

largest New York-based foundations, the Open Society Institute (OSI), chose for launching The After-School Corporation, a citywide intermediary aimed at building the largest after-school system in the United States, without any firm promise of support from the mayor or the school system. To be sure, mayors and chancellors and other top officials often spoke supportively of after-school programs generally, welcomed TASC, provided more-than-modest funding, and generally cheered its efforts. But even as this is written, in TASC's sixth year of operation, there is still no clear commitment from either the schools or City Hall to adopt the TASC model as a city program or to help it expand, much less to extend it to every school. Nor is anyone expecting such a commitment any time soon.

After-school programs in New York long predated TASC, of course, and many continue to function today independently of TASC. The largest, and most nationally known, are the Beacon Schools, whose purpose extends well beyond after-school activity for kids, to include vocational training and education for adults, community meetings, and neighborhood social activities. There were 78 Beacons operating at the time TASC started work, and some 90 "Virtual Y's" — a 3-to-6-p.m. program of the YMCA of Greater New York that operates in

schools rather than in YMCA buildings. Between 50 and 100 other after-school programs were operated around the city by three prominent organizations: the Children's Aid Society, a large family-service agency; the Police Athletic League; and the Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation, a relative newcomer (founded 1992) that runs more than 30 summer and after-school programs in New York.

But these programs are based on various models, offer varying levels of program enrichment, and work on different schedules for slightly different purposes. None of them set out to be a model for the whole city, as TASC did, nor is any of them yet widespread enough to be seen that way. Some programs are more richly funded and offer more service than TASC, but at a cost that would be hard to replicate citywide. Others are less extensive than TASC, operating fewer than five days a week, only at certain kinds of schools, or with fewer kinds of activity, and thus are not an answer for every neighborhood's needs.

Each of the large sponsoring organizations today collaborates with TASC to some degree, usually as the nonprofit sponsor of some number of TASC-funded programs. For example, some 25 TASC programs are now operating in Beacon Schools, as part of their menu of services. YMCAs are sponsors of 21 programs, and

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the Children's Aid Society sponsors 11. In every case, though, the sponsoring organizations also operate other programs elsewhere that are not part of the TASC network.

As this is written, TASC is by far the largest, but far from the only, after-school initiative in New York City. Its support from city government is growing, but it does not yet approach a level at which it could extend to every school in the city. Even so, its effort to demonstrate that a citywide after-school network is feasible in New York City has won it widespread credibility and increasing attention from City Hall. At the end of 2003, TASC supports after-school activity, combining academic, arts, and recreational programs, in 193 schools, including elementary, middle, and high schools, for more than 41,000 students at a time across New York's five boroughs. Each school's program is developed jointly by the local school and a nonprofit organization, often one with a base or branch in the surrounding community. The program is constantly expanding, with the aim, eventually, of reaching every school in the city.

Theory: A Program So Big, So Popular, It Can't Be Undone

THE CREATION OF TASC WAS, by any standard, a huge philanthropic wager on the political durability of a good idea when that idea is given wide enough dissemination and time to take root. The theory, in brief and rough strokes, was that the widespread operation of a good, relatively low-cost after-school program, open from 3 to 6 p.m. five days a week and funded initially with a challenge grant from OSI, would create such demand from parents and school officials that the city would ultimately have no choice but to continue and enlarge it. The Open Society Institute, an international foundation created and led by financier George Soros, committed up to \$25 million a year for five years — an unprecedented aggregate gift of \$125 million to after-school programs in a single metropolitan area. (TASC operates at a smaller scale in other parts of New York State as well.)

The Soros gift, the foundation's largest initiative in the United States, has since been extended to cover seven years instead of five, at a rate of about \$20 million a year in recent years. That annual contribution must be matched at least three-to-one from public and private sources. The matching requirement has been met over time, with most of the

