

College Opportunities for After-School Workers:

**Report on the First-Year Implementation of
the Center for After-School Excellence
Certificate Programs**

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COLLEGE OPPORTUNITIES FOR AFTER-SCHOOL WORKERS:

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Summary

The mission of the Center for After-School Excellence, founded with support from The After-School Corporation (TASC) and the Atlantic Philanthropies in 2006, is to improve the skills, capacities, and knowledge of the staff who design, administer, and deliver after-school services to children and youth. As part of this mission, in Fall 2007 the Center launched a university-based program for staff who serve New York City youth in after-school programs, through a one-year certificate program in after-school studies offered in partnership with the City University of New York (CUNY). The Center contracted with Policy Studies Associates (PSA) to conduct a three-year evaluation of the implementation of its university-based programs and of the experiences and benefits accruing to program participants. This report describes the first year of implementation of the certificate courses and participant experiences in the program.

In its first year of implementation, the Center sponsored a one-year certificate program that provided an opportunity for after-school workers to gain a foundation of skills and knowledge in education and youth development through college coursework provided at five CUNY campuses: Hostos Community College, Kingsborough Community College, LaGuardia Community College, Medgar Evers College, and York College. Through extensive recruitment efforts and partnerships with community-based and government agencies that serve as provider organizations for after-school programming in New York City, the Center recruited 94 certificate program participants during the first year, of whom 75 completed the certificate program. According to Center staff, 49 completers registered to continue classes through the Center for a second year, comparable to the CUNY system retention rate for first-year students (66 percent).

On average, participants had seven years of experience in the after-school field and relatively little exposure to college-level classes prior to enrolling in the certificate courses. Thirty-three percent of participants had not participated in formal schooling beyond a high school diploma or GED, and the Center estimates that 50 percent of participants had previously withdrawn from college programs because of academic challenges. Certificate program participants enrolled in the program to improve their ability to be effective youth workers (67 percent), earn credits towards a college degree (55 percent), serve as positive role models for youth (46 percent), and advance their careers (44 percent).

Many certificate program participants entered the program with extensive knowledge about working with and motivating youth, but 46 percent of participants were concerned about their ability to succeed in an academic setting. To address these concerns and to enhance the overall participant experience, participants received incentives, support, and encouragement from several sources: the Center, their employer, the CUNY college in which they enrolled, and their peers. Participants were most enthusiastic about the supports received from the Center and their

peers. Ninety-six percent of participants agreed that their participation in the program was encouraged by the Center, and 88 percent said their participation was encouraged by peers. Fifty-four percent of participants reported receiving incentives from their employers. The most frequent incentive reported was the opportunity for a pay raise (19 percent).

Approximately 80 percent of after-school workers who had enrolled in the certificate courses completed the program. To complete the certificate program, participants took three to four courses on topics such as foundations of education, English and writing, youth development and psychology, computers and technology, communication, and special education. The participating CUNY campuses together offered 19 courses in Year 1. Participants typically had positive experiences in the courses, particularly in courses that taught them new material and were closely related to their work and life experiences, such as youth development and psychology courses.

Overall, participants were extremely satisfied with the Center-sponsored certificate program. Ninety-six percent of participants reported that they enjoyed the program, 98 percent felt proud of their accomplishments, and 100 percent would recommend the program to a co-worker or friend. In general, participants were also positive about the ways in which the certificate program helped them to improve their own academic abilities as well as their knowledge about working with youth. The majority of participants said they hoped to enroll in more college courses (83 percent) or in another certificate program with the Center (74 percent). In interviews, participants expressed their satisfaction with the certificate program:

Credit accumulation towards a degree is one of the most valuable things [in the program].

The program has given me a new lease on life. I felt trapped with no options. I feel empowered and energized. I didn't think I would feel that way again.

In the first year of implementation of its certificate program, the Center achieved a high level of participant satisfaction with the program and the supports offered, a relatively high level of certificate completion, and served as a foundation for participants' future educational plans. Key findings and recommendations of the first year of the certificate program include:

- The Center's partnerships with community-based and government agencies enhanced recruitment efforts. Agencies reported that efforts could be further improved by extending the application period and better distinguishing the certificate program from typical trainings available to after-school workers.
- Support from the Center and participants' employers, college campuses, and peers contributed significantly to the positive experiences of participants. Participants recommended that the Center incorporate more opportunities for peer interaction, academic tutoring, and mentoring to improve the supports in the program.
- Participants entered the certificate program with diverse academic abilities, and most participants reported a desire to continue their education after completing

the certificate program. Professors reported that further developing participants' academic skills, including writing and study skills, could help participants succeed in the certificate program and in their continued education.

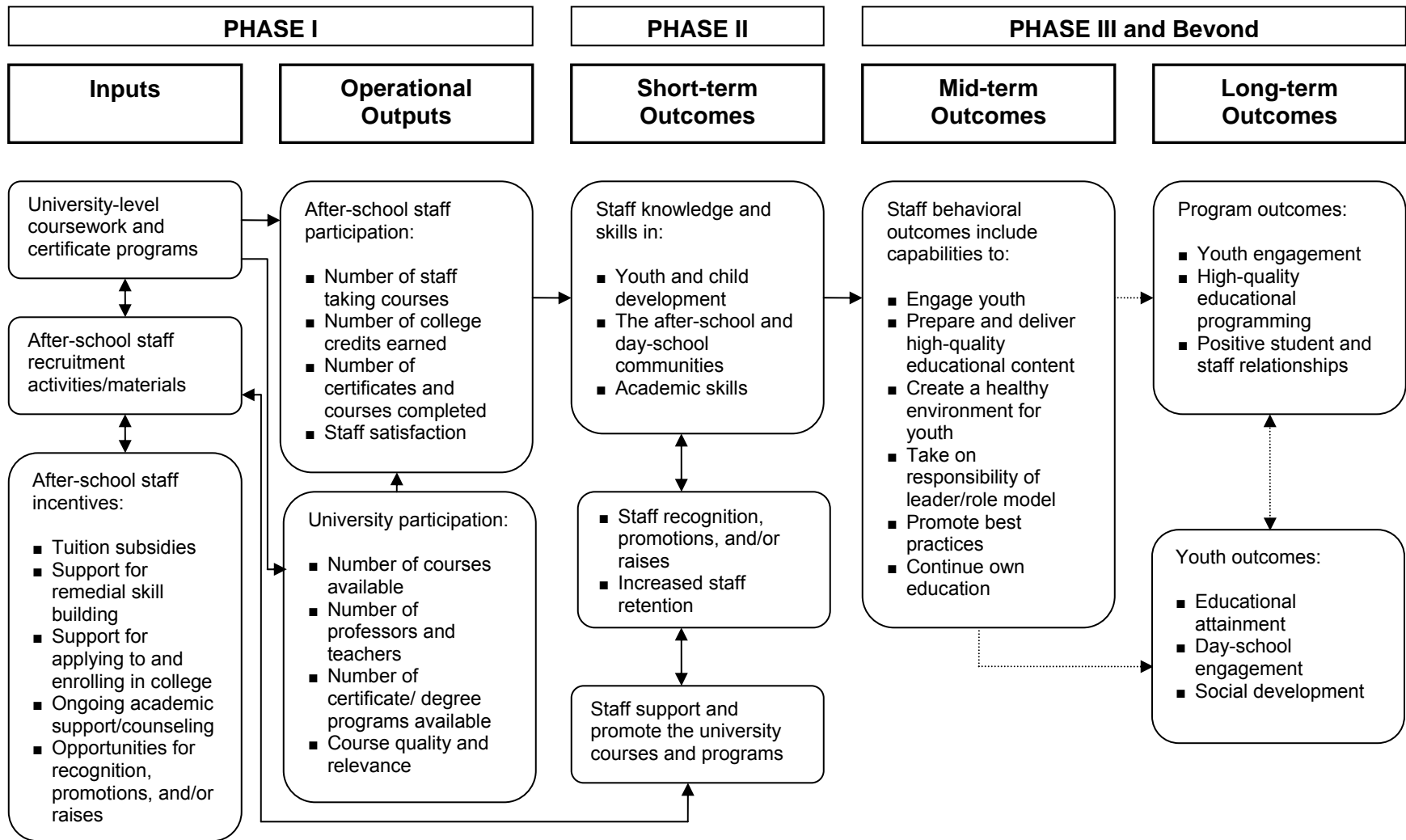
- Participants reported completing the certificate program with improved educational abilities (94 percent) and increased knowledge about working with youth (92 percent). To provide more opportunities to grow and learn, participants reported wanting the Center to offer courses on leadership in after-school, special education, and subjects that would improve their ability to assist youth in homework activities.
- Participants and community-based and government agencies that provide after-school programming valued the Center's certificate program and believed that it is a step in professionalizing the after-school field. Participants reported that deepening the program's commitment to the after-school field—for example, by employing more professors with after-school experience—would further improve the program.

Certificate Program Overview

The Center for After-School Excellence launched its university-based programs for after-school staff within a context of increasingly high expectations for the impact of after-school programs on the educational and social outcomes of their youth participants. Several recent studies of after-school programming in New York City have linked staff qualifications to the quality of after-school programming (Reisner, White, Russell, & Birmingham, 2004; Russell, Mielke, & Reisner, 2008), yet a quarter of after-school workers have no more education than a high school diploma and, of the workers with some higher education, many do not have a degree related to education or youth services (National Afterschool Association, 2006). Furthermore, after-school workers have few opportunities to enter a college program specific to after-school studies, unlike their peers in teaching or social services roles. Building the capacity of after-school workers has increasingly become a focus in the field, with several training and certificate programs being developed nationally, including those at the Center for After-School Excellence, the Center for Summer Learning, Arcadia University, and Foundations, Inc.

As illustrated in Exhibit 1, the Center's services, including university-level coursework combined with incentives and supports for participating students, were specifically designed to address the need for improved after-school staff capacity in New York City. Through coursework and certificate programs, students earn college credits that can be applied toward a degree and take courses that can build their skills and knowledge as after-school workers. In the near term, participation in these courses is intended to improve staff knowledge about youth development, improve the academic skills of after-school staff members, and contribute to a sense of professionalization in the after-school field and an increased retention of staff members. Longer term, it is anticipated that participation in the Center's programs will change the teaching practices of after-school staff by improving their ability to deliver high-quality content, take on leadership responsibilities within their programs, and continue to develop their own skills.

