



All Work and No Play?

Listening to What KIDS and PARENTS
Really Want from Out-of-School Time

Prepared by



Commissioned by



The Wallace Foundation™

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Listening to What KIDS and PARENTS
Really Want from Out-of-School Time



A report from Public Agenda

by Ann Duffett and Jean Johnson

with Steve Farkas, Susanna Kung and Amber Ott

ABOUT THE WALLACE FOUNDATION

The Wallace Foundation seeks to support and share effective ideas and practices that expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people.

Its three current objectives are:

- Strengthen education leadership to improve student achievement
- Improve out-of-school learning opportunities
- Expand participation in arts and culture.

For more information and research on these and other related topics, please visit our Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.

ABOUT PUBLIC AGENDA

Founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich, and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view and to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues. Our in-depth research on how citizens think about policy has won praise for its credibility and fairness from elected officials from both political parties and from experts and decision makers across the political spectrum. Our citizen education materials and award-winning Web site www.publicagenda.org offer unbiased information about the challenges the country faces. Recently recognized by Library Journal as one of the Web's best resources, Public Agenda Online provides comprehensive information on a wide range of policy issues.

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Heeding the Voices of Consumers

By M. Christine DeVita, President, The Wallace Foundation



When we decided to commission this report by Public Agenda, we did so because we were struck that in the national debate over how best to help children make the most of their out-of-school time, the voices of parents and children—the consumers—were notably absent.

The Wallace Foundation's own work in promoting out-of-school learning is premised on the conviction that access to high quality out-of-school learning experiences that actively engage participants is of paramount importance if this nation is to open the doors of lifelong opportunity to all children, regardless of their circumstances. But how can public and private funders, policy makers and providers ever hope to define or accurately assess “quality” or “participation” in out-of-school learning without a clearer fix on what the consumers themselves say they need and prefer? More fundamentally: isn't it perilous to overlook their voices in a sector of learning where, unlike schools, kids can—and do—vote with their feet?

For the first time, these national surveys of parents and of middle- and high-school aged children systematically present these missing voices. What they have to say is, at turns, reassuring and alarming, predictable and surprising.

Those who think, for example, that most kids just want to hang out aimlessly after the school bell rings, or sit in front of a computer screen, will find some reassurance that more than 8 of 10 recognize the value of supervised out-of-school-time activities and realize they're worse off when they're not participating. Weary parents will find it heartening that 89 percent of the young people surveyed admit that, “even though I might complain about it, sometimes I need to be pushed by my parents to do things that are good for me.”

The findings also suggest that not only does the content of these programs matter to parents but also the quality and whether or not they pique their children's interest. And when asked what they want from out-of-school-time programs, almost half of parents cited “teaching the value of hard work and commitment.”

But the report also provides stark evidence of the inequities in opportunities for kids to participate in quality out-of-school-time activities and programs. Indeed, readers will find here a tale of two kinds of American families.

Poorer families and those from minority backgrounds are far more dissatisfied with the availability and quality of program options beyond the school day and are far likelier to want more academic help for their kids. Majorities believe their kids are getting shortchanged in their out-of-school opportunities. More well off families, by contrast, indicate dramatically higher satisfaction with their after-school options and a good deal less interest or concern over whether those options stress academics.

There is some common ground. At a time when the policy debate about out-of-school learning has been polarized between those saying academics should come first, and those who urge enrichment, the report suggests that both parents and their children want meaningful, challenging activities that, in the long run, help kids become informed, satisfied and productive citizens.

If there's a single most important finding in this valuable report, it's that we need to listen more closely to these different voices as we continue to debate the future of after-school programs and where and how to invest scarce public and private resources. What they're telling us, loud and clear, is that one size doesn't fit all.



Executive Summary

There is compelling evidence that organized, structured activities during the out-of-school hours play a valuable and a highly valued role in the lives of our nation's young people, but low-income and minority families are far more likely to be dissatisfied with the quality, affordability and availability of options in their communities.

These are just two among many important findings in *All Work and No Play? Listening to What Kids and Parents Really Want from Out-of-School Time*, a joint project of The Wallace Foundation and Public Agenda that explores how young people spend time when they're not in school and what youngsters and their parents want from out-of-school-time activities. The study is based primarily on two national random sample surveys conducted in June 2004, one with 609 middle and high school students and another with 1,003 parents of school-age children.

One refreshing feature of *All Work and No Play?* is its examination of the views of students and parents—two important constituencies rarely heard from in the policy debate surrounding out-of-school time. What are the people who actually use out-of-school activities and programs really looking for? Just how much do parents and students rely on out-of-school-time opportunities to enhance academic learning? To what extent are they looking for socialization, playtime or merely a place with adult supervision? Since participation is purely by choice, knowing what drives these consumers is essential for implementing effective policies or creating constructive programs.

The study also provides a wealth of information about the very real challenges faced by low-income and minority families when it comes to finding productive things for their children to do when they aren't in school. Viewing the data through the lenses of income and race reveals a story of the haves vs. the have-nots—a story of too many families under real pressure and not getting the kinds of out-of-school opportunities that could genuinely help their children thrive. Whether or not parents or students are generally happy with their options is strongly influenced by these demographic characteristics.

The primary goal of this research is to provide reliable data on what America's parents and young people want for kids during their out-of-school time and their experiences with it. In effect, we hope to add the public's voice to a debate seemingly dominated by advocates with their own agendas. What follows are the highlights of the findings.



FINDING 1: What Kids Do When They're Not in School

Whether it's sports or the arts or a church group or homework help, organized activities and programs in out-of-school time play a valuable and a highly valued role in the lives of the nation's youth. The vast majority of young people believe that kids are better off when their plates are full and they don't have too much time to just hang out. What's more, youngsters who participate in out-of-school activities give them high ratings for being fun and educational and being good places to make friends. Still, nearly 3 in 10 say they are home alone after school at least three days a week, while about 1 in 5 complain their schedules are too hectic.

The lion's share of middle and high school students today participate in at least some organized activities and programs in their non-school hours.

- Well over half the students surveyed (57%) say they participate in some kind of out-of-school activity or program every day or almost every day, and another 37% say they do so a couple of days a week. Almost 8 in 10 (79%) say they do things both on school days and on weekends.
- Students participate in activities and programs such as:
 - ◆ 66% say they participate in sports activities
 - ◆ 62% are in school clubs or extracurricular activities
 - ◆ 60% do volunteer work
 - ◆ 54% attend religious instruction or a church youth group
 - ◆ 52% take lessons in things like music, dance or art
 - ◆ 52% are in an after-school program at school or another locale
 - ◆ 37% of high-school students have a part-time job
 - ◆ 30% get regular tutoring or extra academic or test preparation
 - ◆ 19% belong to an organization like the Scouts

Most youngsters believe organized activities are good, and they acknowledge that they sometimes need a push to get involved.

- The overwhelming majority of students (85%) say kids who participate in organized activities such as a team or a club after school are “better off” than those who have a lot of time to themselves after school.
- More than 9 in 10 (91%) agree with the statement, “Belonging to a club or team and doing things with other kids gives me a good feeling”—with 67% agreeing strongly.
- Approximately 9 in 10 (89%) agree with the statement, “Even though I might complain about it, sometimes I need to be pushed by my parents to do things that are good for me”—with 62% saying they agree strongly.

Students give great marks to the after-school or weekend activity that they spend the most time doing.

- 92% say they made good friends there
- 86% say they learned a lot
- 85% say they usually have a lot of fun
- 79% say the adults in charge really cared about the kids
- 79% say it was easy and convenient to get to
- 59% say the other kids took it seriously and really paid attention

It is hardly surprising that the majority of young people don’t want additional academic work after school. What may be surprising, however, is the relatively high number of students who do.

- Given a choice among organized activities that emphasize sports, the arts or academics, just 9% of youngsters take the academic option; 54% choose sports, and 36% would choose things like art, music or dance.
- 61% of students agree that “when the school day is done, the last thing I want is to go to a place that has more academic work,” although 39% disagree.
- About 3 in 10 students say they would very much like an after-school program that provides homework help (32%) or that focuses on academics (28%).
- A majority of students (56%) would be interested in a summer program that “helped kids keep up with schoolwork or prepare for the next grade.”

Most students are content with their typical school-day routine, but sizable numbers are either too busy or spending a lot of time without any adult supervision.

- 75% of students say their day-to-day schedule during the school year was “just about right”; 22% that it was “too hectic with too many things to do”; and 3% that they had too much free time.
- On the other hand, 28% of students say they are home alone after school at least 3 out of 5 days in a typical school week.

FINDING 2: No Particular Place to Go

The vast majority of students draw an explicit connection

The vast majority of students draw an explicit connection between kids being bored and kids getting into trouble.

between kids being bored and kids getting into trouble. Half say that they themselves are sometimes or often bored. And while most are involved in activities, many youngsters seem to be at a loss for productive things to do during their leisure hours. The majority say that when they get together with friends, they typically hang out without anything special planned. Most complain that in their community “there’s not much for kids my age to do other than go to school or just hang out.” While

most young people believe their own town could provide more options, they are more likely to point to lack of motivation—not lack of alternatives—as the main reason more kids don’t participate in organized activities.

Boredom and a lack of interesting things to do are widespread among America’s middle and high school students.

- Nearly 7 in 10 students (69%) say that when they meet with friends it’s usually to hang out without anything specific to do.
- Half of the students surveyed (50%) say they were “bored and had nothing to do” when they weren’t in school either often or sometimes during the past school year.
- A majority (58%) say the kids they know complain a lot or some about being bored and having nothing to do.
- More than 1 in 4 students (26%) say they “see people their age using drugs or alcohol” every day or almost every day (high schoolers 35%; middle schoolers 13%).

Students themselves recognize the link between boredom and mischief.

- More than 3 in 4 students (77%) agree that “a lot of kids get into trouble when they’re bored and have nothing to do,” with 40% agreeing strongly.
- More than 6 in 10 students (63%) agree that “my parents would be very upset if they knew some of the things my friends have done,” with 36% agreeing strongly.

- Almost half of students (46%) report that when kids their age get into trouble, it's mostly because "they're bored and have too much time on their hands" compared with 39% who say that "their parents aren't paying enough attention to them" or 11% who say it's because kids "don't know right from wrong."

There is something of a void when it comes to leisure time and having things to do with friends when no activity is scheduled.

- Only 27% of students think their community is doing as much as can be expected when it comes to having enough things for kids their age to do; 72% say it could realistically do much more.
- More than half (54%) agree that "there's not much for kids my age to do other than go to school or just hang out."
- More than 1 in 3 students (36%) admit that when they have free time to do whatever they choose, it usually ends up being wasted.

Most youngsters point to lack of motivation—not lack of alternatives—to explain why kids don't participate in organized activities.

- 71% of students say that when kids don't participate in organized activities after school or on weekends, it's because they are just not interested or motivated.
- 29% say it's because most things are too expensive.
- 28% say it's because most things are too far away.
- 15% say it's because there's nothing right for their age.

FINDING 3. The Haves and the Have-Nots

Most families are content with how their child spends out-of-school time, but low-income and minority families are significantly less likely to be satisfied with their options. On virtually every measure of satisfaction—whether it's quality, affordability or availability of activities—low-income and minority parents are substantially more likely than their respective counterparts

to indicate they encounter problems. Both groups, by overwhelming margins, indicate their communities could realistically do much more for kids and that keeping youngsters busy during the summer is especially tough.

Whether it's quality, affordability or availability, it's harder to find if you are a low-income or minority parent.* Both groups are considerably less likely to say:

- It's easy to find things that are affordable [low vs. higher income: 30% vs. 65%; minority vs. white: 39% vs. 62%]
- It's easy to find things that are run by trustworthy adults [low vs. higher income: 45% vs. 72%; minority vs. white: 45% vs. 73%]
- It's easy to find things that are conveniently located [low vs. higher income: 45% vs. 72%; minority vs. white: 44% vs. 71%]
- It's easy to find things that are of high quality [low vs. higher income: 45% vs. 66%; minority vs. white: 37% vs. 66%]
- It's easy to find things that are age appropriate [low vs. higher income: 47% vs. 73%; minority vs. white: 51% vs. 70%]
- It's easy to find things that are interesting to their child [low vs. higher income: 49% vs. 74%; minority vs. white: 53% vs. 71%]



Concerns about negative societal influences preying on children are magnified among low-income and minority parents.

- 46% of low-income parents say they worry that "hanging out with the wrong crowd" might lead their child astray vs. 28% of higher-income parents. [minority vs. white: 37% vs. 28%]
- 39% of low-income parents say the best reason for children to be involved in organized activities and programs in their non-school hours is to keep them busy and out of trouble vs. 23% of higher-income parents. [minority vs. white: 35% vs. 25%]
- Just 37% of low-income parents say that making sure their own child is productively occupied during non-school hours

*Low-income parents reported annual household income of less than \$25,000 per year; higher-income parents reported \$50,000 or more. Minority parents include those who identify as either African American or Hispanic.

is something they have under control, compared with 60% of higher-income parents. [minority vs. white: 48% vs. 56%]

By overwhelming margins, low-income and minority parents indicate their communities could do a lot more for kids.

- Almost 2 in 3 low-income parents (65%) say their community could realistically do much more when it comes to having enough things for elementary school children to do, compared to 46% of higher income. [minority vs. white: 71% vs. 46%]
- When it comes to having enough things for teens to do, substantially larger proportions of low-income and minority parents agree their community could realistically do much more [low income vs. higher income: 85% vs. 65%; minority vs. white: 83% vs. 67%]

The majority of parents—regardless of income or race—say the summer stands out as the most difficult time to find productive things for kids to do, but keeping youngsters busy during the summer is especially tough for low-income and minority parents. They are more likely to say:

- Their kids “really don’t have enough good options” for things to do during the summer months [low vs. higher income: 63% vs. 43%; minority vs. white: 62% vs. 44%]
- They are concerned that they won’t be able to afford things their child would want to do during the summer [low vs. higher income: 76% vs. 42%; minority vs. white: 62% vs. 50%]
- They are concerned that their child will be bored during the summer [low vs. higher income: 65% vs. 48%; minority vs. white: 65% vs. 46%]
- They are concerned that there will not be enough options to capture their child’s interest during the summer [low vs. higher income: 57% vs. 38%; minority vs. white: 62% vs. 38%]
- They are concerned that they will have trouble finding child care during the summer [low vs. higher income: 31% vs. 13%; minority vs. white: 25% vs. 13%]



FINDING 4. More Time on Task?

Despite increased pressures on students to reach high academic standards, relatively small numbers of parents are looking for greater emphasis on academics in their child’s out-of-school time. That’s not to say parents don’t put a high priority on school-work—they do—but homework help or additional time spent on academic subjects is not the first thing parents have in mind when they think about their child’s free time. Kids, most parents say, need time to relax and just be kids. Once again, low-income and minority families are exceptions; both groups are considerably more likely to want activities that emphasize academic learning.

More academics does not top the list of things parents are seeking in their child’s out-of-school activities.

- Other than safety, what’s the best reason for kids in general to be involved in organized activities and programs when they’re not in school? Asked to choose among the following four options, only 15% of parents say the best reason is to improve how well kids do in school; 41% say it’s to develop interests and hobbies; 27% to keep kids busy and out of trouble; 16% to have fun.
- While more than 1 in 3 parents (34%) say they’d go out of their way to find an after-school program for their own child that provides supervised homework time, another 37% say this would be “nice but not essential,” and 28% say it would not be important to them.
- When parents are asked to choose which of these three programs would be the best match for their own child, the results are about evenly split among a program that provides “extra academic preparation and skills” (37%), athletics/sports (32%) or things like art, music or dance (29%).

Parents don’t automatically jump to “after school programs” as a tool for helping their children reach higher academic standards.

- Even among parents who think that the public schools in their community are raising academic standards and expectations for students, only 14% say the best reason for kids to be involved in activities during non-school hours is to improve how well they do in school.
- Similarly, only 17% of parents who say their child needs extra help in academic subjects point to improving schoolwork as the best reason for a child to be involved.
- A modest majority of parents (54%) agree that “kids get more than enough academics during the school day, so after-school programs should focus on other things that capture their interest,” compared with 38% who say, “Since schools are putting so much emphasis on standardized tests and higher academic standards, kids are better off in after-school programs that focus on academic skills.”

By extremely wide margins, low-income and minority parents are considerably more likely to want activities and programs that emphasize academic learning. Both groups are more likely to say:

- Their child needs extra help in school [low vs. higher income: 67% vs. 44%; minority vs. white: 61% vs. 45%]
- They are concerned their child will fall behind on academics during the summer months [low vs. higher income: 60% vs. 32%; minority vs. white 56% vs. 33%]
- An after-school program that provides supervised homework time is something they would go out of their way to find [low vs. higher income: 52% vs. 28%; minority vs. white 56% vs. 27%]
- That since schools are putting so much emphasis on standardized tests and higher academic standards, kids are better off in after-school programs that focus on academics rather than on other things [low vs. higher income: 45% vs. 35%; minority vs. white 55% vs. 33%]
- The best match for their own child would be an activity or program that focused on “providing extra academic preparation and skills” rather than sports or the arts [low vs. higher income: 39% vs. 35%*; minority vs. white 56% vs. 32%]

Activities and programs that focus on learning appeal to low-income and minority students as well as parents. These students are more likely to say:

Despite increased pressures on students to reach high academic standards, relatively small numbers of parents are looking for greater emphasis on academics in their child's out-of-school time.

