

**EVALUATION OF THE  
LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION (LINC)  
OF GREATER KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI'S  
BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM**

**FINAL REPORT**

**SUBMITTED BY**

**THE BUSH CENTER IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
AND SOCIAL POLICY, YALE UNIVERSITY**

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# **EVALUATION OF THE LINC BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM**

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The Yale Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy conducted an evaluation of the Before and After School Program operated by the Local Investment Commission (LINC) of Greater Kansas City, MO. Included in the initiative are before and after school programs in 47 elementary schools. Most of the programs were at one time managed by the Kansas City, MO, School District (KCMSD), with LINC taking over the administration and coordination of the programs in 1999. The evaluation examined the initiative as a whole as it is administered by LINC as well as the individual program sites participating in the effort. The primary purpose of the evaluation was to document the development of the Before and After School Program and begin to ascertain its impact.

Fifteen of the 47 programs were selected to participate in the evaluation, which included observations, interviews, document review, and surveys completed by nearly 2,000 participants, including: LINC administrators and site advisers, coordinators, and staff in the 15 programs, students ages 5-9 and 10-13 years (the two groups responded to slightly different questionnaires) enrolled in the programs, parents or legal guardians of participating students, and principals and teachers in the host schools.

Findings indicate that the Program's governing structure and operational processes are based on best practices in the field of school-age care. The Program is a coordinated effort that includes a public-private partnership and diversified funding. Nationally known individuals with knowledge of and expertise in the field guided the Program's conceptualization. We found that, as the coordinating organization, LINC has successfully implemented initial plans, effectively communicates the Program's goals, and strives continually to improve operations and ensure that, at the site level, there are provisions to make certain that the Program is responsive to local needs and is managed effectively.

We also found that the general effectiveness of LINC's management is as evident in the individual sites as it is in its overall organization of the Program. Study participants noted positive changes and improvements that have occurred since LINC took over the management of the Program, and the point was made that Program improvement is an evolving, ongoing process. Principals and parents were highly supportive of the programs at each site, mentioning in particular the caring nature and contributions of site coordinators and staff as well as the range and quality of activities provided to children. Of significance is our finding that children in both age groups overwhelmingly indicated that they enjoy participating in the Program.

Several overall practices were found to be exemplary: the provision of activities and materials that are relevant to and capture the interests of both younger and older children; efforts to involve parents not only in site-based councils but also in the Program

operations and in communications and interactions among the parents; and the emphasis placed on professional development and staff training, in particular, the offering of on-site training opportunities.

In examining the extent to which the programs adhere to practices that have been identified as strongly associated with good-quality care and positive child outcomes, we found - on the basis of participant perceptions - that the programs adhere to all such practices: the provision of a variety of activities, program flexibility and the ability of students to make choices, and emotional climate (the presence of caring adults). Students and parents indicated that they feel valued and supported by the staff, and principals also mentioned the staff and site coordinators as major contributors to the programs' effectiveness.

We found that the programs adhered to other practices noted in the research, such as attention to health and safety, community contacts, and use of volunteers. However, some of the programs were found to be lacking in the adoption of some Program practices, such as not having mixed-age groups in the after school services. Certain operational issues, such as the lack of dedicated space, low staff salaries, and high staff turnover, which we found have improved since LINC began coordination of the Program, nonetheless remain problematic in some sites. These problems, however, are noted in other school-age care programs around the country. Our observations, which were limited to a few hours, indicated that there are elements of good-quality and even exemplary practices in many of the 15 sites. In some of the programs, however, we noted suggestions for changes in monitoring attendance and sign-in procedures.

We also found positive Program outcomes and impact. Student perceptions indicate that among students participating in the Program, the majority have good attitudes toward school and academic work, and most believe that they can succeed in school. Teachers in the host schools, who teach both students who do not participate in the Program as well as those who do, indicated that the Program has had a positive impact on students' academic achievement. Also of significance were our findings that the Program's impact extends to others (for example, principals) and that the Program provides a supportive and nurturing environment for children; on the basis of parent and teacher perceptions we found that participation in the Program resulted in improvements in social and emotional development for many of the children, despite very difficult life circumstances.

Our findings indicate that two exemplary aspects of the Program as a whole are the provision of, as well as LINC's constant attention to, good-quality care and the provision of school-age care to low-income children, who represent the majority of the 6,500 students participating in the Program. In both respects, LINC surpasses the accomplishments of similar initiatives in several other cities.

Finally, we found that although the Program is still relatively new, LINC has made substantial strides toward building a system of school-age care in Kansas City and ensuring the sustainability of the effort. Various aspects of sustainability – leadership,

commitment to the cause and diversified funding – are evident in LINC's work on the Program, although concern remains about the current operational budget, which is at present overly reliant on public support. A focus on a greater portion of the budget derived from private sources would strongly enhance the Program's sustainability over time and ensure that low-income children and families in Kansas City continue to have good-quality school-age care.

# **EVALUATION OF THE KC LINC BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM**

## **FINAL REPORT**

In this report the Yale Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy presents the findings from its evaluation of the Before and After School Program operated by The Local Investment Commission of Greater Kansas City, MO (LINC). The evaluation examined the initiative as a whole as it is administered by LINC as well as the individual program sites participating in the effort. The primary purpose of the evaluation was to document the development of the Before and After School Program and begin to ascertain its impact.

### **INTRODUCTION**

LINC is a citizen-driven human services collaborative led by neighborhood, civic, labor, and business leaders, among others, who strive to improve the lives of children and families in Kansas City and Jackson County, MO. Created in 1992, LINC works on numerous initiatives, one of which is the Before and After School Program.

LINC assumed coordination of the before and after school programs of the Kansas City, MO, School District (KCMSD) in 1999. Before this, the school district operated the programs, known then as "extended day programs," with the use of state school desegregation funds. In 1999, the district lost its funding and realized it could no longer provide this much-needed service. Faced with the prospect of having to eliminate the programs, a move that would have affected more than 6,000 students and their families, The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, and other community, state, and national organizations worked with LINC and the school district to save the programs. Plans to reorganize the programs and establish a financing structure were developed, and LINC was identified by a community task force as the organization that would administer the programs and coordinate a public-private partnership set-up to guide the initiative. Under LINC's management, the Before and After School Program is growing and currently includes 47 schools. The Program is a collaborative effort involving other community-based organizations besides LINC, including KCMSD, which remains a vital partner. KCMSD supports the Program by allowing the use of school facilities and providing various resources. Other key partners are the Francis Child Development Institute, YouthNet, and several other community-based organizations providing direct services.

In undertaking to manage the Before and After School Program, LINC made a commitment to provide good-quality care to ensure positive outcomes for students and families. Quality assessments have been conducted at each of the program sites to ascertain areas of strength as well as areas where improvement is needed. LINC also sought a broader independent evaluation and approached the Yale Center in this regard. The Center, under the leadership of its director and associate director – Dr. Edward Zigler

and Dr. Matia Finn-Stevenson – has extensive experience in the development and evaluation of school-based services and school reform efforts and has been working at the federal, state, and local levels on these and other child care and development initiatives.

## **BACKGROUND**

The need for and importance of before and after school programs has been noted for many years not only in Kansas City, MO, but throughout the nation; with more and more single-parent households and families where both parents are working full-time, there is concern that school-age children are left home alone or with siblings and peers without any adult supervision. These children, at one time referred to as "latchkey children," are now referred to by some as "children in self-care" to indicate the lack of supervision in their young lives. The consequences of this state of affairs have been documented in several studies, and include not only developmental and safety risks but also increased probability of substance abuse and delinquent and criminal behavior.<sup>1</sup> Children left with no supervision during the time when school is out are also at risk for being victims of crimes. An additional concern is that among such students, there is often an inability to focus on academic tasks, maintain an interest in education, and succeed academically.<sup>2</sup>

The research showing the risks associated with children in self-care and the fears and concerns among parents who have to leave their children alone have given rise to an increase in the number of school-age care programs that serve children both before and after school and during school vacations. Other influences on the growth of such programs have been studies that show: (1) that good-quality school-age care programs can have a major impact on children's development, safety, and academic achievement; and (2) that some children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, need enrichment opportunities to enhance their academic and cognitive skills if they are to succeed in school. School-age care programs often provide such enrichment opportunities.

Enormous amounts of federal funds fueled the growth of school-age care and enrichment programs in recent years. Hundreds of schools across the country received 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC) grants to implement learning opportunities for children in safe and nurturing settings during the time when they are not in school. The impact of the federal government on such programs has been extensive. Recently, the administration of the 21CCLC grant program has been shifted to the states.

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of Education and US Department of Justice (1998). Safe and smart: Making after school hours work for kids. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

<sup>2</sup> Riley, D., Steinberg, J., Todd, C., Jung, S. & McClain, I. (1994). Preventing problem behaviors and raising academic performance in the nation's youth: The impacts of 64 school age child care programs. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin.

The growth of before and after school care extends beyond government funding, however. Many schools and communities have established new programs or enhanced existing before and after school care programs using various other funding sources in addition to public support. The LINC Before and After School Program is an example of the latter. It is unique, in that it is not an undertaking of a single agency, organization, or school but, rather, a community-wide response to ensuring that children and families in Kansas City have access to good-quality before and after school care. The collaborative nature of the Before and After School Program, and the fact that it is administered by LINC, which also manages other services, provides an opportunity for system building and service integration that will ultimately benefit recipients.<sup>3</sup>

## THE EVALUATION

### Overall Approach and Study Design

The Program's community-wide response to addressing the need for before and after school care is of interest to researchers at Yale, who believe that the Program's design and management structure have national implications. The Yale researchers agreed to undertake the evaluation of the Program and were guided in their work by the notion, widely held among experts in evaluation research, that there is a dual purpose in program evaluations: (1) to provide information to be used as feedback for program improvement and monitoring; and (2) to ascertain if programs are effectively designed and managed and are of benefit to children, parents, and others they are serving. Hence the evaluation study included a focus on program processes and implementation as well as on outcomes.

It should be noted at the outset that time (the evaluation period was confined to one year) and finances presented some limitations. Also, as is the case with evaluations of other ongoing community-based services, the evaluation of the LINC Before and After School Program presented methodological challenges that limit the generalization of findings, especially with regards to outcomes: An experimental or quasi-experimental study could not be undertaken since neither a random assignment of study participants nor the use of comparison groups was possible; the Program itself has been operating for a period of time before the evaluation, and many of the current participants have received the services before LINC's involvement, since most of the individual program sites predate the initiative as a whole. This means that there was no true baseline against which to gauge change and assign program benefits. Perhaps even more important, the Program under LINC's management is a relatively new initiative. Our experience with other programs, even those less ambitious than the community-wide effort that characterizes the LINC Before and After School Program, is that effective implementation is an evolving process and that it takes several years before full implementation and program

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<sup>3</sup> Merry, S. (2000). *Beyond home and school: The role of primary supports in youth development*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall; Levy, J.E. & Shepardson, W. (1992). Look at current school-linked services. *The Future of Children*, 2,1,44-55.

benefits can be realized.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the undertaking of outcome studies is recommended only after findings indicate strong evidence of successful implementation.<sup>5</sup> The evaluation described here should therefore be considered as the first of several studies to be conducted over the next several years, each of which may document different aspects of the Program and address unique questions.

### Research Questions

The questions providing direction to this evaluation are:

*Question 1:* How has the LINC Before and After School Program been implemented, what practices characterize its operations, and what conditions and other factors contributed to its development?

*Question 2:* How do the individual programs that make up the initiative operate, and what practices characterize the programs?

*Question 3:* What impact has the Program had on students and other participants?

## **Methodology**

### Program Selection

Program selection and data collection took place over a period of several months in 2002. Fifteen programs participating in the LINC Before and After School Program were selected, following a three-step selection process: First, all programs in the initiative were asked to respond to a brief questionnaire (see Attachment A) designed to provide basic program information and general staff and student/family characteristics. The major purpose of the questionnaire was to facilitate program selection. However, it also provided information on the initiative as a whole. Second, several criteria were established in collaboration with LINC to guide program selection. Included among the criteria were variations in: program location, program size and scope, management structure, and site supervision. Third, based on the criteria, a subset of 15 schools was selected to participate in the study (see Attachment B for School Selection Criteria and Schools Selected). Program selection was made in conjunction with LINC administrators, and agreements were secured from educators and staff in the selected schools to participate in the evaluation and facilitate data collection.

The programs selected for participation in the evaluation represent about one third of the number of sites and are characterized as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> Berends, M., Kirby, S., Naftel, S. & McKelvey, C. (2001). Implementation and performance in new American schools: Three years into scale-up. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation; Finn-Stevenson, M., & Zigler, E. (1999). Linking child care and education: Schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

<sup>5</sup> Shaw, K.M. & Replogle, E. (1996). Challenges in evaluating school-linked services: Toward a comprehensive evaluation framework. Boston, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

- Ten of the 15 programs are LINC operated; five are contracted provider sites. All 15 programs are based in a school building.
- The host schools vary in size, as do the programs, the latter ranging from a low of 70 students participating in before and after school care to a high of 239.
- The percentage of students in the host schools who are enrolled in the Program range from just under 20% to about 50%.
- Eleven of the 15 schools where the programs operate are neighborhood schools. Four are magnet schools.
- Several of the host schools and the programs have unique characteristics: One of the programs is in a charter school; one is in a pre-K to 2nd grade school.
- Four of the programs include ESL and two participate in the Caring Communities initiative, which provide a full range of services in addition to the before and after school program.
- Eight of the programs are licensed by the state of Missouri. Seven did not have a license at the time of the study.

### *Study Instruments and Data Sources*

#### ***Surveys***

Surveys were developed by Yale researchers, based on reviews of the research, related work on school-age care and well-established, nationally recognized quality standards. In the surveys (Attachment C), several groups – LINC administrators and site advisers, site coordinators, site staff, principals and teachers in the host schools, students, and parents – were asked to respond to statements about: (1) their role in and perceptions of the program and its benefits; (2) program processes, operations, and quality; and (3) the extent and nature of collaborations among various groups.

Many of the questions were specific to the Program. Also included, however, were questions drawn from other study instruments and national standards, thereby enabling an analysis and presentation of findings within a national context. National sources from which questions were drawn included:

1) The National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA) Standards for Quality School Age Child Care and the National System of Program Improvement and Accreditation. Questions drawn from these sources established study participants' perceptions regarding program operations and quality and were used in the evaluation in conjunction with program observations (discussed later).

2) Questions adapted from a school climate survey. School climate was initiated in this evaluation with the recommendation that it become a recurrent theme in later evaluations of the Program. School climate is a valuable indicator of how effectively a school and a program within a school are functioning and how well students are likely to perform academically. It is a well-developed construct that refers to many aspects of the overall school and program environment, including:

- How students feel about themselves and their ability to do well in school;
- Interactions among the staff and students as evident in perceptions of equity and fairness;
- Perception of order and discipline in the school;
- The extent to which parents are involved in the school;
- The extent of collaboration and sense of shared mission among staff and between staff and parents; and,
- The extent that adults – staff as well as parents – have high expectations of the students as well as dedication to help students succeed.

These aspects of the school and program environment pertain to student achievement and provide an indication of the extent that the environment is conducive to learning and likely to result in positive academic outcomes for students. However, the value of the school climate measure extends beyond its inclusion of several indicators pertaining to student achievement. It also provides an indication of children's social and emotional status, and, as is the case with the NSACA standards, the school climate measure can be explored from several perspectives, including those of administrators, staff, students, and parents.

The school climate survey used in this study was based on the School Climate Survey developed by the Comer School Development Program (SDP).<sup>6</sup> In a national random sample of 1,600 respondents, a high degree of internal consistency reliability was established for the individual constructs in the survey (between  $p = 0.80$  and  $p = 0.95$ ) and for the overall school climate scale ( $p = 0.97$ ), showing that the items are reliably accurate indicators of school climate and its components. Questions from the national survey were adapted for suitability for the Program.

Participants were asked to respond to school climate statements about their school and program using the Likert technique (expressing agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale). The statements covered the following constructs: leadership, collaborative decision-making, equity and fairness, order and discipline, parent involvement, school building, school-community relations, staff dedication to student learning, efficacy, staff satisfaction, and program benefits.

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<sup>6</sup> Hayens, N., Emmons, C. & Comer, J. (1994). School climate survey (school staff version). New Haven, CT: Yale University.

## ***Observations***

Carole Weisberg, a Research Associate at Yale with experience in and knowledge of school-age care, was assigned to conduct site visits, which included observations of program operations and interviews and meetings with various stakeholders. The Research Associate observed operations at all 15 programs participating in the study. The observations were informal and included variation in the time of day during which they took place. The intent was to observe operations at both before school care and after school care. All observations had a common core, based on attributes of good-quality programming, with the Research Associate using a pre-established guideline for a minimum of what to look for and include in the observations of all sites: program structure, relationships and interactions, the physical environment, and overall impressions and recommendations. The observations (details of which are in Attachment D) are organized as case studies and were used in this evaluation as one of the data sources. Used in conjunction with the surveys, which provided participants' perceptions of program processes and quality, the observations expanded upon our understanding of how the programs operate and the extent that good-quality care is provided. In addition to being used in the evaluation, observation findings were shared with program staff and LINC administrators.

## ***Interviews***

In addition to completing surveys, all site coordinators were interviewed by the Yale Research Associate, using a semi-structured interview schedule designed to yield data specific to program operations at the individual sites. Also interviewed were four site advisers, each of whom is responsible for supervising a certain number of the before and after school programs, and LINC administrators, who have overall responsibility for the Program. The Yale Research Associate conducted all interviews in person during several visits to Kansas City. The Research Associate also met with others involved in the Program, including representatives of funding organizations and the Kansas City school district. The study's principal investigator also conducted interviews on the phone, principally with LINC administrators.

## ***Document Review***

Various program reports, policies, and other documents were reviewed and served as a primary source of evaluative evidence regarding LINC's overall management structure and operations.

