

Barriers to Middle-School Youth Participation in After-School Programs

Wesleyan University Community Research Team

Daphne Clyburn

Kathleen Day

Alex Diamond

Stephanie O'Brien

In Partnership with the Middletown Youth Services Bureau:

Dr. David Blumenkrantz

Justin Carbonella

May 2007

Acknowledgments

The Wesleyan Community Research Team would like to acknowledge the following people, without whom we would not have been able to complete this project:

Dr. David Blumenkrantz, M.Ed., CADC, Ph.D
Executive Director,
Center for the Advancement of Youth, Family & Community Services, Inc.

Justin Carbonella
Youth Services Coordinator
Middletown Youth Services Bureau

Dr. Michael J. Frechette, Ph.D
Superintendent of Schools
Middletown Board of Education

Dr. John Hennelly, Ph.D
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum
Middletown Board of Education

Dr. Gene Nocera, Ph.D
Principal of Woodrow Wilson Middletown School

Sarah Pear
Coordinator, Woodrow Wilson After School Challenge Program

Dr. Rob Rosenthal, Ph.D
Professor of Sociology, Community Research Seminar
Director of Center for Community Partnership

Sally Smyth
Teaching Apprentice, Community Research Seminar

We would also like to extend a special thanks to Migdalia Pinkney from the Center for Community Partnerships and Mary Ann Morello of Woodrow Wilson Middle School for their daily help and support in our research.

-Daphne, Kathleen, Alex, and Steph

Table of Contents

Tables of Tables and Charts.....	2
Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Literature Review.....	7
Methodology.....	11
Survey.....	11
Interviews.....	12
Limitations.....	13
Data Presentation.....	15
Sample Overview.....	15
Who Participates?	17
Income.....	19
Language.....	20
Gender.....	21
Participation by Activity.....	21
Participation by Program.....	22
Analysis of Interviews.....	24
Issues of Feasibility.....	24
Student and Parent Awareness of Programs.....	26
What Students Want Out of After-School Programs.....	30
What Parents Want Out of After-School Programs.....	34
Parental Influence in Structure of Students' Life.....	37
Conclusion.....	40
Summary of Recommendations.....	42
Recommendations for Further Study.....	43
Works Cited.....	44
Summary of Appendices.....	45
Appendices.....	46

Table of Charts

Chart I: Gender Distribution of WWMS.....	15
Chart II: Race and Ethnicity Distribution of WWMS.....	15
Chart III: Lunch Fee.....	16
Chart IV: Language Spoken at Home.....	16
Chart V: Legal Guardians.....	17
Chart VI: Activity Type by Race.....	23

Table of Tables

Table I: Hours of Participation.....	18
Table II: Participation versus Lunch Fee.....	20
Table III: Participation versus Language Spoken at Home.....	21
Table IV: Participation versus Gender.....	21
Table V: Participation in Most Popular Activity Types.....	22
Table VI: Participation by Program.....	23

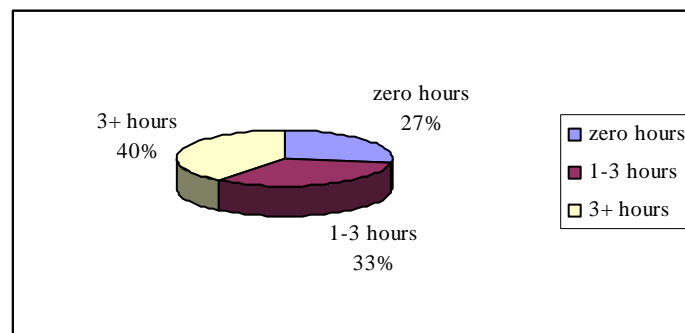
Barriers to Middle-School Youth Participation in After-School Programs **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In collaboration with the Middletown Youth Services Bureau (MYSB), four Wesleyan University researchers—Daphne Clyburn, Kathleen Day, Alex Diamond, and Stephanie O’Brien—investigated factors that affect youth participation in after-school activities, with the goal of identifying barriers and developing strategies to increase participation in after-school programs. Using data from both surveys and interviews conducted with Middletown middle-school students and their parents, this report answers the question of who is not participating in after-school programs and why, and suggests ways to increase student participation.

Sample: 646 WWMS students surveyed; 24 students and 13 parents interviewed.

Survey Findings

“In total, how many hours a week do you usually participate in all of your organized after-school programs combined?”



- **Income:** The strongest demographic correlation with participation is income: 65% of students who qualify for free lunch participate in any after-school programming, while 80% of students on full lunch participate in a program. When we look at high participation rates (three or more hours per week in an after-school program), only a quarter of students on free lunch are high participators, versus 30% of students on reduced lunch and *half* of students on full lunch.
- **Language:** There is a statistically insignificant correlation between lower participation in programs and speaking a language other than English at home. However, students who speak a combination of English and another language at home have a higher rate of participation in after-school programs.
- **Gender:** While boys and girls have a similar rate of high participation (3+ hours per week), boys are more likely to be non-participators (zero hours per week).
- **Number of Guardians:** There is no measurable correlation between participation and number of live-in parents or guardians.
- **Types of Activities:** Students participate most commonly in sports; participation in arts and academic/leadership programs is only half as common.

Barriers to Participation

- Parents and children frequently cite transportation, time, and cost as barriers.
- Time conflicts and a student's responsibilities at home, such as sibling care, are particularly challenging because they are not simply or easily addressed.

Awareness of After-School Programs

- Parents report being fairly unaware of after-school program opportunities for their child.
- Communication links between parents, children, and Woodrow Wilson Middle School appear fragile and potentially ineffective.

Parent and Student Attitudes Towards After-School Programs

Parents and students were found to have similar desires for after-school programs:

- The chance to engage in social activity and develop social skills
- Physical activity
- Homework help
- Leadership opportunities for students
- Mentoring from college students
- Opportunities for students to pursue interests and learn new skills

Recommendations

- *Expand existing mentoring programs and partnerships with local colleges and universities.*
- *Cultivate student leadership in groups and clubs and encourage students to play an active role in designing after-school programs.*
- *Make use of school space for events during after-school hours, such as 'open-mic' or game nights.*
- *Aggressively advertise subsidized programs and scholarships*
- *Improve availability of transportation and encourage carpooling.*
- *Improve communication with and outreach to parents through:*
 - Use of the existing newsletter to publicize all after-school programs
 - Communicate with parents through direct mailing and email.

Suggestions for Future Research

- Conduct research to understand the processes through which students who participate in after-school programs enroll and maintain involvement in programs.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing after-school programs.

Introduction

The Middletown Youth Services Bureau (MYSB) is a municipal government agency that refers youth to local services, identifies and fills gaps in those services, and works to improve overall community conditions related to youth. A large part of MYSB is devoted to students' after-school time activities, which the MYSB has targeted as a key resource for youth development. MYSB not only facilitates contact between students and these kinds of programs, but it also takes an active role in assessing the needs of youth and identifying services, such as after-school programs, will best serve those needs.

In collaboration with the Middletown MYSB Bureau, four Wesleyan University researchers—Daphne Clyburn, Kathleen Day, Alex Diamond, and Stephanie O'Brien—investigated the factors that affect youth participation in after-school activities, with the goal of identifying barriers and developing strategies to increase participation in after-school programs. Using data from both surveys and interviews of students at WWMS in Middletown, Connecticut, as well as their parents, this report answers the question of who participates in after-school programs and why, and suggests ways to increase student participation.

The Developmental Assets Framework, a framework of child development designed by the Search Institute, a non-profit organization that facilitates research regarding the well-being of today's youth, serves as a basis for promoting youth development. Developmental assets are defined as positive characteristics and qualities of young people, families, schools, and communities that have been shown to contribute to academic and social success (Scales and Roehlkepartain 2003). MYSB uses this framework for the purpose of improving community conditions for youth. This includes

the strengthening of after-school programming. Assets such as strong relationships with adults, clear boundaries for youth, positive peer influence, participation in creative activities, commitment to learning, and achievement of high self-esteem may all be increased through participation in after-school activities.