- They would be interested in a summer program that helped kids keep up with schoolwork or prepare for the next grade [low vs. higher income: 69% vs. 51%; minority vs. white: 79% vs. 49%]
- They would “very much” like an after-school program that focuses mainly on academic preparation [low vs. higher income: 39% vs. 24%; minority vs. white: 45% vs. 23%]
- They would “very much” like an after-school program that gives you time to do homework and has an adult around to help if you need it [low vs. higher income: 36% vs. 29%; minority vs. white: 45% vs. 29%]
- The best reason for kids to be involved in activities after school and on weekends is “to improve how well they do in school” [low vs. higher income: 20% vs. 9%; minority vs. white: 23% vs. 8%]

FINDING 5: Where Parents and Kids Differ

Both youngsters and parents see out-of-school activities in an overall positive light, but a few differences in outlook are worth noting. Some are predictable and probably even natural, but the study did unearth several areas

where the contrast between what parents think and what young people actually say is more troubling. For example, most parents say their own kids don't do much hanging out at the mall; yet more than half of kids say they do. And while some parents count on cell phones to know where their kids are, uncomfortably high numbers of youngsters admit they've told their parents they were in one place when they were really in another and that they don't always answer their cell when they know it's their parents calling.

Parents and youngsters are equally likely to think there's a potential for danger on the Internet. But parents, for their part, may be surprised to learn the extent to which they underestimate their child's Internet use.

- The Internet is seen as “a negative and potentially risky thing to be doing” by about 1 in 5 parents (19%). The same proportion (19%) of youngsters who use the Internet acknowledge that something has happened on it that would upset their parents if they knew about it.
- Almost 2 out of 3 parents (65%) say their child uses the Internet at home to surf, play games and chat—compared with more than 8 in 10 middle and high school students (82%) who report doing so—a 17-percentage-point gap.

*This difference is not statistically significant.

The overwhelming majority of parents say their own child doesn't use the mall as a hang out—but most middle and high school students would disagree.

- 81% of parents of middle and high school students believe their child does not hang out at the mall, but well over half of the students surveyed (56%) say they do.
- According to more than 4 in 10 young people (44%), the mall is the place where you would be sure to find the greatest number of kids after school or on weekends—compared with 29% who say most kids can be found at a playground, 13% at a local shop or restaurant or 8% at a community center.
- Of those who do frequent the mall, 27% of kids say they have seen things happen there that would upset their parents if they knew about them.



- 6 in 10 parents (60%) view the mall as a place “with a lot of potential for bad things to happen.”

When it comes to cell phones as a way to keep children safe, parents may be indulging in a false sense of security.

- Among parents whose child does have a cell phone, more than 6 in 10 (62%) find that they give their child more freedom to move from place to place, because the cell phone allows them to check in with each other.
- Among young people who have a cell phone, almost 1 in 3 (32%) say they have used it to tell their parents they were in one place when they really were at another.
- Also, almost 1 in 3 (32%) say there have been times when they did not answer the cell phone when they knew it was their parents calling.



FINDING ONE:

What Kids Do When They're Not in School

Whether it's sports or the arts or a church group or homework help, organized activities and programs in out-of-school time play a valuable and a highly valued role in the lives of the nation's youth. The vast majority of young people believe that kids are better off when their plates are full and they don't have too much time to just hang out. What's more, youngsters who participate in out-of-school activities give them high ratings for being fun and educational and being good places to make friends. Still, nearly 3 in 10 say they are home alone after school at least three days a week, while about 1 in 5 complain their schedules are too hectic.

When the final bell rings and the school day is over, it's no surprise that about 7 in 10 (69%) of today's youngsters say they are ready to "come home, take it easy, do homework and spend time with friends." An afternoon "just hanging out" still holds its time-honored adolescent appeal. But scratch beneath the surface, and there is strong, compelling evidence that organized, structured activities for youngsters—be they sports, clubs, music lessons, religious groups or volunteering—play a valuable and a highly valued role in students' lives. This is one of the chief messages emerging from *All Work and No Play?*, a new in-depth survey examining how youngsters spend time when they are not in school.

A joint project of The Wallace Foundation and Public Agenda, *All Work and No Play?* captures students' and parents' attitudes about what youngsters do after school, on weekends and in the summer. It is based on two separate national random sample surveys, one of 609 middle and high school students and another of 1,003 parents of school-age children, both conducted in June 2004. It also draws on the findings from 10 focus groups with students and parents conducted in communities across the country.

How Much Is Enough?

The surveys were conducted against a backdrop of controversy about the availability, cost, purpose and effectiveness of school- and center-based "after school" programs in communities nationwide. In recent years, there have been debates over federal spending designed to help less affluent districts increase after-

school programming. At the same time, some have charged that current programs leave too many slots unfilled. There have been disputes in local schools, with some now charging robust fees for children to play football or participate in other high-cost programs. Some observers worry that too many youngsters are overscheduled, with little time to play, rest, read, be with family or just daydream. Alternatively, some worry that

too many youngsters are home alone, unsupervised, bored and easily attracted to less-than-wholesome pastimes. Finally, some believe the rationale for after-school programs, particularly those that use taxpayer dollars, should be opened up for debate. Should they serve a specific purpose, such as beefing up academic achievement or teaching a needed skill, or should they focus more on fun, something to give kids a needed break from traditional learning?

Time to Ask the Kids

In *All Work and No Play?*, we take a step back to look at the issue through a wide-angle lens. To our knowledge, this is one of the few studies to look broadly at the full range of activities

and programs youngsters take part in during their out-of-school time—as opposed to research focusing solely on school- or center-based "after school programs."* Other out-of-school-time endeavors include extracurricular activities at school, school and non-school sports, private or group lessons paid for by parents, church programs and volunteer programs, as well as conventional after-school programs. Most important, *All Work and No Play?* is one of the few studies to ask youngsters themselves about their experiences and opinions.

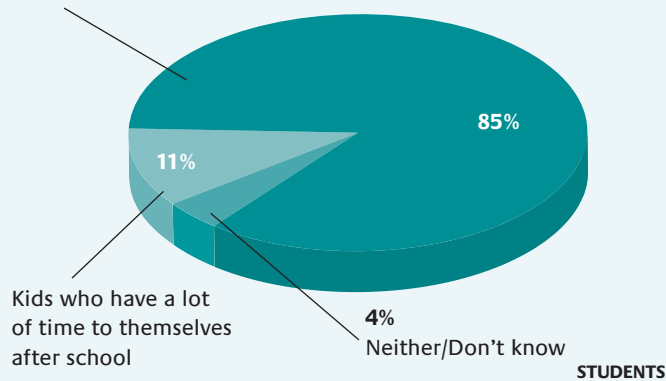
There is strong, compelling evidence that organized, structured activities for youngsters—be they sports, clubs, music lessons, religious groups or volunteering—play a valuable and a highly valued role in students' lives.

* In this report, we often use the terms "after school" and "out of school" activities and programs interchangeably. Unless otherwise specified, we are talking about the full range of things that youngsters take part in during the hours they are not in school.

Students Who Participate Are Better Off

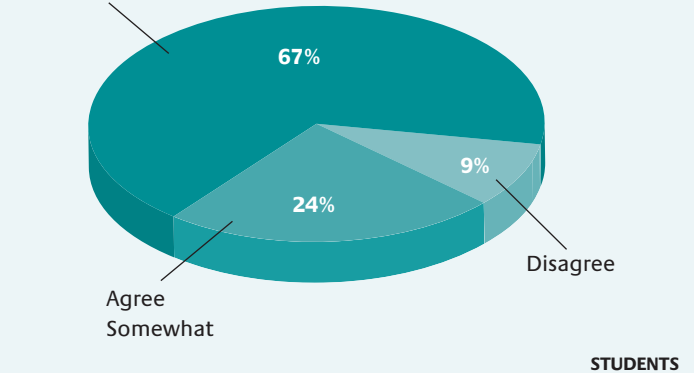
Which kids do you think are better off?

Kids who participate in organized activities such as a team or a club after school



Belonging to a club or team and doing things with other kids gives me a good feeling—do you agree or disagree?

Agree Strongly



Note: Question wording in charts may be slightly edited for space. Full question wording is available in the Complete Survey Results at the end of this report. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding or the omission of some answer categories.

In this chapter, we report findings from the student survey, taking up parents' views in later chapters. And the word from the kids is strong and clear. Despite the initial attraction of taking it easy after class, the vast majority of youngsters say that organized, structured out-of-school activities are enormously important to them. More than 8 in 10 (85%) students say that “kids who participate in organized activities such as a team or a club after school” are better off, compared with just 11% who believe that “kids who have a lot of time to themselves after school” are the ones who benefit most.

A Place to Meet a Friend

It's not just that out-of-school activities are good for you. The vast majority of youngsters we surveyed report that these diverse activities play a crucial and positive role in their lives and that they enjoy and learn from them. More than 9 in 10 students, for example, say that belonging to a club or team gives them “a good feeling”—with 67% strongly agreeing with this statement. Ninety-two percent say they have made good friends through their participation in these kinds of activities.

Nearly all of the youngsters who took part in the survey say they have participated in at least some type of structured out-of-school activity during the course of a school year. Most took part in more than one—findings that run counter to the stereotype of disengaged teens routinely at loose ends. At least 6 in 10 youngsters say they participate in sports (66%) or in school clubs or other extracurricular activities (62%) or in volunteer work (60%). More than half participate in church-sponsored programs (54%), take lessons in things like

music, dance or art (52%) or participate in an after-school program (52%). Somewhat smaller numbers say they get regular tutoring or academic preparation (30%), while 19% say they participate in “an organization like the Scouts.” Almost 4 in 10 high schoolers (37%) report having a part-time job.

Whatever their focus, structured out-of-school activities appear to offer—at least to the youngsters in them—the lure of being educational and entertaining at the same time. When describing the organized activity they participate in most, the overwhelming majority of students (86%) say they learn a lot. A similarly high number (85%) report that they usually have a lot of fun.

Good Marks for the Adults in Charge

What's more, kids give their coaches, teachers, mentors and organizers very good reviews; nearly 8 in 10 (79%) say the adults in charge really care about the kids. Just 19% say that too many of these adults “act like it was just a job.” These ratings compare favorably with ratings that public high school students gave classroom teachers in a 2002 Public Agenda study for the Gates Foundation. In that survey, less than half said that all or most of their teachers “take a personal interest in students and really get to know them,” although they did give teachers much better marks for knowing their subject and treating students respectfully.¹

The majority of youngsters also give their peers reasonable marks. Nearly 6 in 10 (59%) say that most kids take the activities seriously and really pay attention; 35% say that there is “too much goofing off.”

Although we focus on parents’ views in detail in later findings, it is worth noting here that they too hold positive views about the adults who supervise their child’s programs and activities. Asked about their child’s most recent organized activity, more than 7 in 10 (71%) describe it as “of good quality and well run by adults who know what they’re doing”; 3% say it’s unorganized, and 25% say it’s somewhere in the middle.

Lacrosse and Debate

In focus groups conducted for this study, youngsters often described a mix of activities and outlined sometimes complicated schedules that combine school, homework, part-time jobs and their own mix of chosen activities. A girl from the Denver area ticked off her jam-packed but hardly atypical schedule: “I play softball and lacrosse at the school. We have practice every day after school for about two hours. During the winter, I am on the speech and debate team.... I am the editor for our school newspaper.” A youngster from Texas had a similar list: “It’s kind of busy with sports and school. I go to church, too, and we have all these activities going on. Sports really take up a lot of time.... I just got done with basketball.... I’m in track, and I’m a cheerleader.”

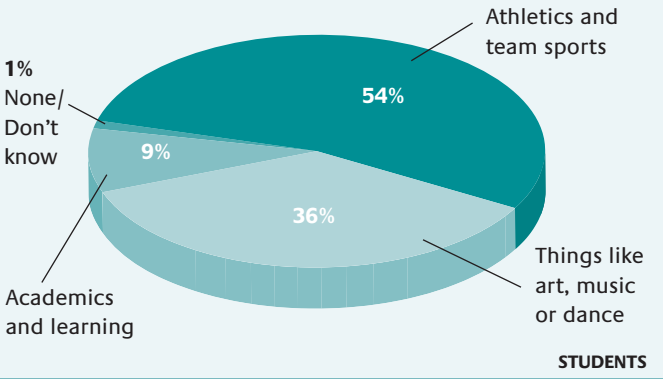
Ramping Up Learning?

With today’s emphasis on raising standards and reducing dropout rates, some educators, policy makers and parents



Sports and the Arts

Suppose it’s the school year and you’re looking at different types of organized activities to join after school or on week-ends. Which of these three would you like the most? Something that focuses on:



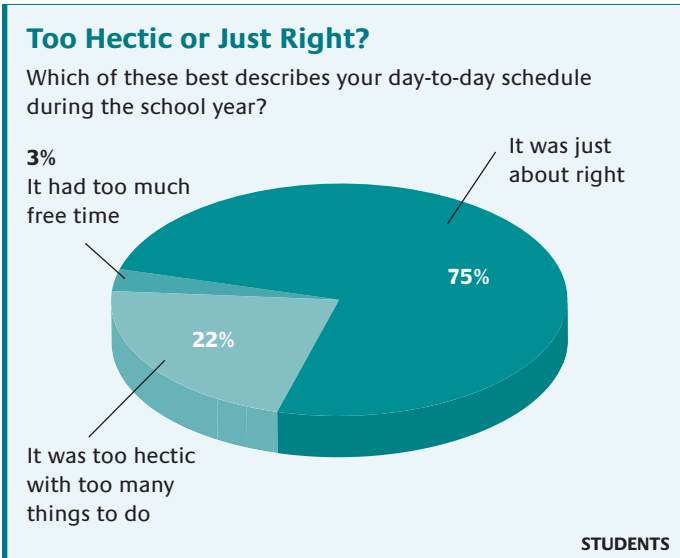
want to use more out-of-school time to ramp up learning, either for youngsters in danger of failing or for those who want to get an edge on college admissions. The benefits of these academic pursuits might seem obvious to adults (a question we look at in Finding 4), but it is hardly surprising that most kids don’t view them so favorably. More than 6 in 10 students (61%) agree that “when the school day is done, the last thing I want is to go to a place that has more academic work.” Given a choice among organized activities that emphasize sports, the arts or academics, just 9% of youngsters take the academic option; 54% choose sports, and arts advocates may be heartened to learn that a healthy 36% would choose something “like art, music or dance.”

Love of Learning Lives

Even so, a sizable 39% of youngsters reject the “last thing I want is more academics” formulation, and about 3 in 10 indicate they would very much like an after-school program that provides homework help (32%) or that focuses on academics (28%). In focus groups, some students talked enthusiastically about such offerings. One Denver middle schooler may not be typical, but he may well be headed for a bright future: “What I do, personally, is go to an after-school organization that is actually in the school building called the Math Counts. It is pretty fun, because it’s not your normal math class stuff. It is more advanced. When I was in elementary school, I hated math. It is only one plus one.... What’s the point about that?” In the focus groups, youngsters gave the thumbs-up to Spanish clubs, speech clubs, creative writing clubs and similar academically themed programs.

Pursuing a subject that interests you, however, may be different from having it imposed on you during your non-school hours,

especially for youngsters who are struggling in regular classes. Nevertheless, more than half of the students surveyed acknowledge that they could use extra help in some subjects (55%) and express an interest in summer programs that would help kids keep up with schoolwork or prepare for the next grade (56%).



“It Does Get Very Stressful”

Well over half the students surveyed (57%) tell us that they participate in some kind of out-of-school activity or program every day or almost every day, and another 37% say they do so a couple of days a week. The overwhelming majority (79%) say they do things both on school days and on weekends. Three out of 4 (75%) judge their own schedule as being “just about right.” It’s clear that youngsters value their activities and even thrive from their participation in them. Still, more than 1 in 5 students (22%) say their day-to-day schedule is “too hectic with too many things to do.” The “things to do”—based on this study—cover a wide range, including homework, paid work, helping with family child care and running errands and chores, along with classic out-of-school options such as sports, clubs, the arts and religious or volunteer activities. Only 3% of young people say they have “too much free time” in a typical school day.

In nearly every focus group, there were one or two youngsters who appeared to be substantially overbooked. In Arizona, one young man talked openly about the strain his various commitments placed on him: “Academics is a big thing because I’m a senior, and so there’s a lot of things that have to be done as far as that goes. It’s not the only thing.... I’m in some other honor societies at the high school. I did Student Council last year, but not this year. Just a few other things—I do tutoring.