## ***Participants***

Meetings and/or interviews were held with 45 individuals associated with the Program, including LINC administrators, representatives of community-based organizations participating in or partially funding the Program, and principals and site coordinators in the 15 programs participating in the study. In addition, 1,984 study participants completed surveys. Included were two LINC administrators and four site

advisers. Other study participants completed survey questionnaires. Included were: 15 site coordinators who are responsible for operating the programs, 174 site staff providing various direct services, 570 parents or legal guardians of students participating in the Program, 674 students ages 5-9 years and 290 students ages 10-13 years participating in the Program. The students were divided into two groups according to their age, with each group responding to a slightly different questionnaire. Fourteen principals and 241 teachers in the host schools also completed questionnaires.

## **FINDINGS**

**Research Question 1: How has the LINC Before and After School Program been implemented, what practices characterize its operations, and what conditions and other factors contribute to its development?**

### **Program Operations and Management**

LINC represents a new approach to addressing human services needs. It is made up of civic, business, and other community leaders, and has the responsibility for coordinating various human services in Kansas City. Its overall mission is to promote citizen decision-making, ongoing learning and professional/leadership development, collaborative program planning and design, data/information sharing, and financing to ensure that all government and other monies used in Kansas City are well spent and associated with positive outcomes. In addition to the Before and After School Program discussed herein, LINC coordinates several initiatives, including a Welfare to Work program; MC+, a managed care program designed to contain costs and improve access and quality of health care services; Educare, which offers training, resources, and home visits to family care providers serving children from birth to age three; Child Welfare, including child abuse prevention and intervention; and Comprehensive Neighborhood Services, which seeks to streamline the delivery of effective and efficient services through neighborhood decision-making and linkages with local schools across multiple school districts in the Kansas City Metropolitan area.

Inherent in all LINC services are partnerships with other agencies and organizations in Kansas City. As such, it was a natural choice as the coordinating organization of the Before and After School Program. The Program is made up of 47 sites providing before and after school care in Kansas City schools. As noted earlier, most of the sites were at one time operated by the KCMSD, which provided the school-age care services free of charge to parents whose children attended the district's elementary schools. The district's provision of no-cost before and after school programs was made possible by the use of state funds allocated to address a court desegregation mandate. However, this funding source was coming to an end in the late 1990s, and the district was faced with having to eliminate the services. In a community-wide effort to ensure continuation of before and after school care in Kansas City, the programs were restructured under one umbrella, and a task force named LINC as the coordinating organization.

## Collaborative Approach

A review of documents and interviews conducted for purposes of the evaluation has shown that LINC's accomplishments are numerous and that at the core of each of its efforts is coordination and work with other community partners. The Before and After School Program follows the same collaborative approach. LINC serves as the governing body, with primary responsibilities for staffing, ensuring program improvement and quality, and financial management and fundraising. LINC partners include the Francis Child Development Institute, which provides professional development and staff training, and YouthNet, which conducts quality assessments. Both organizations provide the services through partnership agreements with LINC. The school district is another partner. It provides the facilities to house the programs in its school buildings and covers insurance, maintenance, and security costs. The school district further contributes by making Title I funds available to the Program under certain conditions, namely, the use of the funds to meet the goal of improving students' academic performance in communities with high concentrations of low-income families.

The individual program sites provide services and programming, based on the needs of students and families and the makeup of the school community. Some of the programs are managed by LINC, other programs in the initiative are managed by various community-based organizations, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, Minute Circle, Parks and Recreation, Della Lamb Community Services, and the Lee A. Tolbert Community Academy. All programs, however, are supervised and supported in their work by LINC-appointed site advisers.

This model of overall program governance by LINC and the provision of direct services at the site level has several advantages: It ensures a certain amount of autonomy so that those who work directly with students and families have the flexibility to address students' interests as well as to ascertain and meet site-specific needs. It also frees the staff and parents from working on funding and management issues, including applying for subsidies for child care, which is often a complex undertaking. One of the disadvantages is that there is the potential for discontinuity and lack of communication between the managing organization and the individual sites providing direct services. For the most part, however, we did not find this to be the case with the Program, indicating that its governance structure and collaborative model are operating efficiently. The reasons for this are several, including:

1. Having one entity take the lead in orchestrating the coordination of services and provide overall management. A system-wide leader, with responsibility and accountability for implementing the collaborative vision and strategic plans is cited in the research as one of the essential mechanisms for the success of school and community collaborations.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Adelman, H. & Taylor, L. (2001). School and community partnership guide. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools.

2. The employment of site advisers. Site advisers are LINC employees appointed to work with, supervise, and assist program coordinators at each of the sites. To ensure that they are effective in their work, LINC worked toward a 1:10 site advisers to sites ratio. Four site advisers responding to the survey question "How many sites are you responsible for?" responded differently, most indicating that they work with 9-13 sites. However, since the questionnaire was completed, some restructuring has occurred, bringing site advisers/sites closer to the 1:10 ratio, with five advisers serving the 47 programs. Site advisers provide the critical link between the managerial and programmatic aspects of the Program, without which the collaborative model may not be as effective. Interviews with the advisers and the site coordinators and others indicated that advisers meet regularly with each of their site coordinators and the staff and that they assist with program improvement and the establishment of site-based councils. Site advisers also hold joint meetings with the group of coordinators for whom they are responsible. This practice promotes professional development, allows for sharing of information and lessons learned, and encourages collaborations across the sites.
  
3. The existence of site-based councils composed of parents and others also contributes to the effectiveness of the collaborative effort. Site councils help ensure that programs meet the needs of families and help shape the program at each of the sites. In responding to the question "Does your program have an active site-based parent council?" over two-thirds of the 15 coordinators responded "yes." In response to the question "If yes, how often does the council meet?" one responded "weekly" and 11 responded "monthly." In open-ended survey questions and interviews on the issue of site-based councils, the coordinators indicated that, as one of them wrote, site councils *"provide stability and direction."* Several site coordinators indicated that site councils also help promote parent participation and involvement not only in the programs but also in the host schools: *"Parents have become more involved with the activities of the school and have become decision makers."* Besides contributing to program planning and decision-making, site-based council members also assist with various aspects of service delivery as volunteers, many of them helping with sports programs and field trips. Some also volunteer in the classrooms and in various program and school projects. Although the makeup and role of the site-based councils vary, coordinators' responses indicated that most of these are operating effectively and contribute to the programs. Four of the coordinators did not regard their program as having an active council, but only one site coordinator reported in an open-ended response that its program's council is *"struggling to become more active with more participation."*

### Effective Implementation

#### **Site Administration**

Having LINC assume managerial responsibilities for the operation of the programs in each of the sites is perceived by host schools' principals as a major benefit.

This is noted in responses to several open-ended questions. For example, in response to the question "Do you feel you have personally benefited from the program, if yes, in what ways?" 10 of 14 principals focused on their appreciation of having LINC administer the programs. In the words of one principal: *"LINC has assumed responsibilities and concerns that normally would have had to be handled by me."*

Principals, most of whom have been involved with the Program in their school before LINC, were asked if they noticed any changes since LINC took over. Several responded that improvements have been and continue to be made: *"The Program has consistently improved in organization and quality of activities for children. The staff is better organized and procedures [are] regularly revised."* Some principals mentioned the addition of program options and activities and less frequent staff turnover as areas of improvement since LINC assumed management responsibility for the Program, and several mentioned improvement in staffing and in relationships among the school staff and Program staff. As one principal indicated, there has been *"a change in the attitudes of staff toward the before and after school program. They are more positive."*

### ***Goal Agreement Among Stakeholders***

The overall mission of the LINC Before and After School Program is to provide "high quality school-age care available to all Kansas City families, providing a safe and fun place that supports the social, emotional, intellectual and physical development of our children." This is referred to as the community mission for the Program, and it is stated in various LINC documents as well as those of other organizations involved in the initiative.

The overall mission is reflected in how various program participants and stakeholders described the program at the individual site level. This is an important finding, indicating: (1) overall goal agreement, which is a key indicator of successful program implementation, especially in the case of programs that are linked to or operated by schools,<sup>8</sup> and (2) that the Program's overall mission is communicated to, understood by, and accepted by the majority of the stakeholders.

We asked site coordinators, site staff, principals and teachers in the host schools, and LINC administrators and site advisers to respond to an open-ended question regarding their perception of the program's overall goal. The question was open-ended to enable us to see how respondents would answer in their own words. Depending on the participant, the responses reflected perceptions either of the goal of the individual program sites or of the initiative as a whole. Of 446 surveys in which the question "What do you believe to be the overall goal of the program?" was included, 407 were returned with a response. Participants described their perception of program goals differently, but overall, their responses included the following key words: child care (included in 50% of responses), academic/learning (46%), "safe" (44%), enrichment (25%), social development (25%), fun (16%), and various other concepts (4%), such as mentoring and extending the regular day.

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<sup>8</sup> Berends, M., Kirby, S., Naftel, S. & McKelvey, C. (2001). Implementation and performance of the New American Schools: Three years into scale-up. Santa Monica, CA: Rand.

The majority of respondents used one or two of the above-noted key words to describe their perception of program goals. Some respondents (31%) combined three or more of the key words, providing a glimpse of their thinking that the program is multi-faceted.

Responses varied depending on the participants' role in the programs. The majority (59%) of teachers in the host schools responded that the program goal is to provide child care, and in 48% of teachers' responses, child care was also linked to academics and/or learning (for example, "to provide before and after school care that extends learning experiences for children"). Among site staff, 43% described the goal of the program as providing "safe" care, whereas 41% described the goal in terms of academics and learning. Although the majority of goal statements focused on students, there were some indications that participants believe that the programs strive to meet the needs of parents and that the Program's overall goal extends beyond providing services to students and families to include linkages to the school and the community.

In addition to key words used to describe participants' perception of program goals, qualifying phrases and words appeared in the majority of the responses. Among the most-often-used qualifiers were the words "quality" (for example, "to provide a quality, caring and safe program"), a related concept of "developmentally appropriate" care as well as "nurturing" and "caring." The concept of quality is at the cornerstone of the LINC Before and After School Program and it is also mentioned in the community mission statement and other documents such as the Parents' Handbook (where "high quality" is included in the vision statement). Having the concept of quality and the related concept of "developmentally appropriate" (often used by professionals to describe quality) is an important finding. One of the two LINC administrators mentioned quality, and three of the four site advisers included the word "quality" in their response to the question on program goals.

### Public-Private Partnership

Another characteristic of the LINC Before and After School Program is its function as a public-private partnership. Various private-public partnerships have been established, many specifically for school-age care programs:

*A public-private partnership exists when the public sector (federal, tribal, state or local officials and agencies) joins with the private sector (employers, philanthropies, media, and civic groups, community based organizations, families, citizens and service providers) in pursuit of a common goal. Public-private partnerships for out-of-school time and community school initiatives typically focus on new ways to expand and improve the capacity of the school, neighborhood, community, or state to meet the needs of children, youth and their families.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> Deich, S. (2001). A guide to successful public-private partnerships for out-of-school time and community school initiatives. Washington, DC: The Finance Project, p. 9.

Although public-private partnerships have a variety of structures, they all share certain characteristics: partners represent both sectors; partners contribute time, money, expertise, or other resources; partners work together toward a common goal; and partners share decision-making and management responsibilities.

We found that the Program, under LINC's coordination, shares several of these characteristics and that the partnership, although established only three years ago, is operating successfully. The research on such partnerships indicates that there are 10 principles for success,<sup>10</sup> many of which we found in our evaluation to be characteristic of the Program: **Clearly defined and communicated goals** (discussed previously in the report), the **involvement of families** (which, as we noted above, is evident in the site-based councils); a **broad-based partnership that includes all stakeholders** (evident in the inclusion of numerous funders, community-based organizations serving children and families, and schools); **focus on positive outcomes and regular assessment** (a point included in program documentation we reviewed and indicated in the request for this evaluation); a **clear governance structure that defines partner roles and responsibilities** and **drawing on the strengths and knowledge of each partner** (for example, although LINC has overall managerial and financial oversight responsibilities, the partner organizations have other specific roles, such as providing direct services, staff development, or program quality assessments); **the ability to promote visibility and champion the cause** (which is inherent in LINC, with its broad-based commission membership that includes civic, business, neighborhood, and other leaders<sup>11</sup>). Another principle of successful public-private partnership is **working toward sustaining the effort over time**, which we found to be a key characteristic of the LINC Before and After School Program, to be discussed separately.

### ***Diversified Funding***

At the core of the public-private partnership is diversified funding for the Program. As noted earlier, LINC's role includes responsibility for securing as well as overseeing public and other funds necessary for the Program. Funding is a key aspect of any program, but is especially important in school-age care programs, which are often accorded low priority. We know from the research cited earlier that school-age care programs contribute to the safety of children as well as their ability to succeed academically. Nevertheless, parents may regard the programs as non-essential, especially when the family budget is tight. It is in part for this reason that participation in school-age care programs is generally low among students from low-income families.<sup>12</sup> The Before and After School Program addresses the needs of low-income students in particular (a point discussed later in the report). Further, it assumed management of the Program from KCMSD, which set the precedence of providing the programs at no cost, making it difficult to immediately establish a fee system for some families.

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<sup>10</sup> Deich, S. (2001), *Ibid.*; Ballen, J., Casey, J., & Decanter, A. (1998). The corporate imperative: Results and benefits of business involvement in education. Washington, DC: US Department of Education.

<sup>11</sup> See also the discussion on diversified funding.

<sup>12</sup> Other reasons include lack of transportation and lack of programs in low-income neighborhoods.

Nevertheless, charging program fees for some families is an essential revenue source, albeit a small one for the Program. LINC instituted a fee system, as follows:

- All families pay a one-time \$10 enrollment fee.
- The program is free of charge to families eligible for subsidies. Working with state officials and KCMSD, LINC streamlined the subsidies application process so that each student eligible for free lunch is automatically eligible for school-age care subsidy as long as their parent/legal guardian is employed.
- Students eligible for reduced-price lunch pay \$5 a week for the Program, and those not eligible for free or reduced lunch pay, at most, \$15 a week or, if there is more than one child in the family participating in the Program, \$10 a week for the second child and \$5 a week for the third child, up to a family maximum of \$30.

A review of documents indicates that these fees are substantially lower than fees charged by neighboring school districts (see Attachment E). The fees are also lower than those of other organizations providing school-age care in the area. The Partnership for Children conducted a study on the cost of school-age care and found that in 2002, weekly fees for school-age care programs in metropolitan Kansas City were, on average, \$50-\$80 per child.

Although the fees for the Program are minimal, families default on payments, an issue all school-age care programs face. LINC has recently made substantial changes in its billing system and is also providing training at the site level to increase awareness of the importance of parental fees. As a result, it is now collecting over 75% of the amount billed in parent fees.

Since LINC had to move from a no-fee precedence established by KCMSD to fees for a small portion of families, we anticipated finding dissatisfaction among at least some parents. We found in our evaluation, however, that the fees are generally accepted by parents. In an open-ended question, parents were asked what they would change about the program. Of the 570 parents who completed questionnaires, only a handful of parents mentioned fees, mostly in relation to the invoices being confusing (the responses predated billing changes instituted recently) or, in one case, in relation to having to pay for full-time care regardless of the number of hours spent in the Program. Asked if the program is sensitive to their family's budget, 71.1% of parents responded "always" and 16.3% responded "usually," with only 7.5% responding "sometimes" and 3.2% (18 parents) responding "no." Similar responses were given to the question "Is the payment schedule flexible enough for your family?" with 72.6% responding "always."

Although the fee system is important, the majority of Program participants are from low-income families, necessitating special financial considerations. The community task force that developed the initial plan and identified LINC as the Program's coordinating organization also developed initial budget assumptions. LINC's operating budget is built on these assumptions. LINC's approach to program funding has attracted national interest; it is based on the need for diverse funding sources, the core of which

(49%) is provided by the Missouri Department of Social Services in child care subsidies. As noted earlier, the school district is also making in-kind contributions amounting to 19% of the budget, and it has allocated Title I funds for the Program, representing another 10% of the budget. Federal nutrition programs (4%) and parent fees (4%) are also included in the budget, but there is still an operating deficit of about 14% (see Attachment F).

About 50% of the expenses are related to site personnel, and another 19% (contributed by KCMSD) are for space- and facilities-related costs (for example, security and maintenance). Notable in the expense breakdown (see Attachment G) are the relatively low direct administrative costs,<sup>13</sup> which amount to less than 10% of the expenses despite the extensive management, coordination, and supervisory activities for which LINC is responsible. This is possible because LINC provides significant in-kind administrative support. For example, several LINC administrators devote a substantial amount of their time to the Program but no portion of their salary is allocated to the budget.

LINC's ability to secure diversified funding stems from its organizational commitment to the Program and the involvement of its Commissioners. Interviews with LINC administrators indicated that since the Before and After School Program represents a substantial part of LINC's overall responsibilities, it gets attention from the entire Commission and the finance committee, which reviews Program information at monthly meetings. The Commission's Chairman, Landon Rowland, who is the Chief Executive Officer of Janus Capital Group, is the Program's champion; he continually promotes the Program, meets with potential funders, and provides testimony on school-age care programs at legislative and other hearings.

### ***Sustainability***

The leadership within the Commission and its promotion of the Program, as well as the diversified funding strategy undertaken by LINC, point to the potential for sustainability. Sustaining a program over time is essential if we, as a nation, are to have a positive impact on the health, welfare, and education of children. However, programs tend to become dependent on public funding sources, and this dependence is often the reason for their demise or a shift in program priorities. Grant funds are vulnerable to change, so the need for diversified funding is obvious and essential for sustainability. However, money and diversified funding, although necessary, are not sufficient for program sustainability. Also critical is leadership – evident in LINC and its Chairman – to provide direction and support.

Although the Before and After School Program has the potential to be sustained over time, it will need to address several financial concerns. We identified two major vulnerabilities:

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<sup>13</sup> Including administrative salaries.

1) LINC is paying a significant amount of money from its cash reserves to cover the Program's operating deficit. Although LINC's ability to tap into its reserves is important and contributes to the Program's stability, this is feasible only if it occurs for short periods of time.

2) The Program's core revenue source (representing about 50% of the budget) is the State Department of Social Services. This means that the Program is extremely vulnerable, especially in the immediate future, when state budgetary cuts are anticipated. Because the state's contribution to the Program includes subsidies to cover the cost of care of low-income children, LINC may want to consider raising funds from the business and philanthropic sectors for an endowment that would support the participation of low-income students. The suggested endowment, which would be used in conjunction with state subsidies, would help establish financial stability and enable LINC to continue its focus on low-income students.