In the summer of 2006, MYSB received a \$55,000 After-School Program Challenge Grant. MYSB is responsible for distributing these funds, and bases its decisions in part on research such as ours. The grant, which is renewed annually, currently targets after-school programs for “at-risk, underrepresented students who traditionally are not involved in after-school programming” (“Afterschool Program Challenge Grant Guidelines”). MYSB is currently funding WWMS’ After School Challenge Program, Traverse Square Community Center, the YMCA, Oddfellows Playhouse, Green Street Arts Center, Cross Street Training and Academic Center, and the Link Crew at Middletown High School. This study serves to inform funding of after-school programs and to help MYSB in its goal of youth outreach and advocacy.

Review of Literature

What does it mean for a young person to be socially competent? In his socio-historical work on the daily life of the adolescent, Thomas Gullotta traces the path of children out of the waged work force and into schools and supervised programs. While apprenticeship once prepared an adolescent for adult life, today “supervised recreation [is] seen as a tool for promoting the individual competency of individuals once obtained through labor.” (Gullotta 2000: 13). The change from work to supervised recreation is revealing when trying to define youth development because school and other supervised recreation promote not only competency in order to literally earn a living through academic success, but cooperation, sharing of values, cognitive skills, academic capabilities, and building of friendship. They “enable a person to perform well in the conceptual categories of work, play, love, thinking, and service” (Blumenkrantz 2000: 74). These qualities are life skills that allow youth to become contributing members of society.

After-school activities serve a number of different functions. They act as places to complement and enhance academic learning that takes place in school, as well as places to build social skills and have fun (Grossman et al. 2001). Additionally, after-school programs may provide “safe-havens” for community youth, essentially serving as areas of adult supervision (Raley et al. 2005). When considering the range of after-school activities available, community and program leaders as well as participants must figure out what each program aims to, and can, achieve. For example, while “academic support directly expands children’s learning opportunities, [a] program’s non-academic activities help meet some of their other needs, enabling them to be more attentive learners during

the school day” (Grossman et al. 2001: 15). Programs like Middletown’s After-School Challenge, a program designed and directed by the city of Middletown that consists of an hour of homework help followed by a leisure or self-awareness activity, are critical in providing this mix of options to students.

In places like Middletown where a variety of after-school programs already exist, why is it that some children do not participate? In a study of sixty after-school programs from around the country, needier children, as determined by income, were less likely to be the ones who first learned about and enrolled in programs. Additionally, coordinators of programs “indicated that their programs were less successful in recruiting students who are behind in school, poor attenders, prone toward detention, lacking support at home, and from non-English speaking and poor families” (Grossman et al. 2001: 9).

Grossman finds direct contact with families and accessibility of transportation to students to be most important in increasing participation among “at-risk” youth, or those youth facing economic challenges, exhibiting behavioral issues, or struggling to keep up in school. After-school programs based in school provide a unique set of opportunities as they not only have established legitimacy in the eyes of guardians, but they have ready access to kids in terms of disseminating information about programs. Additionally, youth who are struggling academically and behaviorally in school may be directly approached and reached by those teachers and student support teams who work with them throughout the day. On the other hand a barrier to recruiting youth into school-based programs is students’ dislike of school, especially among children deemed “at-risk” because of poor academic achievement. Consequently, the availability of non-school based programs was deemed a strong factor in increasing participation (Grossman et al. 2001).

Annette Lareau's book, *Unequal Childhoods* (2003), provides a framework for understanding how the socio-economic class of a child's family might impact his/her engagement in organized after-school activities. A person's socio-economic class status correlates with his/her relationship to mainstream institutions, such as the school system: their level of institutional "know-how" or *cultural capital*¹ both reflects a person's class status and helps determine his or her future class trajectory. To the extent that "legitimate" institutions set the standards and guidelines for success, a child or family's ease or difficulty in navigating those institutions is a strong indicator of their future success. Participation in organized after-school activities fits into what Lareau refers to as the *Concerted Cultivation* model of child rearing, which is encouraged by this country's educational institutions. In this model, parents take an active role in fostering the talents, skills, and opinions of their child by, among other strategies, organizing their child's leisure time into structured activities. Lareau frames this model, used by middle-class parents, in opposition to the *Accomplishment of Natural Growth* model, associated with lower-class parents, which values unstructured leisure time for children and is characterized by a distance from mainstream institutions (Lareau 2003).

Lareau's model informs our research in two ways: 1) it serves to reinforce the value of organized after-school activities in preparing children for success; and 2) it presses us to investigate the ways in which socio-economic class affects middle school children's involvement in organized after-school activities. Correlated to socio-economic class are issues of race, ethnicity, and immigrant status, all areas which we confront in

¹ Term coined by the social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, which refers to a person's material and symbolic cultural resources, such as behavior, tastes, and knowledge, that confer power and status to the holder because they are deemed socially valuable.

our research. While this model is a valuable tool for understanding why children may or may not participate, it should also be stressed that not all theorists agree that participation in after-school activities is advantageous. Shulamith Firestone writes of the “supervised nightmare” in which children of the middle class are constantly pushed into structured activity that stunts creativity, choice, and the unique development of each child (Firestone 1970). While Firestone would agree with Lareau that the middle class certainly has more access to and can better navigate institutional structures, she argues that lower-class children are instead free of the *burden* of these institutions: “Lower-class children are some of the brightest, brassiest, and most original children around. They are that way because they are left alone” (Firestone 1970: 99).

Assessing the end results of after-school activities, however, lies largely outside the scope of our analysis. Our study assumes that involvement in organized programs has a significant impact on youth development. Consequently, we investigate important factors in this participation, specifically attempting to identify barriers that prevent students from being involved.

Methodology

Our research on youth participation in out-of-school programs focuses on Woodrow Wilson Middle School (WWMS) in Middletown, Connecticut. Two major questions inform this research: 1) How do various demographic factors such as race, class, gender, and geographic location affect student participation in after-school programs? And 2) How might we increase student participation in these programs, particularly among populations underrepresented in existing programs? We investigated these questions using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. First, we distributed a school-wide survey in order to discern correlations between participation and demographic factors. We then used the information collected from this survey to target non-participating students and their parents for more in-depth interviews. We conducted in-person interviews with a total of twenty-four students and interviewed fourteen parents by phone. These interviews were crucial because they filled in the qualitative gaps of a large quantitative survey. Surveys provide an important overview of students participation in after-school programs while interviews press further, asking “why?” and help us to identify ways for the MYSB to increase participation in after-school programs. Our research aims, first, to present a broad picture of who participates in after-school programs, and, second, to recognize the factors that lead to non-participation.

The Survey

We designed the survey (Appendix III) primarily to find demographic trends in student participation and non-participation. We also used the survey to identify programs in which students participate. The survey, which lasted approximately ten minutes,

consisted mainly of multiple choice questions which we analyzed using SPSS data analysis software. It also contained two open-ended questions, designed to allow for responses not anticipated by the researchers, concerning the students' after-school activities. The first half of the survey asked students to identify the programs and activities they might be involved in, while the second half asked questions concerning the demographics of the student body, such as race, class, gender, and geographic location, as possible contributing factors to non-participation.

Six WWMS Social Studies teachers administered the three-page survey to all students, and received 646 completed student surveys. The following day, the same teachers handed out a questionnaire (Appendix IV) that asked students to indicate their level of weekly participation in after-school programs by checking boxes ranging from "0" hours to "8 or more" hours. The survey asked the students to write their name on the questionnaire if they were willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview. One hundred and four students who said that they participated zero hours a week in after-school programs consented to be interviewed, out of one hundred and seventy-three non-participants. This information was used to target non-participating students, and ultimately their parents, for interviews. We obtained parental consent for each student interview by asking the students to bring back a signed parental consent form (Appendix V).

Interviews

The second part of our research consisted of in-person interviews with students at WWMS, followed by phone interviews of parents of non-participants. Our student

interview (Appendix VI) attempted to determine why students aren't participating, and what kinds of programs would appeal to them. Conversations with parents were based on similar questions to those in the student interviews. The parent interviews allowed us to examine parental attitudes about after-school programs as well as barriers that might stop them from getting their kids involved.