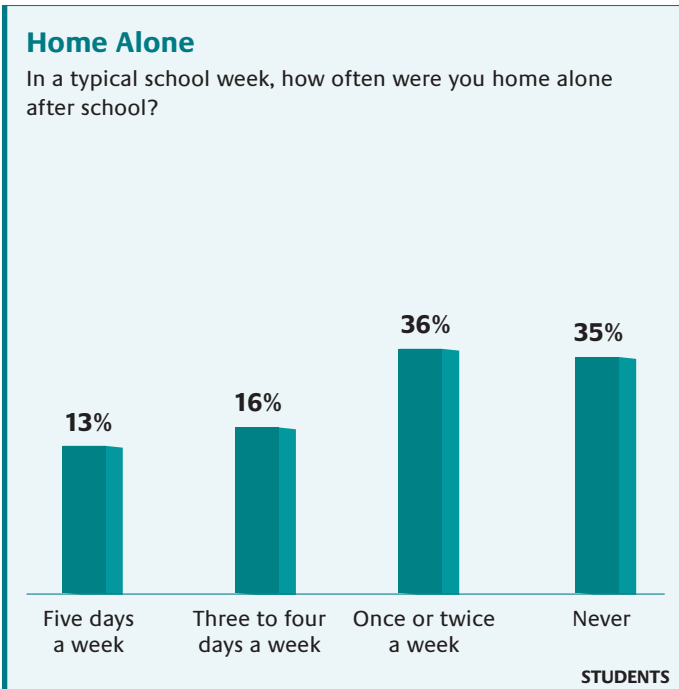
I’m a very busy person.... It does get very stressful because of the amount of things I have to do every day and remember... it’s a lot. For me, being a teenager right now is pretty stressful.”

Another youngster described a demanding schedule for sports: “During tennis season, it is every day. A school sport pretty much is every day. Hockey, sometimes you have to wake up in the morning at like 5:30. That is what time we practice. Now after school, I have been going to 24 Hour Fitness a lot and working out.”

Home Alone

Although most kids believe their own schedule is “just about right,” many adults may not be comforted by the considerable number of youngsters reporting that they spend several afternoons a week at home without an adult present. A recent study of eighth graders from a range of economic and ethnic backgrounds showed that children who care for themselves for 11 or more hours per week were twice as likely to consume alcohol, smoke cigarettes and use marijuana as children who were supervised.²

In *All Work and No Play?*, almost 3 in 10 students tell us they are home alone—that is, sans an adult—for some time after school at least three days in a typical school week, including 16% who are home by themselves three to four days a week and 13% who are home alone five days. According to students, the prevalence of being at home without adult supervision is even higher during the summer months: at the time of the



survey, a full 36% of students expected to “be home alone during the day” at least three days in a typical week during the summer.

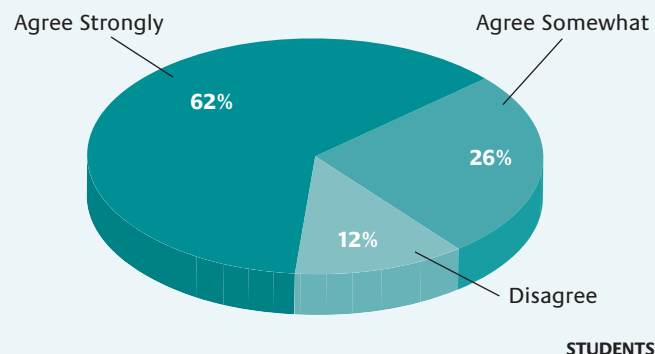
Later in this report, we talk about the special problems low-income and minority families face finding suitable out-of-school activities for their kids, particularly those in less-than-affluent neighborhoods. But although poorer families face special challenges, the youngsters reporting that they are frequently home by themselves on school days come from all demographic groups. There are marginal differences between students who are low-income and those who are better off (22% vs. 31%), those who are of African American or Hispanic background and those who are white (23% vs. 30%), those who are living in the suburbs and those in cities or rural communities (32% vs. 24% vs. 24%).

Parents’ Comfort Level

Most parents, for their part, say that leaving their child home alone for a few hours after school is either something they would never do (38%) or something they’re reluctant to do unless there’s no choice (16%). A mother from Connecticut described her feelings about her 10-year-old daughter: “My daughter is definitely not old enough—mature enough—to stay on her own. I was probably her age when I used to come home from school, take the bus home, and there was nobody there. I’d be home by myself until my mother got home from work. I look at my daughter, and I say, ‘Nuh-uh. No way.’” Still, almost half the parents surveyed (45%) say that being home alone after school is something their child can handle. As one might expect, as children get older, parents’ comfort level increases. The overwhelming majority of high school parents (81%) have no problem leaving their teenager home alone for a few hours after school, compared with 47% of parents of middle schoolers and just 8% of parents of elementary school children.

A Push in the Right Direction

Even though I might complain about it, sometimes I need to be pushed by my parents to do things that are good for me—do you agree or disagree?



Time to Nag a Little?

Based on Public Agenda’s earlier work for the Gates Foundation, fewer than 1 in 10 high school students complain that “there are hardly any after-school activities and clubs” available to them, with 90% saying this is not a serious problem where they go to school.³ And in *All Work and No Play?*, 65% of youngsters say the choice about whether or not to participate (and which activity to choose) is mainly their own. Parents may offer advice and encouragement, the findings suggest, but relatively few seem to force their child to take part in organized activities.

But *All Work and No Play?* also suggests that parents who have encountered disinterest or resistance when they suggest activities to their youngster might be well advised to give it a second try. A whopping 89% of the youngsters we interviewed told us that “even though I might complain about it, sometimes I need to be pushed by my parents to do things that are good for me”—with 62% strongly agreeing.



FINDING TWO: No Particular Place to Go

The vast majority of students draw an explicit connection between kids being bored and kids getting into trouble. Half say that they themselves are sometimes or often bored. And while most are involved in activities, many youngsters seem to be at a loss for productive things to do during their leisure hours. The majority say that when they get together with friends, they typically hang out without anything special planned. Most complain that in their community “there’s not much for kids my age to do other than go to school or just hang out.” While most young people believe their own town could provide more options, they are more likely to point to lack of motivation—not lack of alternatives—as the main reason more kids don’t participate in organized activities.

All Work and No Play? offers a nice dose of good news for anyone concerned about the lives and prospects of today’s youngsters. Most students tell us that they have access to at least some organized out-of-school activities, and the vast majority of those who participate consider them interesting, enjoyable and satisfying both intellectually and emotionally.

But side by side with this upbeat message is a much less reassuring one. Naturally, there are some times during the day that are unstructured, hours when there is no particular place to be, nothing specific planned to do. For adolescents left to their own devices, today’s communities can present a combustible mix of boredom and temptation. Both the focus group and survey findings indicate that when teenagers have too little to do, their free time weighs heavily on their hands. For many youngsters—black or white, urban or suburban, rich or poor—drugs, alcohol or sex seem to be no more than a conversation or phone call away.

What Do Parents Know and When Do They Know It?

Today’s parents often voice anxiety and even fear about the sea of risks and temptations adolescents are exposed to. A recent Public Agenda study for State Farm, for example, found that about 8 in 10 parents (79%) say they are worried about protecting their child from drugs and alcohol, with more than half (55%) saying they “worry a lot” about this.⁴ In the current study, more than 8 in 10 parents (83%) say these are dangerous times to raise kids.

In focus groups, parents worried aloud about their fear that drugs of choice today are so much more dangerous than in their day. One mother who had recently relocated to suburban Arizona said, “The drug issue here—I don’t know if we were just really sheltered in Nebraska, but certainly when I was growing up, and when my 25-year-old was a teenager there, the drugs of choice were beer and marijuana. Here they’re beer, marijuana, Ecstasy, cocaine, heroin and all that more scary stuff.”

But most parents surveyed here also seem to regard their own neighborhoods and communities as relatively safe havens.

The vast majority of parents (91%) say their neighborhood is “generally the kind of place where it’s safe for your child to be outside and have fun.” More than 8 in 10 (81%) say their neighborhood is “the kind of place where people really watch out for each other’s kids.”

Unfortunately, this genial picture is not the same one the youngsters depict. For many of today’s adolescents, the dangers, risks and temptations of modern teenage life lie extremely close at hand. Whether it’s drugs, alcohol or

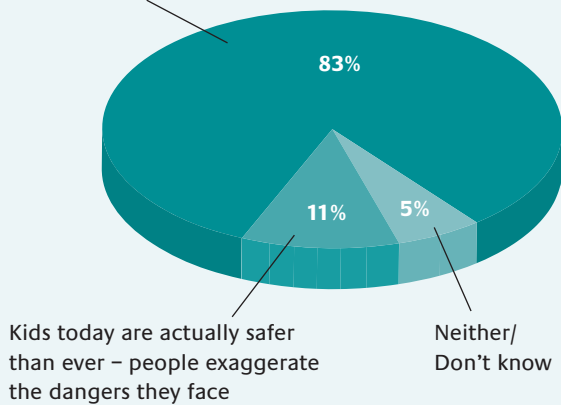
casual sex, many American youngsters seem to know someone their own age who has done it. And it may be more than a passing acquaintance with a couple of troublemakers at school. More than 6 in 10 youngsters (63%) agree that “my parents would be very upset if they knew some of the things my friends have done.”

For adolescents left to their own devices, today’s communities can present a combustible mix of boredom and temptation.

Parents See a Dangerous World...

Which comes closer to your own view?

These are dangerous times to raise kids – when it comes to their safety you can never be too careful



Kids today are actually safer than ever – people exaggerate the dangers they face

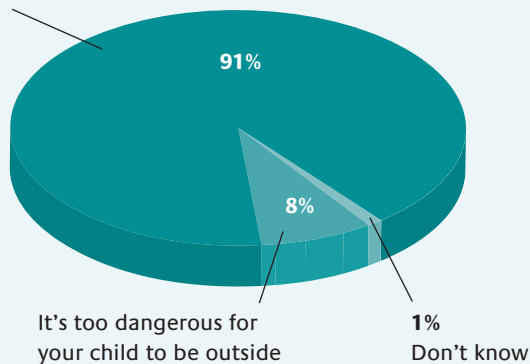
Neither/
Don't know

PARENTS

...But Say Their Own Community Is Safe

Would you say your neighborhood is generally the kind of place where:

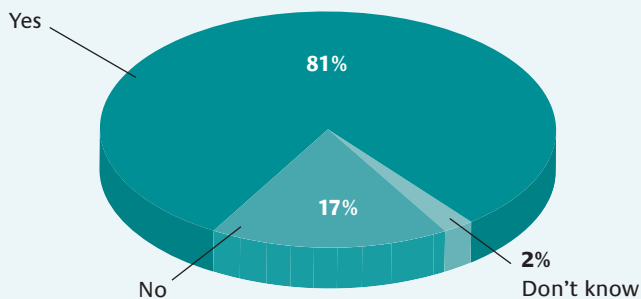
It's safe for your child to be outside and have fun



It's too dangerous for
your child to be outside

Don't know

Would you say your neighborhood is the kind of place where people really watch out for each other's kids?



No

Don't know

PARENTS

In the Oregon focus group, which included both middle and high school students, participants laughed at the naïveté of the moderator when she suggested that most kids aren't having sex or doing drugs. According to one young man, the experimentation starts early. "I think more freshmen get in trouble than more seniors, as far as stuff like that," he said. Another participant chimed in, "Because they're trying to prove themselves." Still, the group did seem shocked at the extent of sexual activity among the junior high set. A sixth grader told the group: "I used to be best friends with this girl. She was totally fine...then this year, she just totally changed. She stopped doing everything she used to do and just changed...like, not doing good things...she had sex."

Just Ask the Right People

All Work and No Play? confirms once again what other researchers have repeatedly shown—that using and abusing drugs and alcohol are all too common adolescent activities. A recent Robert Wood Johnson/Partnership for a Drug-Free America survey showed that over half of teens in grades 7 through 12 say someone has tried to sell or give them drugs.⁵ In this study, 26% of youngsters overall say that they "see people their age using drugs or alcohol" every day or almost every day, although the same proportion (26%) say that they never see this kind of behavior. Not surprisingly, high school students are considerably more likely than those in middle school to say they see peers using drugs or alcohol so frequently (35% vs. 13%).

"Right now," one Arizona teen told us, "I basically know maybe five or six people who actually do drugs or something like that. I'll go down to [the local mall], and I'll see people walking around with cigarettes. I rarely ever see any fights or anything, but just basically drugs are the main problem. Sometimes I'll see a few people walking around with some alcohol and stuff like that.... I rarely ever see security guards or any police officers." Another girl confirmed that the mall was the place to go for drugs: "Basically, you can go down [there] and just ask the right people, and you can get it."

Kids in Oregon offered a similar assessment. "It's so easy to get to," said one girl. Another boy agreed: "Yeah, it's so easy to get to it. Like, if they wanted to take the heroin, they could take it because it's so easy to get it." Another boy added this less-than-comforting reassurance: "Some kids, they kind of learned a little bit about how serious they can get, but most of them do the weed and the crack, because you find them all over the place." Alcohol, too, the youngsters said, was easily available.

Boredom Leads to Trouble

% of students who say:

A lot of kids get into trouble when they're bored and have nothing to do

77%

When meeting with friends, we usually get together to hang out without anything specific to do

69%

My parents would be very upset if they knew some of the things my friends have done

63%

In my community, there's not much for kids my age to do other than go to school or just hang out

54%

STUDENTS

Boredom Creeps In

And in the midst of this milieu of temptation are plenty of bored, sometimes alienated kids. In this study, half of the youngsters surveyed (50%) say they are bored sometimes or often. Nearly 6 in 10 (58%) say a lot or some of the kids at school complain about being bored. Nearly 7 in 10 (69%) say that when they get together with friends, it's usually to hang out without anything specific to do; only 26% say they usually get together with friends to do something specific.

Of course, lack of organized activities or even boredom doesn't always lead adolescents into risky or illegal behavior, but youngsters themselves accept the connection. More than three-quarters (77%) agree that "a lot of kids get into trouble when they're bored and have nothing to do," with 4 in 10 (40%) saying that they agree strongly. In focus groups, youngsters often spoke about the trajectory from boredom to bad behavior.

"I think people do stupid stuff when they are bored," one Colorado teen told us. "That's how I got into trouble, just being stupid. We were really bored and just had to make a game out of stuff. We got in trouble for breaking and entering. It wasn't a bad thing. It was over on [name of road]. There are all these mansions that are unbuilt [sic]. We were playing hide-and-go-seek in there. We caused a lot of problems." Another said, "I started leaning towards that area, but I got out of it really quick. I've had friends that got into a lot of trouble. They weren't into school activities. They wouldn't do anything. They started doing drugs and stuff. I think it is just because you are trying to find stuff to do. Sometimes you just can't find stuff."

Idle Hands?

While the majority of students see an explicit connection between boredom and trouble, their thinking about it is not necessarily simplistic, nor do they absolve adolescents themselves of blame. One Arizona youngster suggested that upbringing and personality produce essentially different types of adolescents, some involved and staying out of trouble, others unmotivated, bored and getting into it. "People that are involved a lot in school aren't people that do those types of things, typically. There's some exceptions, but in general I think that...people that do those types of things, I don't know if they're bored, but I just don't think they're all that busy in their lives."

And in focus groups, kids who were active sometimes voiced a disdain with hanging out, describing it as better in small doses and perhaps better in the abstract than in the reality. A Portland youngster said: "I'd rather have the plan[ned] thing, because playing basketball is fun, and other stuff, sports. I'd like that. But hanging out, all you're doing is talking, and then you talk, talk, talk, and then you have nothing else to talk about and it's all over."

At the same time, several youngsters also pointed out that being active is no guarantee of good judgment or good behavior—top school athletes who drink to near oblivion was one specific example that came up in the focus groups. A Texas student told us, "I know of a couple of people that are in sports and stuff and they go out and drink all the time, and they do drugs all the time." Overall, a little less than half of youngsters say that the main reason kids get into trouble is boredom (46%), vs. 39% who say the main reason is parents not paying enough attention. Just over 1 in 10 (11%) say it's because kids don't know right from wrong.

Why Don't More Kids Join Stuff?

It is not entirely clear from this study whether youngsters who are bored and at loose ends actually lack good options or whether they just don't take advantage of them. A large majority of youngsters themselves (71%) believe that when kids don't participate in organized activities after school or on weekends, it's because they are just not interested or motivated. Far smaller proportions point to other reasons such as most things being too expensive (29%), most things being too far away (28%) or that there is nothing right for their age (15%). As we point out in Finding 3, low-income and minority families report having fewer choices, more trouble covering fees, more transportation problems and less positive views of the quality of programs and activities available where they live.

Leisure Time Void

Of course, as any parent of an adolescent might tell you, teenagers' complaints about boredom may need to be taken with a grain of salt. For example, even among those who are involved in three or more organized activities during the course of the school year, almost half (48%) say they are bored and have nothing to do at least some of the time. And, as we reported earlier, the vast majority of kids are involved in some type of activity, so offerings are available to most who want to take part. Still, the findings do suggest that there is something of a void when it comes to leisure time and having things to do with friends when youngsters are not involved in an organized or structured activity.

More than 1 in 3 students surveyed (36%) say that when they do have free time to do whatever they choose, it usually ends up being wasted time (although a majority [57%] say they use their free time productively). More than half (54%) indicate their communities leave much to be desired, saying that "there's not much for kids my age to do other than go to school or just hang out." In the same vein, more than 7 in 10 (72%) say their neighborhood could realistically be doing much more when it comes to having enough things for kids their age to do. Less than half (46%) say there's a community center near home "where kids your age can go in the evenings to hang out and do things." Ironically, only 23% of youngsters who have a community center nearby use it regularly, but more than 6 in 10 (62%) of those who don't have one handy think they would use it if they did.