Exhibit 1
The Center for After-School Excellence Theory of Change



Ultimately, these improvements in staff capacity are expected to lead to higher-quality programming in after-school settings and improved educational and social outcomes for youth enrolled in after-school.

In its first year of implementation, the Center sponsored a one-year certificate program that provided an opportunity for after-school workers to gain a foundation of skills and knowledge in education and youth development through college coursework at five CUNY campuses. Acknowledging the needs of its targeted students, the Center also offered many supports to students, including basic-skills coursework necessary for success in college, tutoring services, and individualized supports and incentives. Over the next several years, the Center intends to scale up its programs to further professionalize the field of after-school studies and provide opportunities for university-level studies at many levels, including a graduate-level certificate course beginning in Fall 2008.

Evaluation Approaches and Data Collection

Research Questions

The Center has engaged PSA to conduct a three-year evaluation of the phased implementation of its university-based programs for after-school staff. The evaluation questions, aligned with the theory of change, focus on the implementation of the programs and on the extent to which the Center's activities result in outcomes that reflect improvement in staff qualifications, program quality, and youth development. These include:

- Are the Center's university-based programs being implemented in ways that suggest that the Center is on a path to achieving its mission? Do available courses, support opportunities, and incentives meet the needs of candidates for the Center's courses and programs? Are participants satisfied with the content and quality of these services?
- Is the Center achieving the outcomes anticipated in its mission? Do participants improve their knowledge and skills in relevant areas? What are the educational and career experiences of certificate completers? How is the professional practice of completers affected by their learning experiences? How are after-school programs affected by the presence of completers?

This report presents findings from the first year of the Center's certificate program, focusing primarily on the first set of research questions. In Year 1, the Center established the certificate programs, recruited after-school staff, and offered incentives for participation in the program. In addition to examining those inputs, evaluators also examined the operational outputs of the program's implementation. The primary operational outputs in Year 1 included participation and satisfaction of participants with the courses offered. Future evaluation reports will continue to examine implementation as the Center scales up its program offerings, and will also examine the effects of program participation on students' professional practice, educational goals, and after-school program settings.

Year 1 Data Collection

This report relies on the following data sources:

- **Review of program and course documents**, including recruitment and enrollment forms and course documents such as course syllabi and handouts
- **Observations of courses** at each of the five participating CUNY campuses in Fall 2007 or Spring 2008
- **Interviews with Center staff** responsible for designing and implementing the certificate programs and for student recruitment, in Fall 2007
- **Group interviews with certificate course participants** in Fall 2007 and Spring 2008; interview questions focused on the experiences of the participants involved in the program
- **Interviews with CUNY professors** responsible for teaching some of the certificate courses, in Spring 2008
- **Interviews with managers at the community-based organizations** operating after-school programs in which certificate students were employed, in Spring 2008
- **Online survey of certificate course participants** in Spring 2008, which asked questions about the experiences, course satisfaction, supports, and challenges of participants

The evaluation had a 73 percent response rate among program completers. Survey responses were also received from seven participants who had dropped out of the program

- **The Center's participant database**, containing information about participant characteristics

Certificate Program Implementation

Certificate Courses

During the 2007-08 school year, the first year of implementation, the Center for After-School Excellence sponsored certificate programs at five CUNY campuses: Hostos Community College, Kingsborough Community College, LaGuardia Community College, Medgar Evers College, and York College. As described in Exhibit 2, the certificate programs at each campus were not identical in terms of the courses offered, but the intention was the same in each: to improve the skills and knowledge of after-school workers so that they could in turn improve the

quality of services provided to youth in after-school programs in New York City and improve their own academic abilities.

Exhibit 2
Overview of Certificate Programs, by CUNY Campus

	Hostos	Kingsborough	LaGuardia	Medgar Evers	York
Total Number of Participants ¹	32	7	9	19	8
Certificate Program	Foundations in After-School	Foundations in After-School	Foundations in After-School	Foundations in After-School	Excellence in After-School
Number of Credits	9	9	9	9	10
Courses Offered	Foundations of Education General Psychology <u>Or</u> Adolescent Development Introduction to Special Education	Foundations of American Education General Psychology Introduction to Computer Concepts	Foundations of American Education Reflection and Writing for After-school Workers Communication in the Professional Setting <u>Or</u> Introduction to Computers and their Applications	Group and Family Dynamics Foundations of Youth Services Foundations of Educational Psychology: Middle Childhood <u>Or</u> College Composition I	Youth Development: Theory and Practice Introduction to College Writing Teaching with Multimedia Technology Games and Sports for Children

¹ Does not include participants who dropped out of the certificate program

The program at York College was intended for after-school workers with some college experience and involved a four-course, ten-credit certificate program entitled Excellence in After-School. In contrast, the Foundations in After-School sequence offered at the other campuses was intended to be an entry-level program for after-school workers with little or no college. These certificate programs involved a three-course, nine-credit course of study. All participants were required to meet CUNY entrance requirements.

Participants were required to take a youth development or psychology course at each campus except LaGuardia. Hostos, Kingsborough, and LaGuardia campuses required a Foundations of Education course, and LaGuardia, Medgar Evers, and York required an English or writing course during the 2007-08 school year. Participants enrolled at Kingsborough, LaGuardia, and York were also required to take a computer and technology course, such as Introduction to Computer Concepts, Introduction to Computers and their Applications, Introduction to Technology/Academic Computing, or Teaching with Multimedia Technology. The Hostos program required students to take an Introduction to Special Education course. Participants enrolled at York were required to take a Games and Sports for Children course. In the first year of implementation, the courses offered through the certificate program were typically courses that were already offered at each campus, although some of the professors modified courses to support certificate students' skill levels and interests. In the future, the Center hopes to develop courses more specifically targeted to the needs of after-school workers. Courses customized for Center participants will be offered for the first time starting in Fall 2008.

For analysis purposes, evaluators categorized the courses offered at each of the campuses into the following subject areas: Foundations of Education, English and/or writing, youth development and psychology, and computers and technology. The courses on special education and on games were not collapsed into these categories and were examined independently.

Partnerships with Provider Organizations

As part of its first year of implementation, the Center established partnerships with community-based and government agencies that serve as provider organizations for after-school programming in New York City. The Center recruited a group of community-based organizations to become “Partners in Excellence” and to support participation of their staff members in the certificate-programs. As one noted, “We’re always encouraging [staff] to participate in college. We wanted to be part of the shift toward professionalizing the [after-school] field.” These Partners in Excellence assigned a staff member to serve as a liaison between the organization and the Center, and agreed to help identify participants for the certificate programs, support these participants in their efforts, establish a formal mentoring relationship between veteran staff and participants, offer flexibility in work scheduling to participants, and make computers available to participants. Partners in Excellence also promised to offer an incentive for program completion such as promotion, change of job title, recognition ceremony, raise, or bonus. In the first year of programming, 24 provider organizations signed on as Partners in Excellence.

The Center also established a partnership with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), which operates after-school programming throughout New York City. The certificate program at Medgar Evers College exclusively targeted NYCHA staff working in Brooklyn-based programs; in addition, some NYCHA employees enrolled at other campuses. NYCHA borough directors and managers encouraged the participation of staff members who they felt would do well in the program.

Participant Recruitment

Recruitment was a somewhat challenging process in the first year of the Center’s certificate program, largely due to the difficulty of marketing this intensive, credit-earning course sequence, which differed significantly from the various training workshops and one-time courses to which after-school program staff and their managers were accustomed. Participants were recruited in three cohorts throughout the year: the first cohort began in Fall 2007, and the second and third cohorts (including the NYCHA cohort) started in Winter/Spring 2008. The Center conducted extensive outreach efforts through the Partners in Excellence and other provider organizations, its electronic newsletter, and word-of-mouth to recruit and enroll participants in the first year. The Center also held open houses at the five CUNY campuses and at the Center to enhance recruitment efforts. As one Center staff member noted in Fall 2007, “The overwhelming concern is recruitment. We had talked about getting 100 students. In the first semester, 95 total people are enrolled in the courses, including regular CUNY students. Forty-six [were recruited through] the Center.”

Another Center staff member noted that, “Because we’re just starting out there was some apprehension. ... [The potential participants asked] ‘What are the benefits and is this [program] for real?’” The Center conducted informational sessions and outreach to encourage enrollment and continuation with the program as participants realized the commitment involved. “The first Kingsborough class, I sat with students and spoke to them. A few did mention that they didn’t believe it was a serious program. They took it as a training. They didn’t see we were serious...they didn’t understand the fact that these are for credits.”

The Partners in Excellence organizations were instrumental in recruiting youth workers whom they employed to participate in the certificate program. Typically, the organizations notified their staff about the certificate opportunity through their after-school program directors and supervisors. Most openly advertised the program and recruited all interested staff members, while a small number of sites selected staff members they felt would benefit most from the program. “We nominated staff members that have been with the after-school program for several years and have a genuine interest in pursuing the [certificate program] degree.” Outreach through the provider organizations proved to be successful: of the participants who responded to the survey, most reported learning about the certificate program through their employer (62 percent) or a co-worker (13 percent). Twenty percent learned of the program directly through the Center, and only 5 percent found out about the certificate opportunity through CUNY or another source.

Nonetheless, the Partners in Excellence experienced difficulty in finding staff willing to make the commitment to the certificate program despite the high levels of initial interest. One representative said, “Initially, there were ten to twelve people interested. In the final application stages there were four people and one person ended up enrolling.” Partners in Excellence cited the short application period as a barrier to enrollment in both semesters:

I would like to see a change in the time frame for application to the certificate program. It’s too rushed now. We’re not able to give enough attention to the program in two weeks.

Hopefully, we will be able to start advertising and recruiting earlier and will get more people interested in the future. I hope to send more people to the certificate program.