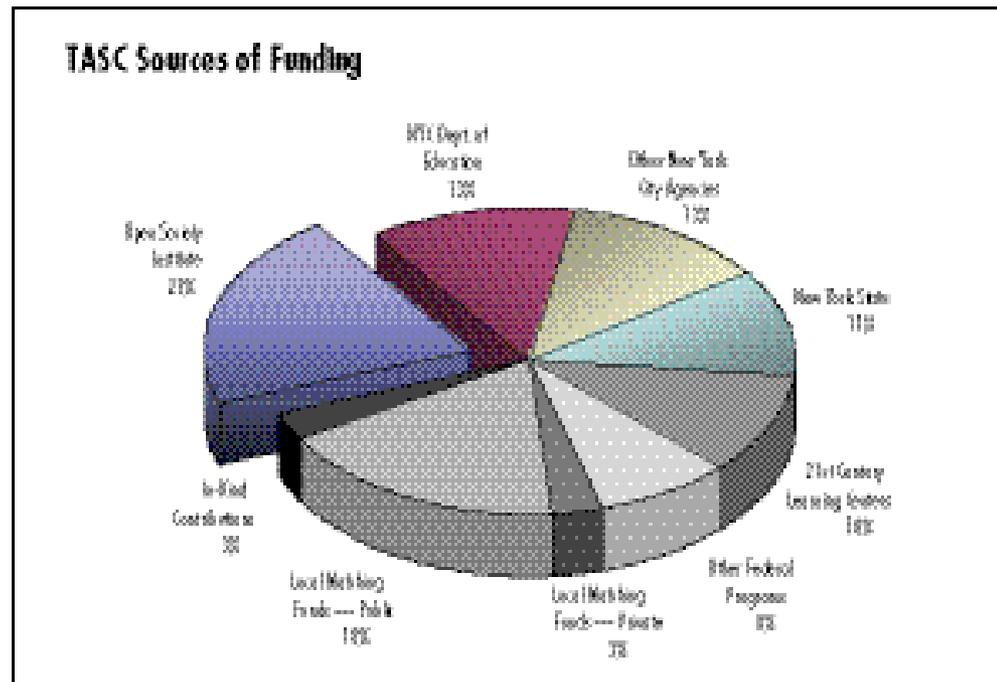
match being raised centrally by TASC from public and private grants, and the remainder coming from less-stringent matching requirements that TASC expects from local programs. In most years, programs at each school have been expected to raise a higher percentage of match money than they did the year before, though TASC often helps them with the fundraising. Most local programs started with 100 percent funding from TASC in their first year, or close to that, but by the end of 2003, nearly all were meeting or exceeding a target of 40 percent — that is, at least 40 cents of every dollar being raised by the local program. The locally raised money is included, alongside TASC's own fundraising, in the total three-to-one matching challenge set by OSI. The Soros and matching funds together have produced a total TASC budget of some \$80 million or more a year citywide, with the total reaching \$85 million in 2003.

Viewed one way, the strategic purpose of these matching funds — lining up a critical mass of public support behind the citywide after-school mission — seems to be working. Public funding thus far has hovered around two-thirds of the total TASC budget, at an average of roughly \$60 million a year. But that support is not yet a regular commitment of any single agency — particularly the crucial

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Department of Education. Government money has instead come from something like a dozen city and state departments. The city's school system provided just under \$7.5 million directly to TASC. Additional money from the school system does make its way into the matching funds that local programs raise, as when an individual school chooses to contribute some of its discretionary funds or teachers' time toward the local match. These cash and in-kind contributions from schools amount to some \$1.4 million in local matching funds. But as a system-wide commitment, Education Department dollars now make up less than 40 percent of the total city contribution, and not much more than 10 cents of every TASC dollar. The remainder of the city and state contribution comes from departments responsible for youth and community development, employment, criminal justice, social services, and antipoverty programs. The single biggest public contributor is the city's Department of Youth and Community Development, at \$10.5 million a year.

In truth, a single, dedicated source of public funding for after-school services is neither necessary for TASC's success nor even much of a goal. Most municipal functions in New York, including essentials like police and sanitation, blend multiple streams of funding. And in some



ways the mix of sources can be viewed as an asset. TASC President Lucy Friedman believes a mix of sources “gives us more potential for sustainability, because we’re not dependent on one source of funds, or even on one [fixed] combination of funds. If we lose one [source], it’s not the end of the program.”

For now, signals from City Hall and the school system are increasingly friendly, and city funding generally steady, even as the city’s fiscal troubles and the schools’ administrative flux continue. It is encouraging, to say the least, that a mayor still facing the prospect of

historic deficits, embroiled in serial feuds with an equally cash-strapped state government, and dodging an assortment of local controversies, nonetheless took the initiative to convene an “Out-of-School Time Summit” at City Hall in late 2003, with TASC among the participants. Advocates see the summit as perhaps a precursor to some eventual consolidated policy on citywide after-school funding. Yet in Year Six of OSI’s seven-year demonstration, no such policy change is in the offing, and the ultimate success of OSI’s big after-school wager is therefore still impossible to gauge.

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Scope: School-Community Partnerships In Every Borough, and Growing

AS OF 2003, TASC supported after-school programs in 193 of New York's 1,290 schools. Because many of the sites in the roster of city schools are in fact small or specialized programs, rather than full-service schools, it is probably reasonable to estimate that TASC-supported programs now serve about one-fifth of New York's standard elementary, middle, and high schools. The number of TASC sites has been growing steadily, with a 28 percent jump in the number of schools between 2002 and 2003 alone. Most important, in the often Balkanized landscape of New York City politics, TASC operates in all five of the city's boroughs, from quasi-suburban Staten Island and parts of Queens to densely urban, blue-collar neighborhoods of Brooklyn and the Bronx, and including a cross section of Manhattan's wealthier and poorer enclaves. In fact, TASC's enrollment closely mirrors the distribution of the city's population by borough. On balance, its programs tend to over-represent lower-income areas and schools where students perform below average — with the result that the poorer Bronx is slightly better served, per-capita, than the more middle-class Queens. But that reflects needs and demand in those areas, not an explicit tar-



get of the program. TASC's scope is intentionally citywide, and it funds programs based primarily on the strength of their proposals and plans, not on their location or demographics.