The Teen Gap

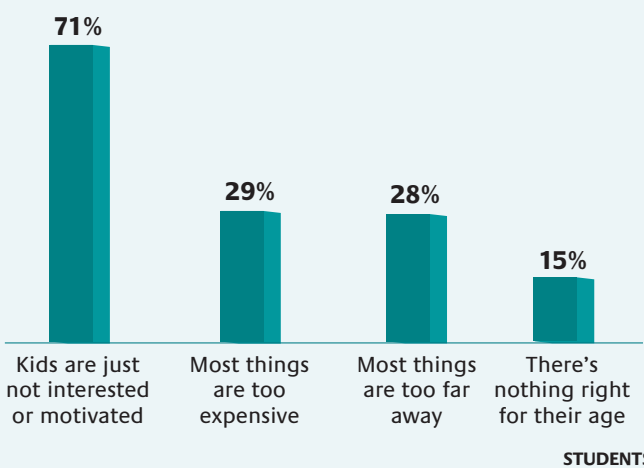
In the focus groups, both parents and students also suggested that there is something of a "teen gap" in their communities—plentiful organized activities for young children or middle school students, but nothing suitable for the age and interests of older teens. In Texas, one mother of teenagers commented, "They want a place to hang. They don't want to hang at Mom and Dad's house. It doesn't matter that we've got a video room and a pool table and all the comforts of home, and Mom will buy the pizza for them. They want to go somewhere else and hang and chitchat with their friends and have some music and whatnot." According to one young man we interviewed, the deli is the place in his neighborhood where all the kids congregate when they have nothing to do. About the nearby community center that is available to them, this is what he had to say: "What usually happens at the community center is little kids' karate and old people's aerobics." There's nothing for people his age.

Summertime Blues?

As long as there have been school days, there have been youngsters looking forward to summer vacation. But there is evidence in the survey that for some youngsters and their parents, finding ways to keep busy and engaged during the summer is especially challenging. While almost 6 in 10 students (58%) are generally satisfied with the number of activities and things they can choose to do during the summer, more than 4 in 10 (41%) say they "really don't have enough good choices." And almost half of youngsters (47%) point to the summer months as the hardest time to find interesting things to do (33% point instead to after-school hours and 14% to week-ends). In fact, at the time this survey was conducted in June, as much as 43% of students said their summer plans were "still up in the air" (although 56% said their plans were set).

It's Lack of Motivation, Not Lack of Options

% of students who say that when kids don't participate in organized activities, it's because:



Parents, for their part, are especially concerned about summer. By an overwhelming margin, they pick summer as the hardest time to make sure their child has things to do (58%)—the next closest is 14% for after-school hours and 13% for the weekend. Not only are most parents concerned that they won't be able to afford the things their child wants to do (52%), but large numbers also express concern that boredom will set in (50%) and that there won't be enough activities available to capture their child's interest (44%). Almost 4 in 10 (38%) are concerned that their child will fall behind on academics—a factor that perhaps contributes to the substantial number of students (56%) who would be interested in a summer program to help them keep up with schoolwork.



FINDING THREE:

The Haves and the Have-Nots

Most families are content with how their child spends out-of-school time, but low-income and minority families are significantly less likely to be satisfied with their options. On virtually every measure of satisfaction—whether it’s quality, affordability or availability of activities—low-income and minority parents are substantially more likely than their respective counterparts to indicate they encounter problems. Both groups, by overwhelming margins, indicate their communities could realistically do much more for kids and that keeping youngsters busy during the summer is especially tough.

For students and parents in Yonkers, New York, the 2004 school year opened with news that, owing to severe budget cuts, there would be virtually no sports offered, no extracurricular activities like yearbook, drama or school newspaper, and no art, music or foreign-language courses at the elementary school level.⁶ In New York City, the Dance Theater of Harlem closed the doors to its ballet school indefinitely, citing lack of funds.⁷ Similarly, many parents these days find themselves paying a lot more money for activities that used to be provided at nominal cost through the schools or the community.⁸ Not surprisingly, when programs are cut or fees go up, low-income and minority families are especially hard hit. Yet finding after finding in this research shows that it’s parents and youngsters in these families who are more likely to lack quality, convenient or affordable opportunities to keep children productively occupied during their out-of-school time.

The Less Money You Have...

The vast majority of America’s parents overall are content with the way their child spends time after school. More than 7 in 10 (71%) describe their child’s routine during the school year as just about right rather than as “too hectic with too

many things to do” (16%) or as leaving kids with “too much free time on [their] hands” (13%).

But scratch beneath the surface and the data reveal substantial problems. The less income a family has, the more likely parents are to hold negative views about the quality, convenience and affordability of the organized activities available to their child and about the family-friendliness of their neighborhoods. As one might expect, the wealthiest families (earning \$100,000 or more annually) are the most satisfied, those with the lowest income (less than \$25,000 per year) the least. But in terms of the dissatisfaction they express, the lowest-earning families stand out against every other income group, even those with relatively modest incomes. For purposes of comparison, in this finding we differentiate “low-income parents” (those with household incomes of less than \$25,000) from “higher-income parents” (those with incomes of \$50,000 or more).

Race Matters

As a group, the views of African American and Hispanic parents (“minority parents”) differ markedly from those of white parents when it comes to their attitudes and experiences

Gap Between Ideal and Reality

% of parents who say their child’s ideal/actual after-school routine is:

	LOW-INCOME PARENTS		HIGHER-INCOME PARENTS		MINORITY PARENTS		WHITE PARENTS	
	IDEAL ROUTINE	ACTUAL ROUTINE	IDEAL ROUTINE	ACTUAL ROUTINE	IDEAL ROUTINE	ACTUAL ROUTINE	IDEAL ROUTINE	ACTUAL ROUTINE
A relaxed afternoon where child comes home, takes it easy, does homework and spends time with friends	57%	vs. 73%	49%	vs. 51%	42%	vs. 62%	54%	vs. 56%
A scheduled place to go and activities to do after school	41%	vs. 23%	45%	vs. 44%	56%	vs. 34%	40%	vs. 39%
PARENTS								

regarding their child's after-school opportunities. On virtually every measure where there's a dissimilarity, minority parents are substantially less satisfied. To a large extent, the demographic variables of income and race tend to go hand in hand. For example, minority parents are more than twice as likely to fit into the low-income category themselves compared with white parents (25% vs. 11%, respectively, have household incomes of less than \$25,000 a year).

Having It All

The data show unequivocally that low-income and minority parents are unhappier with the status quo compared with their counterparts. For example, when asked to think about how their child spends their out-of-school time, low-income parents are twice as likely as those with higher income to say they would want to change things if they could (66% vs. 33%). On the other hand, 67% of higher-income parents—and 63% of white parents—would “basically stick with things the way they are now.”

And why not? Virtually all higher-income parents are living their ideal after-school situation. Whether they prefer their child to have “a scheduled place to go and activities to do after school” or “a relaxed afternoon where [he or she] comes home, takes it easy, does homework and spends time with friends,” almost 100% of higher-income parents get what they consider to be ideal. Among low-income parents, the results are far less sanguine. For example, while more than 4 in 10 low-income parents (41%) wish their child could have an after-school routine that is scheduled with activities, only 23% describe their child's actual routine as such. As you can see in the corresponding chart, this pattern is apparent when comparing minority and white parents as well.

An Arizona mother who is struggling to make ends meet captured the sentiment of many of her peers: “My husband has been laid off for a little over a year now, so it's trying to find \$200 for football and \$100 for track and \$200 for soccer.... I don't think there's enough offered out there for families who don't have the money.... We just can't foot the bill.... It's very difficult.”

Worried about Hanging Out

Making sure their son or daughter is productively occupied during the non-school hours is a significant worry for low-income parents. Just 37% say they have this under control, compared with 60% of higher-income parents. In the same vein, more than 1 in 4 (26%) financially pressed parents say they struggle regularly to keep their child occupied, while just

11% of their higher-income counterparts say this is so for them. Another 37% and 30%, respectively, of both groups say they struggle occasionally.

As we learned in Finding 2, most parents today have serious concerns about the corrosive societal influences preying on children, but there is evidence that this uneasiness is magnified among low-income and minority parents. Perhaps because they live in rougher neighborhoods, or because their children often attend overcrowded, poorly funded schools, almost half of the low-income parents surveyed (46%) worry that “hanging out with the wrong crowd” might lead their child astray. In contrast, just 28% of higher-income parents express this worry. Similarly, a plurality of low-income parents (39%) choose “to keep kids busy and out of trouble” as the best reason for a child to be involved in structured activities during non-school hours, compared with 23% of higher-income parents.

The margins are only slightly smaller when comparing minority and white families. For example, 37% of minority parents worry that their child could be easily influenced if “hanging out with the wrong crowd,” compared with 28% of white parents. Among minority parents, 35% point to keeping kids busy as the best reason for a child to be involved in organized activities, compared with 25% of white parents.

“...trying to find \$200 for football and \$100 for track and \$200 for soccer.... I don't think there's enough offered out there for families who don't have the money.... We just can't foot the bill....”

– ARIZONA MOTHER

Having more options for organized activities that are interesting, convenient and affordable might go a long way toward easing the minds of minority youngsters as well as their parents. While 2 out of 3 minority kids (66%) agree with the statement “When adults see kids my age hanging out together, they automatically think we're up to no good,” just over half of white kids feel the same (52%).

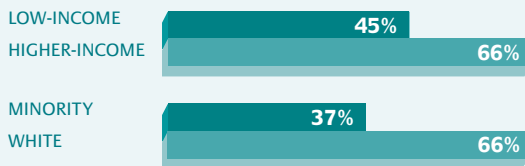
The Search for Quality

Overwhelmingly high numbers of parents (between 83% and 91%)—whether high- or low-income, minority or white—say their families have looked carefully into the options available in their communities for organized activities and programs. But finding high-quality offerings is a much more difficult task for some than for others. When asked how easy it is in

Low-Income and Minority Parents Less Satisfied

% of parents who say it is “very easy” or “somewhat easy” to find:

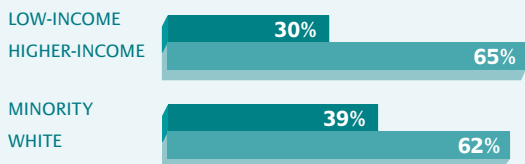
Activities and programs that are of high quality



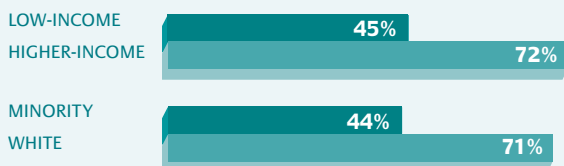
Activities and programs that are run by adults you could trust



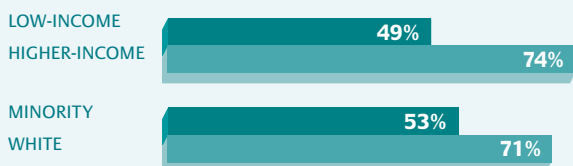
Activities and programs that are affordable



Activities and programs that are conveniently located



Activities and programs that are interesting to your child



Activities and programs that are appropriate for your child's age



PARENTS

their own community to find things for their child that are “of high quality,” 45% of low-income parents say it is easy, compared with 66% of high-income, a 21-percentage-point difference. This wide disparity is consistent on other measures of quality too: 45% vs. 72% say it’s easy to find things that are run by trustworthy adults, a 27-percentage-point difference;

49% vs. 74% that it’s easy to find things that are interesting to their child, a 25-percentage-point difference; 47% vs. 73% that it’s easy to find things that are age-appropriate, a 26-percentage-point difference. A similar pattern is evident between minority and white parents (see chart).

Counting on the Neighbors?

Overwhelming majorities of parents—regardless of their demographic characteristics—have a positive outlook about their own neighborhood and consider it a safe and friendly place to raise children. But for low-income and minority parents, there appears to be considerable room for improvement in some areas. While almost 2 in 3 low-income parents (65%) say their community could realistically do much more when it comes to having enough things to do for grade school children, less than half of higher-income parents (46%) feel this way. (This is virtually the same when comparing minority [71%] with white parents [46%].) When it comes to teens, majorities of all groups agree their community could realistically do much more, although the proportions of low-income and minority parents are considerably higher (see chart).

According to one low-income, single working mother in Oregon: “The neighbors have no kids in our neighborhood.... It’s a nice neighborhood, but there’s hardly any kids. I think that can cause boredom.... The educational system here stinks to me. It’s not priority, and it’s not key. Family is not key. You have to be really strong in your own belief system to be able to make it and [not] take it personal.”

Low-income and minority parents are especially likely to see a role for local government in terms of providing things for neighborhood kids to be doing when they’re not in school. Only about 1 in 10 (12% and 11%, respectively) think it’s enough for local government to “make sure there are parks, playgrounds and libraries in the community.” Almost 9 in 10 of both groups (86% and 87%) say municipal government “should also provide quality organized activities and programs.” In contrast, a much smaller proportion of higher-income and white parents (66% for both) feels this way.

It’s Not Optional

Wealthier parents can typically afford to pick the kinds of activities that could really help their children thrive, but lower-income parents don’t have the luxury of thinking about things like cultivating a child’s interests or hobbies. The bottom line for many low-income parents is the need for child care during the hours between the end of the school day and the end of the workday. This was a burning issue in the focus groups.

Community Matters

When it comes to having enough things for *elementary school children* to do, do you think your community is:

	LOW-INCOME PARENTS	HIGHER-INCOME PARENTS	MINORITY PARENTS	WHITE PARENTS
Doing as much as can be expected or	33%	51%	25%	51%
Could realistically do much more	65%	46%	71%	46%

When it comes to having enough things for *teenagers* to do, do you think your community is:

	LOW-INCOME PARENTS	HIGHER-INCOME PARENTS	MINORITY PARENTS	WHITE PARENTS
Doing as much as can be expected or	12%	26%	11%	25%
Could realistically do much more	85%	65%	83%	67%

PARENTS

“Who doesn’t work today?” asked a mother from Connecticut. “It’s not optional. People work. People have kids, [after-school activities are] something that they need...and there’s also the issue about money, too. Not everybody has a large salary where they can say, ‘Okay, I can pay whatever amount to provide my child with what they need.’” Another said simply, “We both have to work, so I just kind of tried to look for something where he could have a little fun, and I could have the peace of mind that he’s taken care of.” According to the survey, parents earning \$50,000-plus a year are more than twice as likely to say that it’s easy to find things in their community that are affordable, compared with those earning less than \$25,000 (65% vs. 30%; white vs. minority is 62% vs. 39%).

“A Lot of the Programs Are Designed for Stay-at-Home Moms”

For some parents, concerns about quality and affordability must be weighed against their lack of time or means to transport a child to and fro. Again, it’s low-income and minority parents who face this obstacle disproportionately. Less than half of the low-income parents surveyed (45%) say it’s easy to find organized activities and programs in their community that are conveniently located, compared with more than 7 in 10 (72%) of their higher-income counterparts. For minority and white parents, the proportions are 44% vs. 71%. “We’re restricted on what’s available to them,” a Connecticut mother commented, “because by the time you get in from work, pick them up and get them somewhere—a lot of the programs are [designed] for stay-at-home moms.... They’re not set up for parents that come in later.”

In one focus group, which had a mix of both lower-income and more affluent parents, a financially comfortable father

commented, “[Someone] was talking about being in a neighborhood without other kids around. If you don’t have other parents to share, to carpool, or whatever, your kid may be stuck.... If you don’t have the time and means to get there, it can be, perhaps, for some parents, impossible.” And a low-income mother responded, “That certainly happened to us many times, where we wanted to do activities but just didn’t have the means to get there, timing-wise, because parents were working.”

Summertime, and the Livin’s Not So Easy

Summer stands out as the most difficult time to find productive things for kids to do—and this is about equally true among parents regardless of income or race (approximately 6 in 10 for all groups). Still, on virtually every issue addressed in the survey about the summer months, low-income and minority parents are more apprehensive or less satisfied, sometimes by overwhelming margins.

For example, 63% of low-income parents say their kids “really don’t have enough good options” for things to do during the summer months, compared with 43% of higher-income parents. Perhaps this lack of good alternatives is one explanation for why, at the time of this survey in June, 6 in 10 (60%) low-income parents said they were still up in the air with summer plans for their child. In contrast, 75% of higher-income parents said their plans were set.

Almost 2 out of 3 low-income parents (65%) expressed concern that their son or daughter would be bored during the summer months, compared with less than half of those making \$50,000 or more (48%)—a 17-percentage-point gap. By a margin of 57% to 38%, low-income parents were worried

Summer Months Especially Worrisome

% of parents who are concerned about each of the following when they think about their child's summer:

That they won't be able to afford the things their child wants to do



That their child will fall behind on academics



That there's not enough things to capture their child's interest



That their child will be bored if they have nothing to do



That they might have trouble finding someone to watch their child



PARENTS

that there would not be enough options during the summer to capture their child's interest—a 19-percentage-point difference. Finally, by 31% to 13%, low-income parents were much more likely to be concerned about having trouble finding child care during the summer—an 18-percentage-point difference.

In the Connecticut focus group, where there were a number of parents who seemed to be just making ends meet financially, talk about the summer months provoked anxiety. "I don't know what I'm going to do with her for the summer," one mom said, "because I can't afford to send her here [to the community center]." This sentiment is corroborated in the survey findings, with more than 3 in 4 low-income parents (76%) expressing concern that they wouldn't be able to afford the things their child wanted to do during summer break, compared with 42% of those with higher incomes. (See chart on this page for comparisons between minority and white parents regarding the summer months.)

