



Voice of Afterschool

FACTS FROM THE FIELD

PARTNERSHIP FOR AFTER SCHOOL EDUCATION

PASE Survey on Children's Health

By their nature, afterschool programs run by community-based organizations are ideally suited to address the health challenges facing youth from low-income communities. The young people who participate in these programs have trusting relationships with the staff and are therefore open to new ideas and experiences. Most programs have the curricular and structural flexibility to incorporate information and activities related to health and fitness.

Neighborhoods where low-income and minority children live typically have more fast-food restaurants and fewer vendors of healthful foods than do wealthier or predominantly white neighborhoods. Common obstacles to physical activity include unsafe streets, dilapidated parks, and a shortage of appropriate facilities.

The lack of physical activity opportunities in public schools also contributes to the near-epidemic levels of overweight and obesity. A study conducted by physical education expert Nancy Lederman revealed that 41% of the city's public elementary schools do not have a consistent physical education program, in spite of the fact that daily physical education is a requirement of the New York State Education Department.

As the only organization connecting New York City's more than 1,600 afterschool programs, the Partnership for After School Education (PASE) determined that while excellent research is available on a national level, more information was needed regarding the prevalence of health issues among New York City youth. In addition, we recognized that more information was needed about afterschool

program staff members' knowledge of the health issues that commonly affect the youth they serve.

To that end, PASE distributed the Survey on Children and Youth Health in New York City to 3,000 supervisors and managers of New York City afterschool programs. The survey requested information on various health issues common to young people during their school age years, to assess their prevalence, as well as to gauge staff members' knowledge of and interest in these topics.

PASE intends to gather, analyze and distribute the results of similar surveys on other key issues, including social services and mental health, volunteerism, and others. The results of the Survey on Children and Youth Health in New York City are presented in this document.

We have compared the data generated by this survey to information that is available through other New York City and New York State agencies as well as the U.S. Center for Disease Control. In addition, the members of our Children's Health Advisory Council reviewed the findings and provided us with their valuable perspectives and insights.



Partnership for Afterschool Education (PASE)

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We are aware that some of our findings may be unique to afterschool programs in New York City and are eager to learn whether programs in other areas of the country experience these issues in similar ways.

As an example, we are interested in knowing whether the problem of lack of physical activity is as prevalent in other areas as it is here. Do other programs for teens view stress as such a high priority as New York City's respondents? How is the issue of nutrition viewed by afterschool providers in other locales?

To this end, colleague organizations are invited to contact us and arrange for administration of the revised survey to agencies in their areas.

Questions, comments, and suggestions regarding the survey or its replication can be directed to Kevin Roe at 212-571-2664 or kroe@pasetter.org.

Introduction and Demographics of Survey Respondents

In June 2008, PASE distributed a youth health survey to 3,000 supervisors and managers of New York City afterschool programs. We received approximately 340 responses, or eleven percent.

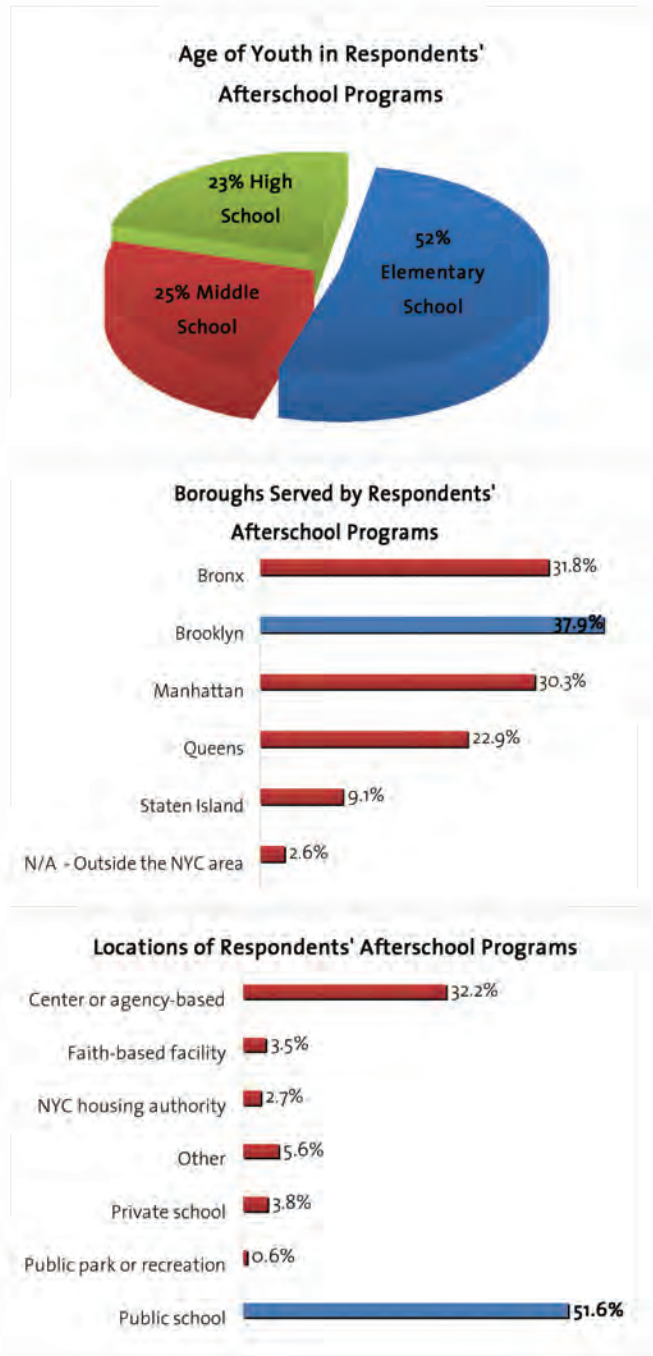
In addition to gathering basic demographic information about respondents' agencies, the survey requested information about the presence of key health issues among youth, as well as staff members' knowledge of and interest in learning about those issues. Respondents were also asked to indicate potential barriers to addressing health needs and ways to effectively develop their knowledge of youth health issues.