### *School-Age Care Available to Low-Income Families*

The financial challenge LINC faces stems in large part from the dual focus on: (1) ensuring that low-income students have access to school-age care programs, and (2) the provision of good-quality care, the latter being critically important yet expensive. From our perspective, these aspects of the Program are non-negotiable, and LINC is to be commended for maintaining this dual focus.

The provision of school-age care to low-income students is particularly important in an urban setting such as Kansas City, where 75% of the students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. The Program is the primary school-age care program for low-income families in Kansas City because, in the words of some of those we interviewed, it provides a well-balanced program that includes, in most sites, enrichment and recreation opportunities as well as supervision; it is accessible to many students, because it is located in school; and it is affordable. Indeed, the Program is in 45 of the 48 elementary schools in KCMSD, and in two of the 12 charter schools, indicating that LINC is undertaking a system-wide effort in its provision of school-age care. More than 80% of the students participating in the Program are from low-income families.

We found that the provision of school-age care to low-income students is one of the major accomplishments of the Before and After School Program. Critical in this regard are provisions for: (1) affordable care and (2) program accessibility, achieved by locating programs in low-income communities. Also important is providing programs that are of interest to children, as evident in participation rates

In its provision of school-age care to low-income students, LINC appears to be ahead of other communities even though the Program, under LINC's coordination, only began a mere three years ago. Studies indicate that one of the challenges facing low-income families is access to school-age care, not only due to lack of money but because

school-age care programs are often not located in low-income communities.<sup>14</sup> Studies further indicate that even in cities where substantial funding for system building for school-age care has been invested, only a small percentage of low-income children participate in the programs. For example, in an evaluation of the MOST (Making the Most Out of School Time) initiative implemented in three cities, researchers found that "no more than 10-15 percent of low-income children participate in regular...programs in Boston and Chicago," with somewhat higher participation rates for low-income children in Seattle.<sup>15</sup> Another city-wide initiative, LA BEST in Los Angeles, CA, provides school-age care in 105 of the city's elementary schools. In telephone interviews with officials at LA BEST, we found that this program also focuses on low-income students, serving 10-20 percent of the students.

The LINC Before and After School Program serves more than one out of five low-income children in Kansas City (about 22%). Although this is higher than the proportion in other community-wide initiatives, it is not exhaustive of the need. Survey responses by coordinators and site staff, as well as by teachers in the host schools, indicated that most know of some students who can benefit from but do not participate in the Program.

We asked LINC administrators about the potential to continue to increase Program participation and found that family income is not a participation-limiting factor since the program is generally free or, for some families, very affordable. Transportation, however, may be a limiting factor for some families, and LINC is examining this issue in conjunction with KCMSD. Although those interviewed indicated that at present no limit is imposed on participation, this could become an issue in the future, given licensing requirements. Asked if growth in the number of sites is a possibility in the future, the replies were cautious, indicating a desire to expand into other schools but lacking, at present, the funding to do so.

*In summary of our study related to Question One, we found that the Before and After School Program's governing structure and operational processes are based on best practices in the field of school-age care. The Program is a coordinated effort that includes a successful public-private partnership and diversified funding. This finding was to be expected since the Program's conceptualization was guided by nationally known individuals with knowledge of and expertise in the field. We found, however, that LINC, as the coordinating organization, has successfully implemented initial plans, effectively communicates the Program's goals, and strives continually to improve operations and ensure that, at the site level, there are provisions, such as sited-based councils and the assistance of site advisers, to ensure that the Program is responsive to local needs. In addition, although the Program is still relatively new, substantial strides have been made toward building a system of school-age care in Kansas City and ensuring the sustainability of the effort. Various aspects of sustainability – leadership, commitment to*

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<sup>14</sup> The Urban Seminar (2001). The urban seminar on after-school time. Urban Seminar Series on Children's Health and Safety. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government. May 10-11.

<sup>15</sup> Halpern, R., Spielberger, J. & Robb, S. (2001). Evaluation of the MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time initiative: Final report. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children, p. 10.

*the cause, and diversified funding – are evident in LINC's work on the Program, although concern remains about the current operational budget, which is at a deficit and is overly reliant on public support. A focus on a greater portion of the budget derived from private sources would strongly enhance the Program's sustainability over time. Two exemplary practices associated with the Program and LINC's leadership are: the focus on quality of care and the provision of school-age care to a substantial percentage (27%) of the low-income children in Kansas City. This proportion is slightly lower than one city for which data are available but much higher than two similar city-wide efforts elsewhere in the nation, where only 10% and 15% of low-income students are served.*

## **Research Question Two: How do the individual programs that make up the initiative operate, and what practices characterize the programs?**

### **Program implementation and operation**

In addition to examining the Program's overall organizational and management structure, we studied the Program's implementation and operation at the site level. We found that the provision of good-quality care is not simply a guiding principle that provides direction to the overall effort; it is also evident in program operations at the various sites.

#### *Program Improvements*

Since it first began to manage the Program, LINC has worked toward the improvement of operations and quality at the site level, and it has accomplished several of its initial objectives, as follows:

#### ***Ensuring that each site has a Full-Time Coordinator***

The impact of this accomplishment cannot be overemphasized, for the appointment of site coordinators is a first step toward the provision of good-quality care. This point is noted in the research on program implementation, especially with school-linked programs.<sup>16</sup> Principals in the host schools also made this point. In open-ended responses to several different questions, principals indicated their high regard for and appreciation of the site coordinators. For example, in response to the question "Since you have been involved with the program, have you noticed any changes that have taken place?" several principals cited the coordinator, some by name, others indicating that the program is – as a result of the appointment of a coordinator – operating more efficiently. As one principal indicated, the program is "*now more organized and staff members are being in-serviced on [the] district's policies and procedures and student safety.*" In response to the question "What aspects of the program would you keep?" three of the 14 principals mentioned the site coordinator, one elaborating by saying that "*a well-organized and efficient program coordinator is essential.*" Not only principals but site staff and parents mentioned the critical role of the program coordinators. In response to

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<sup>16</sup> Fullan, M. (2001). NY: Teachers College; Iscoe, L. (1997). *A blue-print for school-based services*. The School of the Future: Houston, TX: Hogg Foundation.

the open-ended question "What do you like best about the program?" many parents mentioned the coordinators by name, and at one site, parents overwhelmingly responded that they like the site coordinator. As one parent wrote: *"She makes the children feel welcome, smart and loved...she makes the extended day great."*

Observation and interview data indicated that the site coordinators are, as a group, hard-working individuals with commitment to doing a good job. Most worked long hours, covering both the before and after school aspects of the programs. Although they are expected to take a break, many invariably work through the day.

### ***Site supervision***

Another of the initial program improvement goals was the appointment of site advisers. As we indicated in the previous section of this report, site advisers are critical to the success of the Program. They are the link between the Program's overall management and its service delivery at the site level. They also link the 47 program sites, with the potential for a coordinated effort across sites. Because one adviser is assigned to supervise several programs, group meetings, collaborations, and the sharing of experiences are also occurring, which we regard as good practice and essential for professional development.

Interviews with coordinators and advisers indicated that the advisers serve in the role analogous to that of executive director, not only supervising coordinators but assisting in various administrative tasks and providing coaching and mentoring on such issues as staff training and development. Relations between advisers and coordinators appear to be very good, with the majority in each group providing complementary and appreciative statements about the other. The Yale Research Associate felt that, given their responsibilities and extensive involvement at the site level, advisers have a responsibility for too many sites. However, this observation was made before the restructuring that has occurred, which, as indicated earlier, brought the ratio of advisers to sites to about 1:10, with five advisers working with 47 sites.

### ***Parent involvement***

Another program improvement goal was the involvement of parents in local program decision-making. This was accomplished with the establishment of site councils, which we also discussed in the previous section. Site councils provide program direction and ensure that the program functions with an ear to neighborhood needs. Site coordinators reported that most of the councils are helpful. In addition, serving on a council appears to encourage parents to participate in the programs and in the host schools. As is the case with other advisory entities, attention to the efficient operation and appropriate makeup of the councils is ongoing, and the availability of site advisers to help the programs in this regard is a good approach.

### ***Licensing and national standards***

Schools are generally exempt from state licensing requirements governing the operation of child care facilities. However, state licensing represents such minimum standards that experts recommend that schools: (1) acquire the license, and (2) apply for national accreditation, which sets the standard of quality at a higher level. LINC set site accreditation as an eventual goal and started by getting the sites licensed by the state. This is a long process, to be accomplished in phases. At the time of the study, eight of the 15 participating sites were licensed. (Currently, 11 of the 15 sites participating in the study are licensed). All sites, however, appear to be using the NSACA standards to guide program operations and ensure quality, a point that will become evident later in the report.

In addition, LINC has put in place a mechanism for monitoring the provision of quality and adherence to national standards by subcontracting with YouthNet. Using the School-Age Care Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS), YouthNet has assessed the quality of the programs and has reported quality improvement in all seven categories that make up the scale. The SACERS is a commonly used instrument that is helpful in assessing quality and that enables assessors to provide feedback to site staff, who can then see which areas need improvement. As such, the SACERS can serve as a staff development tool, which we found to be the case with the LINC programs.

### **Program Practices, Observations, and Perceptions of Quality**

To identify operational practices and the quality of care provided by the individual sites, we conducted independent observations, interviewed selected staff, and asked study participants their perceptions. We then analyzed the data using as our basis the school-age model practice recommendations made by the Rand Corporation. Rand researchers conducted a comprehensive review of the research and performed a meta-analysis of major studies on school-age care.<sup>17</sup> Their findings led to the development of model program practices, organized within a three-part framework that includes: Staff Management Practices; Program Management Practices; and Communication with Other Organizations. In the study, good program practices were defined as program or process elements that have been shown to be associated with high-quality school-age care programs and/or with positive child outcomes in one or more of the developmental pathways (educational attainment, emotional well-being, and physical health). The researchers ranked each practice as "strong," "moderate," or "limited" in terms of the research evidence available to support the practice as indicative of good-quality care and positive child outcomes. The researchers acknowledge the lack of empirical research essential to establish a cause-effect relationship between recommended program practices and child outcomes. They further note that their recommendations are based in part on scientific studies and in part on expert judgment. Clearly, more research is needed in the field of school-age care. Nevertheless, the Rand model is based on a synthesis of the available literature and an analysis of data collected in several national studies. It offers

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<sup>17</sup> Beckett, M., Hawken, A., & Jacknowitz, A. (2001). Accountability for after-school care: Devising standards and measuring adherence to them. Santa Monica, CA: Rand.

what we consider to be a good standard against which to gauge the LINC Before and After School Program's adherence to the provision of good-quality care.

### *Staff Characteristics and Training*

The Rand study identified five staff characteristics; three of these, staff training, education, and compensation, received a "moderate" rating in terms of their association with supportive evidence that links them to good-quality care,<sup>18</sup> and two, turnover rate and experience, received a "limited" ranking.

In our evaluation, we did not ask specifically about education and compensation due to the confidential nature of some such questions. However, 50.6% of site staff participating in the study indicated that they work in the host schools during the day, some (36.9%) as teachers, who would have teaching certification and a college degree. Others (7.5%) responded that they work in the school as paraprofessionals. Various other site staff reported that in addition to their work in the Program, they work in the host school in various roles, including custodian, coach, nurse, and librarian.

The data on compensation and turnover rates, though not specific, is touched upon in principals' and site coordinators' survey responses and are included in interview data. Two findings in this regard are: (1) staff compensation and turnover rates are better than they were before LINC assumed management of the Program, and (2) these two issues remain a major concern, with the majority of principals, coordinators, and site staff indicating that these issues are challenges. However, this finding is not surprising; both of these issues represent widespread concerns in the field of school-age care as a whole.

In terms of staff training provided by the Before and After School Program, our findings indicate that in this area, the LINC Before and After School Program surpasses what is generally available for school-age care staff around the country. Training refers to opportunities given to the staff to improve their skills and enhance their ability to work with and interact with program participants. The research indicates that staff training is associated with the provision of developmentally appropriate care and the ability of the staff to serve as role models and interact with children in ways that encourage students' curiosity and positive self-image. Beyond the impact on child outcomes, training "may attract and retain high quality staff."<sup>19</sup> The research cited in the Rand study indicates that 90% of after school programs across the country provide some of their staff with training, and the LINC Program is no exception. However, whereas the minimum recommendations in this regard are for orientation and training for new staff members, LINC put in place a formal, ongoing professional development program for its before and after school staff through a partnership agreement with the Francis Child Development Institute, which provides this service. The training entails not only off-site workshops and other related opportunities but also site-based training with instructors from Francis. We

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<sup>18</sup> No practice in this category received a "strong" rating.

<sup>19</sup> Beckett, M., Hawken, A. & Jackowitz, A. (2001). *Ibid.*, p. 14.

feel that this is of critical importance as it is associated with observations and immediate feedback and leads to effective learning.

We asked site staff questions related to their training, both initially and ongoing, and we found the Program's offerings in this regard to be extensive. Most site staff (78.2%) indicated that they were given time to learn about and observe the program before they started work (Figure 1). In addition, 81.1% of staff indicated that they "always" or "usually" have specific training on topics that would help them most in their job (Figure 2). When asked if they would like more training in specific areas, site staff responded that they would, which we see as an indication of their interest to grow and develop in their job. The majority chose the following topic areas for further training: child development and behavior (chosen by 74% as an area where they would like more training); helping children with problem solving (69%); dealing with difficult situations (67%); working with children who have special needs (63%); and identifying and reporting instances of child abuse and neglect (63%). Other training topics were also cited, though to a lesser extent, including involving children in planning (61%); training in risk management (58%); dealing with such diversity issues as gender equity and multiculturalism (57%); planning for school vacations and summers (51%); and using portable equipment (46%).

Observations and interview data support staff perception of the training, indicating that although staff development opportunities exist, there is need for additional training. Emphasis in this regard is placed on training in child development and behavior or related topics to provide staff with direction and specific skills. Such training would enhance the staff's ability to interact effectively with students, which observations indicated is slightly below par in some program sites.

### *Program Characteristics*

Of the 12 Program characteristics identified by Rand, three were ranked as "strong" on the basis of the research evidence linking them to program quality and positive child outcomes: variety of activities, flexibility of programming (enabling children to make choices), and emotional climate.

#### ***Variety of Activities and Program Flexibility***

Responding to the question, "do children have enough activity choices?" 52.2% of site staff responded "always" and 35.6% responded "usually." In terms of choice, responses to the question "Do children get to move from one activity to another when they are ready?" 43.1% of site staff answered "always," 35.6% responded "usually," 14.4% responded "sometimes," and 4% – representing only seven responses – answered "never."

In responses to open-ended questions, the availability of a range of activities for children was a repeated theme, especially among principals. In response to the question

"In your opinion, what are the one or two most innovative/unique aspects of the program?" four of nine principals' responses were related to the variety of activities. Teachers' responses to the same question, however, focused to a lesser extent on the provision of a variety of activities, with many more of the teachers noting the caring and supportive staff and staff training.

66.9% indicated that they can "always" or "most of the time" rest and relax when they want to, indicating that they can make choices; and 88.2% of them indicated that they like coming to the program. We take that to mean that the program offers them things that are of relevance and interest to them (Figures 3-4).

Among the older children, ages 10-13 years, fewer responded that they like coming to the program "always" and "most of the time" (Figure 5). These older children responded to a slightly different questionnaire that included more questions on activities than the questionnaire designed for the younger students. Asked if they have time to do their favorite activities or hobbies, 63.5% responded "always" and "most of the time" (Figure 6). Asked if they have chances to do things outside the program (field trips, special lessons, etc.), 62% responded with "always" and "most of the time" (Figure 7). Asked if they have the time and help to do their homework if they want to, 84.1% responded with "always" and "most of the time" (Figure 8).

These findings on the provision of choice and variety of activities are positive and indicative of the programs' improvement since LINC has taken charge, a point made by several principals in responses to open-ended questions. However, our observations of the programs yielded mixed results, indicating that although some of the programs offered multiple activities and choices, this was not a consistent finding across all programs observed. This finding prompted the Yale Research Associate to suggest work toward offering balanced programming "allowing a wide range of activities" across all sites, particularly in the after school hours. Since some of the programs are exemplary in this regard, it was further suggested that staff training should include lessons learned "in-house" by having some of the staff visit these exemplary sites.

### ***Emotional Climate***

Also strongly supported by the research is the emotional climate associated with school-age care programs. Emotional climate refers to such practices as fostering supportive and warm relationships between the staff and children and the staff and parents, and making both parents and children feel welcome and respected.

We found that the programs scored exceptionally well in this regard. Among students ages 5-9 years, 90.2% felt that the adults in the program like them (Figure 9), 85.6% indicated that the adults in the program listen to them, and 91.7% indicated that if they have a problem, an adult in the program will help them (Figures 10 and 11). The majority (86.6%) of this age group of children also indicated that the adults in the program are friendly, and 76.3% indicated that the staff listen to what the children want to do (for example, what activities or materials they need).

Among students ages 10-13 years, 81% indicated that they think the adults in the program like them (Figure 12), 78.6% indicated that the adults in the program listen to them, and 85.5% indicated that if they have a problem, an adult in the program helps them (Figures 13 and 14). The majority (86.2%) of this group of children further noted that the adults in the program are friendly, and 77.6% responded that the staff listens to what they want in terms of activities and materials.

Similar responses were evident in the surveys completed by parents or legal guardians of children participating in the programs. Almost all parents (94.4%) indicated that their child likes coming to the program, 96.3% noted that the staff seems to like their child, and 94% felt that the staff respond to their child's individual characteristics and needs. Almost all parents (97.3%) reported feeling welcomed, and 95.8% indicated that if they have a problem, they can discuss it with someone in the program (Figure 15).

Other program practices identified by Rand received only "moderate" ranking in terms of the research evidence providing an association with program quality and child outcomes:

### ***Space***

The availability of space is one of the characteristics. When we asked site staff if they are able to perform indoor activities in the space they have, 49.4%% of them responded "always," 38.5% "usually," and 8.6% "sometimes." In response to the same question regarding outdoor space, 58% responded "always," 36.8% "usually," and 2.3%, representing only four respondents, "sometimes."