After-school activities in each site are sponsored jointly by the school and a nonprofit organization, and managed by the nonprofit. Schools and nonprofits are free, within broad limits, to organize their own curricula, hire staff, and establish whatever management structures suit them. As a result, any description of how the local programs are designed, staffed, and governed necessarily rests on generalizations and typical arrangements, not

hard-and-fast rules. TASC does insist that every program it funds operate at least from 3 to 6 p.m. on every normal school day throughout the year.¹

The involvement of nonprofit organizations was a cornerstone of the TASC idea even while it was still percolating in OSI's foundation offices. The program's initial architect, OSI board member Herbert Sturz, now chair of TASC's board, insisted from the outset that the program would need to be driven partly by community-based organizations, for the sake of both program content and administration.

The administrative issues — including management, staff selection, and cost —

¹ For a more detailed summary of TASC's program model and expectations, see "TASC in Focus: A Guide for After-School Principals," available in pdf form from www.tascnyc.org.

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are in some ways the most obvious and inescapable reason for nonprofit involvement. A participating principal, speaking off-the-record, explained the issue this way:

When we started this five years ago, one of the goals was to show that we could run an after-school program for less money than the Board [of Education] was doing it for, with the same results or better. And that's pretty safely what has happened in reality. When the Board runs an after-school program, they have to pay union scale and observe all the other restrictions, work rules, seniority, and so on. You get an applicant for a position, and you must accept that applicant because of seniority, whether they're the person you want or not. Working with a CBO [community-based organization], at the end of the year, if a counselor hasn't performed well or met the needs of the children, we let them go and we'll bring on someone else. That's *much* harder to do and say when you're under the thumb of the Board.

For these reasons, among others, TASC programs are all administered through the local nonprofit, not through the school. Because the school system is not technically the employer during the after-school

hours, most teachers who participate are paid at an hourly rate below that provided in the city's contract with teachers. A few schools do pay teachers to work in the after-school program, and then treat those teachers' time and compensation as an in-kind contribution to the TASC program. In that case, all union rules, wage rates, and benefits apply. In a few other cases, nonprofits pay teachers at their normal hourly rate, but without accrual of most city benefits. In all, just over one-quarter of the teachers working in TASC programs receive the school system's regular rate, which averages \$40 an hour, compared with an average of \$25 an hour in the remaining programs.² Because of union pay scales alone, one observer estimated that a typical program in the TASC network would cost at least 40 percent more to operate if it were run by the school system, without the intervention of the nonprofits.

Most instructors in TASC-supported programs are not full-time teachers. And that is where the other advantage of a nonprofit partner — the programmatic one — comes into play. As Sturz envisioned it, the nonprofits would bring a fresh approach to learning and adult supervision, attracting additional personnel whose credentials and interests are intentionally different from those of the

teachers with whom students have already spent an entire school day. They are more likely to come from the surrounding community, know the parents and children, and reflect the neighborhood's ethnic or cultural mix. Researcher Elizabeth Reisner, who heads a team of independent evaluators tracking TASC's performance, says there is evidence that the nonprofits' ability to recruit fresh talent has been a real success of the program:

The nonprofits' biggest contribution, and what makes them so important in this demonstration, is that they bring in unusual, gifted, and committed people, with interesting and offbeat talents, who can really connect to kids. The nonprofits have identified adults who can work within a very rigid schedule, with fixed start and ending times in a designated space, five days a week, and yet who can fill that time with interesting and unusual activity. [The nonprofits] find people who really enjoy working with kids and find this activity satisfying, even though it pays relatively little. But the job also places very little constraint on the actual content of what they do within those set hours and locations, so it can be a very satisfying experience for the right kind of person. And apparently

² Working for a TASC-affiliated nonprofit, even at a lower hourly rate, can still be an attractive opportunity for a full-time teacher. Under union rules, if a teacher stays on the school's payroll after regular hours, she or he can work only seven additional hours a week, less than half of TASC's 15-hour weekly schedule. So while a teacher working for a nonprofit at \$25 an hour could earn \$375 for a full week of after-school work, a teacher working solely under the school system contract would earn only \$280 for seven hours' work at \$40 an hour. Quite apart from the economics, many teachers have also told TASC's evaluators that they value the opportunity to "do something different" after hours, organizing creative programs for small groups, enjoying more direct involvement with each

The goal of the demonstration is to make after-school programs so popular with parents — i.e., with voters — that the city will do everything possible to keep them alive and extend them to every community.³

it is, because TASC's rate of retention of participating adults is very high.