"Who Can Watch Her?"

A parent from Connecticut told us, only half-jokingly, "If the world were different, like I want it, I would shop for a living, and then I would be out in time to pick up my daughter from school.... I'm a single mom, so necessity runs my life, as far as [my need for] day care. But if [I had a choice], then I would be more concerned about getting her enrolled in soccer or some sort of activity...now it's more a concern of 'Who can watch her?'"



FINDING FOUR: More Time on Task?

Despite increased pressures on students to reach high academic standards, relatively small numbers of parents are looking for greater emphasis on academics in their child's out-of-school time. That's not to say parents don't put a high priority on schoolwork—they do—but homework help or additional time spent on academic subjects is not the first thing parents have in mind when they think about their child's free time. Kids, most parents say, need time to relax and just be kids. Once again, low-income and minority families are exceptions; both groups are considerably more likely to want activities that emphasize academic learning.

For two years in a row, major evaluations of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers,* conducted by the nonpartisan research firm Mathematica, found that participating students made few gains in academic outcomes such as test scores and grades, although there was some evidence of other kinds of benefits.⁹ As a result, some policy makers questioned whether there should be any taxpayer funding of after-school programs if they don't result in improved academic achievement. The after-school community cried foul, saying that the programs evaluated were not designed to improve student academic achievement, so they should not be measured in this way, and that harder-to-quantify benefits were overlooked.

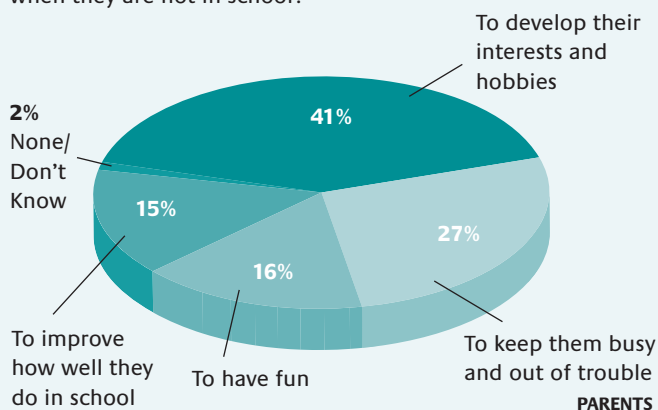
Inevitably, the debate will continue to rage among educators, policy makers and practitioners. But an important constituency is noticeably absent. What are our nation's parents and students—the people who actually use out-of-school-time programs and activities—really looking for? Just how much do parents and youngsters rely on after-school activities to enhance academic learning? To what extent are they looking for socialization, playtime or merely a place with adult supervision? As we saw in the previous finding, not all parents and children want or need the same things. Since participation is purely by choice, knowing what drives these “consumers” is essential for implementing effective policies or creating constructive programs.

“It Would Burn Them Out”

The findings in *All Work and No Play?* strongly indicate that a greater emphasis on academics is not the first—nor the only—thing most parents are looking for when they sign up their children for activities after school. The survey posed the

Relatively Few Parents Look for Academics

Other than safety, which do you think is the best reason for a child to be involved in organized activities and programs when they are not in school?



question “Other than safety, which of these do you think is the best reason for a child to be involved in organized activities and programs” during non-school hours? Only 15% of parents say “to improve how well they do in school.” A strong plurality (41%) instead points to developing their interests and hobbies, and related to that, an additional 16% think it is for children “to have fun.” Another 27% say the best reason is to keep kids busy and out of trouble.

One mother in Oregon outright rejected the idea of more schooling after school. “That would just kill them,” she said. “[It] would burn them out. If your kid is struggling with math, and if you then yank them after they’ve spent 45 minutes in a math class, from 3:00 to 5:00, to do it again? My kid would say, ‘Forget it.’” Still others in the focus groups talked

*The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) are part of a federally funded initiative launched by Congress in 1994 to meet growing public demand for after-school programs. More than 2.5 million students participate in the academic, recreational and cultural activities offered by the CCLC during after-school hours.

about how kids need time to, well, just be kids. “I want him to be a kid,” a Texas father said. “He’s learning stuff now in the sixth grade that I didn’t learn until I was a freshman in high school.... So after school, be a kid, enjoy yourself.” In Arizona, a mother commented, “I think they need to come home and have some letdown time. If you have them go from school to school again, I think it’s overemphasizing school. They need some downtime, and they won’t get that if you’re sending them somewhere else to learn again.”

Importance of School

Still, as strongly as parents may feel about the need for letdown time, they also want their kids to thrive and succeed in school. A decade of Public Agenda research shows that parents care deeply about their child’s academic progress and performance. In *All Work and No Play?*, we found that parents are more likely to worry about how well their son or daughter is doing in school (44%) than they are to worry about who their child’s friends are (35%) or how their child is occupied during out-of-school hours (13%). Asked which of these three would be the best match for their own child, they are about equally likely to pick a program focusing on academic preparation and skills (37%), sports and athletics (32%) or activities like music, dance or art (29%).

A Well-Rounded, Healthy Child

To some, these data may seem to conflict: Only 15% of parents think the best reason for children to participate in organized after-school activities and programs is to “improve how well [kids] do in school,” yet at the same time sizable numbers indicate they worry about their child’s academic performance and would pick an after-school program focusing on academics (rather than sports or the arts) for their own child. But to a parent, an after-school activity is more than just fun, or just tutoring, or just sports. To a parent, whose goal is to raise a well-rounded and healthy child, any exposure to something positive is potentially good. Parents are not looking to after-school programs just to provide specific things to do, they also look to them to reinforce good values and behavior. Asked which of three types of programs would be the best match for their own child, almost half (48%) pick one that focuses on “teaching the value of hard work and commitment,” another 33% a program that focuses on “helping other people in the community,” and 17% a program that reinforces their religious faith.

While the policy debate tends to be narrow and polarized (“More academics!” vs. “Time to have fun!”), parents must weigh the ideal situation against the reality of an individual child’s life. Perhaps their daughter struggles in school but

shines on the softball field. Or maybe looking forward to band practice after the bell rings is what gets their son up and off to school in the morning. To many parents, more academics is not necessarily better. Put simply, even as parents recognize the importance of school and good grades in a child’s life, they don’t want to see their daughter or son overdose on schoolwork. “They’re hit all day long,” explained a mother from Texas. “So when they get home, let them go, let them play. I’m sure they’re tired of doing homework and stuff all day.”

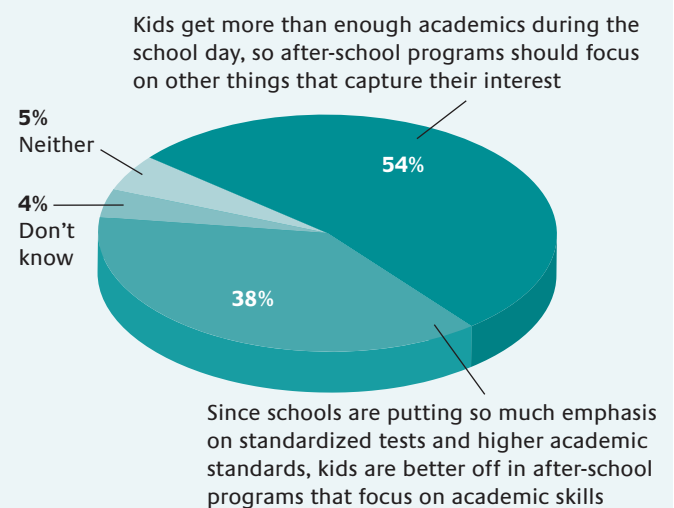
Rising Academic Standards

Parents are keenly aware of the enormous pressure kids are under to do well in school. “The kids these days have a lot more pressure on them earlier than they did before,” said one mom in the Connecticut focus group. “I think education is so much more accelerated. They’re expected to know so much more, even just starting kindergarten, than they knew before.”

Indeed, with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, there is more scrutiny than ever before on students’ standardized test scores and on the efforts schools are making to increase academic standards. Almost half of the parents surveyed for *All Work and No Play?* say that their own community’s public schools are raising academic standards and expectations (45%), although 18% think they are lowering them and 32% believe that things have remained about the same. But even among those who think standards are on the rise, only a very small number of parents (14%) point to academic help/enhancement as the best reason for a child to be involved in activities during out-of-school time, virtually identical to parents overall (15%).

More Fun or More Facts?

Which statement comes closer to your own view?



Yet interestingly enough, while parents acknowledge higher standards and the pressure children are under these days to achieve them, they don't make a beeline for "after school programs" as a solution. In fact, when forced to choose, a modest majority of parents (54%) agree, "Kids get more than enough academics during the school day, so after-school programs should focus on other things that capture their interest," compared with 38% who say, instead, "Since schools are putting so much emphasis on standardized tests

and higher academic standards, kids are better off in after-school programs that focus on academic skills."

Homework Helper

Despite the general sense that youngsters need non-academic outlets, some parents do like the idea of time reserved in after-school programs to help children with homework. A Texas dad praised the program

his youngest child attended: "...they actually helped with

their homework. It was teachers that were part of the program, and if they had homework to do, they'd do it during the after-school time. They'd sit down and do it, whereas in the other program [my kids] were in, it was playtime." More than 1 in 3 parents (34%) say they'd go out of their way to find an after-school program that provides supervised homework time, and another 37% say this would be "nice but not essential." Almost 3 in 10 (28%) say it would not be important.

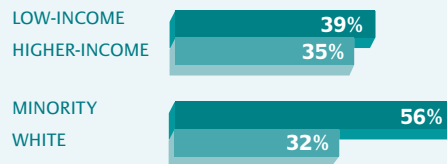
Low-Income and Minority Families Eager for Academic Focus

Perhaps because the schools in their neighborhoods tend to be low performing, perhaps because they believe from their own experience that education is a ticket to a better lifestyle—whatever the reasoning—low-income and minority families stand out as being more eager for an academic focus in their child's organized activities and programs during out-of-school time. By margins ranging from 4 percentage points to 29 percentage points, parents from low-income families (those earning less than \$25,000 per year), and African American or Hispanic parents, are more likely than their respective counterparts to prefer a program for their own child that focuses on providing extra test preparation and academic skills and to go out of their way to find a program that focuses on homework help in a supervised setting. They are also more likely to think that because schools are emphasizing academic standards,

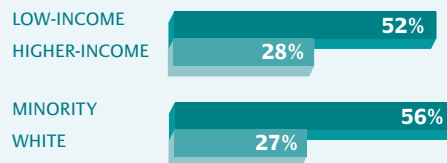
Low-Income & Minority Parents More Likely to Want Academics

% of parents who say:

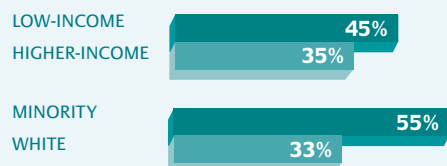
The best match for their own child would be an after-school program that focused on providing extra academic preparation and skills, rather than sports or the arts*



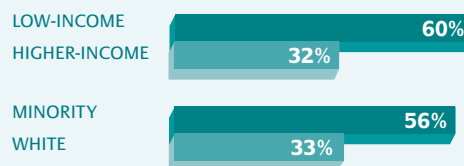
They would go out of their way to find an after-school program that provides time for their child to do homework in a supervised setting



Since schools are putting so much emphasis on standardized tests and higher academic standards, kids are better off in after-school programs that focus on academic skills



They are concerned their child will fall behind on academics during the summer



*The low- vs. higher-income difference is not statistically significant.

PARENTS

children are better off in after-school programs that focus on academic skills rather than ones that focus on other things. Finally, by margins of almost 2 to 1, they are more likely to be concerned that their child will fall behind on academics during the summer.

What to Expect from Kids?

It's one thing to ask parents if they think their child's out-of-school activities should focus on academic skills and learning. But it's quite another to pose this question to middle and high school students, many of whom seem programmed to bolt at the sound of a bell. Only 9% of students, if given a choice,

would pick an after-school activity that focused on academics and learning.

Why is it important to find out what students’ priorities are? Because if youngsters en masse lack enthusiasm for a particular activity or program, they simply won’t participate. And then the policy debate about academic vs. social outcomes becomes moot. Only about 1 in 10 students (12%) say improving how well they do in school is the best reason for a kid to be involved in things after school. They are far more likely to point to having fun (39%), keeping kids busy and out of trouble (29%) or developing interests and hobbies (19%). A strong indication that youngsters have some power in this matter: Most students (55% of middle school and 72% of high school) say they themselves mainly make the decision about how they will spend their out-of-school hours, and an additional 28% and 14%, respectively, say they contribute to the decision equally with their parents.

Some Want More

As reported in Finding 1, more than 6 in 10 students (61%) agree with the statement “When the school day is done, the last thing I want is to go to a place that has more academic work.” Nevertheless, a strong minority of students (39%) disagree, indicating an ample number of youngsters who are interested in taking on more schoolwork. Almost 1 in 3 students (32%) indicate they’d have a lot of interest in an after-school program that promised supervised homework help, and almost 3 in 10 (28%) would very much like one that focused mainly on academics. Well over half the students surveyed also say they would be very (17%) or somewhat (39%) interested in a program that helped kids keep up with schoolwork during the summer.

Out-of-school-time activities that center on learning are especially appealing to low-income and minority students. Compared to their higher-income and white peers, they are more likely to pick improving schoolwork as the best reason for kids to join activities, to like the idea of an after-school program that provides supervised homework help or academic preparation, and to be interested in a summer program that helped them keep up with schoolwork (see chart).

The Real Test

Conflicting ideas about the purpose of certain types of after-school programs, especially ones that are funded by taxpayer dollars, engender lively discussions in policy-making circles.

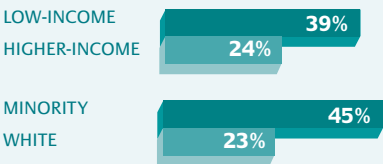
Low-Income & Minority Students More Likely to Want Academics

% of students who say:

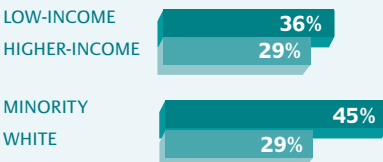
They would be interested in a summer program that helped kids keep up with schoolwork or prepare for the next grade



They would “very much” like an after-school program that focuses mainly on academic preparation



They would “very much” like an after-school program that gives you time to do homework and has an adult around to help if you need it



The best reason for a kid to be involved in activities after school and on weekends is “to improve how well they do in school”



STUDENTS

The question of whether or not the merit of after-school programs should be measured on their ability to improve academic performance will undoubtedly continue to be debated among policy makers and experts for years to come. In the meantime, parents, it seems, have discovered their own unflinching method to determine effectiveness. “Watch them when they come home,” a Colorado dad instructed. “Do they have a smile on their face? Are they sad? Are they quiet and withdrawn? My daughter comes back from most of the things she’s involved in, even the things she professes to hate, like piano, fairly happy and excited about it.”



FINDING FIVE: Where Parents and Kids Differ

Both youngsters and parents see out-of-school activities in an overall positive light, but a few differences in outlook are worth noting. Some are predictable and probably even natural, but the study did unearth several areas where the contrast between what parents think and what young people actually say is more troubling. For example, most parents say their own kids don't do much hanging out at the mall; yet more than half of kids say they do. And while some parents count on cell phones to know where their kids are, uncomfortably high numbers of youngsters admit they've told their parents they were in one place when they were really in another and that they don't always answer their cell when they know it's their parents calling.

One refreshing feature of *All Work and No Play?* is its examination of the views of youngsters as well as adults; consequently, the study allows us to compare the perspectives and judgments of the two. On the whole, parents and students see eye to eye when it comes to out-of-school time. Both say these supplemental activities and programs play an enormously positive role in youngsters' lives. Both groups report participation and enjoyment in a wide array of activities, including sports, clubs, music and dance lessons, volunteer projects and/or religious, arts or academically focused programs. Both parents and kids are largely satisfied with what's offered to them. To the degree that there are problems with the kinds of activities available, the primary shortfall is among low-income and minority families. Both parents and kids in these households are more likely to say that the choices available to them are unappealing and/or too costly or inconvenient. Still, a few overall differences in outlook are worth noting.

Kids Just Wanna Have Fun

Some are predictable and probably even natural. For kids, the main reason to participate in out-of-school activities is to have fun (39%) and keep busy (29%). For parents, the "it's good for you" rationale is more important. Giving children "the chance to develop hobbies and interests" (41%) and keeping busy (27%) are the top reasons parents give for joining. Children and their parents also tend to differ on whether youngsters' free time is used fruitfully or not. Kids (57%) are much more likely than parents (39%) to say that when they have time to do whatever they choose, it usually ends up being productive time. A Texas dad described his son's preferred way to spend time: "He's 10. His perfect day would be

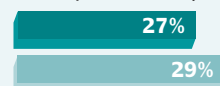
Students Just Want to Have Fun

Other than safety, which of these do you think is the BEST reason for a kid to be involved in activities after school and on weekends?

To develop their interests and hobbies



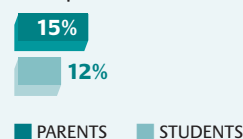
To keep them busy and out of trouble



To have fun



To improve how well they do in school

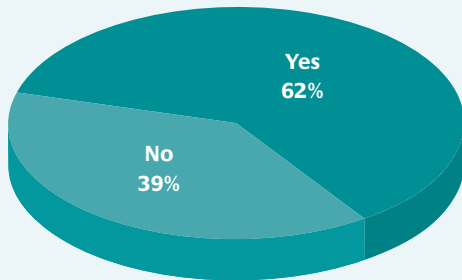


to come home and sit in front of the Nintendo or PS2 and play nonstop. That would be his perfect day."