We would like to make [the recruitment process] more competitive, but we need to get more people to follow through on their interest first.

Despite these start-up challenges, the Center successfully recruited 94 certificate program participants who went on to complete the certificate program during the first year of implementation; 75 of these participants completed the program. The majority of participants (32) were enrolled at Hostos Community College. Nineteen participants attended Medgar Evers College, nine attended LaGuardia Community College, eight attended York College, and seven attended Kingsborough Community College. The majority of participants reported that they selected the CUNY campus in which to enroll based on its location (67 percent) or the convenience of the class schedule (31 percent). Fewer reported that they were attracted to the campus because the courses best fit their individual needs and goals (20 percent), the reputation of the college (9 percent), or their employer suggested the campus (6 percent).

Student Characteristics

The certificate program appealed to after-school workers with widely varied backgrounds. However, to the initial surprise of Center staff, participants were more likely to be older and to have more work experience than the college-aged youth workers who typically constitute the after-school work force in New York City. “We ended up recruiting almost exclusively from those not in college, with no degree, as opposed to the larger segment of the after-school workforce [who were already college students].” According to data collected by the Center, the median age for participants was 31 years, with ages ranging from 18 to 62. The majority of certificate program participants (72 percent) were female, and 90 percent of participants were either African American or Hispanic.

In survey responses, certificate participants reported that they had worked in the after-school field one to 35 years, with a median level of experience of seven years. This experience level suggests that the average participant had a commitment to the after-school field prior to participation in the certificate program. Fifty-seven percent were currently employed in after-school programs full-time (35 hours or more), and 43 percent were employed part-time. Their current roles in after-school also reflected a fairly high level of experience: while the majority described themselves as “line staff,” either leading program activities (37 percent) or assisting in program activities (13 percent), more than a quarter said that they were program directors (26 percent). Only two participants described themselves as primarily performing administrative duties, and one reported being an educational specialist.

Overall, participants had relatively little exposure to college-level classes prior to enrolling in the certificate courses. For 33 percent of participants, the highest level of education completed prior to the program was a high school diploma or GED. Forty-eight percent had taken some college classes, but few had earned a degree. Seven percent of participants had earned a two-year college degree, and another 7 percent held a four-year college degree. Four percent had done graduate work. None of the participants reported being certified to teach.

Evaluators were not able to discern differences in the characteristics of program completers and non-completers based on data available in Year 1. However, the Center estimates that 50 percent of participants had withdrawn from college prior to the certificate program due to academic challenges, compared to 65 percent of non-completers. This suggests that non-completers may have entered the program with lower academic skills and/or motivation compared to certificate completers. Future evaluation reports will further explore differences between these two groups of participants.

Reasons for Enrolling

Reflecting their experience in the after-school field, survey data suggest that the majority of participants enrolled in the certificate program to improve their ability to be an effective youth worker. As shown in Exhibit 3, 67 percent of participants said they enrolled in the program to advance their skills in working with youth, and 46 percent reported enrolling to serve as a role model for youth. Participants confirmed this desire in interviews:

The program is an opportunity for me to be a real benefit to my after-school program.

I'm taking courses I'm interested in because it's related to my work.

A fear in after-school is to have a child come up to me with a homework question I couldn't help them with.

Partners in Excellence also report encouraging staff members to enroll in the program so that they could serve as positive role models for youth:

We have a bridge to college program where the staff works with [youth] on the process of going to college. We prioritize students going to college, and it helps if our staff know about and advocate that process.

Exhibit 3 Reasons for Enrolling in the Certificate Program, in Percents

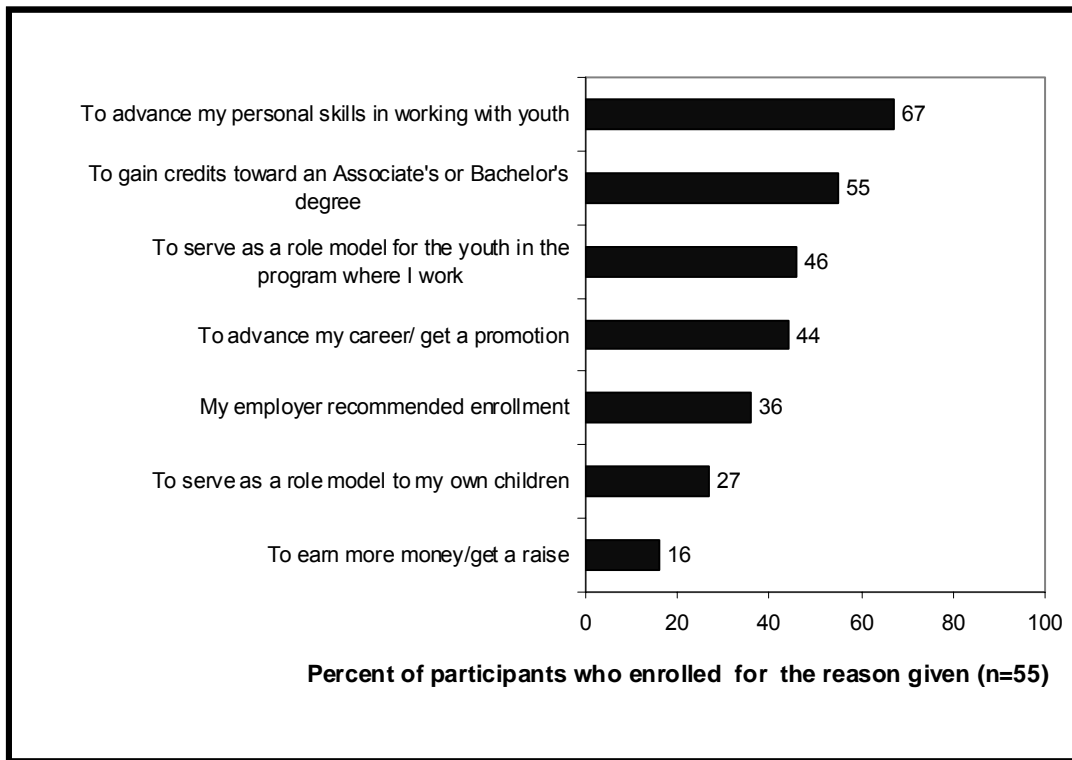


Exhibit reads: The percent of participants who enrolled in the certificate program to advance their personal skills in working with youth was 67 percent.

Participants also saw enrolling in the Center's certificate program as a unique opportunity to pursue a college education and further their careers. In survey responses, 55 percent of participants said they enrolled in the certificate program because they wanted to earn credits toward an Associate's or Bachelor's degree, and 44 percent considered certificate completion as

a way to advance their career or get a promotion. During interviews, participants expressed a strong desire to continue their education:

You need experience and education to continue to work in after-school...college is necessary to get to where we want to be.

I decided to take the classes because going back to school was something I wanted to do for a while.

I wanted to get the college experience. You're never too old to learn.

The certificate program is a step for getting back into school.

The certificate program was the perfect opportunity to go back to school.

Participant Experiences

As described above, the majority of participants enrolled in the certificate program motivated to learn but with little experience in higher education. These participants enrolled in the Center's certificate programs unsure of their ability and preparation to handle college-level coursework.

Participant Engagement

Participation. In general, certificate program participants reported that they regularly attended their courses and faced few ongoing barriers to participation. Participants reported a high level of attendance throughout the year in survey responses: 35 percent of participants reported missing one or two classes, and 16 percent attended every class. Thirty-one percent said that they missed three or four classes, while 18 percent missed five or more.

Although participants were motivated to attend class, the investment of time required by the certificate program, in addition to their regular employment and family commitments, was significant. Almost half of the participants (44 percent) reported that conflicts with family or personal obligations were a challenge for them, and about a quarter (20 percent) reported that they had conflicts with their work schedule. "It has been difficult for some ladies that are participating this year because they have to go home and cook and take care of the kids," explained one participant.

Retention. Overall, about 80 percent of after-school workers who had enrolled in the certificate courses completed the program (75 completers). By the end of the first year of implementation, 19 of the 94 recruited participants had dropped out without completing the certificate. According to Center staff, 49 certificate completers registered to continue taking courses through the Center for a second year; others reported plans to continue their studies outside of Center programs. According to the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and

Assessment, the average system-wide retention rate for students who enter an Associate program is approximately 66 percent (calculated as the percent of students who were enrolled in the subsequent Fall term), similar to the second-year retention expected for certificate completers. Data on CUNY attrition rates within a school year are not available.

Survey responses were received from seven participants who did not complete the program. These responses suggested that they dropped out primarily due to conflicts with family and personal obligations and challenges with transportation and parking. Among these seven participants, three plan to re-enroll in another certificate program with the Center, and five plan to enroll in more courses for college credit. Six said they plan to keep working in the after-school field, and four plan to continue working for their current employer.

Participant Confidence

Fear of inability to succeed. In survey responses, 46 percent of participants said that they were concerned about their ability to succeed in the program. This was a challenge that continued throughout the program, although most reported growing more confident and more comfortable with their own abilities:

Although I was fearful of my success and the reaction of [my] peers, I overcame anxiety and became confident that I would be successful in the program.

The most important result of my participation in the certificate program was becoming more comfortable with the idea of returning to school after so many years. I continue to have some fear, but it has gotten better.

We were all scared to go back to school.

Some of the staff are afraid to go to college, and this is their chance to demonstrate that they can go to college. Things get easier and easier once you start.

I've struggled because I've been out of school for so long. I've always considered words to be my enemy. But as I do more assignments, I'm becoming more comfortable.

Course professors were also aware of many participants' fears of attending college for the first time. "The students need to be more comfortable with the transition to school. They have low self-esteem. I bring myself down to make sure they understand. They are thirsty for knowledge when you get beyond that. I tell them, 'don't worry you'll get the concept,'" explained one professor.