Yet important as the nonprofits are in the management of local programs, it would be misleading to describe the school-community relationship as an equal partnership. Ultimately, as one participating nonprofit leader observed, “the most crucial resource in this program, even more than the money, is the building. If the school building isn't available, there's no program. And the principal effectively controls everything that happens in that building. If the principal doesn't want you, good-bye. So there's not much question who the ultimately authority is in any site.”

The importance of the building extends beyond questions of control and leadership. The use and availability of school premises also determines the limits on after-school enrollment in each TASC site. Under TASC rules, every student in the school must be equally eligible to participate in the after-school activity. But there are usually many fewer slots than eligible students. As a result, many schools maintain waiting lists for after-school programs. Often the reasons are fiscal, but sometimes they're related to space — including restrictions the school may place on the use of some of its rooms after hours, or competing uses of

the building by other programs or activities. In some cases, nonprofit program managers believe that enlarging the program would strain their ability to manage it well, or would dilute the quality of the children's experience.

Other factors limit enrollment as well: TASC strives for an average adult/student ratio of 1 to 10. That means that, even if space were ample, the program would have to pay at least one additional salary for every ten additional students it enrolled. Attendance requirements may be another constraint on enrollment: Not every student wants or needs an after-school program five days a week, and many have other activities or commitments between 3 and 6 p.m. on some days. But TASC expects students to attend every day, and reduces funding for programs where average daily attendance drops below 70 percent. The result of all these considerations is that, on average, roughly one-third of the students in a typical TASC school participate in the after-school program. But significantly, that enrollment is a reasonable cross-section of the whole student body. In TASC programs, the students' race, ethnicity, gender, age, language proficiency, test scores, and need for special education are all nearly identical to those of the schools as a whole.

The insistence on five-day-a-week pro-

gramming serves more than one purpose. On one hand, for both students and schools, the full 15-hour weekly schedule provides ample time for social, academic, and creative activity. The steady, daily attention to homework and academics, the ability to engage in long-term projects with other students, and the ability to form steady relationships with caring adults all contribute to the quality of the program and its odds of making a valuable contribution to children's development. But the full-week schedule is also meant as a service to working parents, who can then rely on the program for after-school child care, at least on regular school days. (Almost no TASC programs operate on school holidays and half-days, so parents still need a backup plan for those times.) In that respect, the five-day-a-week schedule is also a strategic political choice: The goal of the demonstration is to make after-school programs so popular with parents — i.e., with voters — that the city will do everything possible to keep them alive and extend them to every community.³

3 Then again, not all communities may want a five-day-a-week program. In at least one upper-income neighborhood, parents objected to the 15-hour schedule on the grounds that their children had other activities that also needed to fit into the after-school hours. But that view appears to be limited only to the most fortunate

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Content and Quality: Variety, but With an Academic Slant

TASC PICKS PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT based on proposals from schools and community groups. The proposals set out how a program will be organized and managed, what activities it will offer, and how it will meet TASC’s basic requirements (hours and days of service, adult/student ratios, limits on total and per-student costs, among other things). They outline curricula that generally reflect each school’s priorities, the needs and interests of its parents and students, the resources of the nonprofit organization, and the available talent pool of participating adults. TASC favors programs with varied and innovative curricula, but it doesn’t dictate what those curricula should contain. Once the program is in operation, it is run mainly by a site coordinator employed by the nonprofit, with an office in the school building, under the joint direction of the principal and the nonprofit partner.

TASC’s staff includes 10 program managers, each of whom oversees up to 25 local programs. Besides trouble-shooting, fiscal oversight, and general monitoring, the program managers specifically work with local staff on curriculum issues, even after the program is up and running, to ensure that the quality stays close to (or exceeds) the standards set in

the original proposal. They make sure that after-school staff get regular training and other professional-development opportunities, including an extensive catalogue of seminars offered by TASC through contracts with a variety of training and educational organizations. But the managers’ role is to guide, channel resources, raise suggestions, and resolve problems, not to prescribe activity.

In practice, schools typically offer a mix of language arts, science, math, fine and performing arts, and sports. Nearly all of them set aside some time for homework help, but most also offer group activities that give students a chance to interact with adults and one another without the formalities typical of the regular school day. Some offer organized sports or other play and recreation, though that depends partly on the availability of a gym, a playground, or other suitable space.⁴

The result of all these considerations is a curriculum tailored to each school, community, and nonprofit, with wide variations from place to place. In middle and high schools, students themselves frequently participate in the planning of activities, and some high school students are trained and employed in TASC-sponsored programs with younger children. Some instructors use formal, published curricula for certain subjects, though most

do not. About a quarter of the programs use computers regularly, but nearly one-third don’t use them at all. Group activities often, though not always, culminate in some product or performance that students can present to a wider audience.