The 20 health issues addressed in this survey were:

- Asthma
- Child abuse
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Domestic violence
- Eating disorders
- Physical activity
- LGBT issues
- HIV/AIDS
- Lack of insurance
- Nutrition
- Obesity
- Oral health
- Personal hygiene
- Relationship violence
- Sexual behaviors
- Smoking
- Stress
- Substance abuse
- Teen pregnancy

Of the 340 staff members surveyed, we received the largest number of responses from programs serving primarily elementary school-age youth, operating in Brooklyn, and located in public schools.

PASE also took a closer look at the health issues present among youth by borough. The health issues most present in afterschool programs are similar across all five boroughs, as well as those locations outside the metro New York City area.



Health Issues Present Among Youth from All Program Respondents

The survey asked program staff to what extent certain health issues are present among youth in their programs. The following chart displays the ten issues that respondents rated as most prevalent among youth from all programs, combining the survey answer options “present,” “present frequently,” and “present to a major extent.”

Health Issue Present	% of Respondents
Physical activity	73.5
Asthma	67.1
Nutrition	55.2
Allergies	54.3
Personal hygiene	51.5
Obesity	48.2
Stress	48.2
Lack of insurance	39.9
Sexual behaviors	35.7
Oral health	34.5

Six of these issues are also identified by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as contributing to the leading causes of death and disability among adults and youth¹.

These overlapping issues include:

- Allergies
- Asthma
- Nutrition
- Obesity
- Physical activity
- High risk sexual behaviors

Many of the health issues that are most frequently present - obesity, physical activity and nutrition - are also risk factors for other serious health conditions, such as type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes, which accounts for 90% to 95% of all diagnosed cases of diabetes, has historically developed mostly in overweight adults. As more children become overweight and inactive, type 2 diabetes is being diagnosed more frequently among youth. Of our respondents, 10% indicated diabetes to be present.

Breakdown of Health Issues Present Among Youth by Age Group

After ranking the issues by prevalence, PASE further divided the issues by age group. We received survey responses from 50 programs that serve elementary school-age and/or middle school-age youth and ten programs that serve only high school-age youth³.

The following tables display the ten issues that are most present among youth separated by age group and the corresponding percentage of respondents who marked “present,” “present frequently,” and “present to a major extent.”

Elementary and Middle School-Age (%)	High School-Age (%)
Physical activity (79.2)	Stress (70.0)
Nutrition (58.3)	Nutrition (60.0)
Asthma (58.0)	Smoking (60.0)
Allergies (50.0)	Physical activity (55.6)
Personal hygiene (46.0)	Lack of insurance (50.0)
Lack of insurance (25.0)	LGBT issues (50.0)
Obesity (31.3)	Obesity (50.0)
Oral health (35.4)	Sexual behaviors (50.0)
Stress (26.1)	Teen pregnancy (44.4)
Sexual behaviors (19.1)	Allergies/Asthma (40.0)

A few different health issues are more frequently present in high school-age programs, including smoking, LGBT issues, and teen pregnancy. These results were to be expected, since these issues are primarily associated with older youth⁴.