As is characteristic of school-age care programs around the country, however, study participants noted the lack of dedicated space in responses to questions regarding something they would like to change about the program as well as in responses to questions regarding challenges the program is facing. Shared space appears to be a problem in some sites, with site staff indicating that "*sharing space affects the program greatly because it's not willingly shared*" and "*we sometimes get blamed for things that we haven't even done.*" In some sites, staff responses indicated that difficulties are overcome. As one noted, "*[Sharing space] makes it a little crowded, but it's working out.*" Some site staff felt that shared space poses programmatic and time limits (time constraints result from unpack and pack materials every day). Several site staff members, however, mentioned the benefits of shared space, indicating that it allows for "*positive interactions*" and "*it helps you learn about other people and take care of property.*"

### ***Materials***

The availability of materials – games, puzzles, and other related items used by children in school-age care programs – is indicated in the Rand research review as relatively important; an adequate supply of materials enables children to make choices about which activities to engage in, and it prevents conflict among children over

materials. Although the Rand study indicated that a common complaint among school-age care programs is the lack of an adequate supply of materials, we did not find this to be the case with the LINC Before and After School Program.

Most (83.3%) of site staff indicated that they "always" or "usually" have enough materials and equipment to support program activities (Figure 16). Of children ages 5-9 years, 84.6% indicated that there are enough things to use so that everyone gets a turn (Figure 17), and of children ages 10-13 years, 79.3% responded the same way to the same question (Figure 18).

However, in observations of the before school programs, the use of materials and supplies was cited as an issue. There was a good supply and variety of games and other materials in storage areas, but in some sites, only a few of the games and other materials were out for the children's use. This may have stemmed in part from the concern over using up the supply of materials, although the Yale Research Associate noted that many of the materials, such as puzzles and games, could be used repeatedly. It may also be the case that program staff are inclined not to unpack all supplies every day since these have to be packed at the end of the period, or staff may feel that by withholding some materials they can have something "new" with which to interest children. Regardless of the reason, it seems a shame to keep materials in storage, so effort should be made to address this issue.

### ***Attention to safety and health***

This practice refers to the safety of the physical environment as well as personal hygiene and the nutritional needs of children while they are in the program. LINC's attention to this area is evident in:

1) The provision of snacks and breakfast. This is made possible with the collaboration of KCMSD and represents 4% of the Program's overall expenses. However, this is the one aspect of the Program for which the majority of children indicated less than hearty enthusiasm. Most of the children noted they get enough to eat while in the program, but only 52% of the younger children and less than 50% of older children indicated that they always like the food. Although there were fewer positive responses here than for other program practices, such as variety of activities, they are higher than we anticipated, given the low marks children generally give to school meals.

2) LINC's attempts to ensure that all sites are licensed by the state. Licensing requirements generally focus on basic health and safety considerations that need to be taken into account in providing services to groups of children. Our findings indicate not only compliance with basic requirements but also effective communication of these to the site staff, who have direct responsibility for the health and safety of children who participate in the Program.

The majority of the site staff (88.5%) indicated that they know the Program's policies regarding hand washing, and 87.4% indicated knowledge of handling

emergencies in general. The majority (83.9%) of site staff also indicated they know the Program's policies for weather emergencies; 85.6% indicated that they know the Program's policies for accident prevention procedures (Figure 19); 86.8% indicated that they know policies for fire drills and evacuation procedures (Figure 20); and 74.7% indicated that they know the Program's policies for fire emergencies and use of a fire extinguisher (Figure 21). Similar findings were noted on all other issues related to children's health and safety. However, slightly fewer staff (generally less than 70%), indicated knowledge of Program policies related to the following: giving medications to children; caring for children with chronic health problems; and supervising such high-risk activities as swimming and sledding. There may be explanations for the fewer positive responses here, however: dispensing medications and knowing about children with chronic health problems may be the responsibility of the site coordinator, and high-risk activities such as swimming may not be offered in all the programs.

Issues related to children's safety extend beyond basic health and the prevention of accidents. Also included are concerns about ensuring that the staff knows the whereabouts of children and that their parents or legal guardians pick them up. In this regard the majority of site staff (over 85%) indicated that they know the Program's policies for releasing children to unauthorized adults and what to do in the event that an unauthorized person tries to pick up a child. Asked if the staff know where their children are when they pick them up, 70.2% of parents responded with "always," and 25.5% responded "usually." Only 3.7% (21 parents) responded "sometimes," and 0.9% (five parents) did not respond to this question. Similarly positive parental responses were given to the question "Does the staff know who is allowed to pick up your child?"

However, we have two concerns here. First, although 85% of site staff know the policies for releasing children, the expectation is that all staff should be aware of basic Program procedures, so efforts to provide training and orientation on this issue is recommended. Second, our observations of the 15 programs participating in the study indicated that the sign-in procedures in many of the sites created situations that are potentially unsafe for children. For example, parents sign in and leave the children in the school office, which is often a distance from the site. This leaves the children unsupervised for a time during which they may not go directly to the program site with no knowledge of this among the staff. A simple solution would be to move the sign-in location to where the program is taking place. This would address the safety issue and would provide opportunities for the staff to greet and interact with parents.

A related concern, also noted on the basis of our observations, regards attendance and issues surrounding the transition time from school to the after school program. We found that the majority of the 15 programs did not have procedures in place to ensure that children enrolled in the Program on any given day were actually in attendance, since only a few sites took attendance immediately after children's arrival. Even in these cases, this was merely a name check, and questions were not raised about a child on the list who may not have been there that day.

Another concern noted in the observations is parent pick-up procedures. All sites required parents to sign their children out, but some sites had looser controls than others.

Although these issues were observed in some but not all the programs, they raise serious concerns, and our recommendation is that they be addressed immediately.

### ***Total enrollment, staff-to-child ratios, and mixing of age groups***

The research and our experience with school-age care suggest a limit on the number of children participating in the Program. Small group size can address the potential safety concerns raised in the previous section, and it has the added benefit of enabling staff to pay attention to individual children's needs. Rand researchers suggest, on the basis of studies as well as the general consensus in the field, that total enrollment in school-age care programs should be 30 children ages 6 or older. The total enrollment for each of the LINC program sites is higher, especially in the after school programs. However, the children are separated into several classrooms, so that each group is small.

Having small group sizes in the LINC after school programs enhances management and supervision. However, the practice of separating the children into age groups has a down side: foregoing the opportunity of having mixed-age groups. The developmental benefits associated with mixed-age groups are numerous, and experts in the field note that school-age care programs are in a position to mix age groups and so vastly expand upon and enrich children's experiences. Although LINC has to address program size limitations by separating children into groups, the feasibility of having mixed-age groupings should be considered.

LINC is ensuring that its programs adhere to state standards on staff-to-child ratios. The staff-to-child ratio in the LINC Program is 1:16, which meets Missouri standards but is high in comparison to national averages. The NSACA standards call for a staff:child ratio of 1:10-1:15 for children six years or older. The Rand study indicates that the national average for staff-to-child ratios is 1:8.9, with private providers having the lowest average ratio (1:6.9) and public and non-profit organizations having higher ratios (1:11.4 and 1:9, respectively).

### **Community Contacts**

The Rand study identified three practices – family involvement, use of volunteers, and partnerships with community-based organizations – as "moderately" supported by research and practice as effective approaches that school-age care programs should adopt. Our findings on the Program's overall organizational structure and management indicated, as we noted in previous sections of this report, that LINC has put in place exemplary practices in this regard. These findings were reinforced in our analysis of program data, indicating that LINC's practices are as effective at the program site level as they are at the overall organizational level.

## ***Family Involvement***

The Program's site-based councils, described earlier, provide an opportunity for families to become involved in and shape the Program's implementation at each site. They encourage parents to participate in the Program as well as in the host schools, a point several study participants mentioned.

Since participation in the council is limited to a small number of parents, we asked the 570 parents who participated in the study several questions about their involvement in the Program. We found that parents are highly involved in the Program, that they frequently interact with Program staff and discuss their children's progress with site staff, and that they feel welcomed in the Program as well as in the host school. For example, asked if they feel welcome in the Program at any time, 86.8% of the parents responded "always," and 10.5% responded "usually." 90.4% responded that they always feel free to visit the program at any time, and another 7% responded that they usually do. The majority of parents also indicated that they received orientation and that they visited the Program before their child's enrollment, and 92.1% indicated that there are staff members in the Program who share their language and culture. Perhaps most significant, however, is our findings that there are ongoing interactions between parents and program staff: 90.2% of parents responded "always" or "usually" to the question "Does the staff keep you informed about program schedule, activities, staff changes, and decisions?" (Figure 22). A majority (83.9%) responded "always" or "usually" to the question "Does the staff discuss your child's development and behavior with you?" (Figure 23), and 75.9% responded "always" or "usually" to the question "Do you have a say in how your child spends time at the program?" (Figure 24).

Asked in open-ended questions what they do to keep families informed of program practices and events, eight of the 15 site coordinators said they have newsletters, flyers, calendars, or other regular means of written communications, and all 15 coordinators also indicated verbal communications and daily contacts with parents as ways of keeping parents informed. Asked what they do to encourage parent involvement, site coordinators and staff provided a list of different activities, some formal (for example, monthly meetings and "family nights" and other related events), others less formal, such as encouraging parents to volunteer and letting parents make suggestions and give their opinions about the programs. There were also indications that staff routinely encourage parents to participate *"through daily activities, daily conversations and meetings,"* as one site coordinator noted.

## ***Use of volunteers***

Open-ended responses by some site coordinators indicated that the programs involve the use of volunteers on a regular basis, in part because there are school-based requirements that facilitate this: *"Our partnership with community members, and the schools' parental compact requires parents to volunteer at least 20 hours per school year. The parents and community volunteers are always ready to come and help in the*

*[Program].*" Apparently, the extended hours of operation in school-age care make volunteering an easy choice for parents and others who work during the day.

Our findings further indicate, however, that the use of volunteers extends beyond parents and legal guardians. Site coordinators and site staff indicated regular use of other volunteers in the Program, and they mentioned teachers (for example, a music teacher) who volunteer their time each week to work with children in the school-age programs; various community members and coaches who assist with sports, field trips, tutoring, and helping students learn to read; and high school students who participate in the programs in various ways as volunteers.

### ***Community Partnerships***

Community partnerships and collaborations with other organizations are at the core of the Program. Indeed, as we noted earlier in the report, LINC was identified by a community task force to serve as the coordinating organization.

As with other Program and management practices, we found that community partnerships exist not only at the overall organizational level but at the site level as well. For example, principals noted in responses to open-ended questions that one of the major benefits of the program is its link to the community. Several site staff members mentioned the Program's involvement with the community. One staff member noted that "*children being involved in community services*" is one of the innovative/unique aspects of the program, indicating that children, too, have opportunities to participate in and become involved within the community.

### **Other Findings**

#### ***School-Program collaborations***

Other Program practices and characteristics not mentioned in the Rand study were evident in our findings. One of these is the collaboration and sense of teamwork that exist between school and program staff. Some of the faculty and staff in the host schools actually work as site staff, providing natural school-Program linkages. There is also shared space, which occurs in many school-age care programs. Beyond these aspects, however, school staff know about and think highly of the Program: 71.8% of teachers in host schools said they know most of the Before and After School Program staff, and 86.7% indicated they know students who participate in the Program. Although only a relatively small percentage of teachers (21.1%) said they were actively involved in the development of the Program, 67.7% said they believe that others in the school were involved in the Program's development. The majority (74.3%) of the teachers who responded to the survey also indicated their belief that the before and after school program has made a difference in their school (Figure 25).

Many site staff members (84.3%) "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement "The school staff and the Before and After School staff in this school work as a

team" (Figure 26). And, confirming collaborations among site staff, 95.4% "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement "My colleagues and I have a good working relationship," and an equally impressive percentage "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement "The Before and After School staff in this program work as a team."

*In summary of the findings related to question two on characteristics and practices of the Program as it operates at the individual site level, we found that the general effectiveness of LINC's management is as evident in the individual sites as it is in its overall organization of the Program. Study participants noted positive changes and improvements that have occurred since LINC took over the management of the Program, and the point was made that Program improvement is evolving and ongoing. Principals and parents were highly supportive of the programs in each of the sites, mentioning in particular the caring nature and contributions of the site coordinators and site staff as well as the range and quality of activities provided to children. Of significance is our finding that children in both age groups (5-9 years and 10-13 years) overwhelmingly indicated that they like participating in the Program.*

*Several overall practices that we felt were exemplary were: the provision of activities and materials that are of relevance to and capture the interests of both younger and older children; efforts to involve parents not only in site-based councils but also in the operations of the programs and in communications and interactions with parents; and the emphasis placed on professional development and staff training, in particular, the offering of on-site training opportunities.*

*In examining how well the programs adhere to practices that have been identified as strongly associated with good-quality and positive child outcomes, we found – on the basis of student, parent, and staff perceptions – that the programs adhere to all such program practices: the provision of a variety of activities, program flexibility and the ability of students to make choices, and emotional climate, which refers to the presence of caring adults. Students and parents indicated that they feel valued and supported by the staff, and principals also mentioned the staff and site coordinators as major contributors to the programs' effectiveness.*

*We found that the programs adhered to other practices noted in the research, such as attention to health and safety, community contacts, and the use of volunteers. However, in the adoption of certain program practices, such as not having mixed-age groups in the after school services, the programs were found to be lacking. In addition, we found that some operational issues, such as the lack of dedicated space, level of staff salaries, and rate of staff turnover, have improved since LINC began coordination of the Program yet nonetheless remain problematic. These problems, however, are also noted in other school-age care programs around the country.*

*In terms of our observations, which were limited to a few hours, we found elements of good-quality and even exemplary practices in many of the 15 sites. However, concerns were raised in observations of some sites about: monitoring attendance and sign-in procedures, which in some programs leave children unsupervised for a short*

*time. Both of these procedural aspects of the programs, although they pose serious safety issues, are easily remedied.*

*Of significance are observations that indicated the existence of several exemplary sites. Since staff training is an integral aspect of the Program, we recommend the use of these exemplary sites for staff development and the sharing of good program practices and lessons learned.*

### **Research Question Three: What impact has the program had on students and other participants?**

#### **Impact on Principals, Staff, and School**

Study participants indicated that the Program has made a difference to their lives and job satisfaction. This was especially evident among principals in the host schools. Some principals, responding to open-ended questions about how they personally benefited from the Program, mentioned improved communications and contacts with the community: *"It has helped me do a better job connecting with the community,"* and *"I have grown personally by acquiring techniques and strategies for involving the community in school affairs."* Some principals mentioned the workload lifted off them: *"The leadership of the program is strong and so much weight is lifted from me, personally."* Six principals attributed enhanced job satisfaction to their ability to depend on the site coordinators: *"A smooth after school program keeps me busy doing my primary job, which is running the school day."* Four principals derived job satisfaction from knowing that the children have a safe place to be after school. As one principal wrote: *"Knowing that children have a safe place is key. One of my main objectives is to make the school accessible and open to all we serve. LINC plays a key role."*

Among site coordinators responding to an open-ended question on how they personally benefited from the Program, five responded that the training they receive contributed to their ability to develop leadership and other skills. But the majority derived satisfaction from working with and making a difference in the lives of children and families: *"You get great joy out of working with children and families,"* is one statement reflecting how the coordinators generally feel; wrote another: *"Seeing the children perform and feeling good about themselves makes me feel like I have made a difference in children's life."*

It was also evident in our findings that the Program's impact extends to the school as a whole. Of the teachers in the host schools, 74.3% responded that they "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement "The Before and After School Program has made a difference in this school," and 87.9% of site staff responded in the same way to this statement. Eleven of the principals, or 78.6%, responded that they believed the Program is making a difference in the school; one principal was not sure, one disagreed, and another marked the response "not applicable." All site coordinators felt that the Program

has made a difference in the school, a majority (53.3%) indicating that they "strongly agree" with the statement and others (46.7%) stating that they "agree."

### **Impact on Students**

The potential contributions of school-age care to children's development and education are noted in numerous studies. The studies point to academic and other benefits associated with students' participation in school-age care programs, particularly among low-income students. The academic benefits cited in the research include students' improved attitudes toward school, higher expectations of school achievement, better work habits, and higher attendance rates.<sup>20</sup> We found that the LINC Before and After School Program may be associated with many of these benefits.

We note this on the basis of responses to the school climate portion of the survey used in the evaluation. Among students ages 5-9 years, 71.4% indicated that they like coming to school, and another 18.5% indicated that they "sometimes" like coming to school. A majority of students, 66.5%, indicated that they "usually" obey rules in school, and 24.8% indicated that they "sometimes" do so. An equally large percentage (60.8%) of the students reported that they do their homework without being reminded, and 68.4% noted that they pay attention in class. These findings point to students' interest in school as well as their motivation to do well academically, a prerequisite to the ability to succeed in school. The responses further indicated that many of the students also believe they can succeed academically. In response to the statement "I feel I can do well in this school," 89% of the students responded "yes," and 10.1% responded "sometimes."

Among students ages 10-13 years, only 56.2% responded that they like coming to school, and 35.9% responded that they "sometimes" like coming to school. The lower percentages here may be indications of developmental differences between the two age groups. Similar percentages (56.6% and 36.9%) were noted in response to the statement "I usually obey rules at school." In this age group, 57.6% indicated that they do their homework without being reminded, and 62.1% stated that they pay attention to class. In response to the statement "I feel I can do well in this school," 73.1% responded "yes," and 19.7% responded "sometimes."

Although the findings noted above cannot be used as an absolute indication of Program outcomes, teachers, site staff, and others generally indicated their belief that the Program has had a positive impact on school achievement among some of the students. Of significance here are the perceptions of teachers in the host schools, who teach students who are participating in the Program as well as those who do not. Among the teachers, 44.8% "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement "I have seen marked improvements in student achievement among students participating in the Before and

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<sup>20</sup> Studies pointing to these benefits include: Schinke, S. Cole, K. & Poulin, S. (1998). Evaluation of Boys and Girls Club of America's Educational Enhancement Program. Atlanta, GA: Author; and Brooks, P., Mojica, C. & Land, R. (1995). Final evaluation report: Longitudinal study of LA Best's after school education and enrichment program, 1992-1994. Los Angeles, CA: YCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation.