Academic readiness. Overall, while professors reported that participants were motivated to learn, accommodating the wide range of skills and abilities in the program was a challenge in some classes. Despite participants' high level of motivation, many lacked the academic skills needed to succeed in college-level courses. Professors noted that participants often had poor writing and study skills. "Test-taking skills need to improve. The program needs to have a

component for study strategies and support,” explained one professor. “Writing skills were poor. They definitely need to take a writing course. I had to make a lot of changes to my syllabus because they were not able to complete the work,” said another. “Writing is a big concern. How do we improve their writing in such a short period of time?” asked a third.

However, professors were often impressed with participants’ insights about working with children as a result of their experience working with youth in after-school programs. During site visits, evaluators observed lively discussions in the youth development courses. Students shared their experiences in working with youth and applied their experiential knowledge to the coursework. One professor noted that the certificate program participants are “probably more determined and motivated” than other students who do not have the same levels of prior work experience.

While some participants struggled with the new experience of attending college, in interviews a smaller number of participants reported that they did not feel adequately challenged by the certificate program. One woman already enrolled in college said, “These classes are nothing compared to my other classes that I have taken in college.” Participants with higher levels of prior academic experience and substantial experience working with youth expressed not needing to “start from the bottom” in subject areas covered by the certificate courses. In survey data, the percent of participants who reported that the coursework was too easy ranged from 8 percent in youth development or psychology courses to 25 percent in computer courses.

Supports and Incentives

Participants in the Center’s certificate program received support and encouragement from: the Center, their employer, the CUNY college in which they enrolled, and their peers. As described below, participants were most enthusiastic about the supports received from the Center and their peers in encouraging them to remain enrolled in the program.

The layered support network available to certificate program participants was a critical element of the program. Participants relied on support from the Center, professors, employers, and peers at all stages of the program, particularly during the application process and in class. The support networks made students feel “at home” and comfortable in a new environment. One student attributed her continuing participation to the supports available. She said, “I would drop out if I didn’t have help and support.” Survey data reflected these findings: 96 percent of participants agreed that their participation in the program was encouraged by the Center. Similarly, most participants said their participation was encouraged by their peers (88 percent), by their employer (73 percent), and by their college (56 percent).

Supports from the Center. The Center offered varied incentives to the participants in the certificate programs, including tuition subsidies to cover the full cost of tuition and books. The Center also promised ongoing personal support and outreach to participants in all aspects of the academic process, including the application, class registration, and finding tutoring and help on campus. The Center also offered an orientation to participants prior to the start of classes, which

participants identified as an important step in helping them understand the program and the options available to them.

As illustrated in Exhibit 4, survey results confirmed that participants experienced high levels of support from Center staff, including general encouragement and friendly support (82 percent), help with the application process (71 percent), and help applying for financial aid (51 percent).

Exhibit 4
Supports from the Center, in Percents

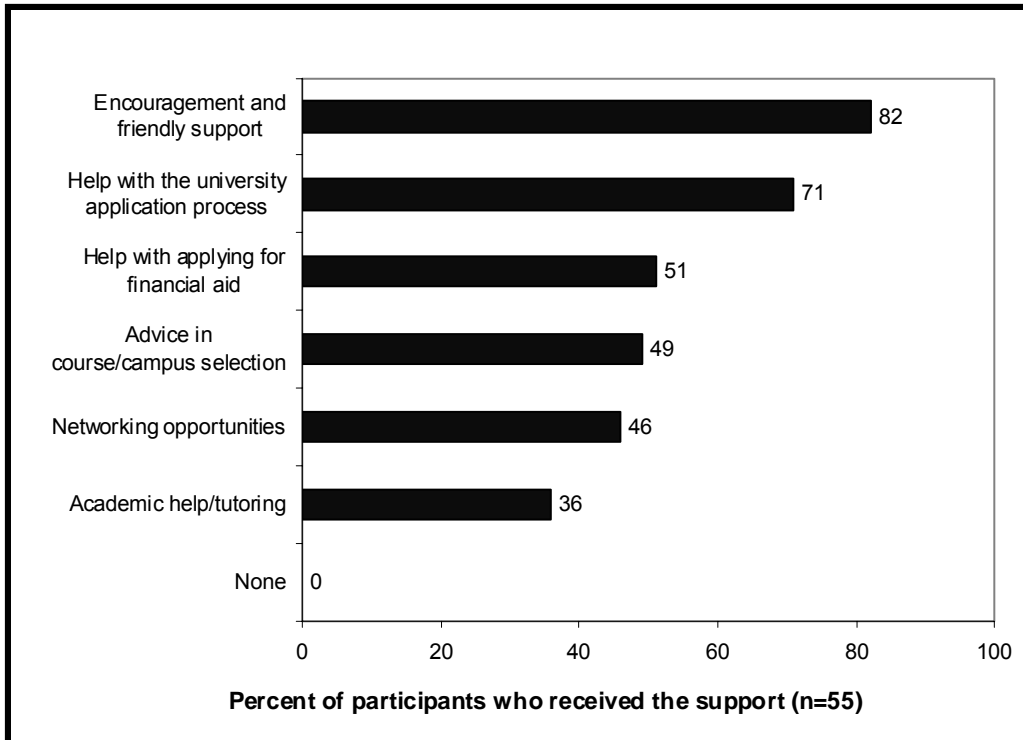


Exhibit reads: Eighty-two percent of participants said that they received encouragement and friendly support from the Center.

In interviews, participants were overwhelmingly positive about the willingness of Center staff to help them with a variety of issues:

The Center is great. They are always on call. Anything that would come up they will answer.

You get a personal email from the Center staff saying this might be up your alley, like job openings. The information was great. They are an excellent group of people.

The Center will answer questions about personal/mental issues or academic issues.

The Center staff ask for feedback and are always open.

Supports from provider organizations. As part of the Partners in Excellence program, participants' employers were also asked to offer incentives and supports for staff members participating in the Center's certificate programs. Prior research has shown that these supports from employers can play an important role in the success of college initiatives for staff. For example, in a recent study of a partnership between two community-based organizations and the New York City College of Technology, the Youth Development Institute found that a strong commitment of the organization to participants was a critical factor in student success, because the organizations were able to respond to participant needs faster than the college (Reilly, 2008).

In survey responses, however, participants reported receiving few incentives from their employers: 46 percent said that they did not receive any incentive at all. The most frequent incentive reported was the opportunity for a pay raise (19 percent), followed by a special recognition or ceremony (17 percent), opportunities for promotion (17 percent), and a stipend (10 percent).

Survey data suggest that participants were more likely to receive informal supports from their employer for their participation, rather than formal supports. As illustrated in Exhibit 5, 55 percent of participants said that they received encouragement from their employer, and 46 percent said their employer provided them with flexibility in scheduling work hours. Fewer reported receiving access to computers (18 percent), or a mentor (16 percent). In interviews, participants described the types of supports that employers provided:

My employer is always willing to help with papers and give me advice. They gave us mentors on site and send me [forward] e-mails from the Center.

My site director was really supportive and very supportive during the program orientation week when I was late all the time. She really understood and didn't dock pay.

My employer covered all of the application fees.

My employer has a mentoring program and a stipend; they match the Center's stipend.

Although the extent to which participants reported receiving support from their employer was generally limited to encouragement and flexibility with work schedules, some Partners in Excellence liaisons described support structures they developed to help participants in the certificate program:

We coach the participants with writing, with assignments, and some have personal challenges.

We try to give them all the assistance they need.

Right now the participants are developing a study group under the director. They are really helping each other with the program.

Exhibit 5 Supports from Employers, in Percents

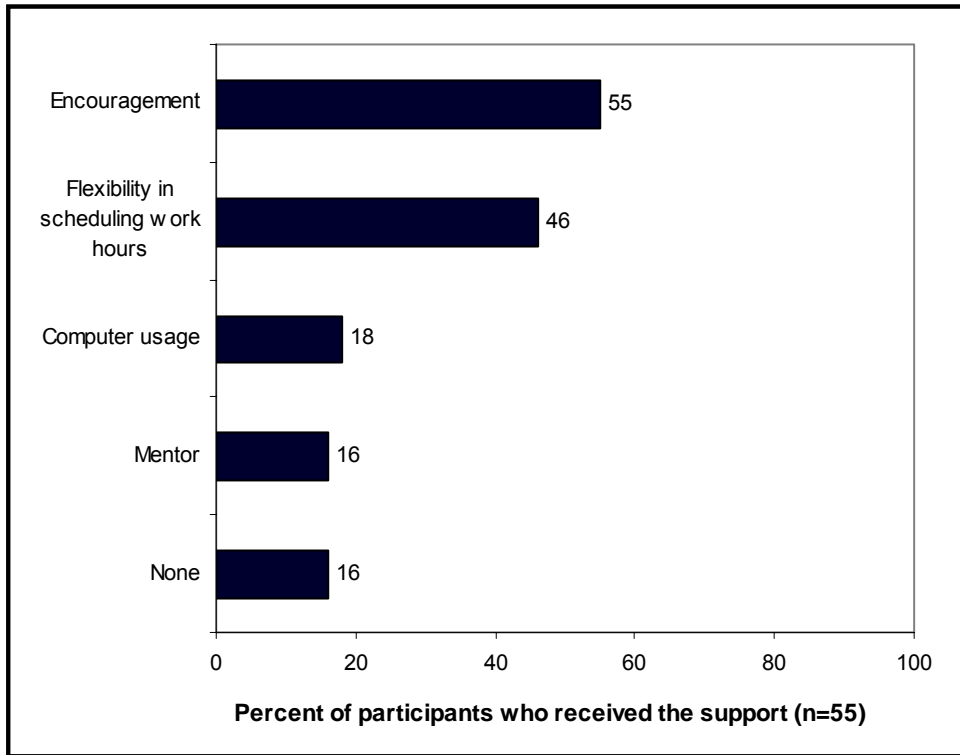


Exhibit reads: Fifty-five percent of participants said they received support in the form of encouragement from their employer.

Supports from CUNY colleges and professors. The level of support that participants received from CUNY staff varied by campus. At some campuses students were supported by administrative staff, including academic deans, while at other campuses students had no interaction with college staff beyond the necessary paperwork processes. “The college has been very helpful with registration, materials, and offering tutoring. They made it easier knowing all of us haven’t been in school for a long time,” explained one participant. “The education director is wonderful. We call and she takes care of everything on the administrative end. The dean is also wonderful. The teachers support us,” said another. The Youth Development Institute study of an initiative similar to the Center’s certificate program had found that the involvement of college leadership, such as an academic dean, was a critical factor in participants’ ability to obtain college supports (Reilly, 2008).