Health Issues of Most Interest to Staff Members

We also asked program staff to rate their knowledge of and interest in learning more about the 20 health issues. From all 340 responses, we compiled a list of the five issues in which respondents had the most interest, combining those who indicated having a “moderate” or “high” level of interest.

It is notable that staff's level of interest does not align with the issues most present in programs. Three of these issues -- depression, child abuse, and domestic violence -- are not found among the ten most prevalent issues.

Health Issue	% of Moderate - High
Depression	89.0
Nutrition	88.5
Child abuse	88.1
Domestic violence	87.9
Sexual behaviors	87.1

There are several reasons this is likely to be the case. First, while program staff may not be aware of specific instances of these three problems in their programs, these issues are difficult to identify and unlikely to be self-reported by youth participants. Second, staff members are likely to be highly aware of the presence of these problems in the world at large. In addition, because these topics are so serious and potentially detrimental to the health of youth, program staff are likely to be highly interested in being prepared to address them, even if they only come up once or twice in their entire career as a youth worker. Finally, these are issues with which staff members may have personal experiences, thereby increasing their level of interest.

Levels of Staff Knowledge of Health Issues Among Youth

Similarly, we examined the issues about which respondents have a “moderate” or “high” level of knowledge, as well as a “low” level of knowledge. The following is a list of the five issues of which respondents have the highest levels of knowledge, combining those who indicated having “moderate” or “high” levels of knowledge.

Health Issue	% of Moderate - High
Personal hygiene	91.3
Physical activity	87.3
Child abuse	86.5
Nutrition	84.8
Stress	84.6

Moderate to High Levels of Knowledge

With the exception of child abuse, each of these issues is also part of the overall top ten health issues that staff identified as being present among youth in their programs. Given that the New York State Department of Health requires all licensed afterschool staff to be trained in recognizing and reporting child abuse, it is not surprising that this is an issue about which respondents have relatively high knowledge.

While a relatively high percentage (85%) of all survey respondents reported having a moderate or high level of knowledge about stress and nutrition, 50% of program staff in high school-age programs indicated that they have a low level of knowledge of these issues. This is significant because according to our survey data, stress and nutrition are the two issues reported to be present most frequently for high school-age participants.

Health Issue	% of Low
Diabetes	45.4
Lack of insurance	39.6
Eating disorders	37.4
LGBT issues	35.4
Oral health	30.5

Low Levels of Knowledge

As noted earlier in this report, lack of insurance, poor oral health, and LGBT issues were indicated as being highly prevalent in afterschool programs. It is interesting to note, therefore, that these are areas in which staff members also report having a low level of knowledge.

LGBT issues are indicated as present frequently in programs serving high school age youth. However, 60% of

staff serving high school age students indicated that they have a low level of knowledge of these issues, as opposed to only 35% of the whole survey population.

Our survey data indicates that diabetes is also a more relevant issue for high school-age participants than for younger children. A greater number (70%) of high school-age program staff also have a low level of knowledge of diabetes, as compared to those serving younger populations.

Staff Knowledge of Most Prevalent Health Issues Among Youth of All Ages

PASE looked at the percentages of respondents who reported having moderate to high levels of knowledge of the most prevalent health issues among youth. More than half of the respondents indicated having moderate to high levels of knowledge of all ten of the most prevalent issues. There are a variety of reasons why staff members might have a greater exposure to topics such as physical activity, nutrition, personal hygiene, stress, and sexual behaviors. Factors include the prevalence of the issues in their programs, media attention, and trainings. Many of these issues are also commonly encountered through personal experiences (e.g. self, family, and friends), which may also contribute to their knowledge of these topics.

This high level of knowledge is encouraging for those seeking to provide professional development in these areas. Since staff feel personally knowledgeable about these issues, it is likely that they will be eager to learn how to address and discuss these issues with their youth.



Physical activity builds teamwork skills and healthy youth at Liberty LEADS.



At Groove With Me, girls in Harlem stay active through dance.

Barriers to Addressing Youth Health Needs

In looking at the barriers to addressing the health needs of New York City’s youth, we combined survey answer options “barrier” and “significant barrier.”

While at first glance it would appear that programs face many significant barriers to addressing health issues with youth, closer analysis reveals a clustered set of barriers that can be addressed through targeted professional development. Training that helps staff understand how health can be integrated into a program’s existing structure, explores ways to interact with youth on issues of health, identifies the many community resources available to youth and programs, and builds the confidence of program staff to work on these issues will be key to enabling programs to address youth health issues on a day-to-day basis.