After School Program." Another 35% responded that they were not sure. Asked to describe the Program's impact on one child or family, some teachers wrote about changes in students' interest in and motivation to do well in school. In the words of one teacher: *"One student I have struggled with every subject. The additional tutoring she receives added with her involvement in extra activities placed her self-esteem up so high, she was able to bring her grades up to honor roll. Now she believes with hard work she can do anything."*

Among site staff responding to the statement "I have seen marked improvements in student achievement among students participating in the Before and After School Program," 48.3% responded that they "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement, and 24.7% responded that they were "not sure." Principals revealed some ambivalence in their response to the same statement: 35.7% indicated that they have seen a marked improvement in academic achievement among students participating in the Before and After School Program, 28.9% indicated that they did not see such improvement, and 28.6% were not sure. Among site coordinators, 60% (nine coordinators) indicated their agreement with the statement, but 26.7% (four) were not sure, and one of the site coordinators disagreed. Among parents, 86.8% responded that their child "seems to enjoy school," and 79.5% indicated that they felt that their child's schoolwork has improved.

We also asked some study participants to give us an idea of what they believe would be good indicators of the Program's impact on students. Among principals and site coordinators, most mentioned students' improvement in school attendance as an indicator of positive academic outcomes.

The research indicates that the impact of school-age care programs extend beyond academic improvement and includes also positive changes in student behavior and socio-emotional development. Here studies point to decreases in the incidence of substance abuse, violence, and other anti-social behaviors among students in school-age programs, as well as better social adjustment and improved relations with peers. Although we did not have the means to examine all such indicators, there was general belief among participants that the Program is associated with improvements in student behavior: 65.5% of site staff, who work directly with students and see them daily, indicated that they "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement "I have seen marked improvements in student behavior among students participating in the Before and After School Program."

In response to open-ended questions, several teachers in the host schools indicated positive changes in student behavior and social relations. Asked to describe the impact the Program has had on one student or family, many cited enhanced social skills and improved mental health. As one teacher wrote: *"The student I have in mind has shown great social growth as the result of responsibilities given to him during extended hours. Self-concept has greatly improved. The child is focused on listening and following directions. Our extended day program has given him room and challenge to grow."*

In response to open-ended questions, four out of 10 principals mentioned academic improvements as one of the variables useful for observing or measuring the

Program's impact. However, in response to the question "Can you briefly describe the impact of the program on one particular child or family?" none of the principals mentioned academic improvement/schoolwork. Rather, the majority of principals focused on the program's impact on children's social and emotional development. The responses of two principals in particular show how important the program is to some of the children:

*"One particular child that comes to mind is a third grade girl who lost her father this past year. The [program] activity has allowed her the opportunity to express her feelings. Instead of quietly observing other children, she is now participating. She comes to school with a smile on her face and appears to be adjusting well to her loss."*

*"One child who never smiled or interacted with other children learned to trust adults, especially her teacher and the extended day personnel. She has a very unhappy home situation and the adults in the program provided nurturing care (love and clothing). The child blossomed and appears to be happy, at least in school."*

The Program's impact on children's social and emotional development is important in and of itself. It also provides another indication that participating students are likely to do well in school, because strong social and emotional development, as well as having access to supportive and caring individuals (for example, teachers and program staff), provides the foundation for school success.<sup>21</sup> Space precludes our highlighting all comments. However, there were many such comments, all strong testimony to the impact the Program is having, particularly on participating children and families. The comments were also illuminating, as are the ones above, of the life circumstances and experiences of many of the children, for whom participation in the Program provides the caring and supportive environment they need.

*In summary of our findings related to question three, we note that the methodological and other limitations inherent in this evaluation limited our ability to conduct an empirical outcome study. Nevertheless, student perceptions indicated that among the younger and older students participating in the Program, there are good attitudes toward school in general and academic work in particular, as well as the belief, among the majority of the children, that they can succeed in school. Teachers in the host schools as well as site staff believed that the Program has had an impact on student achievement, as did parents of participating students. Of significance are findings that the Program provides a supportive and nurturing environment for children, many of whom, according to principals, site coordinators, teachers, and site staff, have made improvements in social and emotional development despite very difficult life circumstances. Beyond the impact on students, there were benefits to site coordinators, who indicated professional growth as a result of the Program, and to principals, most of whom indicated that because of effective leadership at the site level and overall LINC administration of the Program, they can work more effectively with the community and, most important, are able to concentrate on their responsibilities as principals.*

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<sup>21</sup> Philips, D. & Shonkoff, J. (2001). From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER EVALUATION**

Program impact has to be ascertained over a period of time. The short duration of this evaluation, as well as methodological challenges associated with evaluations of ongoing, community-based, and school-linked services, enabled us to begin to look at Program outcomes and potential benefits. The findings presented here suggest that the Program is making a difference to children's academic performance and social and emotional development. However, we recommend that LINC undertake longitudinal outcome studies, with design options including:

1. Using the same surveys we used in our evaluations, but among two groups of students – Program participants and non-Program participants, matched in age and demographics.
2. Collecting and analyzing school data on student attendance, retention in grade, referral to special education, and performance on standardized tests and analyzing these to see how well Program participants are doing in relation to students as a whole or to a subgroup of non-participating students.
3. Collecting data to illuminate life circumstances among students in general and Program participants in particular. Changes in the numbers of children living in poverty, children who are homeless, and children from immigrant families should be used to illuminate Program outcomes. For example, even if a large percentage of Program participants show evidence of school achievement, increases in difficult life circumstances would indicate that the Program is doing well despite difficult conditions.

The above-noted recommendations should be used in longitudinal studies that would provide indications of change over time.

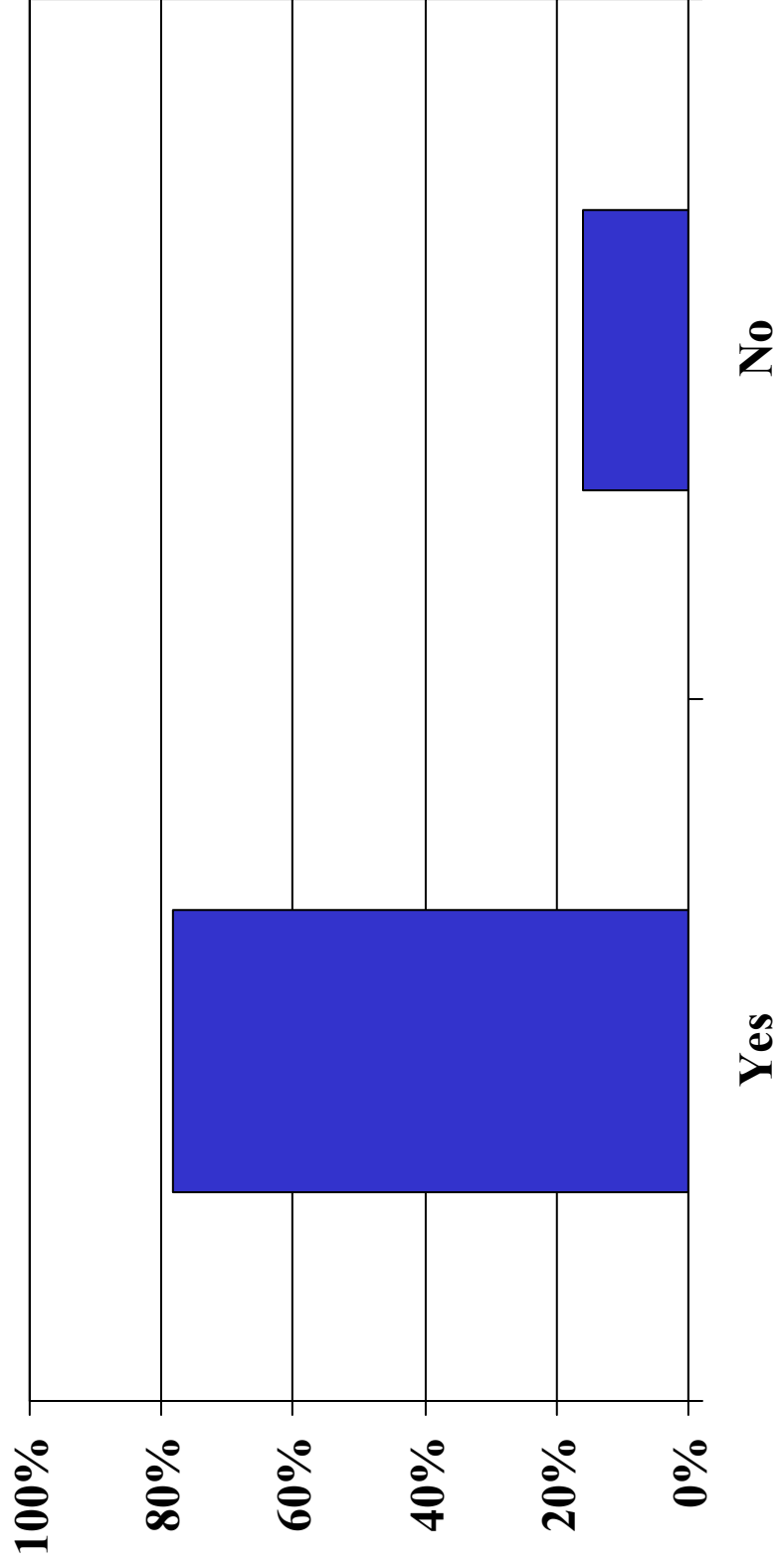
We also recommend continued monitoring of Program operations and quality on a regular basis. Our evaluation provided strong indications that LINC's overall organizational structure and the operations and quality of the programs at the site level are working well. However, the Program is an evolving effort and unlikely to remain static. Circumstances and leadership and staff changes occur and are likely to contribute to positive or negative or outcomes, hence our recommendation for regular evaluations of program processes and implementation.

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# Figure 1

Site Staff (n = 174)

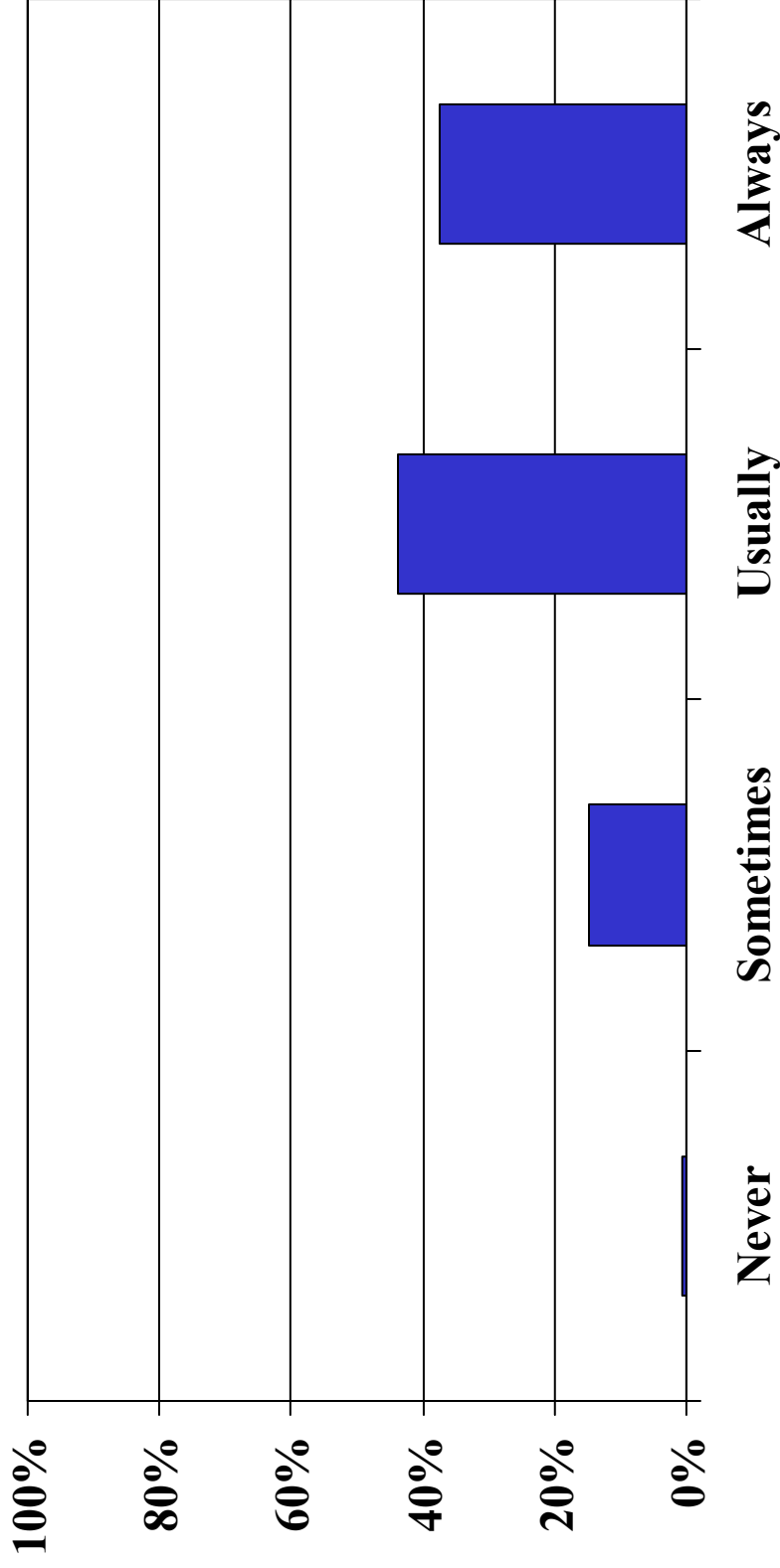
*Were you given time to learn about the program and observe it before you started your job?*



## Figure 2

Site Staff (n = 174)

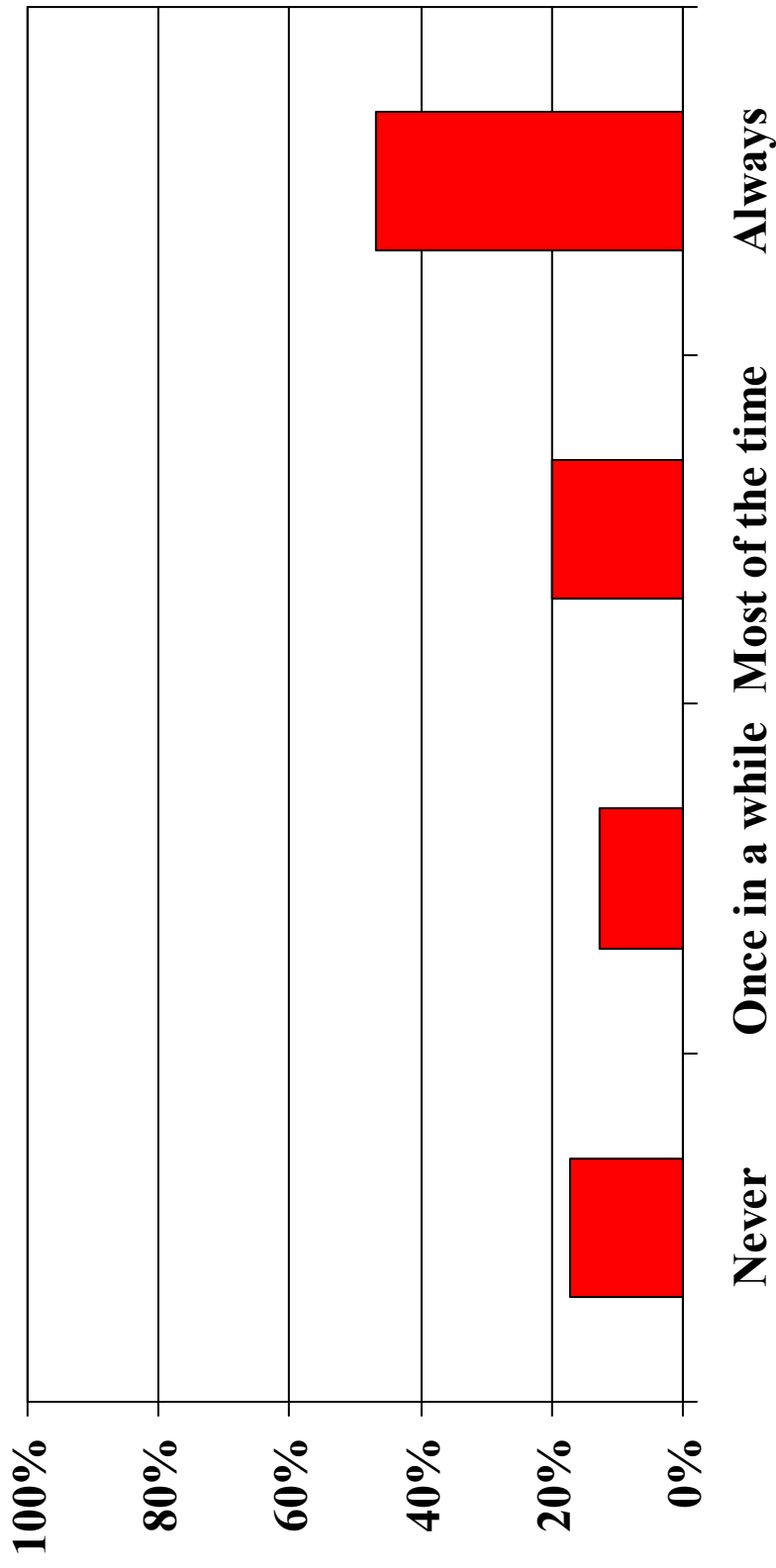
*Do you have specific training on topics that would help you most in your job?*