The one element that virtually all programs have in common is an emphasis on academic enrichment. The activity that claims the single greatest share of after-school time across all three school levels — some 20 percent, on average, and sometimes much higher — is homework help. Even beyond that, other activities in math, the language arts, and science are expressly related to the goals of the school day, even if the style of the activity is quite different from the conduct of daytime classes. The reason is partly tactical: an attempt to prove the value of after-school programs to school officials, for whom academic achievement is the overwhelming priority. But another part of the reason is inherent in the TASC structure: principals wield considerable influence, and principals tend to be among those officials for whom academics are paramount. As one observer put it:

The only way you’re ever going to make after-school [activity] a reality citywide is if it’s essential to the biggest funding source in the city. That means it has to be supportive of the core mission of the

⁴ Information on curriculum content is mostly drawn from interim reports by the TASC evaluation team, especially “Supporting Quality and Scale in After-School Services to Urban Youth,” by Elizabeth R. Reisner et al., Washington, D.C.: Policy Studies Associates, Inc., March 29, 2002. This and other evaluation reports

New York public schools. So a nonprofit, or a parent, or a kid, may have other things in mind, things they'd like to do that aren't really school-related, things that would be fun and keep the kids coming back every day. And those may be great. But if the program isn't demonstrably connected to improving student achievement, it's not going to be a high enough priority to get very scarce money from the only deep pockets in town. Impact on achievement is the only reason most principals are going to put up with the inconvenience of having all these people running around their schools and causing them to put in extra work hours at the end of a long day.

But principals aren't the only force behind academic programming. Parents, in an early survey by TASC evaluators, listed homework help among their top priorities, apparently in the hope that by the time they come home from work, the school assignments will be done, and parents and children will be able to spend some quality time together before the lights go out.

To be sure, not all principals take such a rigid view of after-school academics. As funding for the arts and sports becomes scarcer in schools' regular budgets, offering these activities after school becomes as important to principals as to anyone

else. One principal articulated this view in especially strong terms:

The art, to me, is important in and of itself. The literature says we'll get some academic benefit from that, which is wonderful. But to get a kid turned on to music or to drama, that's essential.... There's too much emphasis, in talking about after-school programs, on whether it improves test scores. To me, the arts and after-school are an enrichment, quite independent of the effect on test scores. Appreciating the arts, or having an opportunity to perform or create, is an essential part of making people good human beings. We don't have enough wonderful memories, all of us. I'm trying to create as many good memories for kids as possible. When a kid performs and hears the applause, they'll never forget that moment.

Noting views like these, Lucy Friedman, TASC's president, suggests that "the pendulum is swinging slightly back on this issue.... Principals don't necessarily see academic content as the only important activity any more." Particularly in middle and high schools, when students are relatively freer to wander off and skip the after-school program entirely, emphasis on enjoyable activity and on practical opportunities like career planning or computer

training becomes at least as important as rushing up on science or math.

Cost: Maintaining a Replicable Budget, but With Flexibility

BY TASC'S ACCOUNTING, its program costs between \$1,500 and \$1,600 per student per year. That number includes \$1,000 to \$1,100 made up of a combination of grants from TASC and the matching funds required from each program. It also includes another \$200 per student from the school system, used mainly for staff development and some operating expenses in the school buildings, like supplies, snacks, or extra security after normal school hours. TASC then allocates an additional \$200 to each program's budget, half of which is for training and technical assistance that TASC will provide to the program over the course of the year. The other half is for a portion of TASC's overhead. The last \$200 is paid from grant funds that TASC raises, including those from OSI, not from public dollars.

Of the basic \$1,000 to \$1,100 per student, TASC initially provided most, and often all, of the money for the earliest participating sites to get up and running. Thereafter, the local school and nonprofit were expected to raise escalating amounts of matching money, eventually reaching

The integrity of the standard TASC budget — keeping costs close to the prescribed amount from site to site — is an important tenet of the demonstration.



40 percent in 2004. The exact level of TASC's contribution at any given school has depended partly on what other sources of support might have been available to that school and nonprofit. Some sites, for example, were already getting regular funding from city or state programs or later became regular grantees of one of those programs. In those cases TASC contributed less than it did to other schools that may have been starting from scratch, with no other funding available. Today, the norm is roughly 60 percent TASC funding with 40 percent coming from matching sources, but that norm is surrounded by many exceptions and variations, including half a dozen

schools whose programs now run with no Soros funding at all.