As illustrated in Exhibit 6, participants most commonly reported receiving academic supports from college staff: 44 percent received academic help and tutoring, and 42 percent received encouragement and friendly support.

Exhibit 6 Supports from CUNY Colleges, in Percents

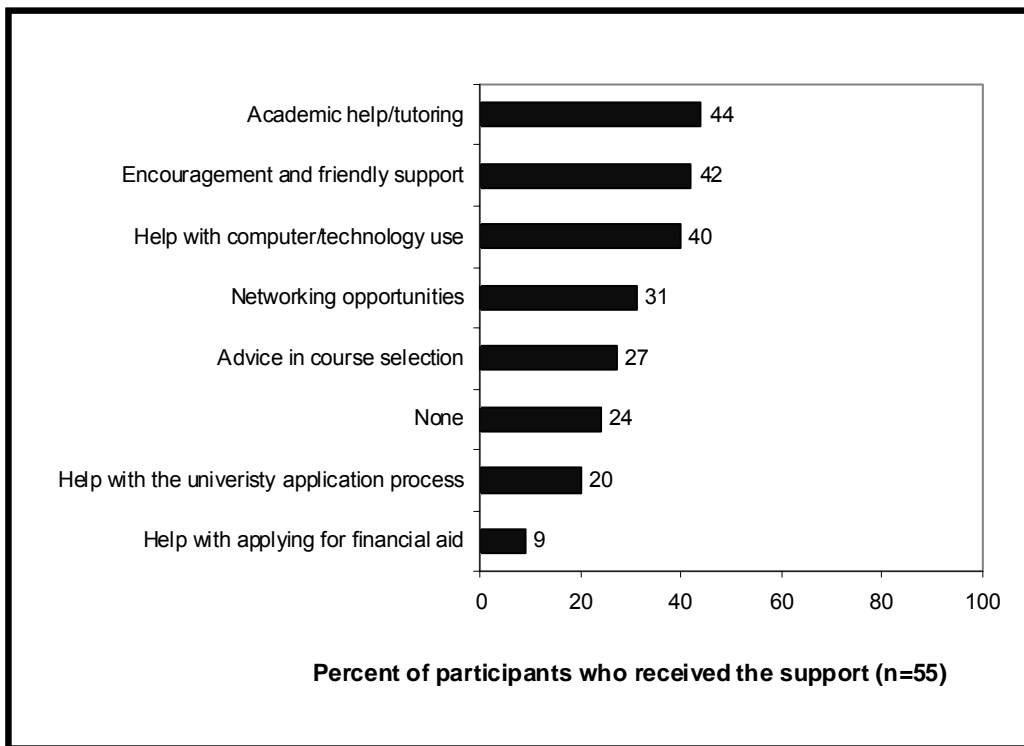


Exhibit reads: Forty-four percent of participants reported that they received academic help or tutoring support from the college in which they attended.

Overall professors were very supportive of the Center students, although their degree of familiarity with the Center's certificate program seemed to vary. Participants appreciated the efforts of professors to reach out to them and support them in their coursework. As one participant explained, "I'm only here because of the good professors." Another participant agreed: "My professor is excellent. She is really helping me build my confidence." Any dissatisfaction with the support from professors occurred when the relationship between what participants were learning in class and their roles serving as staff in after-school programs was not made clear:

The class doesn't relate clearly to what we're doing in after-school.

It would help if the teacher was an after-school person, and she related everything back to her own experiences.

The classes are for teachers and not after-school workers. One of the problems is that the class is targeted at teachers.

Participants also expressed a preference for professors with teaching styles that guided them through the learning process with visual cues. Some participants expressed frustration with

professors who “didn’t put anything on the board,” which caused them to not understand what points were most important.

Support from peers. The most important support participants received may have been the encouragement they gave each other, reflecting the importance of peer communities, as described in recent research. Many colleges use learning communities as a way to increase student engagement, build peer and faculty relationships, and promote academic success. Learning communities are usually small groups of students who gather for group activities outside of class to focus on common coursework. In a study of a program at Kingsborough Community College, Scrivener et al. (2008) found that learning communities improved students’ college experience by making students feel more engaged in the college process. The Youth Development Institute (Reilly, 2008) also found that learning communities reduced students’ sense of isolation.

The structure of the certificate program allowed cohorts of participants at each campus to bond and establish a community within the program. The larger cohorts benefited more from peer support than did the smaller cohorts, although students in smaller cohorts in the spring semester acknowledged receiving support from the fall cohort and sometimes from general college students who were also enrolled in their classes. Classes often required group work, which allowed the participants to work collaboratively and support each other. Peer support also enhanced the learning experience because participants were able to comfortably and openly share their experiences in class. In interviews, participants identified their peer support system as a highlight of the certificate program:

This has been a learning experience through each other. There’s a lot that I didn’t know that I learned through others.

I like it here because others are interesting and interested in what I’m interested in. We learn about different positions in different programs because we are together. When we go back to our programs, we can understand more because we share experiences.

We can push each other and not let one of the group members fall behind because we are a group.

There’s a real bonding among students as peers.

We work as a team. We scold each other.

We are competitive with each other, but we really support each other. We call each other about our programs.

Everyone is willing to help. We know there is nothing wrong with calling any of our fellow students to ask for help.

Not going back to school for so long [was an issue for me] and talking with peers is so helpful.

Course Experiences

Participants in the Center-sponsored certificate courses enrolled with the dual goal of improving their skills in working in after-school programs and also their own academic skills. Two major themes emerged from participants' survey responses to questions about their experiences in various courses: First, participants placed high importance on gaining a deeper understanding of themselves and youth. Second, participants wanted to be able to apply what they learned in class to their work and life experiences.

Youth development and psychology courses. Reflecting their desire for courses that provided both a theoretical understanding of new concepts and knowledge that they could apply directly to their work in after-school settings, participants were unanimously positive about their experience in courses that evaluators categorized as "youth development" (courses with titles such as General Psychology, Adolescent Development, Group and Family Dynamics, Youth Development: Theory and Practice). More than half of the 36 participants who reported taking one of these courses strongly agreed that they saw how the course applied to their work with youth (57 percent), that the course taught them new material (53 percent), and that they were satisfied with the course (51 percent). Virtually no participants disagreed with any of these statements, as illustrated in Exhibit 7. Participants were also very positive about the ways in which these courses helped them improve their skills as an after-school worker and also their academic skills.

Most participants entered the certificate program with informal knowledge of human development and how to work with youth. Through the certificate program coursework in youth development, participants were able to validate their informal knowledge with formal knowledge. Obtaining a deeper understanding of themselves and youth was often an empowering experience for participants:

The class helps me understand myself better. I get to look back at why I do the things I do now and why people do the things they do.

The class helps us understand the people we work with, the youth and the parents. It gives us more knowledge of how to deal with situations that come up.

You learn to see people differently and how to identify with people.

It helps us to better understand working with kids. I learned more about how to approach kids on their level and to make them more comfortable.

I can understand and be more patient with people. I can lend out a helping hand because I understand more.

When I look at child who behaves poorly, I [now] look at them different instead of judging. I intervene or say this is an overactive child instead of a boy who can't stay still.

Exhibit 7 Experiences in Youth Development Courses, in Percents

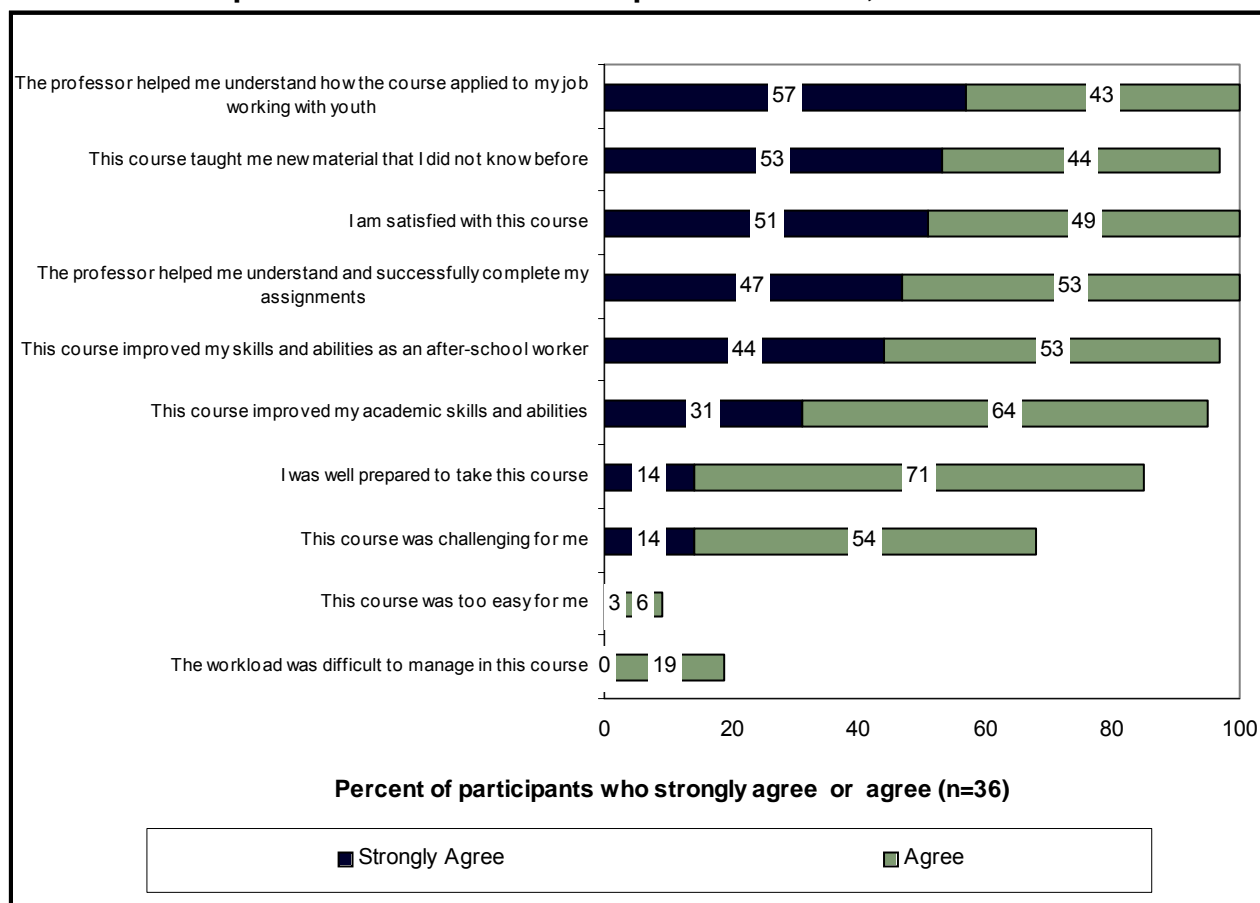


Exhibit reads: Fifty-seven percent of participants strongly agreed that their professor helped them understand how the course applied to their job in working with youth, and 43 percent agreed.