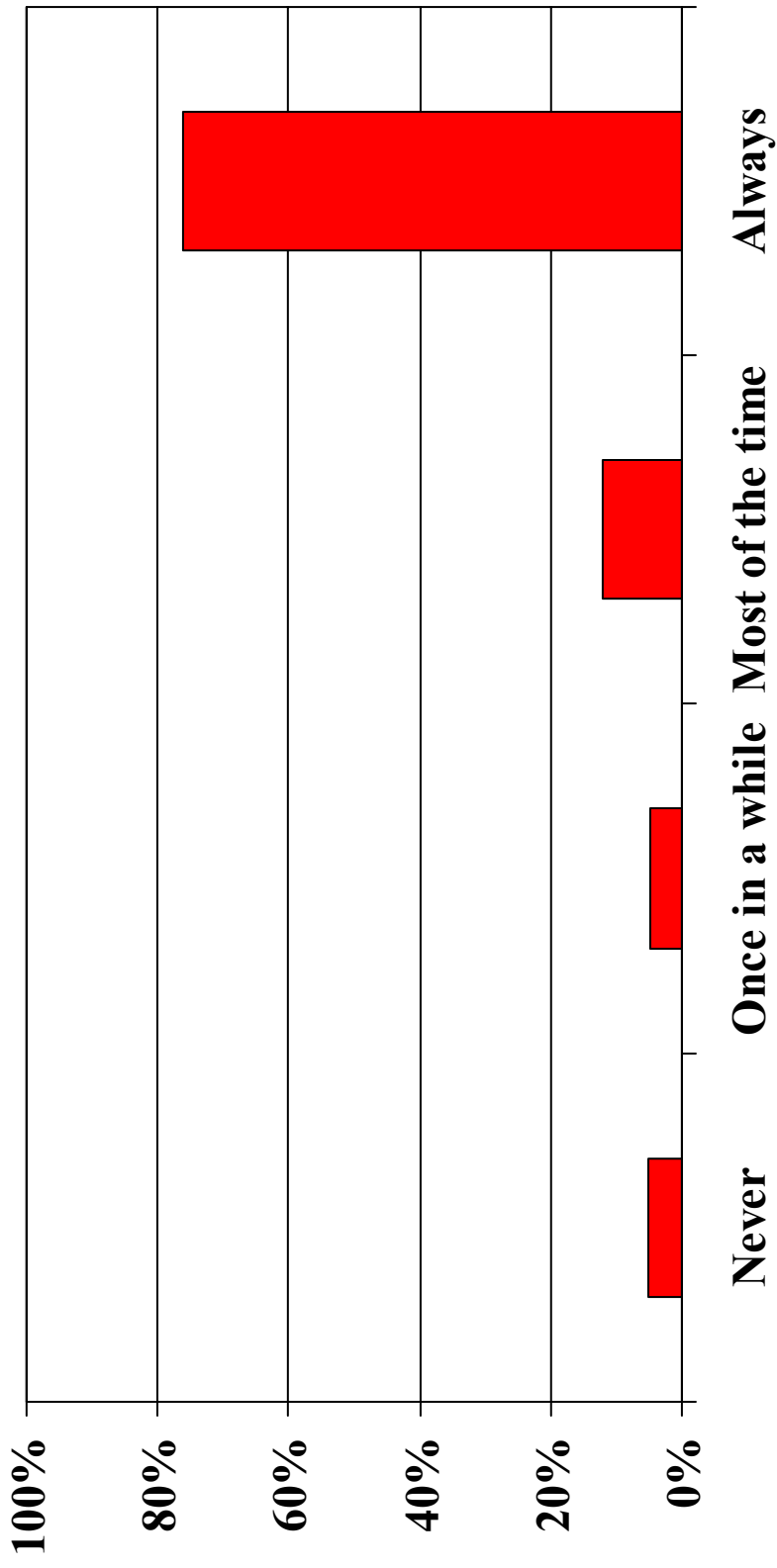
# Figure 3

Students 5-9 years old (n=674)

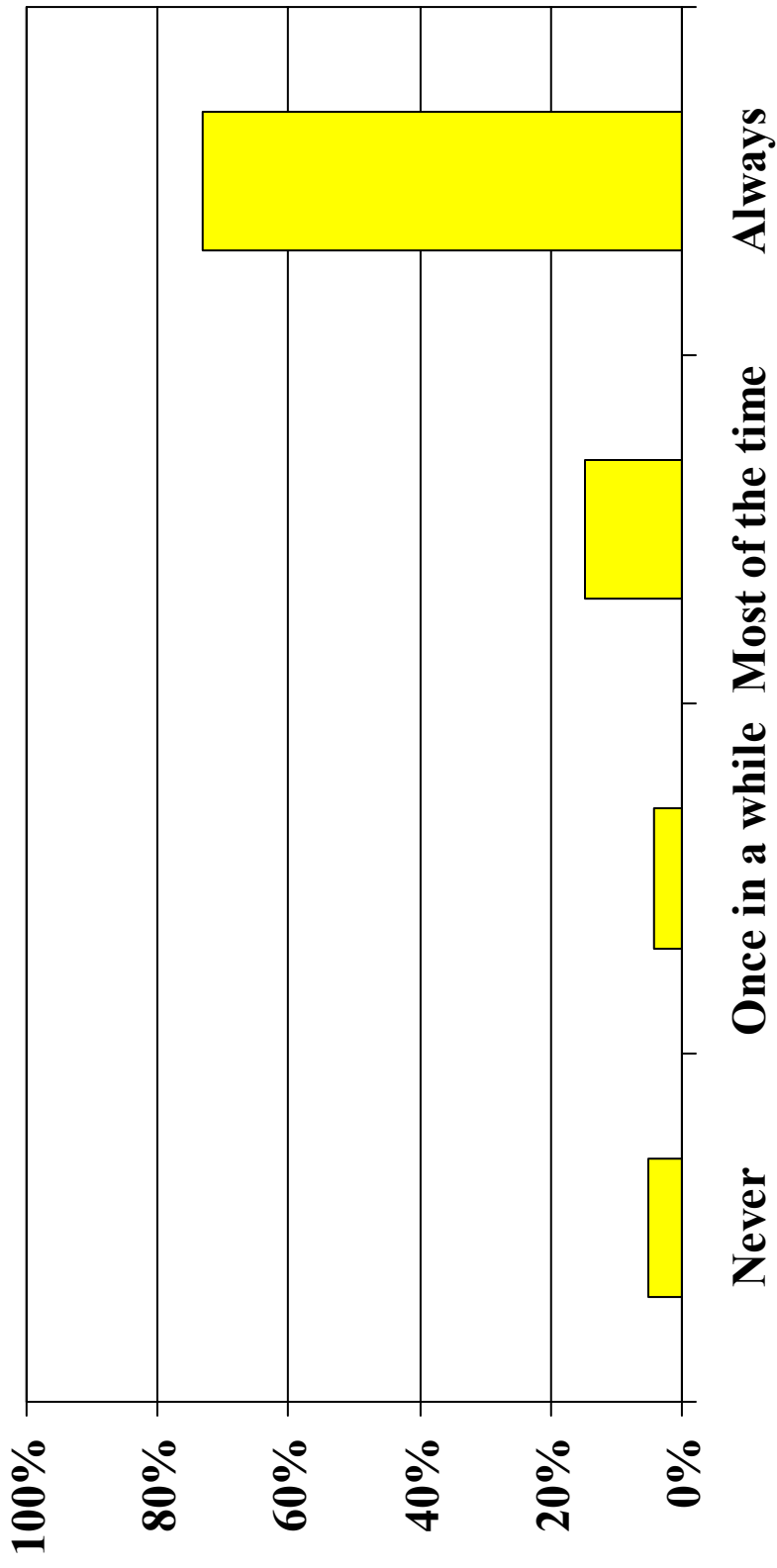
*Can you rest and relax here when you need to?*



**Figure 4**  
Students 5-9 years old (n=674)  
*Do you like coming here?*



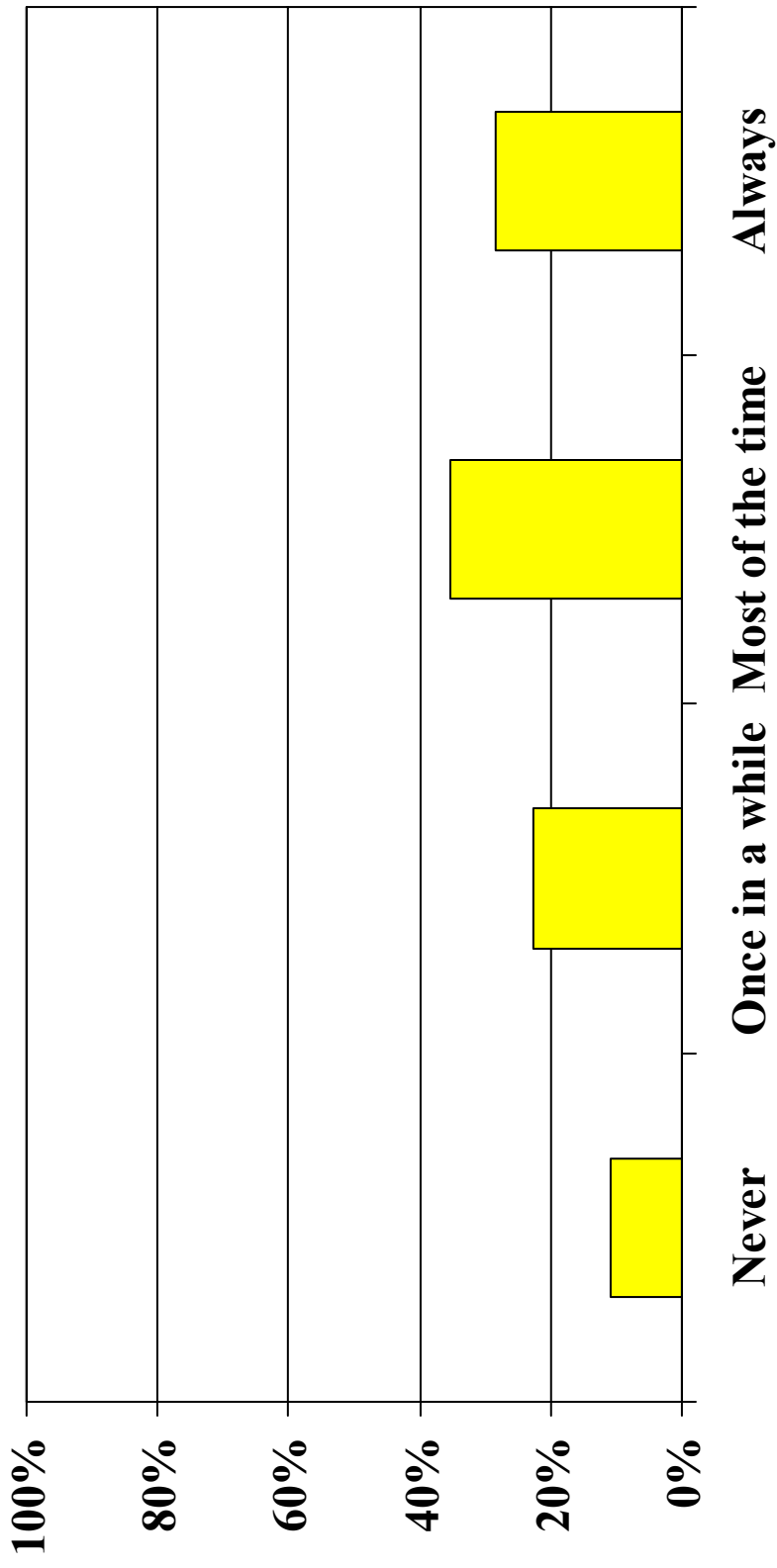
**Figure 5**  
Students 10-13 years old (n=290)  
*Do you like coming here?*



# Figure 6

Students 10-13 years old (n=290)

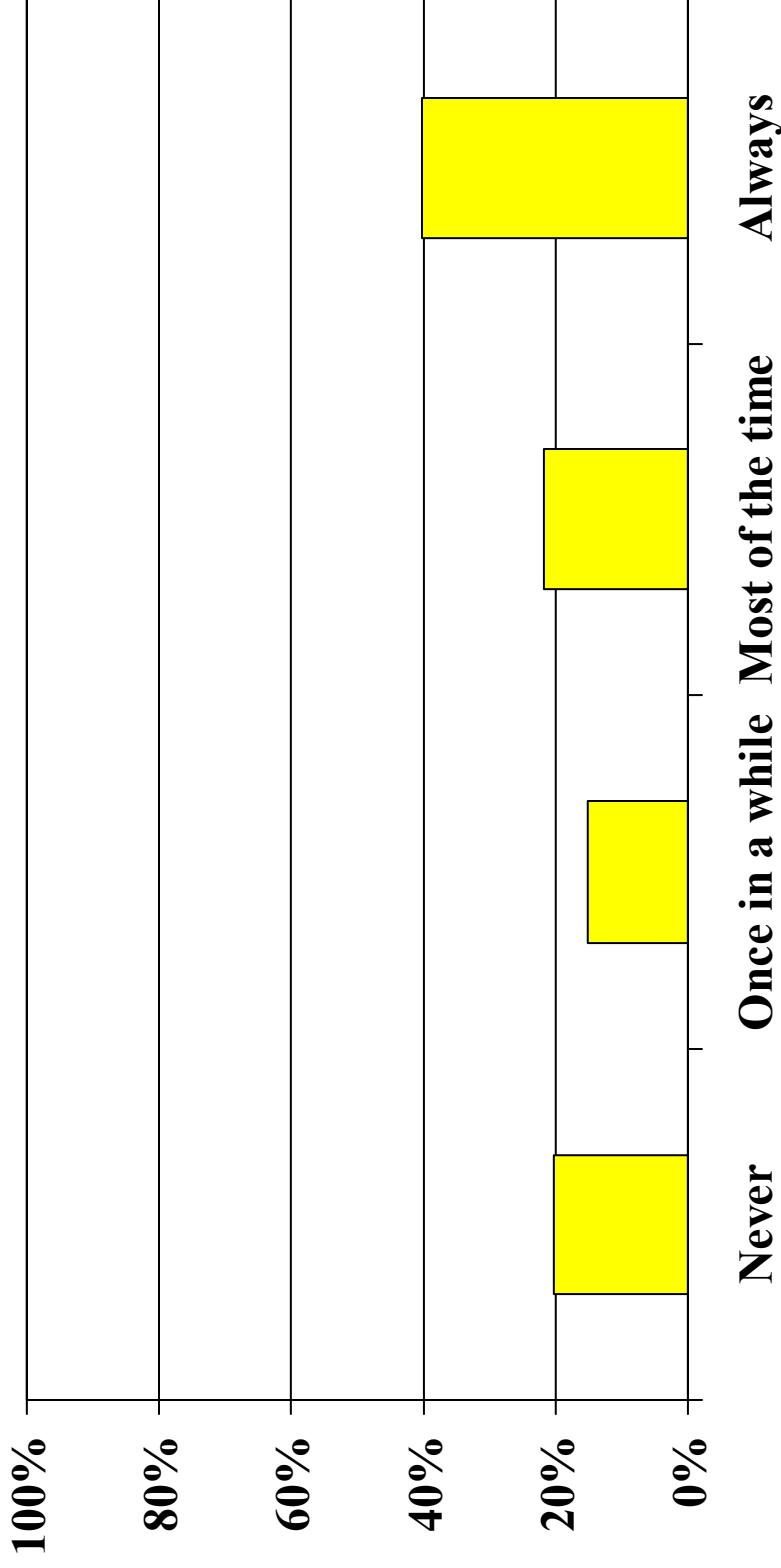
*Do you have time to do your favorite activities and hobbies?*



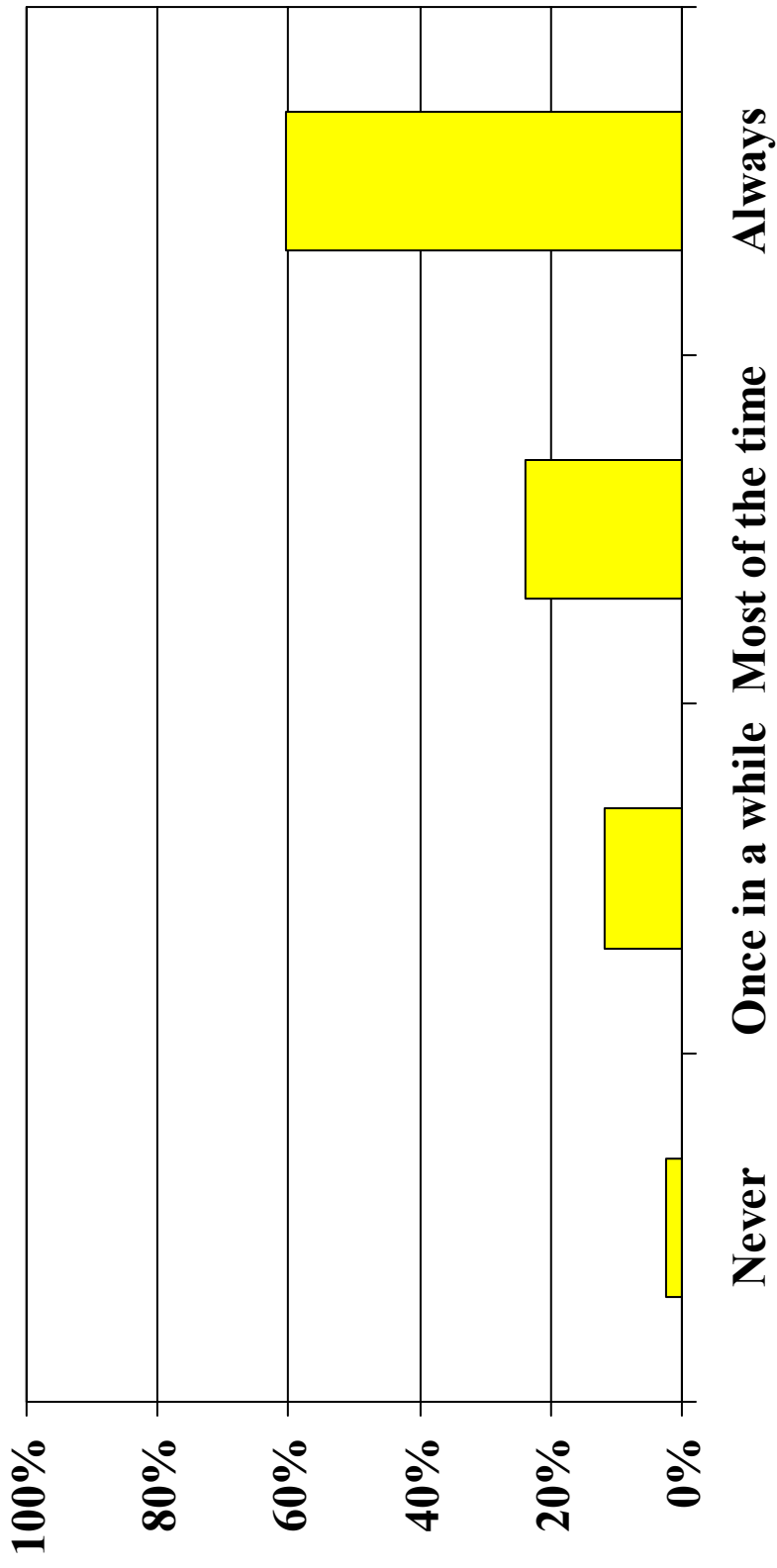
# Figure 7

Students 10-13 years old (n=290)