We conducted ten-minute long interviews with twenty-four students at WWMS over the course of three days. Although we interviewed only students who indicated in the questionnaire that they participated in zero hours per week of after-school programs, we found that several students did in fact participate in after-school activities, had in the past, or had just joined a program. Nevertheless, their responses still provided us with a valuable perspective.

We selected parents for an interview based on the list of student “non-participants,” but regardless of whether their own child had been interviewed. WWMS provided us with parents’ contact information. For reasons of confidentiality, if a child and their parent were both interviewed, the child’s response cannot be traced to their parent, nor the parent’s response traced to their child. We conducted a total of fourteen fifteen-minute parent interviews over the phone (Appendix VII) over the course of one week.

Limitations

Due to a miscommunication between the Wesleyan research team, MYSB, and the administration of WWMS, an early draft of the survey was administered, resulting in some complications with the data collected. Imprecise wording of the non-final version

of the survey may have affected students' understanding of the questions. (For a discussion of details and implications of this, see Appendix II.)

Given that we specifically wanted to target non-participants in after-school programs and their parents, we were particularly concerned that there might be a selection bias in our interviews. Student participation in interviews was contingent upon student submission of the second day questionnaire and parents' receipt and signature of the permission slip, which may have led to a self-selection bias against the most disengaged students and parents. However, only one parent declined to participate in our study, so we do not think that a self-selection bias affected our results. In addition, since we made phone calls to prospective parent interviewees during early evening hours, we may have excluded parents who work during this time.

Presentation of Data

Sample Overview

The population for our survey consisted of all 709 7th and 8th grade students at Woodrow Wilson Middle School. We received a total of 646 completed surveys, a response rate of 91.1%. Factors that may have affected this response rate include student absence from school and language barriers, as only English-language surveys were distributed.

The sample demographics closely reflect the demographics of the Woodrow Wilson population as a whole, as reported by the Connecticut Department of Education. The following tables display percentages of the WWMS population for sex, race/ethnicity, lunch fee, number of legal guardians, and language spoken at home.

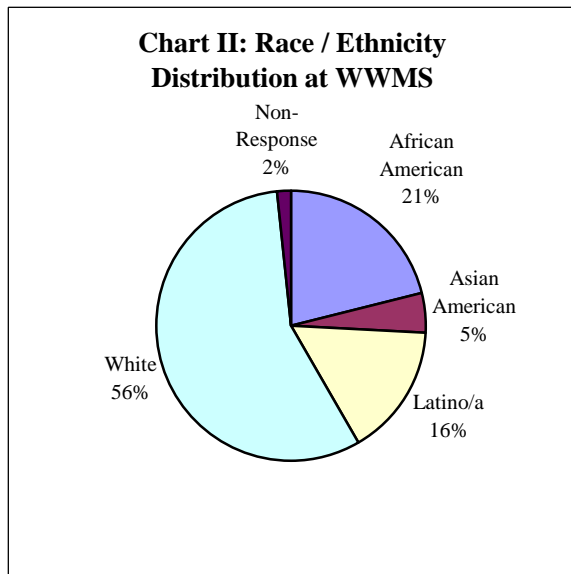
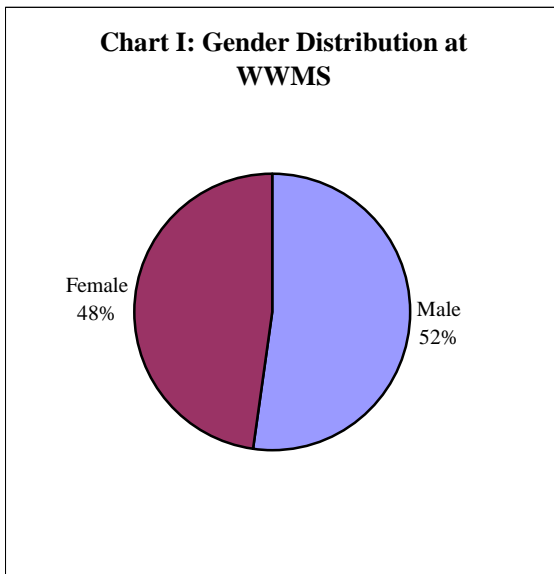


Chart III: Distribution of Lunch Fee Qualifications at WWMS

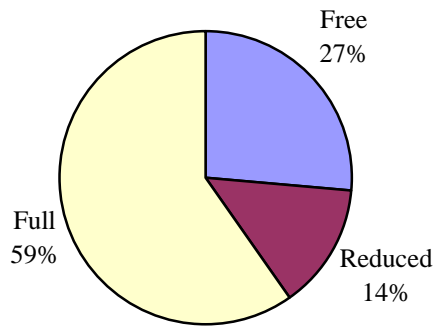
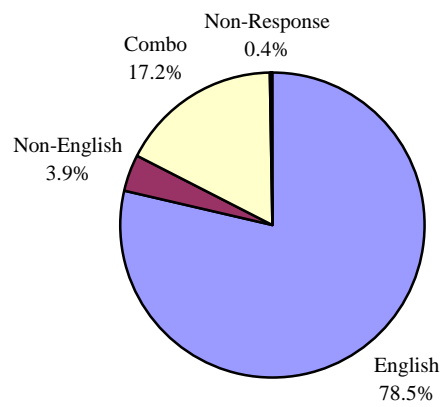
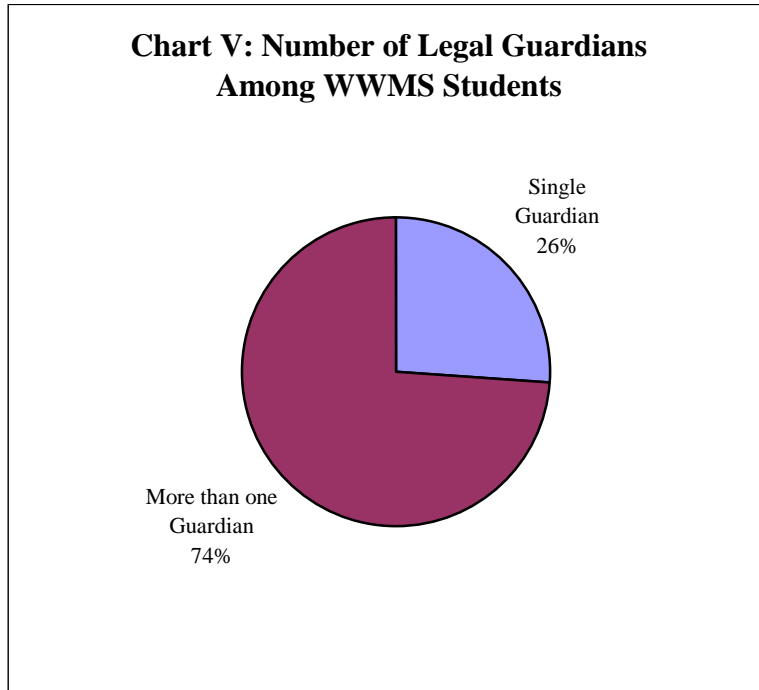


Chart IV: Language Spoken at Home Among WWMS Students





Who Participates?

We used student responses to the question “How many hours per week do you participate in after-school activities?” to fit each respondent into one of three categories: no participation (zero hours), low participation (one to three hours), and high participation (three plus hours). Our breakdown between low and high participation is guided by the assumption that those who participate in after-school activities for one to three hours per week are only involved in one program, only once a week, while those students participating more than three hours a week are involved in after-school programs several days a week.

Table I: “In total, how many hours a week do you usually participate in all of your organized out of school programs?”

	Number of students	Percent
Zero Hours	173	27.4
One to Three Hours	207	32.8
More than Three Hours	251	39.8
Total	631	100.0

The table shows that while the highest percentage of students (39.8%) are high participators, a third (32.8%) of students are low participators, and more than a quarter (27.4%) do not participate in any after-school programs. Thus the vast majority of students at Woodrow Wilson participate in some kind of after-school activity. However, it is important to look at those students who are not participating as they potentially represent a group that is being systematically, rather than randomly, excluded from participation.