In our youth development class, we always talk about our programs more than the theory. I was intimidated by class at first, but we really relate class to what we are doing in our jobs. We see theory in practice.

Family dynamics has some benefits for my work performance with kids. It lets us help kids better and work better with kids.

I've learned how not to personalize things with my participants. By doing this, it has helped me build a better relationship with the kids.

My participation has helped me in regards to providing more quality service in the field of youth development.

Foundations of Education courses. Twenty-nine survey respondents said that they had taken a Foundations of Education course as part of the certificate program. Overall, as illustrated in Exhibit 8, participants also reported a high degree of satisfaction with this course, although to

Exhibit 8 Experiences in Foundations of Education Courses, in Percents

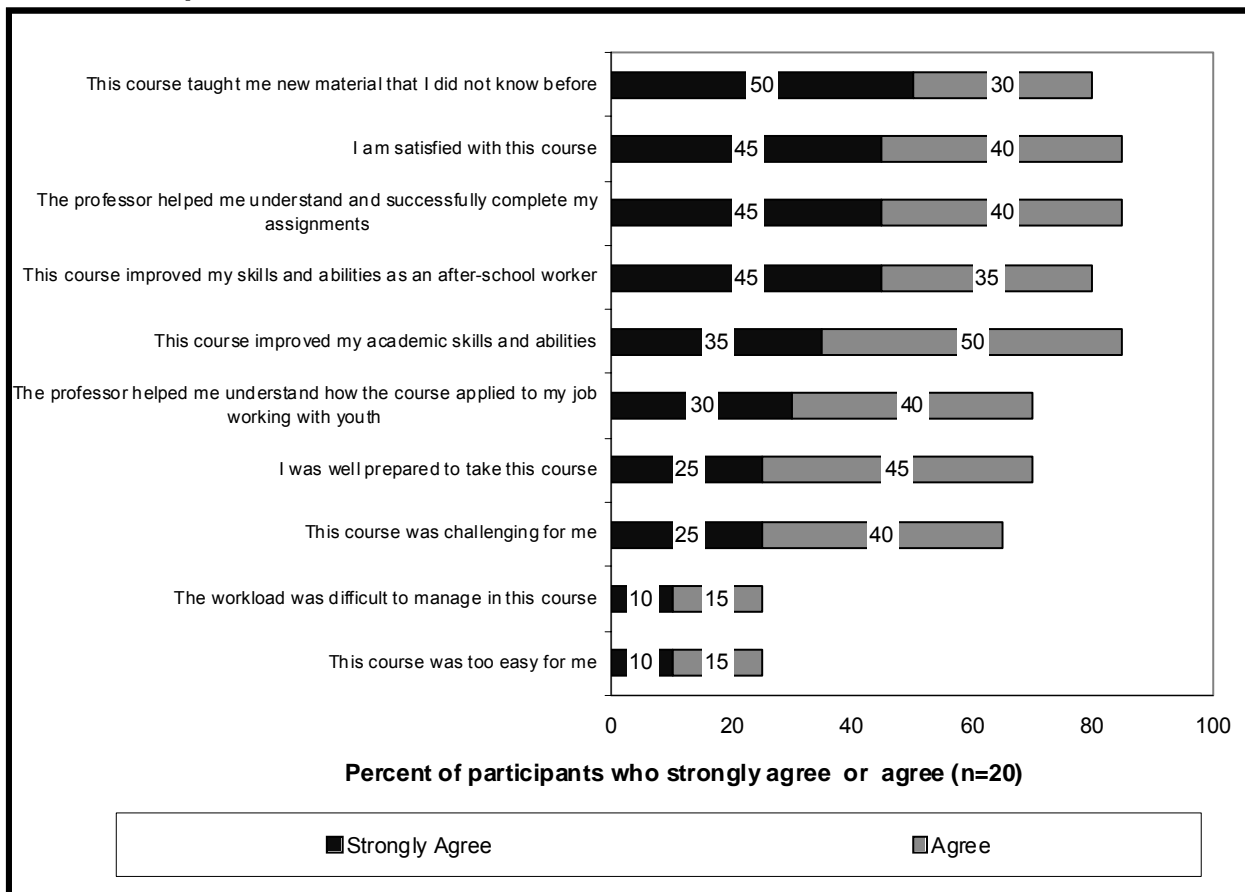


Exhibit reads: Forty-eight percent of participants strongly agreed that their Foundations in Education course taught them new material that they did not know before, and another 48 percent agreed.

a somewhat lesser extent than in the youth development courses. Overall, participants also appreciated the applicability of these education course to their work in after-school: a total of 93 percent agreed that the course improved their skills and abilities as an after-school or youth worker (38 percent strongly agreed), and 86 percent agreed that the professor helped them understand how the course applied to their job (38 percent strongly agreed). Interview responses also reflected the value that participants placed on better understanding the education process:

We need to understand the school setting and how it fits with the after-school setting.

I'm not sure about the foundations class, but I hope it gives me insight on how to teach and background on teaching.

In general, participants also reported that the Foundations of Education course improved their skills and knowledge. Ninety-six percent agreed that the course taught them new material (48 percent strongly agreed), and 94 percent agreed that the course improved their academic skills and abilities (35 percent strongly agreed).

English and writing courses. In course observations, evaluators noted that participants struggled with the content and concepts of the English and writing courses, perhaps because participants considered these courses to be more academic and less directly linked to their experiences as youth workers than were the education and development courses. This is reflected in participant survey responses, as shown in Exhibit 9. Although most participants reported that they were satisfied with the courses (56 percent strongly agreed and 40 percent agreed) and with the support from the professors, just under a third (32 percent) said that the course either improved their abilities as an after-school worker or improved their academic skills.

**Exhibit 9
Experiences in English and Writing Courses, in Percents**

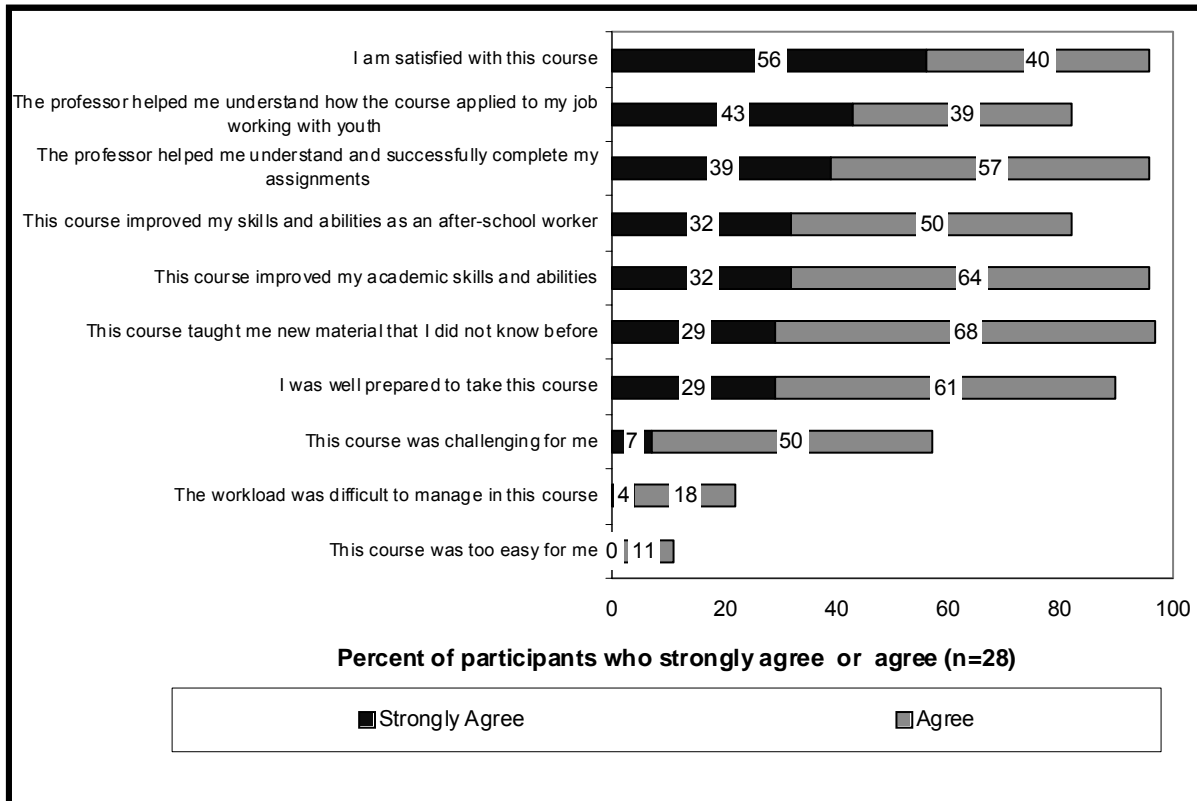


Exhibit reads: Fifty-six percent of participants strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their English/writing course. Forty percent agreed with this statement.