Some parents overestimate their child's interest in trying something new—at least at the outset. While half of parents (50%) say their child is "eager and willing" when it comes to joining an organized activity or program, just 38% of kids say they generally look forward to joining after-school and weekend activities. According to substantial numbers of parents

Cell Phones Reassure Parents...

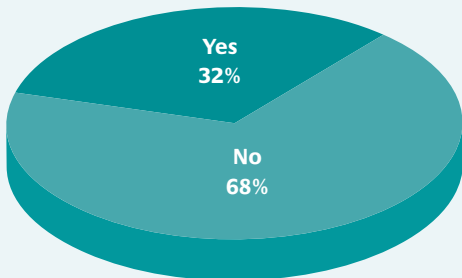
Do you find that you give your child more freedom to move from place to place because the cell phone allows you to check in with each other, or is this not the case for you?



Base: Parents who say child has own cell phone (n=260)

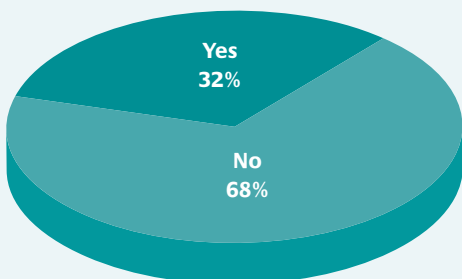
...But Is It False Comfort?

In talking with your parents on the cell phone, have you ever told them you were one place when you were really at another?



Base: Students who have own cell phone (n=250)

Have you ever NOT answered your cell phone when you knew it was your parents calling?



Base: Students who have own cell phone (n=250)

and kids, the reality is that kids are neither eager nor reluctant to join, but rather somewhere in between (43% and 54%).

The survey also suggests that many parents have a fairly subtle touch when it comes to encouraging their child to participate in out-of-school-time activities and programs. While 42% of

middle school parents and 36% of high school say they decide how their child will spend their time, most kids are convinced that they are really making these decisions themselves (55% of middle schoolers and 72% of high schoolers).

Mom and Dad Will Pay

Parents may not be shocked to learn that worries about cost and convenience tend to be adult preoccupations. Since parents often deliberately insulate children from the financial pressures they face, it's not surprising that youngsters don't seem to focus much on this issue. More than 4 in 10 parents (42%) say it's somewhat or very hard to afford activities and programs in their community during the school year, and more than half (52%) say they are somewhat or very concerned about being able to afford their child's summer interests. But only 29% of kids believe that when kids don't take part in activities, it's because most things are too expensive.

Naive Parents

Differences between parents and kids about which activities are preferable or affordable are important, but most families probably have ways of working these things out. On the other hand, *All Work and No Play?* did unearth several areas where the contrast between what parents think and what kids actually say is more troubling. In both, the bottom line is that many parents need to be more skeptical and inquisitive when they are faced with glib reassurances from some of today's youngsters.

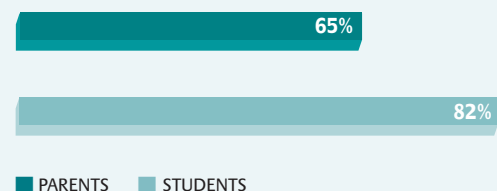
The Internet

For sure, when it comes to technology, there may be a generation gap—but not in the way the term is commonly understood. Parents and kids are on the same wavelength regarding their views on the possible dangers involved with Internet use. About 1 in 5 parents (19%) think of the Internet as “a negative and potentially risky thing to be doing,” and the same proportion of youngsters who use the Internet (19%) acknowledge

Just What Are You Up To?

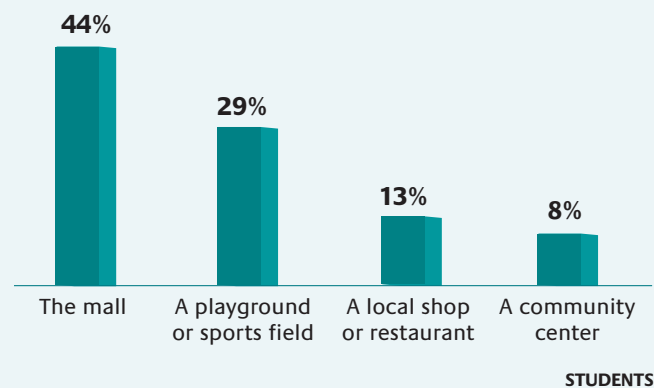
Do you/Does your child use the Internet at home to surf the web, play games or chat?

% who say “yes”



You'll Find Them at the Mall

In your community, where would you be sure to find the greatest number of kids after school or on weekends?



that something has happened on it that would upset their parents if they knew. But parents may be surprised to learn the extent to which they underestimate their child's Internet use. Almost 2 out of 3 (65%) say their child uses the Internet at home to surf, play games and chat—compared with more than 8 in 10 youngsters (82%) who report doing so—a 17-percentage-point gap.

Down at the Mall

Parents might also want to double-check whether or not their own child is among those so-called mischief makers hanging out at the mall. According to the youngsters we surveyed, this is the most likely place to find the greatest number of kids after school or on weekends (44%)—compared with 29% who say the bulk of kids can be found at a playground, 13% at a local shop or restaurant or 8% at a community center. Most youngsters themselves (56%) say the mall is a place where they sometimes go to hang out. And while relatively few consider it an especially desirable destination, it does seem to be a common fallback choice. More than 6 in 10 (61%) told us that kids generally hang out at the mall because “they really don’t have anything better to do,” compared with 37% who say most kids hang out there because it’s a lot of fun. “There is nothing at the school, nothing to do,” said a middle school student from Colorado. “At the mall, it’s the only place that there are tons of people.... We have a gang, and we go to the mall and hang out. That is pretty much what we always do.”

This sketch of local adolescent life, from the parents’ perspective, is hardly reassuring. Six in 10 parents (60%) say that the

local mall is a place “with a lot of potential for bad things to happen,” compared with just about 1 in 5 who think it’s safe but a waste of time (19%) or a nice place for kids to go to keep occupied (18%). Even more worrying, there is considerable discrepancy between parents and kids on just how likely kids are to go there. Most parents of middle and high school students (81%) say their own child is not hanging out at the mall. Meanwhile, well over half of the youngsters surveyed (56%) report that they do. And among those wandering the mall with time on their hands, more than 1 in 4 (27%) say that they have seen things happen there that would upset their parents if they knew. One teen told us bluntly: “We’re not about to tell them, ‘Hey, there’s drugs and marijuana and fights over at the mall.’”

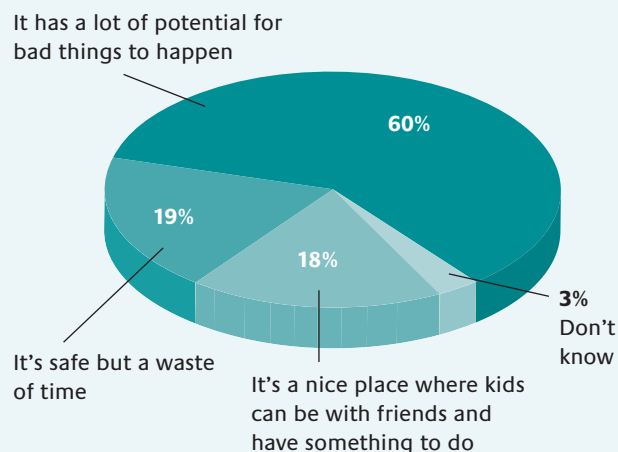
Cell Phone Deceits

And *All Work and No Play?* offers a strong warning for parents who rely on cell phone check-ins to make sure their children are out of harm’s way. Many parents surveyed here say that their child has a personal cell phone (21% of middle school and 51% of high school parents), and the technology does seem to offer them the reassurance that comes with instant communication, no matter where, no matter when.

The majority of parents whose children do have cell phones say that they give their child “more freedom to move from place to place” because they or the child can always call to check in (62%). One young man in Arizona described how it is with his parents: “My mom is not bugging me all the time, because she knows that if I go anywhere, I’ll usually call her and say, ‘We’re going to the mall. I’ll give you an update at

A Breeding Ground for Bad Things

Which comes closest to your view of the mall as a place for kids to hang out?



8:00'.... She seems to be perfectly fine with that, so I never get the calls like, 'Where are you? It's 5:00 and I thought you were going to be home.'"

But based on what we heard from the kids, many parents may be

indulging in a false sense of security. Almost 1 in 3 youngsters with personal cell phones say that they have told their parents "they were one place when they were really at another" (32%). The same number (32%) say there have been times when they've just not answered when they knew their parents were calling.

Afterword by Ruth A. Wooden, President, Public Agenda

Reading through *All Work and No Play?*, I couldn't help but think about my own experiences as a parent and even as a teenager—both about how much things have changed, and really, how things have remained the same. Who couldn't identify with the parent who said in one of our focus groups, “We both have to work, so I just kind of tried to look for something where he could have a little fun, and I could have the peace of mind that he's taken care of,” or with young people who say that, complaints aside, they need to be pushed a little by their parents to do things that are good for them?

I also thought about all the unstructured time I had when I was a kid. I might have put some of it to better use, but I also did not find danger at every corner. I then recalled the multitude of scheduled activities that my own child had access to that didn't protect him from experiencing some of the difficult pitfalls young people face these days.

So what does *All Work and No Play?* tell us about what parents want for our children in the non-school hours? Are the needs of families actually being met with existing offerings?

Too often in policy debates we rely on “experts” to tell us what the major issues are that we should be focusing on. In recent years, so much of the discussion on “after school programs” has been dominated by calls for increasing the number of slots in structured programs on one side and demands for demonstrable academic improvements resulting from after-school programs on the other.

All Work and No Play? takes a step away from the referee huddle of experts and asks kids and parents—the players and the coaches, as it were—to assess the action on the field. Looking broadly at the full range of activities and programs youngsters take part in during their out-of-school time instead of just school- or center-based “after school programs,” we've allowed parents and kids to go beyond restating the current score and to think about the prospects for the longer season.

What Parents and Kids Want

Experts will debate what is best for kids in out-of-school hours, but ultimately it is the parents and kids themselves who make choices about how that time will be spent. After all, these are voluntary activities. Parents and kids are the “selective consumers” of these activities. So policy makers and providers really have to listen to what they are saying in order to successfully entice these “consumers.”

Families make out-of-school-time choices based on a variety of priorities, interests, limitations and needs—and while educational support is in the mix, it is at the top of the list for relatively few. There are many parents—and even kids—who

really do want more of an academic focus in the out-of-school hours—this is especially true among low-income and minority families. And we should consider if we are doing enough to provide for those urgent needs. But when the majority of both parents and youth point to things other than academics for filling the bulk of kids' out-of-school hours, we should listen to those voices.

Families tell us they want programs that provide opportunities for youth to develop new interests and hobbies, friendships, safety and just plain fun. For advocates and operators of after-school programs, it is good to know that nearly 8 in 10 kids say that the adults in charge of their activities really care about kids and 7 in

10 parents say their child's activities are “of good quality and well run by adults who know what they're doing.”

Some parents and kids do want supplemental academic activities and programs, and perhaps these should be evaluated by their impact on learning. But most parents and kids value and choose non-academic out-of-school activities. The policy-making community should therefore understand the value of those types of programs and begin to better assess their place in family life.

Of course, parents' and children's general satisfaction with what is available to them in the out-of-school hours documented in



this research should not overshadow some of the stark revelations contained in this report. *All Work and No Play?* raises serious concerns about the disparities in experiences and perceptions across economic and racial lines. It also presents some eye-opening truths about how kids are really spending their leisure time versus what they tell their parents.

Not Everyone Is Happy

Policy experts will surely view this research and feel a greater urgency to address the out-of-school concerns of the “have-nots” in our nation. On quality, affordability and availability of activities, low-income and minority parents are more likely to be encountering problems—and keeping their youngsters busy during the summer is especially tough for these families. The disparity in opportunities for young people is pretty clear when low-income parents are twice as likely as those with higher income to say they would want to change things if they could, while two-thirds of higher-income parents would basically stick with things the way they are now.

A special word about the “long, lazy days of summer” is in order. For too long, this period of out-of-school time has been accepted as a fact of life for kids and families. Yet the voices of parents and kids on this subject suggest a major lost opportunity. Many students, including those who may not want after-school academics during the school year, might welcome a chance in the summer to “get ready” for the next school year. As I noted above, it is a strongly held sentiment among lower-income families who really seem to patch it together during the summer months.

Locating Kids by Cell: Is Truth on the Line?

As an American concerned about opportunities for all kids, the disparity in perceptions of out-of-school program quality, affordability and availability certainly got my pulse racing. But

as a parent, the research’s look at how kids spend their time versus what they tell their parents really made my heart jump.

I admit that I was surprised to hear that “the mall” has become so widely recognized by kids as being the “go to” place to hang out—and as being the site for illicit activities. The fact that a majority of kids say they sometimes hang out there

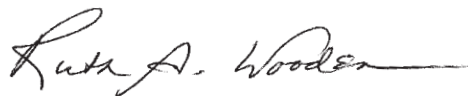
when most parents say their own child does not is rather jarring. And that so many kids—about 1 in 3—admit that they lie about their location in cell phone calls to their parents and don’t answer the cell phone when their parents call is itself a major wake-up call.

Listening to Parents and Kids

All Work and No Play? is research that suggests a change in direction for our national conversation on out-of-school activities and programs. It is clear that structured, organized non-school activities are highly valued in the lives of our

nation’s young people. Families want a variety of activities that provide a child new interests—not just after-school tutoring. And so the way we understand, design and evaluate out-of-school offerings needs to respond to those values.

Whether it is soccer, dance, Spanish club, Bible study, marching band or homework help, parents and kids across America say out-of-school activities and programs play a critical role in family life. For some, the options are plentiful. But for others, keeping kids productively engaged is a challenge. We have now heard from parents and kids about the priorities, interests, limitations and needs that inform their choices. The next big question after *All Work and No Play?* is: What can we do to give more families what they seek?



Policy experts will surely view this research and feel a greater urgency to address the out-of-school concerns of the “have-nots” in our nation.

Endnotes

1. *Sizing Things Up: What Parents, Teachers and Students Think About Large and Small High Schools*, Public Agenda 2002, p. 45. Based on a national mail survey of 920 public high school teachers and national telephone surveys of 801 parents of children in public high schools and 1,008 public high school students.
2. *Caring for Your School-Aged Child: 5-12*, American Academy of Pediatrics 1999.
3. *Sizing Things Up: What Parents, Teachers and Students Think About Large and Small High Schools*, Public Agenda 2002, p. 43.
4. *A Lot Easier Said Than Done: Parents Talk about Raising Children in Today's America*, Public Agenda 2002, p. 9. Based on a national telephone survey of 1,607 parents or guardians of children aged 5 to 17.
5. Partnership for a Drug-Free America/Robert Wood Johnson Survey 1999. Based on telephone interviews of 6,529 teens in grades 7-12.
6. "After Cuts, Yonkers Prepares for School with Few Extras," *The New York Times* 7 Sep 2004.
7. "Out of Money, Harlem Ballet School Closes," *The New York Times* 17 Oct 2004.
8. "Some High School Students Will Pay for After-School Activities," *The Oregonian* 20 Jul 2004.
9. *When Schools Stay Open Late: The National Evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program*, Mathematica Policy Research 2003.

Methodology

The findings in *All Work and No Play? Listening to What Kids and Parents Really Want from Out-of-School Time* are based on two national random sample telephone surveys conducted in June 2004: one with 609 6th through 12th grade students and one with 1,003 parents of K-12th grade students. The surveys were preceded by ten focus groups.

The Surveys

Telephone interviews with 609 students in grades 6 through 12 were conducted between June 18 and June 28, 2004; interviews averaged 15 minutes in length. Similarly, telephone interviews with 1,003 parents or guardians of students in grades K through 12 were conducted between June 3 and June 13, 2004; interviews averaged 19 minutes in length.

Respondents were selected through a standard, random-digit-dialing technology whereby every household in the 48 contiguous states had an equal chance of being contacted, including those with unlisted numbers. The margin of error is plus or minus three percentage points for the sample of parents; it is plus or minus four percentage points for the sample of students. The margin of error is higher when comparing percentages across subgroups.

The surveys were fielded by Robinson & Muenster Associates, Inc., and sample was provided by Survey Sampling, Inc.

The Questionnaires

Both questionnaires were designed by Public Agenda, and all interpretation of the data reflected in this report was done by Public Agenda. As in all surveys, question order and other non-sampling sources of error can sometimes affect results. Steps were taken to minimize these, including extensively pre-testing the survey instruments and randomizing the order in which some questions and answer categories were read.