The demographic factors which the survey considers include race, gender, income, number of live-in guardians, and geographical location of household. The strongest correlations we found link overall participation to income and language spoken at home. Though race and geographical location do correlate with participation, these correlations appear to be explained by differences in income between these groups. More specifically, there were not major differences across racial and geographic lines between people of the same income level. However, differences did appear between races when compared with program types. Considering that single-parent households tend to have lower family income, it should be noted that we found no correlation between

participation and number of guardians; however, this result is statistically insignificant² due to the small sample size.

Income

As discussed in our literature review, participation in after-school activities may be strongly linked to income, as higher income can provide material resources, making participation more possible. Because we did not have direct access to family income, our statistics are based on student eligibility for free or reduced lunch. The table below shows a direct correlation between income and participation in after-school activities. Students who qualify for free lunch are least likely to participate in after-school activities; students on reduced lunch are less likely than students paying full price and more likely than students who qualify for free lunch to participate in programs. Finally, students on free lunch are least likely to be high participators. This last statistic is the most striking: Just over a quarter of students on free lunch participate in after-school activities three or more hours per week, versus 30.2% of those on reduced lunch and 47.2% of students on full lunch.

² In other words, we cannot prove that a possible correlation isn't present but hidden by chance, given the small number of respondents in that category.

Table II: Participation versus Lunch Fee

	Free		Reduced		Full	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Zero Hours	59	35.8*	24	27.9*	89	23.6*
One to Three Hours	59	35.8*	36	41.9*	110	29.2*
More than Three Hours	47	28.5*	26	30.2*	178	47.2*
	165	100.0	86	100.0	377	100.0

*statistically significant at an alpha level of .05

Language

Students were asked whether they spoke English, another language, or a combination of the two at home with their family. We hypothesized that language may be a barrier for students and parents who do not have access to informational materials in their native languages or to certain programs conducted only in English. While 27.7% of students who speak English at home are non-participants, 47.8% of students who speak another language at home do not participate in after-school activities. However, only 3.9% of students at Woodrow Wilson speak another language at home with their families, so although this factor is strongly correlated with non-participation, these results are not statistically significant, due to the small sample size. Surprisingly, students who speak a combination of English and another language at home have the highest rates of both low and high participation, and thus participation overall.

Table III: Participation versus Language Spoken At Home

	English		Other		Combination	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Zero Hours	137	27.7*	11	47.8	24	21.6*
One to Three Hours	158	32.0*	7	30.4	41	36.9*
More than Three Hours	199	40.3*	5	21.7	46	41.4*
	494	100.0	23	100.0	111	100.0

*statistically significant at an alpha level of .05

Gender

Participation also varies significantly by gender. While males and females have similar rates of high participation, 32.6% of males are non-participators, compared to only 22.2% of females. This difference is found in the low participation category, as 28.9% of males are low participators, while 37.1% of females were low participators.

Table IV: Participation versus Gender

	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Zero Hours	110	32.6*	69	22.2*
One to Three Hours	97	28.9*	115	37.1*
More than Three Hours	129	38.5*	126	40.7*
	336	100.0	310	100.0

*Statistically significant at an alpha level of .05.

Participation by Activity

Students were asked to select the types of activities in which they participate as well as specific programs in which they are involved. Non-school sports and school sports participation were the most common types of activity, reported by 34.1% and

24.3% of the students respectively, far outweighing other kinds of programs. While half of all students report participation in school or non-school sports, only a quarter report participation in arts programs and a quarter report participation in academic or leadership programs. These differences in participation may be related to the availability of sports programs, as well as the accessibility of school sports.

Table V: Participation in Most Popular Activity Types*

	N	%
Sports	305	47.2
Arts	177	27.4
Academic/Leadership	164	25.4

*Not all activities are included. Multiple choices possible, total is 100% by chance.

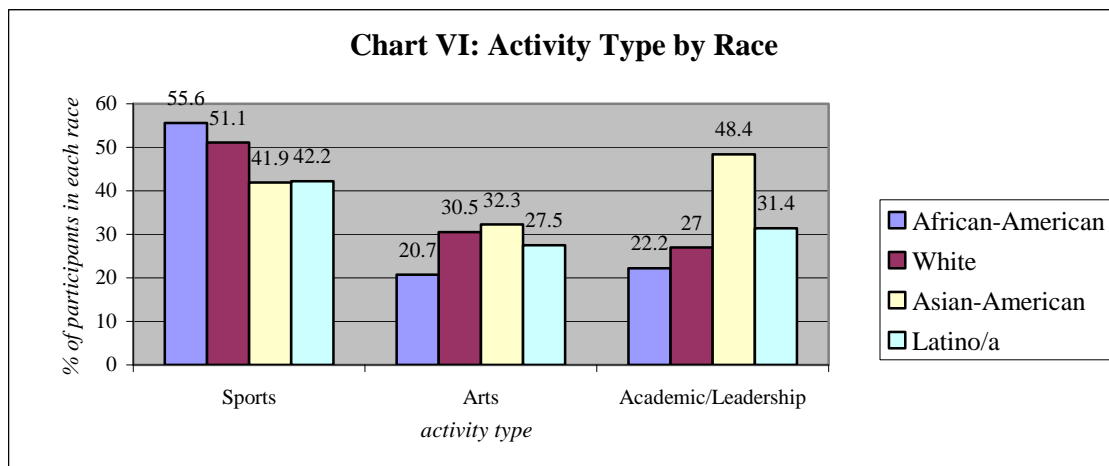
Participation by Program

Students also selected programs in which they are currently involved from a list which included After-School Challenge Grant programs, as well as other programs suggested by the Middletown MYSB Bureau. In addition, students could indicate in their response to an open-ended question that they participated in programs not listed in the survey. Table VI shows the percentage of students who report participation in each program.

Table VI: Participation by Program

	N	%
YMCA	73	11.3
Rushford Center	51	7.9
After-School Challenge	49	7.6
Oddfellows	47	7.3
Green Street Arts Center	26	4.0
North End Action Team	10	1.5
Cross Street Training	9	1.4
Traverse Square	5	0.8
The Connection	0	0.0

Striking differences in participation rates by activity type exist between racial groups in the sample. Over half of Black and half of White students participate in sports, while around forty percent of Asian and Latino students participate in sports. White and Asian students have the highest arts participation rates, while only twenty percent of Black students participate in the arts. Asian students have by far the highest participation in academic and leadership programs, at a rate of almost fifty percent. Over thirty percent of Latino students and twenty-seven percent of White students participate in these programs, while twenty-two percent of Black students participate in them. These major differences do not exist between groups based on income or gender.



Analysis of Interviews

In the qualitative portion of our study, we interviewed 24 students who reported to participate in zero hours of after-school programs per week (23.1 % of 104 self-identified non-participants) and 13 parents of non-participants (12.5% of non-participating students' parents). Some of these students had participated in activities in the past but no longer did; three of them actually were involved in an organized activity at the time of the interview. We found it important to interview both students and parents to gain a broader perspective of the overall needs of the Middletown community in regards to after-school programming. While students participate in the programs, parents also play an integral role in facilitating this participation. Middle school is typically a period of transition from childhood dependence on parents to adolescent independence and freedom to choose what to do with one's own time. To understand how these perspectives differ and complement each other, it is necessary to look at both parents' and children's visions for after-school programs. We identified several important themes that ran through their answers, both of barriers to participation and their desires for after-school programs.

Issues of Feasibility

Both parents and students report transportation, time, and cost as factors that hinder participation in after-school activities. In terms of transportation, all of the non-participants interviewed indicate that they have to take the bus home from school, while those students interviewed who do participate in after-school activities report that parents are available to pick them up from programs. For example, a student who plays on sports teams throughout the year at Woodrow Wilson mentions that while one of her parents

usually picks her up from practice, her live-in grandparents are also available if her parents have other obligations. In contrast, the mother of one non-participator told us that because she often has to work late, she cannot pick up her child after school.

Parental and student time commitments also contribute to a lack of participation. Work is the most commonly mentioned time commitment for parents. One mother said, “My daughter goes home and waits for her brother. I get in at 6. I mostly don't know what she does [because I get in so late].” This family is one of several we interviewed in which the older child is expected to care for his/her younger siblings after school. Caring for siblings and other chores or duties around the house, along with doing homework, comprise time commitments that often conflict with participation in after-school programs.