The annual increases in required matching are intended partly to provide an exit strategy for OSI — that is, by the end of the seven-year demonstration, when the Soros grant runs out, each school's program should be operating on a budget that comes primarily from public dollars, whether raised by the local program or centrally by TASC. Because TASC expects to remain in business, it foresees a continued role in raising and channeling money to local after-school programs, but in most places, TASC's share of the local budget will be smaller than it is today. Hence the expectation of

increased local fundraising. Realistically, if the level of government grants doesn't increase substantially by the end of the OSI demonstration, it's likely that TASC will have to re-examine the way it distributes its support, given that there will not be enough money to keep all current programs afloat.

For now, with \$1,300 per student (including the \$200 grant from the school system, but not counting TASC's \$200 in allocated training and overhead), each program is expected to pay its site coordinator, instructors, and community outreach or liaison staff, buy supplies, food, and equipment, and pick up whatever other administrative costs are required to operate the program. Everyone, including TASC, acknowledges that some costs are often covered outside the strict limits of this budget — some schools provide supplies and equipment at no cost; some nonprofits do the same; some programs have volunteers doing work that must be paid for elsewhere. As in most after-school accounting, the capital costs of using the school building, and some of the building's operating costs, aren't reflected in this budget either. One example is utility bills, which TASC programs don't pay. Another is custodial services: The work hours of New York City custodians are staggered over the course of the day, with at least one custodian in each school

working until 6 p.m. That is normally sufficient to cover the 3-to-6 p.m. after-school time, thus posing no additional cost to the program. Most local budgets don't include transportation, either — which, in subway-rich New York, isn't much of an issue. In other places, that would be a substantial additional cost.

The integrity of the standard TASC budget — keeping costs close to the prescribed amount from site to site — is an important tenet of the demonstration. In the early years, in fact, it was more than a tenet. TASC started off with the hope of demonstrating and testing a single fiscal model that would be replicable across the whole system: not so thin that it compromised quality, but not so rich that it wouldn't be realistic as a citywide model. If schools or nonprofits used additional resources or raised extra money, TASC reduced its funding in proportion. To say the least of it, this policy was unpopular with local program operators.

“Initially,” says President Lucy Friedman, “we asked people not to use other funds to increase their budget, mainly for research reasons. We wanted to be able to study whether the program was truly effective and replicable, and for that, we really wanted all the sites to be more or less the same in terms of cost. But after two years of that, we gave in. We didn't want to keep kids from getting extras.”

Today, she says, of the nearly 200 programs around the city, “the funding structure of every one is different. That maybe makes the research and accounting more difficult, but it is great for creativity, for getting local buy-in, and for fundraising. And those are all essential, too.”

Yet the flexibility goes only so far. Even under the more permissive rules, when schools or nonprofits raise major public grants for their after-school programs, TASC will still reduce its funding somewhat, in the hope of spreading its dollars farther. In fact, TASC's development staff deliberately helps nonprofits find outside sources of funding beyond their required match, in the hope that this funding can offset scarce OSI dollars and sustain the nonprofits' funding after the OSI demonstration is over. But there is no longer a deliberate policing of local budgets to adjust for every dollar raised above the initial budget. Not only did that policy prove unworkable, but as one participant put it, “it was really an incentive for us to hide things from [TASC] and do things off-the-books. Not only does that screw up your supposedly clean research, but it makes for a dishonest relationship that doesn't help anybody.” It wasn't long before TASC agreed.

Even so, some real costs of the program still go unreflected in the official budgets, not so much through deliberate conceal-

ment as through the vagaries of accounting. Besides the school operating costs already mentioned, unreckoned costs include some overhead of the operating nonprofits, including some management costs that are made necessary specifically because of their participation in the TASC demonstration. One example: Raising an escalating portion of the after-school budget every year means, for many organizations, dedicating part of a fundraising director's or consultant's time to raising new grants every year. Another example is specific to larger nonprofits that operate more than one local TASC program. In those cases, the organization's central office incurs some extra costs in managing and accounting for the operations of several far-flung sites, which usually aren't reflected in their TASC accounting.

TASC doesn't refuse to acknowledge these costs, but any reimbursement for them would have to fit into the standard \$1,500 to \$1,600 per-student budget. Not every participating nonprofit is able to fit into that restriction, and some end up devoting the lion's share of that amount to direct program expenditures — mostly instructors' and coordinators' salaries — rather than to management. One participating nonprofit estimated that “a TASC program that they budget at \$300,000 actually costs us \$360,000. But they'll give us 80 percent of \$300,000” for the first

If the ultimate purpose of TASC is to create a program of indispensable value to parents, educators, and executives of the school system, then the findings of independent researchers will be crucial in establishing [the program's value].

year, leaving another 20 percent, or \$60,000, as the required match. Including the unfunded management costs, this organization estimates that it actually needed to raise \$120,000 to match TASC's first-year contribution, and then increase that target by some \$30,000 a year as the matching requirement escalated.

