

Harvard Research Findings Guide Quad A Program Design

A Harvard Family Research Project on Out of School Time Programs, funded by the Charles Mott Foundation, represents the synthesis of the evaluations of hundreds of after-school programs throughout the nation. In its study, Harvard researchers focused on the answers to four questions:

- 1) What types of programs work?
- 2) For whom do they work?
- 3) Why do they work?
- 4) How can these programs be improved?

To make constructive use of after-school time, we need to develop programs that result in improved academic achievement, assertiveness, peer social skills, and task orientation, decreased risk-taking behavior, improved school behavior and fewer absences from school. These are the goals that Quad A has had from its inception. Now the Harvard study provides us with the characteristics of programs that deliver those outcomes for the elementary school-age children with whom we work. First and foremost, there needs to be a significant block of time devoted to these programs (ideally five days a week, three hours per day) and students must attend on a daily basis. Once we recognize what the barriers to regular attendance are, we can build a program that addresses the issues raised by those barriers. The Harvard study outlines those barriers and suggests incentives to overcome them. For example, after the school day ends, many students want to relax and “hang out” with friends. Therefore, we have built some “down” time into the program when kids have a snack. Furthermore, many youngsters have family responsibilities after school. Consequently, we have provided opportunities for younger siblings to take part in our program as well. Also, many kids profess boredom or disinterest in after-school programs. However, we survey students and parents regularly during the year in order to get their feedback about ways to improve our program and now offer a wide variety of experiences, activities, and opportunities to develop new relationships with peers and adults. In addition, we allow students to choose the activities in which they are engaged. Finally, many of the activities that are a part of our program offer older students leadership opportunities.

How do we recruit and retain children in elementary after-school programs? Some of Harvard's most important recommendations are as follows: **1) Show families the opportunities associated with participation.** The research shows that parents make their decisions about after school enrollments based on cost, convenience, and their child's enjoyment of a program. Quad A programs provide many benefits such as academic support, socialization and forming new friendships, involvement in physical fitness and nutrition activities, exposure to the arts, learning new life skills, and association with positive peers and caring adults. **2) Reach out directly to youth and their families.** Research shows that word-of-mouth and one-on-one conversation are the best forms of program advertising. Therefore, Quad A holds parent nights that allow activity providers to promote and answer questions about their programs, teachers follow up with conversations with their students, and Quad A staff talk directly with parents and students about our programs. **3) Make sure that program attendance goals are clear.** In our programs at School #34 and #4, the coordinator contacts the homes of students who are in school but do not attend the after-school program. Because there is always a waiting list of students who want to become a part of our program, parents understand that lack of regular attendance may jeopardize their child's place in the program. **4) Consider at-risk youth in recruitment efforts.** Quad A works closely with staff members to identify some of the most at-risk students and encourage their participation in our program and makes sure to contract with staff that demonstrate an ability to relate well to these youth. Research shows that these students make significantly greater academic gains than other participants as well as students not participating in the evaluation. **5) Link academics to an engaging project.** Offering more of the same after school does not attract student participation. That is why Quad A includes projects such as Art to Market where students will work with professional artists as they make projects in their area of interest and learn how to market them appropriately. We also are providing students with the chance to publish their own after-school newspaper.

As the above information indicates, Quad A's programs at School #34 and #4 are based on the Harvard research. Both run 5 days per week

for 3 hours each day and include provisions for a snack and a hot meal. We're very excited about our programs and we are encouraging our donors to arrange for a visit.