Finally, cost comes up as an issue in both parent and student interviews. A student reports that he wanted to play on the baseball team, but thought that he would need to provide his own equipment and thus couldn't participate. He decided instead to join track and field because “all you need is running shoes.” The programs at both Woodrow Wilson and outside of school are repeatedly described as too expensive. One mother said, “It costs so much money to get them into anything. Cheerleading is \$200, so she missed out.”

Issues of transportation, time and cost help to explain our findings that income plays a large role in student participation. While Woodrow Wilson offers a late bus for some students, after-school programs not affiliated with the school offer a greater challenge to students who lack transportation, as they need a ride both to and from the program. Those parents who get home after their children or who work into the night are

both unavailable to provide transportation and also may depend on their children to fulfill certain responsibilities at home. This issue may be especially pertinent for low-income families for whom it is a great financial burden to pay for childcare. In short, children from families with limited income have less opportunity to participate in after-school programs.

Several practical and straight-forward steps could be taken to address these issues. First, availability of subsidies or scholarships based on family income would help recruit those students who have the time but not the means to participate. Those programs that already offer a sliding scale fee should widely publicize this option. Similarly, group transportation including bus and carpooling could be made available to students through the programs. Where bussing students is not an option, specific programs could help to organize rides with parent or staff volunteers. While other time commitments may remain barriers to participation, removing additional costs and transportation problems from after-school activities will decrease potential conflicts.

Student and Parent Awareness of After-School Programs

Our interviews indicate that a primary reason for non-participation is a lack of awareness about the kinds of after-school programs available to Woodrow Wilson students. A third of the students interviewed were not aware of any after-school programs, another third of students interviewed had only heard of sports programs. Of the thirteen parents of non-participants interviewed, all but one agreed that lack of awareness was an important factor in their child's lack of involvement.

Student awareness of the quantity and variety of after-school programs available to them was limited. While the majority of students in our interview sample had heard of some type of program, the programs of which they were aware were overwhelmingly sports-related through Woodrow Wilson or town leagues. Even when students had heard of other programs, they had only ideas of what they were like. The following conversation illustrates a typical student response:

Interviewer: Do you know about any after school programs for middle school students?

Student: Yeah, like track and all that, or maybe some math stuff, I dunno. I dunno about that.

When students had heard of programs, they mentioned the school announcements given during homeroom as their primary source for information. However, a student pointed out that homeroom is often loud because students are socializing and thus it is very difficult to hear the announcements. Two students pointed out that the initial sign-up for school-based activities is in the cafeteria during lunch, suggesting that registration for these programs is easily available to students. However, the fact that a student mentioned that she had forgotten to follow through with her sign-up, and that parents must pay for programs later, indicates that signing up for a program does not guarantee participation and that parents must also take an active role in getting their kids to participate.

Parents mention two different ways in which the school communicates with them: through materials their children bring home and the parent newsletter, which the school mails home to parents six times a year. Some parents do report that their child has brought home information about after-school programs, but the fact that seven of the thirteen parents have not heard of any kinds of programs indicates that this medium of communication may fall short of its goal in reaching out to parents. Several parents say

that their children never show them anything sent home from school. The research team experienced the difficulty of communicating with parents through students when, after handing out parental consent forms to 64 students, we received back only thirteen the next school day.

The newsletter, because it is mailed directly to the parents' address, seems to be a more effective way to get information out. However, two parents expressed reservations about the newsletter. One derisively called it the "same old newsletter," while another said it is unhelpful, geared "more towards extolling the school's virtues" and intended "to make the school board look glamorous."

This particular mother also says that "there don't seem to be a lot of organized activities," comparing Middletown to a previous place of residence in which there were more organized programs. Without a substantive comparison between Middletown and her former home it is impossible to say to what extent this comparison is correct. However, other interviews indicate that parental attitudes about after-school programs are highly affected by a lack of information, even resulting in misguided perceptions about the availability of particular kinds of programs. One parent says that there is nothing to do after school after the 5th grade, specifically citing the lack of a YMCA (there is, in fact, a centrally located Middletown YMCA, at 99 Union Street). As quoted on page 20, she also bemoans the lack of inexpensive programs for her daughter: "I wish I could get her into an after-school program... It costs so much money to get them into anything." Similarly, another mother is only aware of expensive programs. She has researched the classes listed in the Middletown Parks and Recreation handbook, but does not know about cheaper options, or of any programs that might offer scholarships.

Our interviews of the parents of non-participants suggest that the model of participation in after-school activities is one in which it is incumbent upon parents to track down information. Two parents mentioned that Middletown Parks and Recreation sends out a seasonal catalog of programs they offer. Beyond this, however, the parents we interviewed did not mention being contacted about other possibilities. We do not have data on how students *did* become involved in after-school programs, but our results suggest that parents who do not pursue information about programs won't have the knowledge to be able to enroll their kids.

WWMS, as compared to other after-school program organizations, has the unique advantage of having access to all of its students in one place. Materials given to students, however, do not seem to reliably find their way home. The newsletter appears to be an obvious alternative. On the other hand, the fact that two parents criticized it without prompting suggests that rather than being the most effective link between parents and the school, it may in some cases contribute to negative attitudes about the school. Our small sample size makes these reactions hard to generalize.

Changing the model through which kids become involved in after-school programs would bring information to the non-participants. Woodrow Wilson should use existing channels of communication such as the newsletter to disseminate information about after-school programs. Similarly, the school could mail home information about programs in an attractive and easy-to-read format, with translations provided for non-English-speaking parents, though we acknowledge that this would incur mailing costs. Alternatively to mailing out information, the school could look into using direct e-mail communication to publicize after-school programs. Although this may perpetuate class

disparities based on who has access to the internet, it would potentially reach more parents and eliminate the costs associated with printing and mailing. It should be stressed, however, that parents must take an active role in reading the information that does come home and communicating with their children about signing up for programs.

What Students Want Out of After-School Programs

Our student interview included asking non-participants what they wanted in an after-school program. Specifically, what would their ideal after-school program look like? Students gave a variety of responses regarding the specific kinds of programs they wanted, ranging from science experiments to hip-hop dance to music. Some students are interested in indoor activities relating to computers (engineering, Power Point, graphics), while others express an interest in outdoor activities (sports, skateboarding). One student wants an outside activity because “you’d actually get outside once in a while at this school.” Students at WWMS do not go outside at any point during normal school days.

Students see after-school activities as important and have many ideas as to what these activities should entail. When asked, “Do you think there are any benefits of doing after school programs?” one student replied, “Yeah. Like, you get to learn new things and if you do sports you get lots of exercise. You get to meet new people, new friends.”

Despite being non-participants, the students we interviewed think after-school activities are both potentially interesting and important. When asked what activities they would ideally like to participate in, they have many ideas covering a wide variety of activities. Their motives behind these fall into five categories:

- To be engaged in social activity
- To have a mentor

- To excel in an activity
- To learn a new skill
- To embrace leadership opportunities

To be engaged in social activity

Students' ideal after-school programs overwhelmingly involve the opportunity to spend time with friends. One student wants "a place where friends could go, like after school, if we can't go to our house we just hang out at the school and go outside, play basketball." Another said,

I'd probably just make it, like, a hang out. Like, maybe it would be in the [cafeteria], and maybe there would be food, and maybe it would be, like, a chill spot. I don't want to say like a café, but somewhere where people can just go and hang out after school. It's easier to stay after school, if you want to meet up with a bunch of friends because I have a lot of friends who live across town.

One interviewee who had just joined the track team the week stressed the role of friends:

Interviewer: How did you hear about track?

Student: The announcements...and my friends

Interviewer: Were they looking for more people to join or...did you hear about it recently? What made you decide that you wanted to do it?

Student: I wanted to do something after school and my friends were joining it so I just decided it was a good way to hang out.

Many students seem to be influenced by the activities that their friends do and often know about other programs only because their friends are involved. This makes it clear that students not only want to be with their friends, but also gain knowledge of after-school programs from their friends.

To have a mentor

Some students appear to want guidance from older students through an after-school program. One student said that he wants a program for "tutors to help kids with

homework” and “after schoolwork they could just play games with their tutors.” Another said that he wants to be able to “hang out with friends, play sports, go swimming, talk about stuff in school, get help with your work if you need it, and basically have a good time.”