However difficult these considerations may be for the participating schools and nonprofits, they generally amount mainly to accounting disputes. The cost structure of the basic program probably varies more than it might appear on paper, but not so much that it undermines TASC's fundamental desire for a standard, replicable program model. Yet the program's "basicness," its deliberate limitation on frills and enrichments, still rankles some participating nonprofits whose philosophy demands more services than TASC considers essential.

One example among many is the provision of services outside of TASC's 3-6 p.m. slot on official school days. When schools are closed, or open for only half a day, some nonprofits feel a need to protect parents from the disruption of their normal child-care routine. One such organization accepts students from its TASC program into its other day care programs on non-school days. The cost and administrative complexities are considerable, but the organization believes it

owes this service to its constituents. The result is a program that isn't quite comparable to other TASC sites, either in cost or possibly in outcomes. TASC has no objection to these additional expenditures, and even supports them philosophically. But it does not fund the additional service, and does not count the additional expenditures for that service toward the matching requirements for its basic program.

It isn't unusual, in fact, for nonprofits to want a richer program than TASC's funding model would allow, and several of them therefore supplement their programs well beyond what TASC would willingly fund. For TASC, raising additional private grants for program enrichment is fine, so long as the program first meets its annual matching requirement in the basic budget. When programs raise additional public dollars, however, TASC normally will respond by reducing its own contribution, rather than allow the public grant to be spent entirely on enhancements. Government dollars, says Friedman, "are more sustainable, so those are the basis on which the [local programs] ultimately should be supported. They can't be dependent forever on the Soros dollars, and the sooner those can be replaced by more sustainable sources of money, the better — for them, as well as for the whole effort."

Most participants seem to understand

this calculation and the limits it imposes. As one observer explained it:

A lot of projects wanted to enrich their programs not because they couldn't fit into TASC's budget, but because they didn't fundamentally share TASC's concern about keeping this affordable.... Lucy [Friedman] and Herb [Sturz] are interested not only in offering high-quality programs, but more important, they're interested in serving as many kids as possible. It's got to be good but also really big. You can't do that by constructing a program that's too expensive to do in more than a few lucky places that maybe have great nonprofits or easy access to private grant money or something extraordinary like that.

Evaluation: Quality, Scale, Outcomes, and Replicability

AT THE OUTSET OF THE PROGRAM, TASC commissioned an independent evaluation that will run at least through the five years of OSI's initial demonstration period. With funding from four large national foundations, TASC chose as its evaluator Policy Studies Associates (www.policystudies.com), a 20-year-old research firm that specializes in education and youth development. The firm has so far produced

eight interim reports for TASC, either presenting general preliminary findings or zeroing in on particular research subjects like student outcomes, program content and scale, and participant satisfaction. There will be a more complete evaluation report, in 2004, corresponding to the end of TASC's fifth year. The findings will be based particularly on the schools where after-school programs opened in TASC's first two years of operation — thus providing a relatively long series of data from which to draw conclusions.

In the meantime, the interim reports from Policy Studies Associates provide at least a rough — and so far favorable — impression of how TASC and its constituent programs are performing. The December 2002 report (the most recent one available at the time this is written) offers these tentative conclusions:⁵

- The program is on track to achieve its goals, and is producing positive opportunities and experiences for participating schools, students, and families.
- Students are reacting to these efforts with steadily rising rates of after-school attendance, which means that participating students are experiencing increasing levels of exposure to TASC activities and hence to the benefits that participation confers.
- Results so far are consistent with the findings from comprehensive evaluations of similar after-school programs. Full-term evaluations of those programs eventually concluded that they contributed to improved school atten-

dance and achievement, better social adjustment, the development of useful skills and constructive attitudes, and reductions in some harmful behaviors.

- Though still under way, the research already shows that TASC programs are promoting improved achievement in math, with students at greatest academic risk deriving the greatest benefit from regular TASC participation.
- Participation in a TASC program is associated with significant gains in school attendance and hence greater exposure to the academic programs of the host schools.

The most immediate purpose of the evaluation and interim reports is, of course, to help TASC manage the program, and to inform OSI on how well the goals of its grant were pursued. But in the longer run, the research is itself a strategic element in reaching those goals. If the ultimate purpose of TASC is to create a program of indispensable value to parents, educators, and executives of the school system, then the findings of independent researchers will be crucial in establishing how much value the program really represented, and what the city and its schools would lose if TASC's accomplishments aren't sustained.