The Focus Groups

Focus groups allow for an in-depth, qualitative exploration of the dynamics underlying the public's attitudes toward complex issues. Insights from the students and parents who participated in these focus groups were important to the survey design, and actual quotes were drawn from the focus groups to give voice to attitudes captured statistically through the surveys. Ten focus groups were conducted with parents and students in February 2004:

- In Bristol, CT: parents of elementary and middle school students; mostly lower income
- In Frisco, TX: one with middle and high school students and one with parents of K-12th graders; mostly middle income

- In Cave Creek, AZ: one with middle and high school students and one with parents of middle and high school students; mostly middle income
- In Portland, OR: one with middle and high school students and one with parents of K-12th graders; lower and middle income
- In Denver, CO: one with middle school students, one with high school students and one with parents of K-12th grade students; middle to upper income

Characteristics of the Sample

	Students %	Parents %
Gender		
Male	50	40
Female	50	60
Household Income		
Less than \$25,000	N/A	14
\$25,000 to less than \$50,000	N/A	30
\$50,000 to less than \$75,000	N/A	24
\$75,000 to less than \$100,000	N/A	15
\$100,000 or more	N/A	15
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	9	11
Hispanic	12	8
White	74	76
Grade of Child		
Elementary (K-5)	N/A	39
Middle School (6-8)	42	23
High School (9-12)	58	39
Education		
Less than high school	N/A	5
High school graduate	N/A	29
Some college/Associate's degree	N/A	35
4-year/Graduate degree	N/A	31
Household Status		
Both parents working full time	38	38
One working full time/One part time	20	18
One full time/One at home	24	27
Single parent	15	15
Free/Reduced School Lunch		
Yes	27	N/A
No	71	N/A
Urbanicity		
Rural	21	24
Suburban	52	49
Urban	27	27
Region		
Northeast	19	18
Midwest	23	23
South	35	36
West	23	23

Complete Survey Results for 6th-12th Grade Students

All Work and No Play? Listening to What Kids and Parents Really Want from Out-of-School Time

The following results are based on a national random sample of 609 middle and high school students. The survey was conducted by telephone from June 18-28, 2004. The margin of error is plus or minus four percentage points.

Results of less than 0.5 are signified by an asterisk (*). Results of zero are signified by a dash (-). Responses may not always total 100% due to rounding. Combining answer categories may produce slight discrepancies between the numbers in these survey results and numbers in the report.

1. What grade in school did you just finish?

13%	Sixth
13%	Seventh
17%	Eighth
19%	Ninth [Freshman]
18%	Tenth [Sophomore]
16%	Eleventh [Junior]
6%	Twelfth [Senior]
2. Which of these best describes your day-to-day schedule during the school year?

22%	It was too hectic with too many things to do
3%	It had too much free time
75%	It was just about right
*	Don't know
3. If you could choose one of these as your IDEAL after-school routine, which would it be?

69%	You come home, take it easy, do homework and spend time with friends
30%	You have a busy schedule with activities to do after school
1%	[VOL.] Neither
*	Don't know
4. In a typical school week, how often were you home alone after school?

13%	Five days a week
16%	Three to four days a week
36%	Once or twice a week
35%	Never
1%	Don't know

5. Which kids do you think are better off?

85%	Kids who participate in organized activities such as a team or a club after school
11%	Kids who have a lot of time to themselves after school
2%	[VOL.] Neither
1%	Don't know
6. From what you know, when kids your age get into trouble, is it mostly because:

46%	They're bored and have too much time on their hands
39%	Their parents aren't paying enough attention to them
11%	They don't know right from wrong
2%	[VOL.] Something else
2%	Don't know
- I am going to read you some statements. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each one. [Q7-13]
7. My parents would be very upset if they knew some of the things my friends have done—do you agree or disagree? Is that strongly or somewhat?

36%	Agree strongly
27%	Agree somewhat
21%	Disagree somewhat
16%	Disagree strongly
*	Don't know

8. In my community, there's not much for kids my age to do other than go to school or just hang out—do you agree or disagree? Is that strongly or somewhat?

31%	Agree strongly
24%	Agree somewhat
19%	Disagree somewhat
26%	Disagree strongly
1%	Don't know

9. Even though I might complain about it, sometimes I need to be pushed by my parents to do things that are good for me—do you agree or disagree? Is that strongly or somewhat?

62%	Agree strongly
26%	Agree somewhat
7%	Disagree somewhat
4%	Disagree strongly
-	Don't know

10. Belonging to a club or team and doing things with other kids gives me a good feeling—do you agree or disagree? Is that strongly or somewhat?

67%	Agree strongly
24%	Agree somewhat
7%	Disagree somewhat
2%	Disagree strongly
-	Don't know

11. When adults see kids my age hanging out together, they automatically think we're up to no good—do you agree or disagree? Is that strongly or somewhat?

25%	Agree strongly
30%	Agree somewhat
27%	Disagree somewhat
18%	Disagree strongly
1%	Don't know

12. When the school day is done, the last thing I want is to go to a place that has more academic work—do you agree or disagree? Is that strongly or somewhat?

34%	Agree strongly
27%	Agree somewhat
22%	Disagree somewhat
18%	Disagree strongly
*	Don't know

13. A lot of kids get into trouble when they're bored and have nothing to do—do you agree or disagree? Is that strongly or somewhat?

40%	Agree strongly
37%	Agree somewhat
15%	Disagree somewhat
8%	Disagree strongly
*	Don't know

Think about the school year that just passed. I'm going to ask you about the kinds of activities you participated in when you were NOT in school—that is, after school and on weekends. [Q14-23]

14. Did you participate in any kind of sports activities?

66%	Yes
34%	No
-	Don't know

15. Did you participate in any school clubs or school extra-curricular activities?

62%	Yes
38%	No
-	Don't know

16. Did you take lessons in things like music, dance or art?

52%	Yes
48%	No
-	Don't know

17. Did you participate in an organization like the Scouts?

19%	Yes
81%	No
-	Don't know

18. Did you get regular tutoring, or extra academic or test preparation?

30%	Yes
70%	No
-	Don't know

19. Did you participate in religious instruction or a church youth group?

54%	Yes
46%	No
-	Don't know

20. Did you do volunteer work?

60%	Yes
40%	No
*	Don't know

21. Did you participate in an after-school program either at school or another location?

52%	Yes
48%	No
-	Don't know

22. Did you have a part-time job?

Base: High school student (n=354)

37%	Yes
63%	No
-	Don't know

23. Is there some other activity that I haven't mentioned that you took part in after school or on weekends during the past school year?

4%	Yes
93%	No
2%	[VOL.] Unstructured activity
-	Don't know

24. Typically, did your activities take place only on school days, only on weekends or both?

Base: Participant (n=596)

18%	Only on school days
2%	Only on weekends
79%	Both
*	Don't know

25. Typically, how many days a week did you participate in your activities during the past school year?

Base: Participant (n=596)

20%	Every day
37%	Almost every day
37%	A couple of days a week
6%	Less than that
*	Don't know

26. Generally speaking, do you look forward to joining after-school and weekend activities, are you reluctant to do so, or is it somewhere in between?

38%	Look forward
7%	Reluctant
54%	Somewhere in between
1%	Don't know

Now I want you to think about the after-school or weekend activity that you spent the most time doing during the past school year. [Q27-32]

27. Did you feel that the adults in charge really cared about the kids, or did too many act like it was just a job?

Base: Participant (n=575)

79%	Really cared
19%	Just a job
2%	Don't know

28. Did you usually have a lot of fun, or were there too many times when you were just passing time?

Base: Participant (n=575)

85%	A lot of fun
14%	Just passing time
1%	Don't know

29. Was it easy and convenient for you to get to, or was it sometimes too much of an effort?

Base: Participant (n=573)

79%	Easy and convenient
20%	Too much of an effort
1%	Don't know

30. Did you feel that you learned a lot, or did you end up not learning much?

Base: Participant (n=574)

86%	Learned a lot
12%	Ended up not learning much
2%	Don't know

31. Did you make any good friends there, or not?

Base: Participant (n=576)

92%	Yes
8%	No
*	Don't know

32. Did you feel that the other kids took it seriously and really paid attention, or was there usually too much goofing off?

Base: Participant (n=569)

59%	Took it seriously
35%	Too much goofing off
6%	Don't know

33. Thinking back to the past school year, who decided how you spent your time when you were not in school? Was it:

- 15% Mostly your parents' decision
- 65% Mostly your decision
- 20% [VOL.] Both equally
- Don't know

34. Suppose it's the school year and you're looking at different types of organized activities to join after school or on weekends. Which of these three would you like the most? Something that focuses on:

- 54% Athletics and team sports
- 36% Things like art, music or dance
- 9% Academics and learning
- * [VOL.] None of these
- * Don't know

35. How much would you like an after-school program that gives you time to do homework and has an adult around to help if you need it? Is that something you would like very much, a little, or not at all?

- 32% Very much
- 52% A little
- 16% Not at all
- * Don't know

36. How much would you like an after-school program that focuses on volunteer work and helping other people in the community? Is that something you would like very much, a little, or not at all?

- 44% Very much
- 49% A little
- 7% Not at all
- 1% Don't know

37. How much would you like an after-school program that focuses mainly on academic preparation? Is that something you would like very much, a little, or not at all?

- 28% Very much
- 53% A little
- 19% Not at all
- 1% Don't know

Some kids your age are not in organized activities after school or on weekends. [Q38-41]

38. When kids don't participate, do you think it's because kids are just not interested or motivated, or is that not really a reason?

- 71% Not interested or motivated
- 27% Not really a reason
- 2% Don't know

39. When kids don't participate, do you think it's because there's nothing right for their age, or is that not really a reason?

- 15% There's nothing right for their age
- 84% Not really a reason
- 1% Don't know

40. When kids don't participate, do you think it's because most things are too expensive, or is that not really a reason?

- 29% Most things are too expensive
- 71% Not really a reason
- 1% Don't know

41. When kids don't participate, do you think it's because most things are too far away, or is that not really a reason?

- 28% Most things are too far away
- 72% Not really a reason
- * Don't know

42. Other than safety, which of these do you think is the BEST reason for a kid your age to be involved in activities after school and on weekends?

- 39% To have fun
- 29% To keep them busy and out of trouble
- 19% To develop their interests and hobbies
- 12% To improve how well they do in school
- * [VOL.] None of these
- 1% Don't know

43. In the past school year, how often did the kids you know complain about being bored and having nothing to do when they weren't in school?

- 26% A lot
- 32% Some
- 27% A little
- 14% Not at all
- Don't know

44. In the past school year, how often were you bored and had nothing to do when you weren't in school?

15%	Often
35%	Sometimes
40%	Hardly ever
10%	Never
-	Don't know

45. Think about the times when you have free time just to do whatever you choose. Does this usually end up being:

36%	Wasted time
57%	Productive time
5%	[VOL.] I always have something to do
2%	Don't know

46. When you meet with friends, do you usually get together to do something specific, or do you usually get together to hang out without anything specific to do?

26%	Do something specific
69%	Hang out without anything specific to do
5%	[VOL.] Both equally
*	Don't know

47. In your community, where would you be sure to find the greatest number of kids after school or on weekends? Would it be:

44%	At the mall
29%	At a playground or sports field
13%	Hanging out at a local shop or restaurant
8%	At a community center
5%	[VOL.] Something else
2%	Don't know

48. How often do you see people your age using drugs or alcohol?

11%	Every day
14%	Almost every day
28%	Sometimes
19%	Almost never
26%	Never
*	Don't know

49. Do you use the Internet at home to surf the Web, play games or chat?

82%	Yes
17%	No
1%	[VOL.] No computer at home
-	Don't know

50. Has anything ever happened on the Internet that you know would upset your parents if they knew about it?

Base: Uses internet at home (n=502)

19%	Yes
81%	No
*	Don't know

51. Do you have your own cell phone?

41%	Yes
59%	No
-	Don't know

52. In talking with your parents on the cell phone, have you ever told them you were one place when you were really at another?

Base: Has own cell phone (n=250)

32%	Yes
68%	No
-	Don't know

53. Have you ever NOT answered your cell phone when you knew it was your parents calling?

Base: Has own cell phone (n=250)

32%	Yes
68%	No
-	Don't know

54. Is the mall a place where you sometimes go to hang out?

56%	Yes
43%	No
1%	[VOL.] There is no mall
-	Don't know

55. Have you ever seen anything happen at the mall that you know would upset your parents if they knew about it?

Base: Hang out at mall (n=340)

27%	Yes
73%	No
-	Don't know

56. Do you think most kids who hang out at the mall go there because they think it's a lot of fun, or because they really don't have anything better to do?

37%	It's a lot of fun
61%	They really don't have anything better to do
1%	[VOL.] Neither
1%	Don't know

57. Is there a youth center or community center near your home where kids your age can go in the evenings to hang out and do things?

46%	Yes
49%	No
5%	Don't know

58. How often do you use it—regularly, just for special events or programs, hardly ever, or never?

Base: Youth center near home (n=280)

23%	Regularly
25%	Just for special events or programs
32%	Hardly ever
20%	Never
1%	Don't know

59. If there was one near your home, do you think you would use it?

Base: No youth center near home (n=328)

62%	Yes
29%	No
9%	Don't know

60. When it comes to having enough things for kids your age to do, do you think your community is doing as much as can be expected, or do you think that it could realistically do much more?

27%	Doing as much as can be expected
72%	Could realistically do much more
1%	Don't know

61. Do you have any friends who you spend time with on a regular basis who live within walking distance of your home?

68%	Yes
32%	No
*	Don't know

62. Other than how you get to and from school, how do you usually get around when you need to be somewhere?

5%	Take public transportation
56%	Get a ride from someone
39%	Get around on your own
*	Don't know

63. Are there academic subjects where you feel you could use extra help and attention?

55%	Yes
45%	No
*	Don't know

64. Do you think that the public schools in your community are raising academic standards and expectations for students, lowering them, or are things not changing either way?

47%	Raising them
8%	Lowering them
41%	Things are not changing either way
5%	Don't know

65. For you personally, when is it the hardest to find interesting things to do? Is it during:

47%	The summer months
33%	The hours after school
14%	The weekend
5%	[VOL.] Never hard
1%	[VOL.] All equally hard
1%	Don't know

66. Are you generally satisfied with the number of activities and things you can choose to do during the summer, or do you find that you really don't have enough good choices?

58%	Generally satisfied
41%	Really don't have enough good choices
1%	Don't know

67. For the most part, have you already decided what you're going to be doing during the summer, or are things still pretty much up in the air?

56%	Already decided
43%	Still up in the air
1%	Don't know

68. If there was a summer program in your community that helped kids keep up with school work or prepare for the next grade, how interested would you be in it?

17%	Very interested
39%	Somewhat interested
24%	Not too interested
20%	Not interested at all
-	Don't know

69. During a typical week in the summer, how often do you think you will be home alone during the day?

16%	Five days a week
20%	Three to four days a week
38%	Once or twice a week
26%	Never
1%	Don't know

70a. Including yourself, how many kids are there in your family?

16%	1
37%	2
26%	3
22%	4 or more
*	Don't know

70. How often do you keep an eye on your younger siblings when your parents are not home—is that something you do a lot, only once in a while, hardly ever, or don't you have any younger siblings?

Base: More than one child in family (n=439)

36%	A lot
25%	Only once in a while
18%	Hardly ever
21%	[VOL.] Never
*	Don't know

71. Which of these best describes your family?

38%	Both of your parents work full time
20%	One works full time and the other part time
24%	One works full time and the other is mainly at home
15%	There's only one parent at home
3%	[VOL.] Something else
*	Don't know

72. Are both your parents college graduates, one, neither, or are you not sure?

37%	Both are
22%	One is
24%	Neither
16%	Not sure

73. How often, if ever, do you go to religious services?

14%	Never
18%	A few times a year
12%	About once a month
17%	Nearly every week
26%	Every week
13%	More than once a week
1%	Don't know

74. Are you white, black or African American, Hispanic, Asian, or something else?

74%	White
9%	Black/African American
12%	Hispanic
2%	Asian
1%	Native American
3%	Something else
*	Don't know

75. Do you get free or reduced price lunches at school?

27%	Yes
71%	No
2%	Don't know

Region

19%	Northeast
23%	Midwest
35%	South
23%	West

Urbanicity

21%	Rural
52%	Suburban
27%	Urban

Gender

50%	Male
50%	Female

Complete Survey Results for Parents of K-12th Graders

All Work and No Play?

Listening to What Kids and Parents Really Want from Out-of-School Time

The following results are based on a national random sample of 1,003 parents of K-12th graders. The survey was conducted by telephone from June 3-13, 2004. The margin of error is plus or minus three percentage points.

Results of less than 0.5 are signified by an asterisk (*). Results of zero are signified by a dash (-). Responses may not always total 100% due to rounding. Combining answer categories may produce slight discrepancies between the numbers in these survey results and numbers in the report.

1. Are you the parent or guardian of any school-age children who currently live with you, or not?

100% Yes, parent of school-age child

2. Grade of oldest child

7% Kindergarten
6% First
6% Second
5% Third
8% Fourth
7% Fifth
8% Sixth
7% Seventh
8% Eighth
10% Ninth [Freshman]
9% Tenth [Sophomore]
11% Eleventh [Junior]
10% Twelfth [Senior]

3. Please tell me, is this child a girl or a boy?

47% Girl
53% Boy

4. Which of these comes closest to describing your child's day-to-day schedule?

16% It's too hectic with too many things to do
13% Child has too much free time on their hands
71% Things are just about right
1% Don't know

5. There are lots of things that parents worry about when it comes to their children. Which of these things—if any—is most likely to worry you?