To excel in an activity

Many students wish to pursue an after-school program that matches their own hobbies, either in school or outside of school in a non-organized activity. Some of these activities include: science-related activities, dancing, football, basketball, drama club, and skateboarding. Many students are interested in skateboarding and even want to start a team. Other students want to pursue sports that they practice outside of school normally, such as basketball, while others are interested in science and computer-related activities. One student commented that he wants to “build things” and when asked why, he replied, “Building with electronics and just building in general would be great. Because I love building, my dad’s an architect so he designs some of the stuff that I build.” Another student had more of an interest in improving his computer skills, especially in engineering and computer graphics. When asked what kind of things he liked to do on the computer, the student replied, “I like to learn lots of different programs that are on the computer because my parents get lots of good updates for their computer for things like Power Point and Excel.”

To learn a new skill

Another important aspect of after-school activities for students is learning a new skill and building new strengths. These skills range from art to skateboarding to computer programs. One student commented that she wanted to learn something “doctor-related,” either online or through a program. One of the students comments on skateboarding, saying, “I took an interest in skateboarding, so if they had a team or something that’d be cool.” Students can expand what they learn in school or enjoy their hobbies within structured activities.

To embrace leadership opportunities

Students cite the opportunity to become a student leader as one of their interests in an after-school program. One student commented that she wanted to start a Gay-Straight Alliance at WWMS. Another student talked about using his skills as a skateboarder to teach other members of a skateboarding team: “I’m the best in the school for it, and I’m sponsored, so maybe I could be the captain of it.”

Several things can be done to expand options and strengthen existing programs. Hosting activities similar to school dances in the afternoons and evenings, such as “open-mic” nights and game nights where students could gather, socialize, and share their thoughts, would make WWMS a safe space for students to gather and build school community. In terms of mentoring, WWMS already has an after-school tutoring program, in partnership with Wesleyan University, which gives students the opportunity to have college-age role models, but this program can be publicized and expanded. WWMS could

expand its mentoring partnerships to other colleges and universities, and to the high school. For example, college students could work with WWMS students to create their ideal programs, or facilitate group sessions for students to talk about current issues in their lives.

In order to attract more students to programs, WWMS and MYSB might rethink how and how much programs are advertised. Many students know of few programs and comment that they have heard about programs mostly from their friends and from the announcements. In order to give students more leadership opportunities, which could increase participation, students could read the announcements in the morning or afternoon or help run school events. Also, if students are allowed to help lead groups and clubs, they might attract their friends to the program. Another way of using school hours to promote after-school participation would be through school assemblies. Organizations such as Oddfellows Playhouse and Green Street Arts Center could have older students perform for WWMS students and then hold information sessions to draw in new participators. Overall, if a few students are attracted to a program, it is likely that their friends will follow. However, students will follow students in both negative and positive directions and for this reason it is important that they have strong guidance from teachers, the administration, and, of course, parents.

What Parents Want Out of After-School Programs

Parents we spoke with overwhelmingly believe in the value of after-school programs. This is striking considering that we drew our sample of parent interviewees

from a pool of students who self-identified as non-participants. Parents we interviewed identify four major characteristics of an “ideal” after-school program:

- To allow kids to engage in physical activity
- To build social skills
- To offer academic support
- To give kids opportunity to pursue their interests

To allow kids to engage in physical activity

According to most parents, children should engage in physical activity during after-school hours. Parents think that their kids should have the chance to exercise, “stretch their legs” and have fun outside. Voicing a common concern of parents, one father says: “My big issue as a parent is that the kids’ number one interest is video and computer games. They spend a lot of time sitting with the control. They need more physical activity.”

To build social skills

A major benefit of after-school activities, according to several of the parents we interviewed, is the opportunity to build social and “interpersonal skills” through interactions with other students. One mother said that she was “more than willing” to drive her daughter around to hang out with her friends, and would like to see her in an after-school program that would allow her to socialize with her friends, “to build social skills.”

In addition to giving middle-school kids opportunities to socialize, after-school programs could allow students to learn “life skills.” For instance, several parents expressed an interest in mentoring programs, particularly in those that pair kids with

college students who can “prepare [middle-school kids] for life.” This parent seemed unaware of the Wesleyan mentoring programs that already exist. Another parent’s suggestion that there should be a program that focuses on self esteem for girls also points to the role of after-school programs in the development of life skills.

Finally, some parents stress the role of after-school programs in the formation of a community through civic education. For example, one parent’s ideal after-school program would resemble “Diversity Week,” a program at the high school. Another misses her child’s former school, where they learned about democracy and where there were “things [students] could rally around” such as Earth Day. She wishes there were a debate club or a program to learn about voting.

To offer academic support

For some parents, after-school programs should offer students help with their schoolwork. For instance, one mother who gets home after her daughter has already finished doing her homework would like to see an after-school academic support program:

Interviewer: Is there anything you think is important for your kids to do or be involved in outside of school time?

Parent: More education--help with homework, I don't help [my daughter] with her homework.

Another parent’s ideal after-school program, which she said would help kids “scholastically,” would involve more organized library time, so that kids could learn the library organization system.

To give kids opportunity to pursue their interests

Some parents think of after-school programs as opportunities for middle-school students to explore their interests and discover new ones. One artistic middle-school student's mother would like there to be an after-school program that focuses on drawing, because this would allow her daughter to develop her talent. One father likes his son to be able to explore his own interests, such as piano, or making robots. Just as after-school programs can give kids the chance to do something in which they're interested, it can also expose them to new things, "things for [them] to get interested in," as one parent said.

The Role of Parents in the Structuring of Middle-School Students' After-School Life

This section looks at the role of parents in determining how their children spend their time. Although all of the parents we spoke to believe that after-school programs can be worthwhile, they tend to only loosely structure and schedule their children's lives. Determining the level of structure imposed on children by their parents allows us to gauge where and how the decision is made to participate in after-school programs, and therefore shows us where an effort to increase participation might be targeted.

In response to the question, "Does your child pretty much decide for her/himself what s/he does in his/her free time, or do you have a strong voice?" parents generally talked about granting freedom to their children to do as they please, within wide but clear limits. For instance, one common response was that a child "has to have his homework done, but otherwise has free rein." This response points to parents' prioritization of schoolwork over free time, but also reveals a clear separation between the two. Although school comes first, after-school time is characterized by children's freedom to explore

their own interests. One parent points to a divergence in his and his son's interests when he says that although homework is the father's priority, his son "doesn't put it on the list. Sometimes he does it. His number one priority is video games and the computer. He has a PS2 and a PSP, and does online games... I'm not fond of 'shoot 'em up' games." Parents' disapproval of videogames paired with simultaneous permission for their kids to use them is common among the parents we talked with. Although they don't wholeheartedly approve of their child's interests or priorities, parents often allow their child the freedom to choose what to do with his or her after-school time. Another parent echoed this separation between his son's interests and his own: "I'm too busy. I wouldn't do that to my kids [have a strong voice in what they do]."

Most parents talked about loosely monitoring their kids. Their authority over their child's activities is generally negative—that is they set the rules about what *not* to do—rather than positive, whereby they would actively structure or schedule their child's life. In one typical response, a parent said that her daughter "does whatever—unless I don't like it." One father hinted at a similar negative authority when he says of his son, "I know what he's doing," implying that although he is aware of his son's activities, he would not intervene unless he needed to.

In contrast to middle-school students who mostly want to "have a good time" in after-school programs, parents frame after-school programs as potentially instrumental in children's development. Where students see the expressive benefits of after-school programs—the opportunity to have fun and hang out with friends, play outside, learn a fun new skill or lead an activity—parents see concrete benefits such as physical health, social aptitude, academic ability, and development of skills.

Generally, the ideal after-school programs proposed by students and parents are consistent with one another. Both students and parents see the value of after-school building social skills, participating in mentoring programs, pursuing interests, and ultimately developing new ones.