The Future: Preservation, Growth, and Sustainability

AT THE END OF 2003, with one year left in the OSI demonstration period, there are just over half a dozen TASC sites whose after-school programs function without the So ros dollars. Their support comes mainly from the federal 21st Century Learning Centers program and a combination of city and state funds. The rest continue to rely to varying degrees on grants from OSI that will no longer exist come 2005.

To help preserve and enlarge public contributions for after-school programs, OSI and TASC helped form the After School Alliance, a national advocacy and policy network. The Alliance's goal is something like a national version of TASC's: to make after-school services available by 2010 to every young person who wants them. Although a rising federal deficit makes it unlikely that Washington will soon contribute significantly more toward that goal than it now does, advocacy by the Alliance at least helped to keep the 21st Century program whole in fiscal 2004, when the Bush Administration had proposed a 40 percent reduction. The Alliance also hopes to promote more effective after-school policies in state and local governments around the country. That prospect got a boost in 2003 when Alliance Honorary Chairman (and now California Governor) Arnold

5 This summary is drawn from "What Have We Learned from TASC's First Three Years?," Policy Studies Associates, December 2002, especially pp. 8-9. The full

At best, it seems, public policy will move in TASC's direction only gradually, and will need a lot of guidance and encouragement along the way.

Schwarzenegger himself took charge of a state government, having run partly on a record of supporting universal after-school programs.

Yet for now in New York City, it is not yet clear whether any likely combination of private and public dollars will be enough to fund sustainable service in every New York City school. At some point, as Lucy Friedman sees it, “the solution will probably come through statewide legislation that says, in effect, ‘after-school for all.’ . . . That could start with the consolidation of the three major funding streams [the federal 21st Century program and two state initiatives] and eventually produce a formula something like 30 percent federal, 30 state, 30 local, and 10 percent private or fees.”

Within those broad categories might still lurk a hodgepodge of different funding streams not necessarily very different from the mix that supports TASC today. But if the amounts were great enough in aggregate, and the rules for each funding source were flexible enough to allow the money to be used and combined where needed, a continued mélange of different funding agencies would be manageable. In fact, given the many functions ascribed to after-school programs — youth development, academic reinforcement, physical fitness, cultural enrichment, child care for working parents — it is reasonable to

assume that many budgets would ultimately be tapped to fund a complete system. Untidy as the result might be, if it brought some official consensus on how the burden would be shared, with recurring line items securely written into the various agencies’ budgets, that would still be a giant step forward. It might, in reality, be as firm and clear a system as any other public function in New York, and good enough to make citywide after-school programs a reality.

But just past TASC’s sixth birthday, these thoughts are mostly speculation. Political support for after-school services is clearly building, and New York’s experiments (of which TASC is by far the largest, but not the only one) continue to draw interest and, here and there, new funding. Whether that will eventually lead to a full-scale, officially sanctioned citywide program remains a matter of speculation.

“With so much in flux in New York City,” Friedman says, “you can’t just take it on faith that somehow the system will bend over backwards to take care of after-school. There’s still just too much going on in the school system for anyone to have figured out how to do that, or make it their number one priority.” In that respect, the school system isn’t alone. New York State politics and budgets are likewise in turmoil, leadership is fractured at the best of times, and the consequences of

court-ordered changes in statewide education funding are still uncertain as this is written. At best, it seems, public policy will move in TASC’s direction only gradually, and will need a lot of guidance and encouragement along the way. To that end, Friedman and her staff work closely with policymakers in education and youth services at the state and local level, conduct research locally and nationally on after-school policy and funding, and join forces with after-school programs in other cities to build a national constituency for greater funding and better policy.

“We don’t expect a statewide mandate soon” for after-school programs, Friedman says, and “funding for universal after-school is probably still a ways off. . . . But we’d be happy if we could just get more order and efficiency in the current funding. Before we started, one principal had four after-school programs running in her school at one time. Even then, there was money, but little planning, system, or infrastructure. Money is getting spent, but there’s no system. That’s why the mayor’s Out-of-School Time Summit is so important.” For now, TASC is as broad, consistent, and complete an after-school network as New York City has ever had. It is not yet the system that Friedman and OSI hoped to create. But the prospect no longer looks quite as remote as it did when the big wager first began.

Acknowledgments

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New York, New York

www.fascorp.org

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www.lasbest.org

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About the After School Project

THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION created the After School Project in 1998 as a five-year, three-city demonstration aimed at connecting significant numbers of young people in low-income neighborhoods with responsible adults during out-of-school time. To that end, the Project focuses on developing: (1) consistent, dedicated revenues to support after school programs in low-income communities; (2) an array of developmental opportunities for youth, including physical activity and sports, educational, social, and recreational programs; and (3) strong local organizations with the necessary resources, credibility, and political clout to bring focus and visibility to the youth development field.

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