Barriers to Addressing Youth Needs	% of Respondents
Lack of funding for health-related programming	72.9
Not enough time in schedule to address issues	58.5
Lack of interest among youth in discussing issues	54.9
Lack of community resources for referral	53.7
Lack of training needed to work with youth on issues	48.8
Youth are uncomfortable discussing issues with staff	41.5
Health issues are not a priority of my organization	27.7
Organization prohibits the discussion of certain issues	15.5
I feel uncomfortable discussing issues with youth	10.4

Top Methods to Develop Staff Knowledge of Youth Health Issues

The survey also asked program staff to rate how useful certain methods would be for developing their knowledge of youth health issues. The results will help PASE determine how to most effectively disseminate information in the future.

It is not surprising that staff members rated workshops as the most useful method for developing knowledge. Workshops are an efficient way for staff members to learn new information and strategies that can be used immediately in their programs. They also provide staff with a safe venue in which to reflect as well as interact with and learn from others who are struggling with the same topic, and are also the way in which staff are most accustomed to developing knowledge through PASE.

More than 80% of respondents indicated that the most useful methods for developing their knowledge are workshops with hands-on experience and practice or discussion. These methods were followed by small conferences (64%) and videos (55%).



Afterschool programs are ideal places for kids to acquire healthy habits.



Next Steps

Moving forward, PASE will work to build on the information obtained through the Survey on Children's Health in several ways.

In the coming year, PASE will offer workshops on several of the key issues identified. These workshops will be open to the entire afterschool field in New York City and offer crucial information and skill-building opportunities for youth workers.

PASE will solicit feedback from participants in these workshops regarding their effectiveness as well as topics for additional or more in-depth training. PASE will continue to integrate health-related workshops into its Professional Development Institute based on this input and the results of the survey.

It is interesting to note that the analysis shows a range of areas of interest and knowledge amongst the respondents. Of particular interest is that areas in which respondents request more instruction are also areas that are prevalent in the community but may not be identified in the individual programs – such as mental health issues, child, and domestic abuse, and sexual behaviors. These are also issues that can be overlooked because they are difficult areas for intervention by untrained staff.

One approach to these areas of interest is to look at them as healthy lifestyle choices. This approach can reduce the fear or stigma surrounding health and fitness issues, and enable staff of youth-serving programs to recognize health issues that are present, and to intervene in ways that prevent harm to the child, and help children and families access the proper resources. PASE trainings will include strategies for promoting the awareness of health issues among children and families without singling out any specific child.

In addition, PASE plans to work with organizations and networks of youth-serving organizations on other cities to replicate the Children's Healthy Survey. The results of these additional surveys will be analyzed and compared to the results of the New York City survey to ascertain areas of difference and overlap.

PASE will also present the findings of the New York City Children's Health Survey at national conferences and meetings, as well as to a citywide audience through a public forum on November 7, 2008.

For more information about the Children's Health Survey or other PASE research, please contact us at 212-571-2664.

End Notes

¹<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/healthtopics/index.htm>

²<http://www.diabetes.org/diabetesnewsarticle.jsp?storyId=15351710&filename=20070623/ADA200706231182625856641E.DIT.xml>

³The remaining programs served a mix of age groups and are not included in this section.

⁴While the data set was very limited for high school programs, the issues highlighted are consistent with observation of the field and anecdotal knowledge about programs.



Children's Health Advisory Council Members, 2008-2009

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About PASE

The Partnership for After School Education (PASE) is a child-focused organization that promotes and supports quality afterschool programs, particularly those serving young people from underserved communities.

PASE:

- leads a network of individuals and organizations committed to afterschool excellence
- is a recognized leader and expert in the field of afterschool education
- provides training and technical assistance to its network and beyond
- consults with organizations to build their capacity and sustainability
- convenes afterschool leaders and others from allied professions
- acts as a laboratory for innovative afterschool programs and practices
- recognizes outstanding afterschool staff
- advocates for the afterschool field

Every day in New York City, more than 500,000 young people in low-income communities are provided safe and enriching environments in afterschool programs run by community-based organizations. PASE recognizes the crucial role these programs play in fostering young people's intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual growth. PASE believes that academic skills should be integrated into all aspects of an afterschool program; that parents, youth and community members need to have input into program development; and that programs should make a commitment to be inclusive, foster cultural diversity, and build community.

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