Conclusion

The middle school students with whom we interacted for this study were a curious, energetic, and likeable group. Many of them who did not participate in after-school activities expressed a desire to be actively engaged, but lacked the means, the motivation, or simply the information to participate. While in general parents in this study view participation in after-school activities as a positive way for their children to spend time, they share these same barriers with their children. School administrators and organizations such as MYSB may be able to fill some of these informational and means gaps, but children and parents also serve as valuable resources to each other in several ways.

This study is based on the premise that participation in after-school activities helps to build social competence and develop life skills. By middle school, kids have a sense of their interests and how they want to express themselves, yet they still rely on their parents for guidance as they take on responsibility and develop personal drive. Though parents may play the role of motivators, middle school students and the schools have direct access to each other on a daily basis, creating a clear path for the dissemination and collection of information. This path, though, has to be forged by both the student and the school. Overall, parent, student, and school can each play an important role in both disseminating information about programs and involving the student.

We have found that transportation, time, and cost are barriers to participation, and correspondingly that income correlates to a student's level of participation. On a practical level, even if information about after-school programs is available to children

and parents, lack of material resources and time may hinder participation. We also conclude, though, that non-participants and their parents lack knowledge about after-school programming. Considering the correlation between income and participation, this finding suggests that higher income families may have more knowledge of programs, supporting Lareau's argument that families of higher socio-economic status are better able to navigate social and cultural institutions such as schools and after-school programs. This does not have to be the case, though.

Accessibility to after-school programs is dependent upon parent and student action and involvement with WWMS as well as institutional acknowledgement of the barriers that systematically hinder participation of students. WWMS and MYSB can, in collaboration, take action, reach out further to families in order to increase awareness, and better engage the students in and out of school. Actually using our data and the overall themes from the interviews, MYSB and WWMS can make the choice to target improvement in certain areas as well as reevaluate existing programs. It is important to look at both what is happening in the present as well as what is ahead in the future; in order to build stronger relationships between students, parents, and WWMS, as well as stronger after-school programs, WWMS and MYSB must reassess what they already have. We hope that this report will be used a guide to help both understand lack of participation and rectify the exclusion of students from after-school programs.

Summary of Recommendations

Although increasing participation in after-school programs requires a joint effort between students, parents, Woodrow Wilson Middle School, and administrators of existing after-school programs, we offer the following suggestions for the Middletown Youth Services Bureau, Woodrow Wilson Middle School, and other purveyors of after-school programs:

- *Expand existing mentoring programs and partnerships with local colleges and universities.*
- *Cultivate student leadership in groups and clubs and encourage students to play an active role in designing after-school programs.* Mentors can be instrumental in leading discussions on possible after-school programs and helping students design their own. Not only can this be a positive experience for student leaders, but it can help attract leaders' friends to programs.
- *Make use of school space during after-school hours, for instance to host events such as "open-mic" or game nights.*
- *Make use of the availability of the entire student body during school hours.* Student from organizations such as Oddfellows Playhouse and Green Street Arts Center could perform for the student body and later hold information session to attract new participators.
- *Raise awareness of available resources.* For example, subsidized programs and scholarships can be more aggressively advertised among students and parents.
- *Improve availability of transportation.* Wherever possible, the school should continue to provide bussing and encourage carpooling with available parents.
- *Improve communication with and outreach to parents:*
 - Use the existing newsletter to publicize all after-school programs, and not just those run through WWMS.
 - Mail information on programs directly home to parents in an attractive and easy to read format.
 - Communicate with students' parents directly through email. While this runs the risk of further privileging families who own a computer, it is one cost-efficient method of disseminating information.

Recommendations for Further Study

Our study of after-school programs focused on non-participants, trying to understand the reasons why they are not involved. Our findings would be supplemented by research on those who do participate, attempting to understand the processes through which they become enrolled and maintain involvement in programs.

Additionally, we are hesitant to portray all after-school programs as beneficial. With an overall goal of encouraging positive youth development through after-school programs, we recommend a study evaluating the effectiveness of existing after-school programs. This could provide both recommendations for specific programs and add to existing literature about what kinds of programs and activities encourage positive development.

Works Cited

- Blumenkrantz, D.G., "Let's Play: Initiating Youth Into the Healthy World of Play," Danish, Steve J. and Gulotta, Thomas (Eds.), Developing Competent Youth and Strong Communities Through After-School Programming. Washington, D.C.: CWLA Press, 2000, 67-111.
- Firestone, Shulamith, "Down With Childhood," Hoyles, Martin, Ed. Changing Childhood. London: Writers' and Readers' Publishing Cooperative, 1979, 60-79.
- Grossman, Jean Baldwin; Walker, Karen and Raley, Rebecca. "Challenges and Opportunities in After-School Programs: Lessons for Policymakers and Funders," Public/Private Ventures. April 2001.
- Gulotta, Thomas, "Introduction," Danish, Steve J. and Gulotta, Thomas (Eds.), Developing Competent Youth and Strong Communities Through After-School Programming. Washington, D.C.: CWLA Press, 2000, 1-15.
- Lareau, Annette. Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Scales, P. C., and Roehlkepartain, E. C. "Boosting student achievement: New research on the power of developmental assets," *Search Institute Insights & Evidence 1* (1: October 2003), 1-10.
- Raley, Rebecca; Grossman, and Walker, Karen, "Getting It Right: Strategies for After-School Success," Public/Private Ventures. September 2005.

SUMMARY OF APPENDICES

I.	Letter to Parents.....	46
II.	Explanation of Survey.....	48
III.	Survey and Questionnaire.....	51
IV.	Student Interview Questions.....	55
V.	Parent Interview Questions.....	56

Appendix I: Letter to Parents

February 15, 2007

Dear Parent or Guardian,

The Youth Service Bureau is a city of Middletown youth and family agency working in close collaboration with The Middletown Public Schools. We have been working with the Assets Community Team (ACT) to discover how our community can support the healthy growth of our children. You may remember back in November these groups co-sponsored a comprehensive study of youth in Grades 7-12 through a survey entitled Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors.

We are working with students from Wesleyan University to conduct a study on factors that affect youth participation in out-of-school time activities. It will provide our schools and community with specific information, such as how students spend their out-of-school time and barriers that interfere with their involvement in out-of-school time activities. Most important, the survey will tell us the extent to which our students are experiencing Developmental Assets. Developmental Assets are the “building blocks” of positive relationships, opportunities, skills, and values that young people need to grow into healthy, caring, and responsible adults. Young people can obtain many Developmental Assets through out-of-school time activities. The survey results will help all of us as we seek to increase the Developmental Assets in our youth and guide them into healthy out-of-school time activities.

During the week of February 26th, Woodrow Wilson Middle School will conduct this very important study on the out-of-school time behaviors of our students in Grades 7-8.

Additional Information:

- Students will be given twenty minutes to complete the survey. The surveys are completed anonymously. However, students may be given an opportunity to participate in a follow-up interview. No one will know how individual students respond to the questions and the surveys are sent directly to Wesleyan University for processing.
- The final report will present findings by the total group, by grade, by gender, and by race. No individual student data is reported.
- Students are told that their participation is voluntary and that they may skip items if they so choose.
- The survey is not a test they take for school grades, and their grades will not be affected if they choose not to participate. Nonparticipating students will be asked to partake in a study hall in the library. A copy of the survey is available for your review at Woodrow Wilson Middle School main offices between the hours of 7:30am-3:30pm. The value of a study of this kind depends on the participation of as many students as possible.

The Middletown Youth Services Bureau along with the Assets Community Team is inviting all parents to participate in the community-wide Developmental Assets initiative. Results from the large Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behavior survey will be discussed at a community workshop entitled “What’s Up With Our Kids” April 11th from 7:00 – 9:00 pm at the Middletown High School.

If you have any questions, please contact Youth Services Coordinator, Justin Carbonella at 704-4500 ext. 4600. If you do not want your child to participate, you must notify the building principal in writing by Monday, February 26th.

Sincerely,

Justin Carbonella, MPA
Youth Services Coordinator

Appendix II: Survey Explanation

We designed our survey primarily to determine which students were participating in what kinds of out-of-school activities. The three-page survey began with an open-ended question (“This year, what do you usually do after school?”) both because we were interested in the answer and to avoid biasing our results by expressing participation as the norm. We then asked questions about participation, both in terms of whether students were involved in organized programs (and for how many hours a week) as well as the kinds of programs. We also asked students to check off the specific programs in which they are involved. Furthermore, as part of our goal to catalog all the available out-of-school programs, we asked them to list any we hadn’t thought of that they participated in.