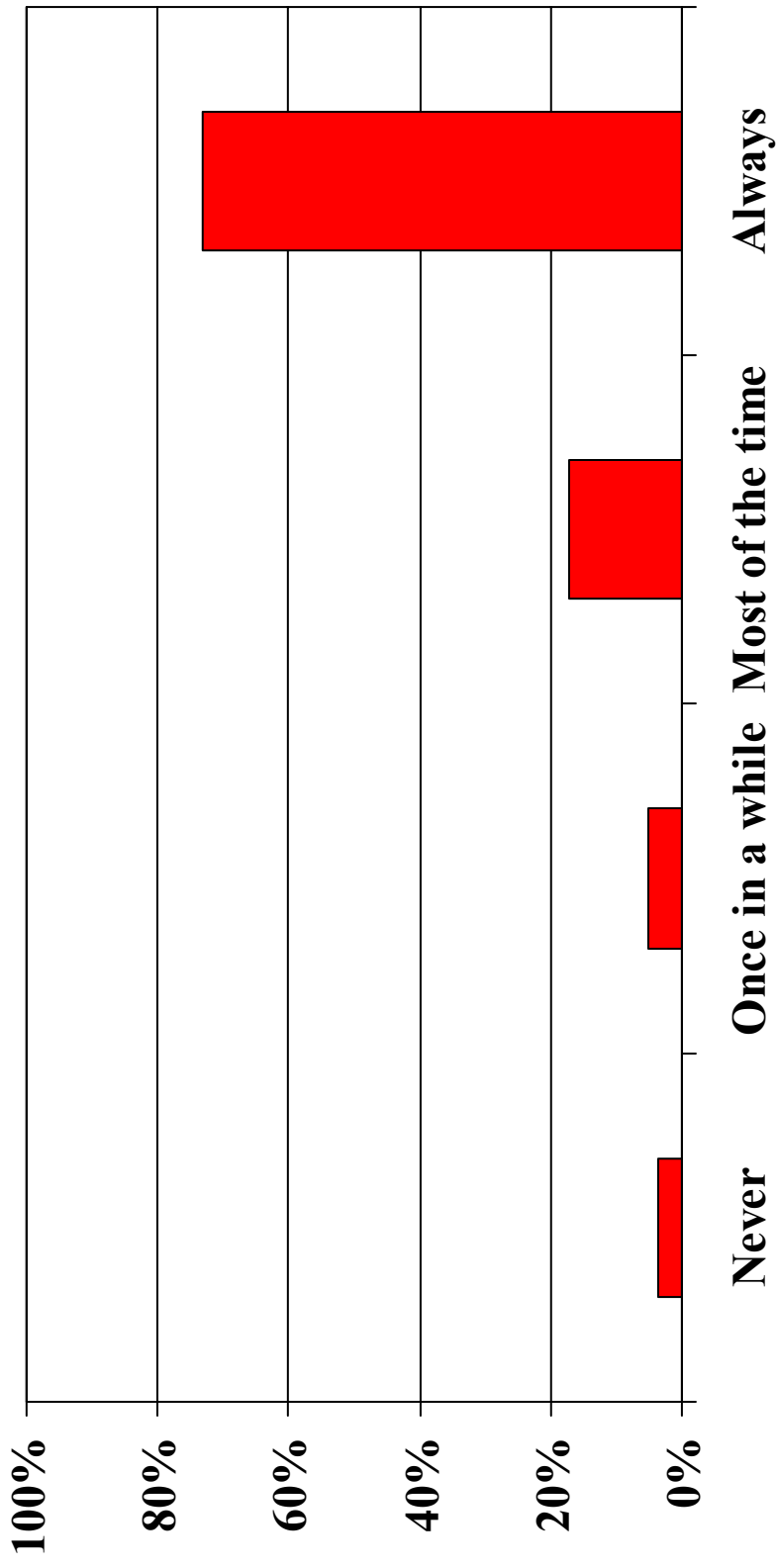
*Do you have chances to do things outside the program? (For example: field trips, special lessons, volunteer in the community)*



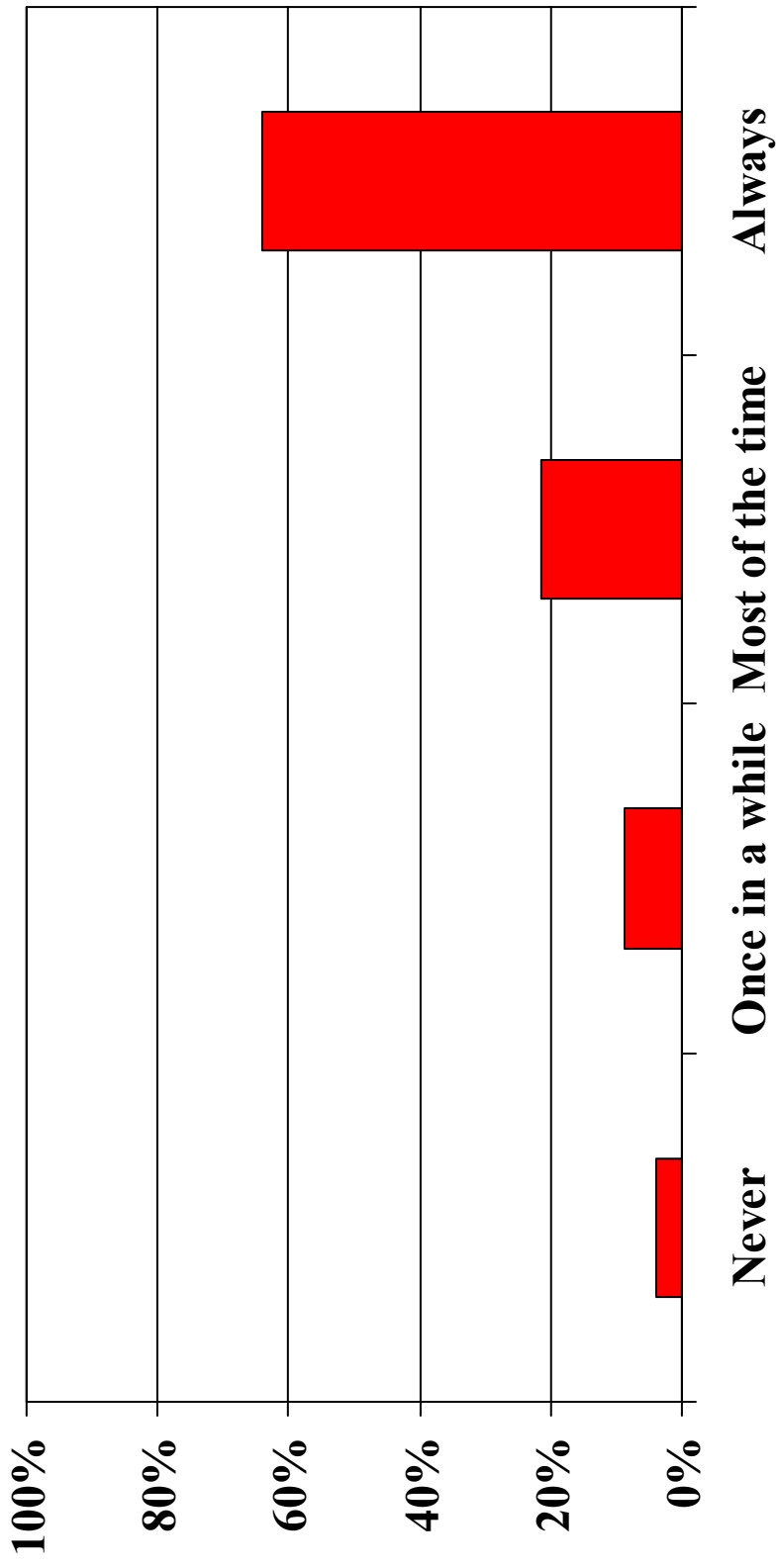
**Figure 8**  
Students 10-13 years old (n=290)  
*Do you have time and some help to do your homework if you want to?*



**Figure 9**  
Students 5-9 years old (n=674)  
*Do you think the adults in the program like you?*



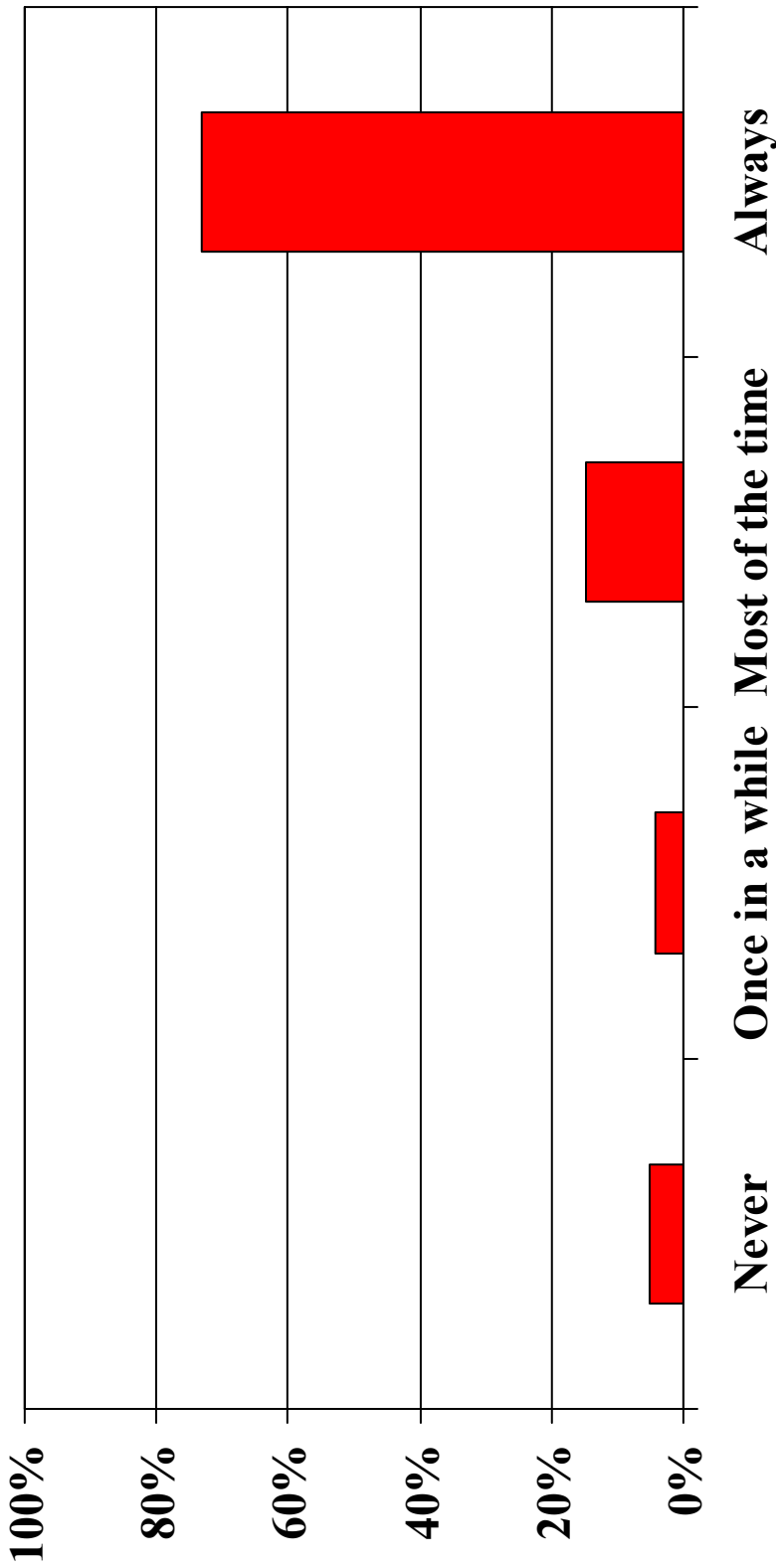
**Figure 10**  
Students 5-9 years old (n=674)  
*Do the adults in the program listen to you?*



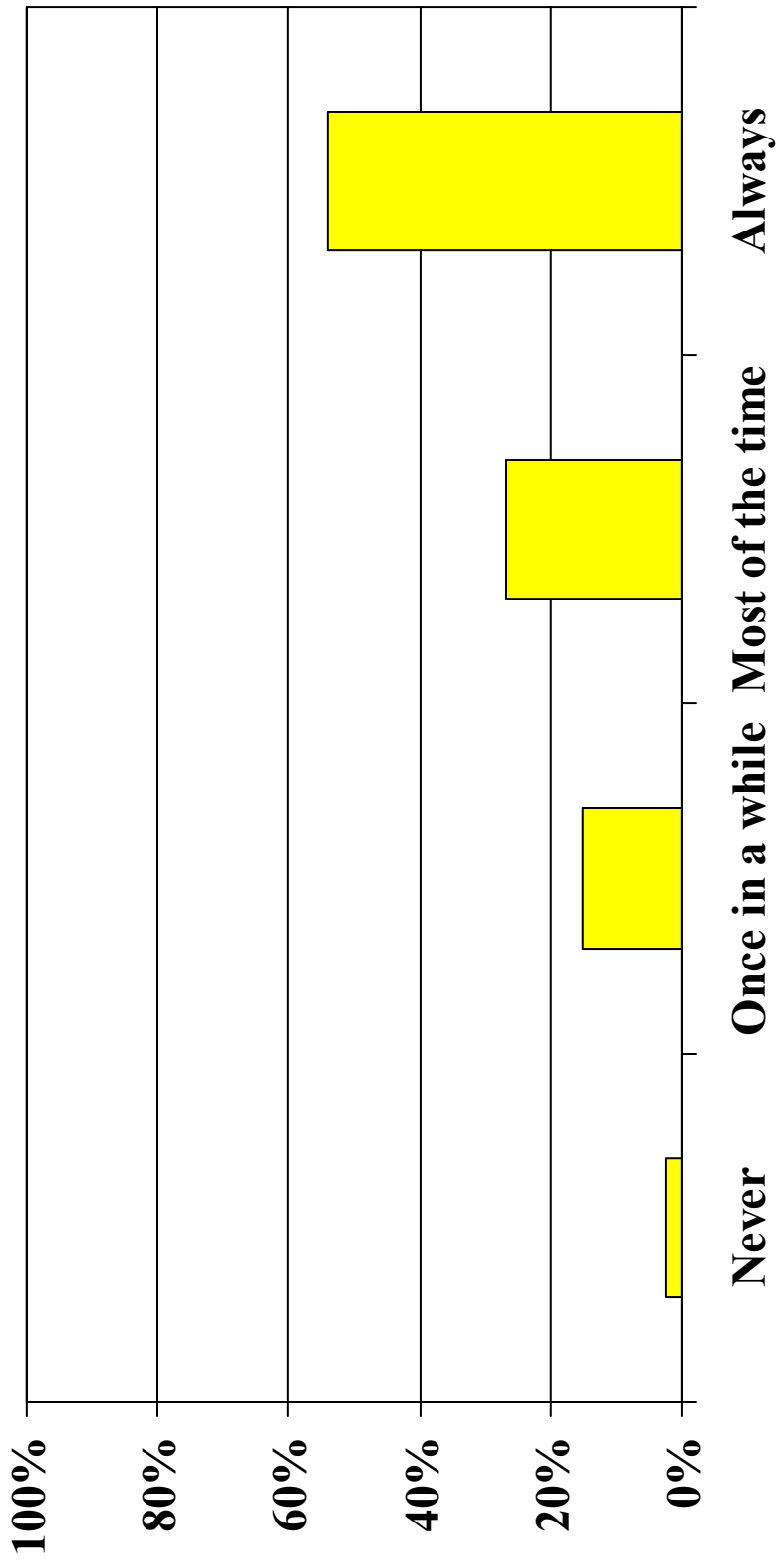
# Figure 11

Students 5-9 years old (n=674)