44% How well your child is doing in school
35% Who your child's friends are
13% What your child is doing when not in school
8% [VOL.] None
1% Don't know

6. Which comes closer to your own view?

83% These are dangerous times to raise kids
—when it comes to their safety you can
never be too careful
11% Kids today are actually safer than ever
—people exaggerate the dangers they face
4% [VOL.] Neither
2% Don't know

7. Which of these comes closer to describing your child's after-school routine?

58% Child has a relaxed afternoon where s/he
comes home, takes it easy, does homework
and spends time with friends
37% Child has a scheduled place to go and
activities to do after school
4% [VOL.] Neither
1% Don't know

8. And which would be your ideal routine? For your child to have:

52%	A relaxed afternoon where s/he comes home, takes it easy, does homework and spends time with friends
43%	A scheduled place to go and activities to do after school
4%	[VOL.] Neither
2%	Don't know

9. How comfortable are you leaving your child home alone for a few hours after school? Would you say it is:

16%	Something you're reluctant to do unless there's no choice
45%	Not a problem at all, your child can handle it
38%	Something you never do
*	Don't know

10. And in a typical school week, how often is your child home alone after school?

9%	Five days a week
5%	Three to four days a week
22%	Once or twice a week
64%	Never
*	Don't know

Now, I am going to ask you about the kinds of activities your child does when s/he's NOT in school—that is, after school and on weekends. Please think about the current school year from September 2003 through June 2004. [Q11-20]

11. Did your child participate in any kind of sports activities either after school or on weekends, or not?

64%	Yes
36%	No
-	Don't know

12. Did your child participate in any school clubs or extra-curricular activities after school or on weekends, or not?

53%	Yes
47%	No
*	Don't know

13. Did your child take lessons in things like music, dance or art after school or on weekends, or not?

38%	Yes
62%	No
-	Don't know

14. Did your child participate in an organization like the Scouts after school or on weekends, or not?

24%	Yes
77%	No
-	Don't know

15. Did your child get regular tutoring or extra academic preparation after school or on weekends, or not?

24%	Yes
76%	No
*	Don't know

16. Did your child participate in religious instruction or a church youth group after school or on weekends, or not?

57%	Yes
43%	No
*	Don't know

17. Did your child do volunteer work after school or on weekends, or not?

35%	Yes
65%	No
*	Don't know

19. Did your child have a part-time job after school or on weekends, or not?

Base: High school student (n=392)

46%	Yes
54%	No
-	Don't know

18. Did your child participate in an after-school program either at school or another location, or not?

38%	Yes
62%	No
*	Don't know

20. Is there some other activity that I haven't mentioned that your child took part in after school or on weekends?

2%	Yes
93%	No
5%	[VOL.] Unstructured activity
-	Don't know

21. Typically, did these things take place only on school days, only on weekends or both?

Base: Participants (n=929)

15%	Only on school days
7%	Only on weekends
78%	Both
*	Don't know

22. Thinking back, how active and involved was your child in organized activities and programs?

Base: Participants (n=940)

43%	Very active and involved
39%	Somewhat active and involved
10%	Not too active or involved
8%	Hardly involved at all
*	Don't know

23. Think about the organized activity your child took part in most recently. Would you describe it as:

Base: Participants (n=927)

71%	Of good quality and well run by adults who know what they're doing
3%	Of poor quality and not well organized
25%	Somewhere in the middle
1%	Don't know

24. Generally speaking, when it comes to joining organized activities or programs, is your child usually:

7%	Unwilling and reluctant
50%	Eager and willing
43%	Somewhere in the middle
*	Don't know

25. Whether or not your child participates in any organized activities or programs, how carefully would you say your family has looked into the options available in your community?

53%	Very carefully
36%	Somewhat carefully
5%	Not too carefully
5%	Not carefully at all
1%	Don't know

Please tell me how easy or hard you think it is to find activities and programs in your community that have each of the following characteristics. [Q26-31]

26. How about things that are run by adults you could trust—do you think that is very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat hard, or very hard to find?

32%	Very easy
34%	Somewhat easy
19%	Somewhat hard
13%	Very hard
2%	Don't know

27. How about things that are affordable—do you think that is very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat hard, or very hard to find?

19%	Very easy
38%	Somewhat easy
24%	Somewhat hard
18%	Very hard
1%	Don't know

28. How about things that are conveniently located—do you think that is very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat hard, or very hard to find?

33%	Very easy
32%	Somewhat easy
19%	Somewhat hard
15%	Very hard
1%	Don't know

29. How about things that are interesting to your child—do you think that is very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat hard, or very hard to find?

33%	Very easy
34%	Somewhat easy
20%	Somewhat hard
12%	Very hard
1%	Don't know

30. How about things that are appropriate for your child's age—do you think that is very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat hard, or very hard to find?

35%	Very easy
32%	Somewhat easy
20%	Somewhat hard
13%	Very hard
1%	Don't know

31. How about things that are of high quality—do you think that is very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat hard, or very hard to find?

25%	Very easy
34%	Somewhat easy
25%	Somewhat hard
13%	Very hard
3%	Don't know

32. Other than safety, which of these do you think is the best reason for a child to be involved in organized activities and programs when they are not in school?

41%	To develop their interests and hobbies
27%	To keep them busy and out of trouble
16%	To have fun
15%	To improve how well they do in school
1%	[VOL.] None of these
1%	Don't know

33. Thinking about how your child spends his/her time when s/he's not in school, if you could choose, would you basically stick with things the way they are now, or would you want to change things?

58%	Basically stick with things the way they are now
41%	Would want to change things
1%	Don't know

34b. Suppose you were looking at different activities or programs for your child when s/he is not in school. Which of these three would be the best match? A program that focused on:

48%	Teaching the value of hard work and commitment
33%	Helping other people in the community
17%	Reinforcing your religious faith
2%	Don't know

35b. Suppose you were looking at different activities or programs for your child when s/he is not in school. Which of these three would be the best match? A program that focused on:

37%	Providing extra academic preparation and skills
32%	Athletic activity or team sports
29%	Teaching things like art, music or dance
2%	Don't know

36b. Now if you had to choose between [top choices in Q34b and Q35b], which of these two would you pick as the best match:

27%	A program that focused on teaching the value of hard work and commitment
19%	A program that focused on providing extra academic preparation and skills
16%	A program that focused on helping other people in the community
12%	A program that focused on reinforcing your religious faith
12%	A program that focused on teaching things like art, music or dance
11%	A program that focused on athletic activity or team sports
3%	Don't know

37b. How important would it be to you to find an after-school program that provides time for your child to do homework in a supervised setting—is that:

34%	Something you would go out of your way to find
37%	Something nice but not essential
28%	Not important to you
*	Don't know

[There is no Q38-41]

42. Which of these groups would you trust most to run a program?

40%	Your child's school
33%	A local religious organization
19%	A local non-profit organization, such as the Y
6%	Your city or town
*	[VOL.] None of these
2%	Don't know

43. When it comes to deciding how your child spends his/her time when s/he's not in school, would you say that ultimately:

42%	Things mostly go according to what you and your spouse want
23%	Things mostly go according to what your child wants
34%	[VOL.] Both equally
*	Don't know

44. As a parent, how much of a struggle is it for you to make sure your child has things to do when s/he's not in school? Is it:

- 55% Something you have under control
- 33% Something you struggle with only occasionally
- 13% Something you struggle with on a regular basis
- * Don't know

45. And which time would you say is the hardest to make sure your child has things to do? Is it during:

- 58% The summer months
- 14% The hours after school
- 13% The weekend
- 12% [VOL.] Never have to struggle
- 2% [VOL.] All equally a struggle
- 1% Don't know

46. Are you generally satisfied with the organized activities and programs available to your child during the summer months, or do you find that you really don't have enough good options?

- 50% Generally satisfied with the organized activities and programs
- 48% Really don't have enough good options
- 2% Don't know

47. For the most part, have you already decided what your child is going to be doing during the summer, or are things still pretty much up in the air?

- 66% Already decided
- 34% Still up in the air
- * Don't know

When you think about your child's summer, how concerned are you—if at all—about each of the following? [Q48-52]

48. How about that your child will be bored if s/he has nothing to do?

- 24% Very concerned
- 27% Somewhat concerned
- 17% Not too concerned
- 33% Not concerned at all
- Don't know

49. How about that you might have trouble finding someone to watch him/her?

- 8% Very concerned
- 9% Somewhat concerned
- 15% Not too concerned
- 69% Not concerned at all
- Don't know

50. How about that s/he will fall behind on academics?

- 20% Very concerned
- 18% Somewhat concerned
- 17% Not too concerned
- 45% Not concerned at all
- * Don't know

51. How about that you won't be able to afford the things s/he wants to do?

- 25% Very concerned
- 27% Somewhat concerned
- 20% Not too concerned
- 28% Not concerned at all
- * Don't know

52. How about that there's not enough things to capture his/her interest?

- 17% Very concerned
- 26% Somewhat concerned
- 21% Not too concerned
- 35% Not concerned at all
- * Don't know

53. These days, is it your sense that the public schools in your community are raising academic standards and expectations for students, lowering them, or are things not changing either way?

- 45% Raising them
- 18% Lowering them
- 32% Things are not changing either way
- 6% Don't know

54. Are there academic subjects where you feel your child needs extra help and attention, or not?

- 48% Yes
- 52% No
- * Don't know

55. Which statement comes closer to your own view?

- 54% Kids get more than enough academics during the school day, so after-school programs should focus on other things that capture their interest
- 38% Since schools are putting so much emphasis on standardized tests and higher academic standards, kids are better off in after-school programs that focus on academic skills
- 5% [VOL.] Neither
- 4% Don't know

56. Does your child use the Internet at home to surf the Web, play games or chat, or not?

65%	Yes
34%	No
1%	[VOL.] No computer at home
-	Don't know

57. And do you mostly see this as:

Base: Uses internet at home (n=649)

58%	A good use of time where child is learning something while having fun
21%	A harmless way to pass the time
19%	A negative and potentially risky thing to be doing
2%	Don't know

58. Does your child have his/her own cell phone, or not?

26%	Yes
74%	No
*	Don't know

59. Do you find that you give your child more freedom to move from place to place because the cell phone allows you to check in with each other, or is this not the case for you?

Base: Has own cell phone (n=260)

62%	Give child more freedom to move from place to place
39%	This is not the case
-	Don't know

60. Is the mall a place where your child sometimes goes to hang out, or not?

11%	Yes
88%	No
1%	[VOL.] There is no mall
-	Don't know

61. In general, which of these comes closest to your view of the mall as a place for kids to hang out?

60%	It's a place with a lot of potential for bad things to happen
19%	It's a place that's safe but a waste of time
18%	It's a nice place where kids can be with friends and have something to do
3%	Don't know

62. Think about the times when your child has nothing in particular to do. Do you think that this time usually ends up being:

45%	Wasted time
39%	Productive time
14%	[VOL.] My child always has something to do
2%	Don't know

63. Do you think that your child is the type who might do the wrong thing if s/he's hanging out with the wrong crowd, or is this not an issue for your child?

31%	Child might do the wrong thing if hanging out with the wrong crowd
68%	This is not an issue
1%	Don't know

64. Would you say your neighborhood is generally the kind of place where:

91%	It's safe for your child to be outside and have fun
8%	It's too dangerous for your child to be outside
1%	Don't know

65. And would you say your neighborhood is the kind of place where people really watch out for each other's kids, or not?

81%	Yes
17%	No
2%	Don't know

66. When it comes to having enough things for elementary school children to do, do you think your community is doing as much as can be expected, or do you think that it could realistically do much more?

46%	Doing as much as can be expected
51%	Could realistically do much more
4%	Don't know

67. And how about when it comes to having enough things for TEENAGERS to do? Do you think your community is doing as much as can be expected, or do you think that it could realistically do much more?

22%	Doing as much as can be expected
70%	Could realistically do much more
9%	Don't know

68 When it comes to giving kids things to do when they're not in school, what do you think your local government's role should be? Is it enough to make sure there are parks, playgrounds and libraries in the community, or should it also provide quality organized activities and programs?

27%	Make sure there are parks, playgrounds and libraries in the neighborhood
71%	It should also provide quality organized activities and programs
3%	Don't know

69 How often do you rely on your child to keep an eye on his/her younger siblings when you are not home?

Base: Has younger siblings (n=475)

17%	Routinely
32%	Once in a while
32%	Hardly ever
19%	[VOL.] Never
-	Don't know

70. In your family, who takes care of most of the day-to-day needs of the children—is it mom, dad, equally split between the two of you, or is it someone else?

58%	Mom
4%	Dad
37%	Equally split
1%	Someone else
*	Don't know

71. And how personally involved would you say you are in deciding how your child spends his/her time when they're not in school?

79%	Very involved
18%	Somewhat involved
3%	Only a little
1%	Not at all
-	Don't know

72 Which of these best describes your family's current employment situation?

38%	Both parents work full time
18%	One works full time and the other works part time
27%	One works full time and the other is mainly at home
15%	I am a single parent
3%	[VOL.] Something else
-	Don't know

73. How often, if ever, do you attend religious services?

13%	Never
21%	A few times a year
12%	About once a month
15%	Nearly every week
24%	Every week
14%	More than once a week
*	Don't know

75. What is the highest level of school you completed?

5%	Less than High School
29%	High School graduate
22%	Some College or Trade School, no degree
13%	Associate's or 2-year degree
21%	Bachelor's or 4-year degree
10%	Graduate degree
*	Don't know

76. Are you white, black or African American, Hispanic, Asian, or something else?

76%	White
11%	Black/African American
8%	Hispanic
2%	Asian
1%	Native American/ Amer. Ind.
3%	Something else
*	Don't know

77. I'm going to read some ranges of annual household income. Please stop me when I read the one that best describes your total household income in 2003.

14%	Under \$25,000
30%	\$25,000 to less than \$50,000
24%	\$50,000 to less than \$75,000
15%	\$75,000 to less than \$100,000
15%	\$100,000 or more
2%	Don't know

Region

18%	Northeast
23%	Midwest
36%	South
23%	West

Urbanicity

24%	Rural
49%	Suburban
27%	Urban

Gender

40%	Male
60%	Female

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Rolling Up Their Sleeves: Superintendents and Principals Talk About What's Needed to Fix Public Schools.

Supported by The Wallace Foundation. 2003. 74 pgs. Print Edition Price: \$10.00. ISBN No. 1-889483-83-4. "A major new study released today finds American school administrators feel red tape keeps them from raising student performance. The nationally recognized, non-partisan research organization Public Agenda says superintendents and principals have a number of concerns. Their biggest headaches are bureaucracy and the expense of complying with local, state and federal mandates." – CNN

Stand by Me: What Teachers Really Think about Unions, Merit Pay and Other Professional Matters. Supported by The Broad Foundation, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and The Sidney J. Weinberg, Jr. Foundation. 2003. 64 pgs. Print Edition Price: \$10.00. ISBN No. 1-889483-82-6. "The research group Public Agenda consistently offers insightful studies of education, and its latest report is a winner. Stand by Me draws out teachers' views of the policies that shape their professional lives – what they think about unions, merit pay, tenure, alternative certification, standardized testing and more." – *Scripps Howard News Service*

Where We Are Now: 12 Things You Need to Know about Public Opinion and Public Schools. Supported by Washington Mutual. 2003. 35 pgs. Print Edition Price: \$5. ISBN No. 1-89483-81-8. "Drawing on 10 years' worth of surveys, focus groups and other analyses of public opinion, Public Agenda has developed a compelling analysis of current attitudes toward the nation's schools. Although toughened standards and high-stakes tests have drawn the bulk of policymakers' and press attention, Public Agenda's findings demonstrate that education is influenced far more by classroom-level conditions." – *Cleveland Plain Dealer*

With Diploma in Hand: Hispanic High School Seniors Talk about their Future. The report is available through its sponsor, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. 2003. "This recent pilot study found academically qualified Latino high school students are often detoured from higher education by low expectations from teachers, poor understanding of the college admissions procedures, lack of financial assistance and little support from adults." – *The Salt Lake Tribune*

A Lot Easier Said Than Done: Parents Talk about Raising Children in Today's America. Supported by State Farm Insurance Companies with additional funding from the Family Friendly Programming Forum. 2002. 54 pgs. Print Edition Price: \$10.00. ISBN No. 1-889483-79-6. "Across the board, from teaching kids self-discipline to basic manners, parents give themselves very low grades, according to a new study from Public Agenda, a non-profit research organization. The unexpected findings provide a snapshot of where parents think they are falling short." – *USA Today*

Aggravating Circumstances: A Status Report on Rudeness in America. Supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts. 2002. 60 pgs. Print Edition Price: \$10. ISBN No. 1-889483-75-3. "We Americans sometimes wonder why people in other countries don't always think of us as being as wonderful as we seem to think we are. Well, maybe we should start by asking ourselves what we really think of our fellow Americans. Well, the research group, Public Agenda, did just that." – Charles Osgood, CBS News "The Osgood File"

When It's Your Own Child: A Report on Special Education from the Families Who Use It. Supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Progressive Policy Institute and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. 2002. 36 pgs. Print Edition Price: \$10.00. ISBN No. 1-889483-76-1. "The poll [by Public Agenda] suggests parents feel that while teachers care and school personnel are qualified to deal with disabilities, school systems don't offer special help to children unless families insist... The findings could affect negotiations in Congress over rules for special education programs." – Associated Press

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