The second part of our survey touched on the demographic characteristics of particular students. We based these questions on factors that we suspected of influencing participation. They were also drawn from the research proposal submitted by MYSB, which asked us to specifically investigate race, class, gender, and geographic location. In order to gauge a possible correlation between income and participation, we asked students if they qualified for free or reduced lunch. In order to ask about geographic location in a way that would allow us to compare responses and isolate trends, we asked students which neighborhood school they lived closest to, allowing them to choose between Middletown’s eight elementary schools. In addition to these questions (as well as race and gender), we asked if students speak English at home, how many parents or guardians they lived with, and how they usually traveled to and from school.

Due to a miscommunication with the Woodrow Wilson administration, an early draft of the survey was administered to the students, leading to several potential problems in our data. Although we pre-tested our survey with 5th and 6th graders in the Traverse Square after-school program, we were unable to incorporate the results of that testing. In the draft that went out to students, our second question asked: “Do you currently participate in any organized *school* programs out of your normal school day?” [italics added for emphasis] Our interest, of course, was not only with school programs, but any kind of organized program. The testing we did of the survey identified this as a point of confusion, and we have no way of knowing how individual students interpreted the question. This is not a major problem, however, as our analysis of the survey leaves out this question, instead using our sixth question: “In total, how many hours a week do you usually participate in all of your organized out of school programs?” In this case, an answer of zero indicates non-participation. In addition, in our categories of activities we had hoped to change “Arts” to “Organized Arts Program” to make it clear that we were interested in an organized program rather than someone who draws as a hobby. We had also planned to add “Organized Music Program.”

Furthermore, we prepared teachers prompts for them read to their class when administering the survey; we were not aware of when the survey went out and thus could not distribute these prompts. We recognized that the manner in which the surveys were taken could have a major impact on the data we obtain from them. It is possible that the different ways in which the six social studies teachers handed out and explained the surveys may have had some effect on our results, although there is no way of knowing.

The questionnaire component of our survey was intended to identify potential interview subjects. We had planned to include the questionnaire and ask students to tear off the survey. It repeats the question, “In total, how many hours a week do you usually participate in all of your organized out of school programs?” It also asks students to write down their names if they would be willing to give us a personal interview. Due to our miscommunication with WWMS, the questionnaire was distributed only the next day. We were nevertheless able to identify a sufficient number of non-participants to interview. Our only concern was that students might have forgotten what they originally answered, but since we only contacted those who answered zero hours, this is likely less problematic.

We had also hoped to make translated copies of the survey into available for Spanish and Polish-speaking students not proficient in English. Again, because of miscommunication with Woodrow Wilson and MYSB, the surveys were distributed before the planned materials were ready.

Appendix III (a): Survey

This survey is part of a research project on out-of-school activities, conducted jointly by the Middletown Youth Services Bureau and Wesleyan University. All answers to this survey are **anonymous and confidential**.

1. This year, what do you usually do after school?

2. Do you currently participate in any organized school programs out of your normal school day?

- yes
- no

3. Are you currently involved in any of the following activities? Check all that apply.

- School sports
- Organized non-school sports
- Church group
- Academic school club
- Arts (painting, drawing, photography, etc...)
- Theater
- Dance
- Mentoring
- Tutoring
- Community Service
- Program through your Community Center

4. Are you involved in any of the following programs? Check all that apply.

- After School Challenge
- Traverse Square (the center)
- Odd Fellows
- Green Street Arts Center
- YMCA
- Cross Street Training and Academic Center
- Rushford Center
- The Connection
- North End Action Team

Please turn over →

5. What other programs, not listed above, are you involved in this year?

6. In total, how many hours a week do you usually participate in all of your organized out of school programs?

- 0
- 1-3
- 3-6
- 6-8
- More than 8 hours a week

7. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

8. What is your ethnicity? (check all that apply)

- African American
- Asian American
- Hispanic/Latino
- White/Caucasian
- Mixed Race
- Other _____

9. Do you qualify for free or reduced lunch?

- free lunch
- reduced lunch
- none

10. Do you speak English at home with your family?

- yes
- no
- I speak a combination of English and another language at home with my family

11. Which neighborhood school do you live closest to?

- Bielfield
- Farm Hill
- Lawrence
- MacDonough
- Moody
- Snow
- Spencer
- Wesley

12. How many parents or guardians live at home with you?

- one
- more than one

13. How do you usually travel to and from school?

- get a ride from a parent or guardian
- carpool with a friend
- school bus
- public transportation—city bus
- walk, bike, or skateboard
- other _____

End of survey—please fill out the other form

Appendix III (b): Student Questionnaire

As part of our research project on after school participation, the Middletown Youth Services Bureau and Wesleyan University would like to ask a few questions that would go into more detail than the survey you just filled out. Please answer the following question and fill out your name if you wouldn't mind if we contacted you for a follow-up interview.

All information you give us is **strictly confidential**, which means that your name can never be connected to your answers by anyone except for the research team for research purposes only.

In total, about how many hours a week do you participate in all organized after-school activities put together?

- 0
- Between 1 and 3 hours
- Between 3 and 6 hours
- Between 6 and 8 hours
- More than 8 hours a week

Name (please print) _____

first

last

Appendix IV: Student Interview Questions

- 1) Take me through what you usually do after school: Where do you go? What do you do? How do you get there?
- 2) Who do you live with? When do the other people who live at your house get home?
- 3) Do you know about any after school programs for middle school students? Are you involved in any program?
 - 3a) How did you hear about them?
 - 3b) Do they sound interesting to you? Why or why not?
 - 3c) *If they are appealing:* Why aren't you involved in the ones that sound good?
 - 3d) Do you think you would benefit from any of the programs you know about? How and why (not)?
- 4) Can you imagine an organized out-of-school program that would appeal to you? What would it look like?

Concluding Questions

- 5) How old are you?
- 6) What grade are you in?
- 7) What is your gender?
- 8) What race or ethnicity do you identify with?
- 9) Do you qualify for free or reduced lunch?

Appendix V: Parent Interview Questions

Date: _____ Interviewer: _____

Hello, may I speak to the parent or guardian of _____?

I'm calling on behalf of Wesleyan University and the Middletown Youth Services Bureau, following up on a short survey that _____ filled out a few weeks ago about what kids do after school.

Would you be able to talk with me for about ten minutes, as part of our research project on what Woodrow Wilson students do after school? (if no, is there a better time to contact you)?

We may use what you tell us in the final report of our project; however, anything we use will be entirely anonymous. Your child will never be identified by name.

1. What's it like raising children in Middletown // *Do you think your child has had a good experience at WWMS? Then probe: If so, why, if not why not?*

2. *What kinds of things does your child do after school. What's a typical day for him/her? How about on weekends?*

3. *Does your child pretty much decide for her/himself what s/he does in his/her free time, or do you have a strong voice?*

4. Is there anything you think is important for your kids to do or be involved in outside of school time? What?

5. Do you know of any programs available to Woodrow Wilson kids after school? How about clubs, sports, or programs through the middle school or community groups? [If no to all of these, skip qs 6-10]

6. Is your child in any of these programs?

7. How did you hear about them?

8. *Have you heard anything about them?*

9. Do you think your child would benefit from any of the programs you've heard about? Why or why not?

I'd like to ask you how important various factors are in your child not being enrolled in after-school programs. Would you please tell me if they're very important, somewhat important, or not important.

10. Your child's desire or lack of desire to participate.

11. Other responsibilities or tasks your child has (such as childcare or chores). [If yes to 11, what responsibilities?]

12. Lack of information about programs.

13. Difficulty in arranging transportation. [if yes, why? When do you get off work? Are you a single parent? Do you have a car?]

14. The cost of programs.

15. Are there any other important factors I haven't listed?

16. If you could design the ideal after school activity or program for your child, what would it look like? (in terms of convenience for you, and what you'd like to have your child do in his/her after school hours)