Nonetheless, participants saw the value of these courses for their jobs: 43 percent strongly agreed that the professor helped them understand how the course applied to their job, and another 39 percent agreed. This sentiment was also described in interviews:

The writing class will definitely help when helping students with writing.

We all write reports in our jobs. Now we know how to write better.

I'm trying to apply what the teacher said. I apply everything at work and home.

We're learning how to communicate. I'm trying to apply it in daily life now. I want people to tell me when they don't understand me.

Computer and technology courses. The certificate program also offered participants the opportunities to take classes related to computers and multimedia technology. These classes presented many participants with the chance to learn new skills: 50 percent of the 20 participants who took the computer courses strongly agreed that the course taught them new material, and 30 percent agreed with this statement, as illustrated in Exhibit 10. In interviews, participants discussed the challenges they experienced related to being prepared for college courses. Participants who had been out of school for a long time were particularly concerned with the challenges of academic work. Many felt that attending college was like learning a new language. “We don’t have enough time. It was my first course in computers...I learned from it but I couldn’t keep up with the pace,” explained one participant.

Exhibit 10
Experiences in Computer and Technology Courses, in Percents

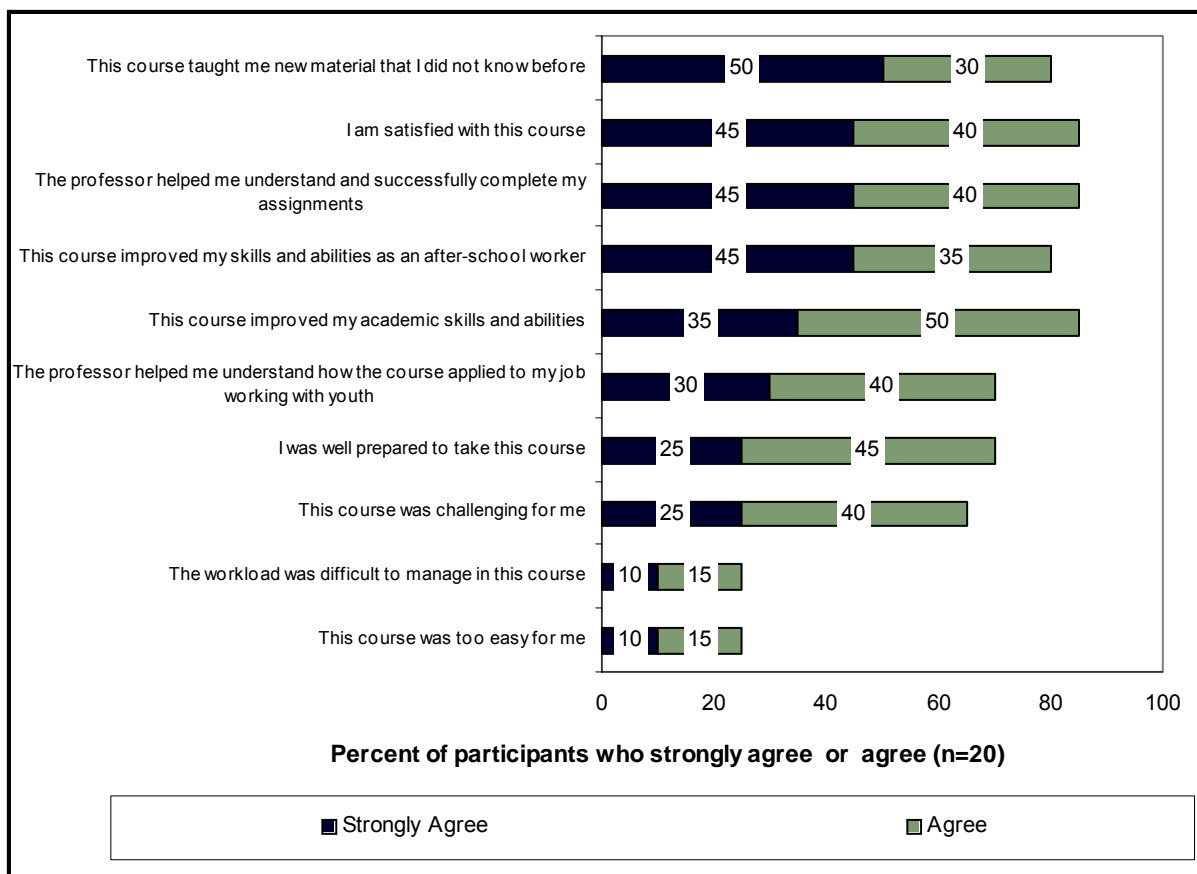


Exhibit reads: Fifty percent of participants strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their computer or technology course. Thirty percent agreed with this statement.

Other courses. On the other hand, only two out of the six participants who took Games and Sports for Children were satisfied with the course. In interviews, participants said they were not satisfied with the course because it was not relevant to after-school staff who implement such programming on a regular basis. One student said, “Games is repetitive with the trainings we already receive.” “We already have a system of implementing sports [in our programs],” said another student. However, according to survey data, four out of the six participants agreed (two strongly agreed) that this course improved their skills and abilities as an after-school worker. Two strongly agreed and three agreed that this course taught them new material they did not know before.

Twenty participants said they took the Introduction to Special Education course offered at Hostos. Most participants reported that they were satisfied with this course (22 percent strongly agreed, 56 percent agreed). Three-quarters agreed that the course taught them new material. “Becoming a part of [the certificate program] has helped me understand children. Before taking [Introduction to Special Education], I use to be very aggressive in the way I spoke to the children. Now I am very calm and I think twice before I speak to a child,” explained one participant. Participants were also satisfied with their professors. More than half (55 percent) of participants agreed that their professor helped them understand and successfully complete their assignments, and 60 percent agreed that their professor helped them understand how the course applied to their job working with youth.

Overall Satisfaction

As illustrated in Exhibit 11, participants were extremely satisfied with the Center-sponsored certificate program. More than half of participants strongly agreed that they felt proud of their accomplishments (67 percent), enjoyed the program (65 percent), would recommend the program to a co-worker or friend (59 percent), had made new friends and professional colleagues through the program (56 percent), and were satisfied with the program overall (55 percent).

Exhibit 11
Program Satisfaction, in Percents

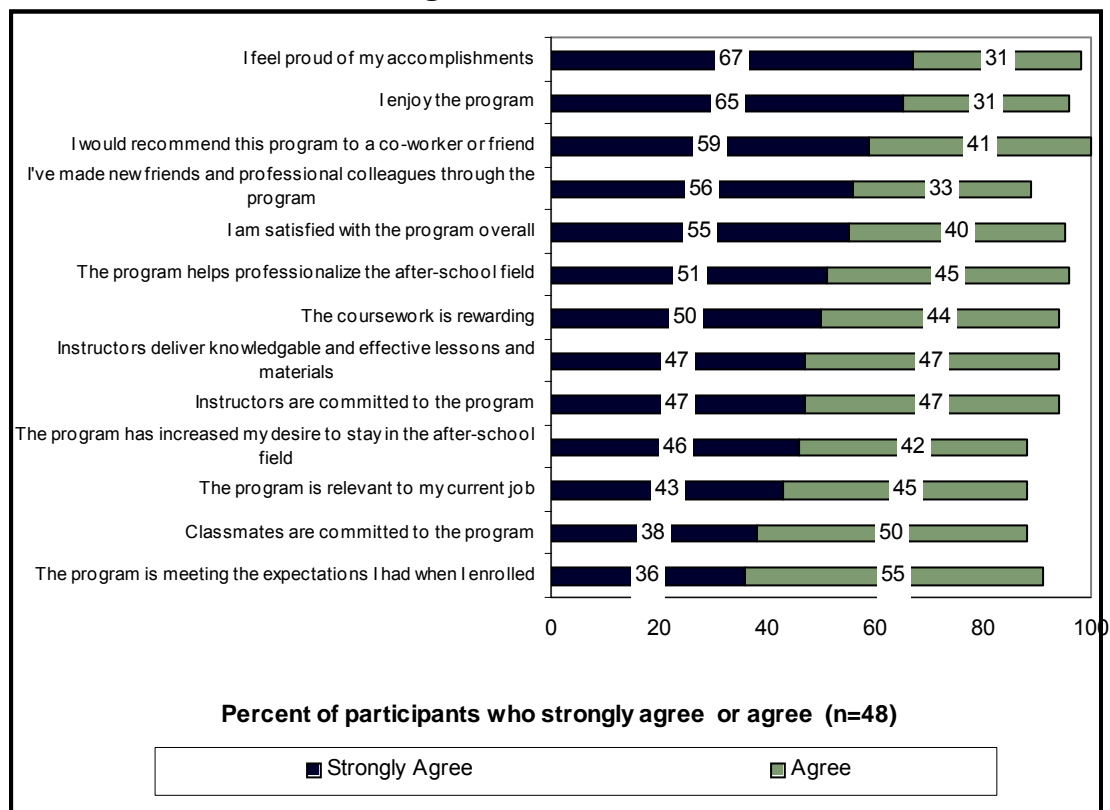


Exhibit reads: Sixty-seven percent of participants strongly agreed that the certificate program made them feel proud of their accomplishments. Thirty-one percent agreed with this statement.

In general, participants were also positive about the ways in which the certificate program helped them to improve their own educational abilities as well as their knowledge about working with youth. As illustrated in Exhibit 12, 94 percent of participants agreed that the certificate program helped them develop their academic skills. Ninety-two percent said it increased their understanding of youth development and improved their ability to provide quality instruction to youth at work.

Exhibit 12
Knowledge and Skills Gained from
Participation in the Certificate Program, in Percents

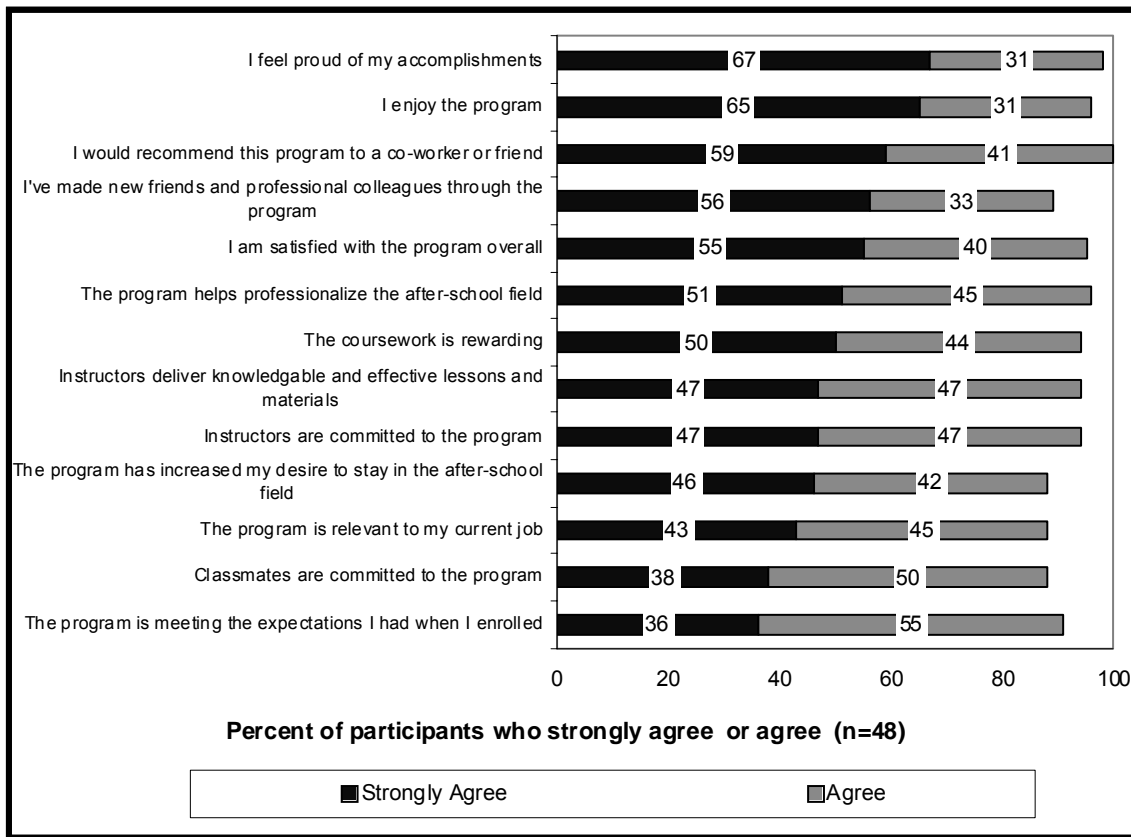


Exhibit reads: Fifty percent of participants strongly agreed that their participation in the certificate program helped them improve the quality of their administrative work. Thirty-five percent agreed with the statement.

Participants also described their satisfaction with the program in interviews and on the survey:

This is the best thing I've ever done in my life. It's the best decision I've ever made.

Credit accumulation towards a degree is one of the most valuable things [in the program].

Overall, the program was very helpful, and I am happy to be a part of it.

The program has given me a new lease on life. I felt trapped with no options. I feel empowered and energized. I didn't think I would feel that way again.

My personal skills have improved, and I have been a better positive role model with the children I care for.

The most important result is that now I can understand my students better. I can provide them with better tools to succeed in school. I can now relate to parents better and recognize the programs available that can benefit them.

I was able to enhance my after-school program with the tools that were offered to me.

In this program I have learned that there is not just one way of dealing with youth and it is important to have staff with different personalities and skills. Most of all, I learned that it is important to learn from one another.

Reactions of Provider Organizations

Partners in Excellence concurred that the program provided an important opportunity for improving the capacity of their participating staff members as well as their after-school programs as a whole. The majority of participating organizations said they would continue to encourage employees to enroll in the program, and many hoped that the Center would expand the program:

I will definitely nominate staff again. This is another way to promote staying at our agency and another way within the after-school program for staff to be promoted.

Partners in Excellence shared participants' priority on the application of learning to work. Many Partners in Excellence expressed an expectation that participants would implement their new skills at work and share their learning with coworkers:

We really expect the participant to bring everything she learns in school to her after-school site. Our [organization] is big on sharing information. We want a person to come back and report and share with other staff.

If we had a bigger cohort, I would love to see a "learning leaders" program. We would do shares where participants would talk about what they are doing in class, how it applies to their work, and train people.

We haven't done a lot of having people come back and share knowledge. It's informally done now, but we want to do it in a more formal way.

The certificate program will raise the skill level of the workers. The quality of the after-school program will improve. It will promote good judgment and hard work. A lot of our workers are young, and understanding youth development will better able them to

plan appropriate activities and understand behavior and not take it personally. We hope staff will handle instances better.

Partners also believed the additional education and college credits were a benefit to participants and their after-school programs. Most of the employers encourage all staff to develop and grow in the field and beyond the after-school field. They expressed an overall belief that the Center's certificate program was helping to professionalize the after-school field. Partners in Excellence also viewed the certificate program as a more challenging way to gain skills and knowledge beyond the professional trainings available in the field:

The program is giving the participant education credits to graduate and become a certified teacher. He teaches our staff and children. I'm hoping he will grow into a full-time teacher at the school.

We have a goal of providing staff with training that's more challenging than what's generally delivered to them by other organizations. College-level courses are more challenging. We would like nothing better than to see some of them leave the nest and find something bigger.

My employer is really embracing that the certificate program is marketable and a way to increase yourself in the field. It's professionalizing the field.

I think modeling is a big issue. When we have staff engaged in education, it raises the whole boat and then it seems like a reachable goal for young people too.

Our staff helps their students with the college process and encourages them to attend, so it is good when the staff have been to college themselves.

Future Plans and Next Steps

Participant Plans

For many participants the certificate program was a first step in going back to school to earn credits towards an associate's or bachelor's degree. In fact, 74 percent said they hoped to re-enroll in another certificate program with the Center. Eighty-seven percent of those who responded to the survey planned to complete the certificate program, and 83 percent said they plan to enroll in more courses for college. In interviews and surveys, participants expressed their desire to continue their education:

Each class is a step into maturing into college. Credits are a stepping stone.

When I finish my nine credits, I'm empowered to move on.

I wish to go further in my educational life. I will register for the fall at a community college.

[The program] enabled me to be exposed to the college life. [It] made me want to pursue a college degree.

The most important result was my success in the courses given. I passed with very good grades and that gave me motivation to go further in my educational journey.

Most certificate program participants also planned to continue working with youth in the after-school field. Eighty-one percent said they plan to keep working in the after-school field, and 79 percent said they plan to continue working for their current employer.

Center Plans

A concern of Center staff and some participants in the first year was the degree to which the program was customized to after-school content. The Center tried to meet with every professor before classes and asked them to “infuse after-school content into the topics when they can.” Few professors had a background in after-school, and few were very involved with the program, making it difficult to focus the program on after-school content. Professors reported having little interaction with other professors who were teaching classes in the certificate program. The Center found it difficult to develop its own courses due to CUNY processes, but the Center has “redoubled efforts to develop courses from scratch” in the future. Center staff also acknowledged that, when they have more students enrolled in the program, they will have more sway with CUNY to design courses. “We need to get more practitioners into the classroom [whether as teachers or guest speakers].” More after-school centered courses, including After-School Programs and Foundations of Youth Services, were added to the course offerings at several campuses for the 2008-09 school year.

Participants suggested several topics that would interest them if offered in the certificate program. Numerous participants recommended that the Center add content on leadership in after-school. Participants desired to know more about the business side of running an after-school program and how to complete tasks such as managing a budget, accessing funders, and writing grants. Learning how to be a supervisor was another leadership topic of interest. Participants also expressed a strong interest in learning more about special education. Special education topics included learning about types of disabilities and dealing with special needs youth with behavioral issues. Additional topic recommendations included more course content in core academic subjects, including science, math, and English, and languages to better help youth in homework activities.

In addition to the above topics, participants recommended practices and activities they would like to see incorporated into the program. Some participants suggested that a broader and stronger commitment to the after-school field would help improve the program. More collaboration with CUNY professors and TASC and creation of a degree in youth development were recommended to strengthen the after-school connection. Additionally, participants believed more peer interaction should be incorporated into the program. Participants wanted more group work, peer networking, and activities to get classmates together within their own

campuses and with participants in other cohorts and campuses. Participants also desired more support from the colleges and employers in the form of academic tutoring and mentoring. In the classroom, participants recommended that professors employ more hands-on learning activities and fieldwork.

Addressing some of these suggestions, the Center will add a certificate program designed for after-school workers with a bachelor's degree to its program offerings in the 2008-09 school year. The Center is offering a nine-credit graduate certificate program in Leadership in After-School at Hunter College beginning in fall 2008. Courses in this program will include the Art of Effective Teaching, Child Development, and Educational Psychology.

Additionally, in the 2008-09 school year, the Center plans to continue offering the Foundations in After-School certificate program at Kingsborough and Hostos Community College, the Building Foundations in After-School program at Medgar Evers College, and the Excellence in After-School program at York College. In each of the programs, the Center plans to add more course options and to refine existing courses to better meet the needs of after-school workers.

Next Steps for the Evaluation

In the next phase of the evaluation, PSA evaluators will continue to examine the implementation of new and expanded Center programs. The evaluation will include new programs, such as the Hunter College graduate certificate program, and will examine changes in implementation that address first-year challenges, such as recruitment. Evaluators will explore participants' careers after completing the Center program and assess short-term outcomes in participant knowledge and skills as they relate to working in the after-school field. The evaluation will also collect additional data from participants who drop out of the program before completion in order to identify characteristics and supports that contribute to retention in the certificate program. In addition, the evaluation will examine in depth the career and education experiences of participants, including evidence of increased understanding of youth development and the after-school community and development of academic skills through continued education. Later phases of the evaluation will focus on mid- to long-term outcomes, including the effects of employee participation in Center programming on the after-school programs where graduates work.

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