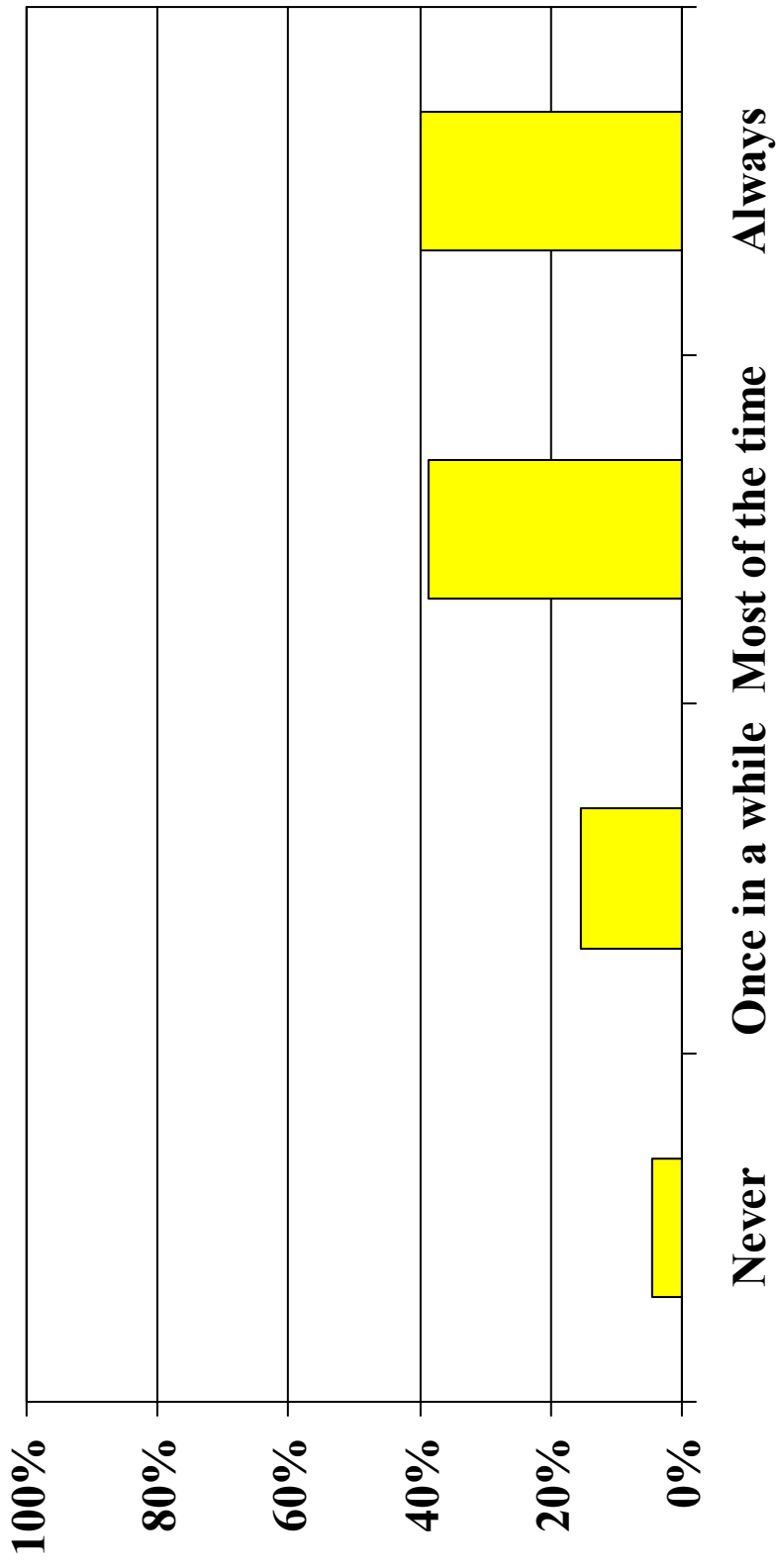
*If you have a problem, will an adult in the program help you?*



**Figure 12**  
Students 10-13 years old (n=290)  
*Do you think the adults in the program like you?*



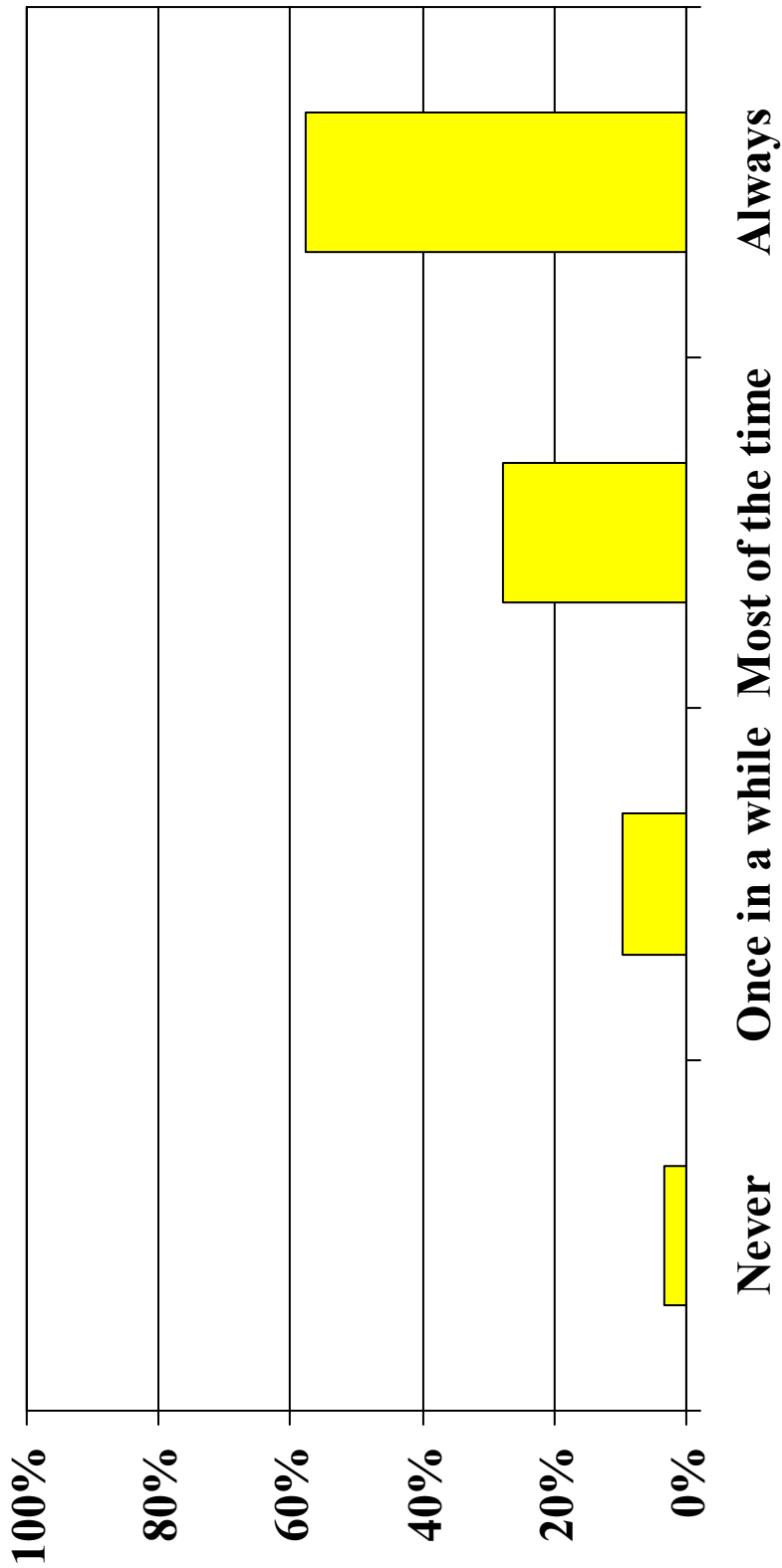
**Figure 13**  
Students 10-13 years old (n=290)  
*Do the adults in the program listen to you?*



# Figure 14

Students 10-13 years old (n=290)

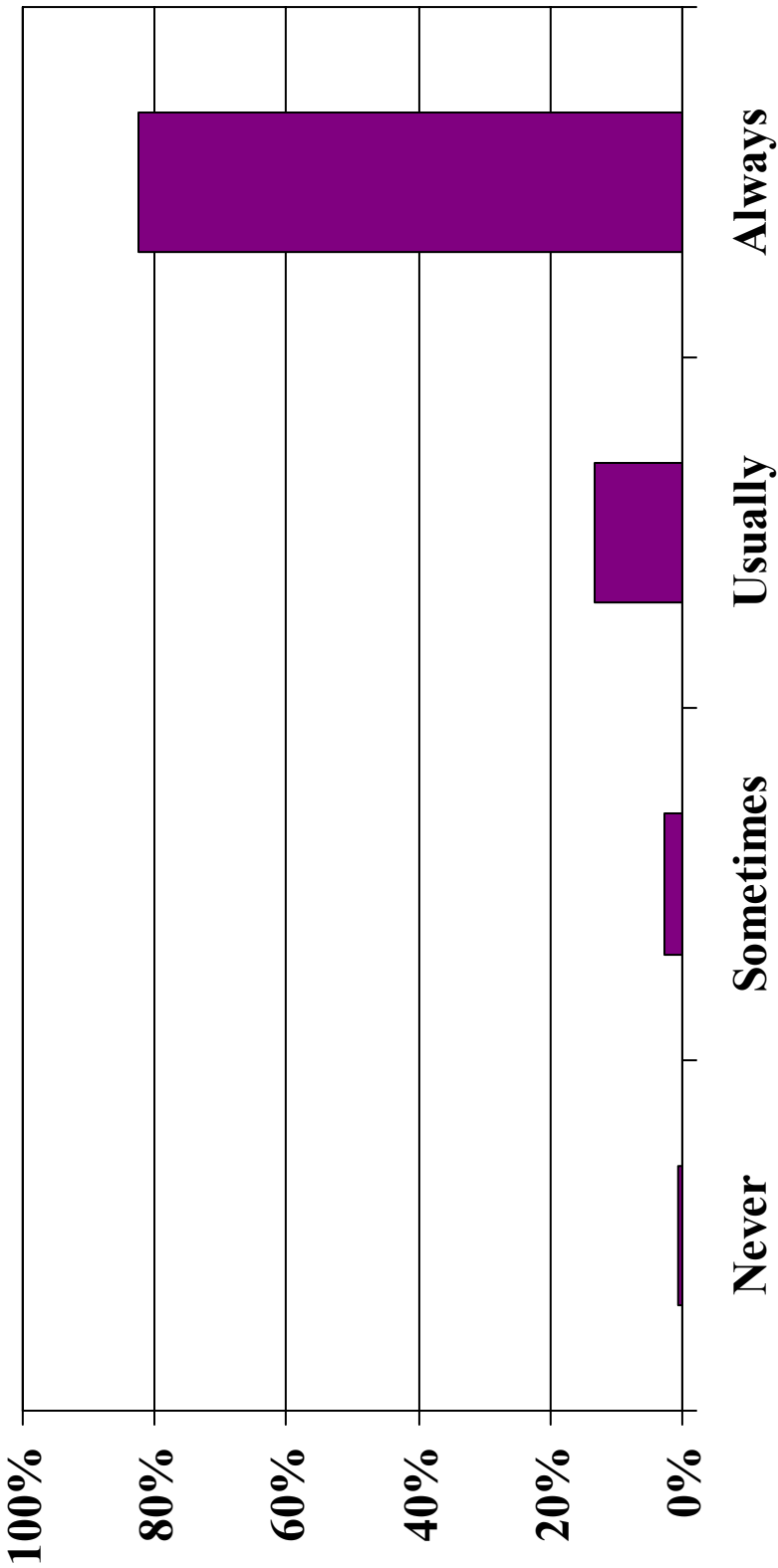
*If you have a problem, will an adult in the program help you?*



# Figure 15

Parents (n=570)

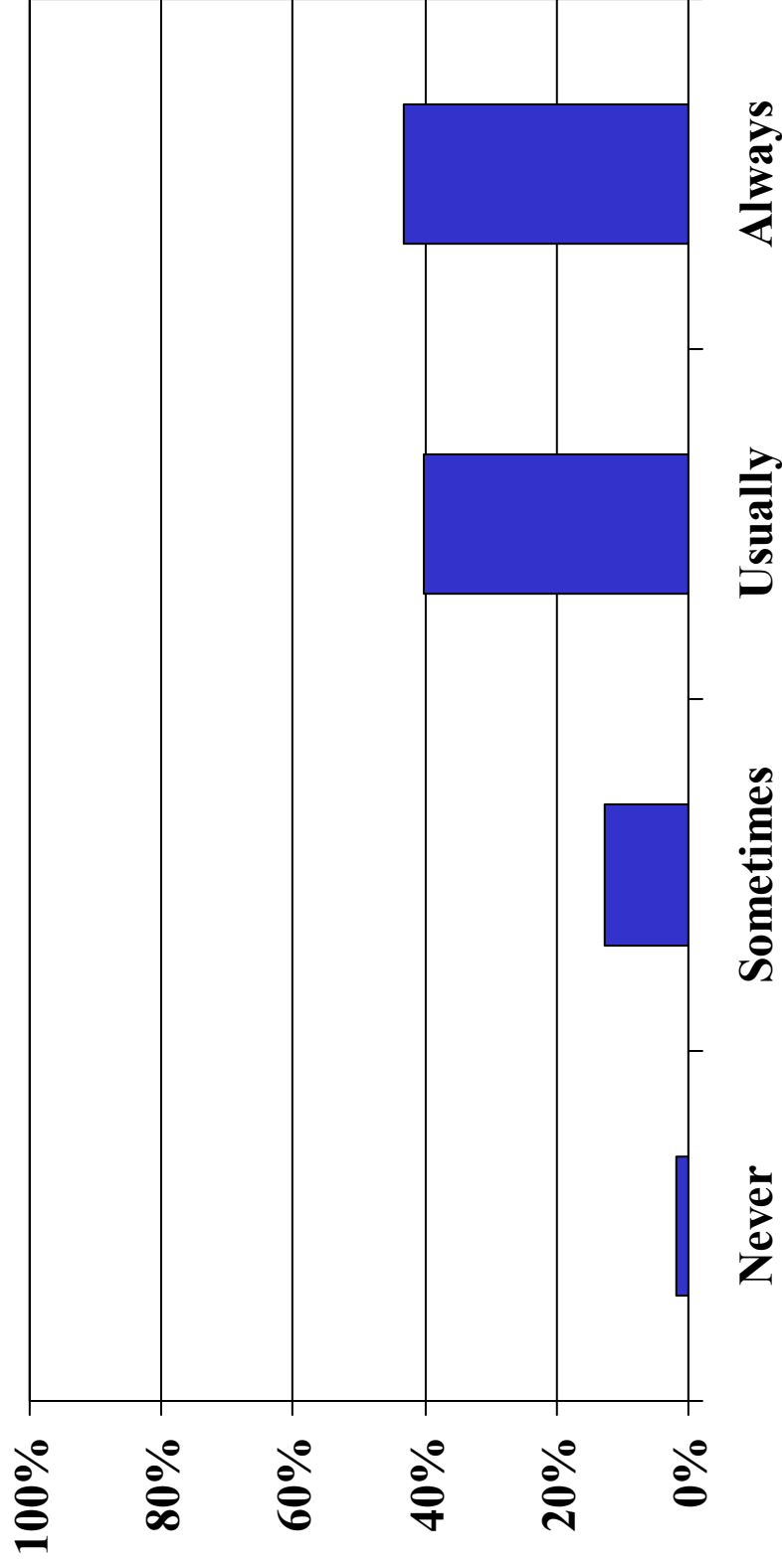
*If I have a problem, there is usually someone at the program I can discuss it with?*



# Figure 16

Site Staff (n=174)

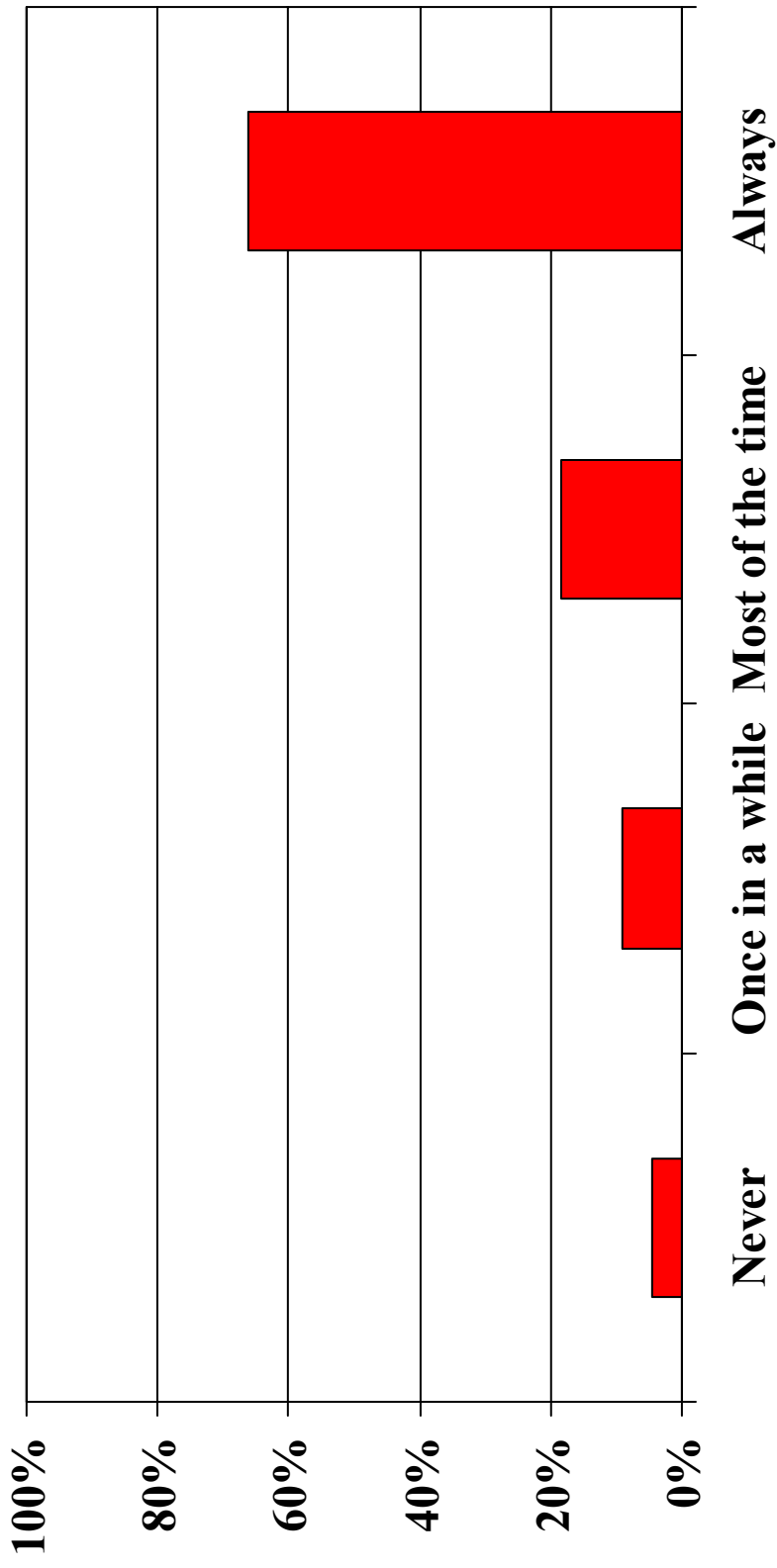
*Are there enough materials and equipment to support program activities?*



# Figure 17

Students 5-9 years old (n=674)

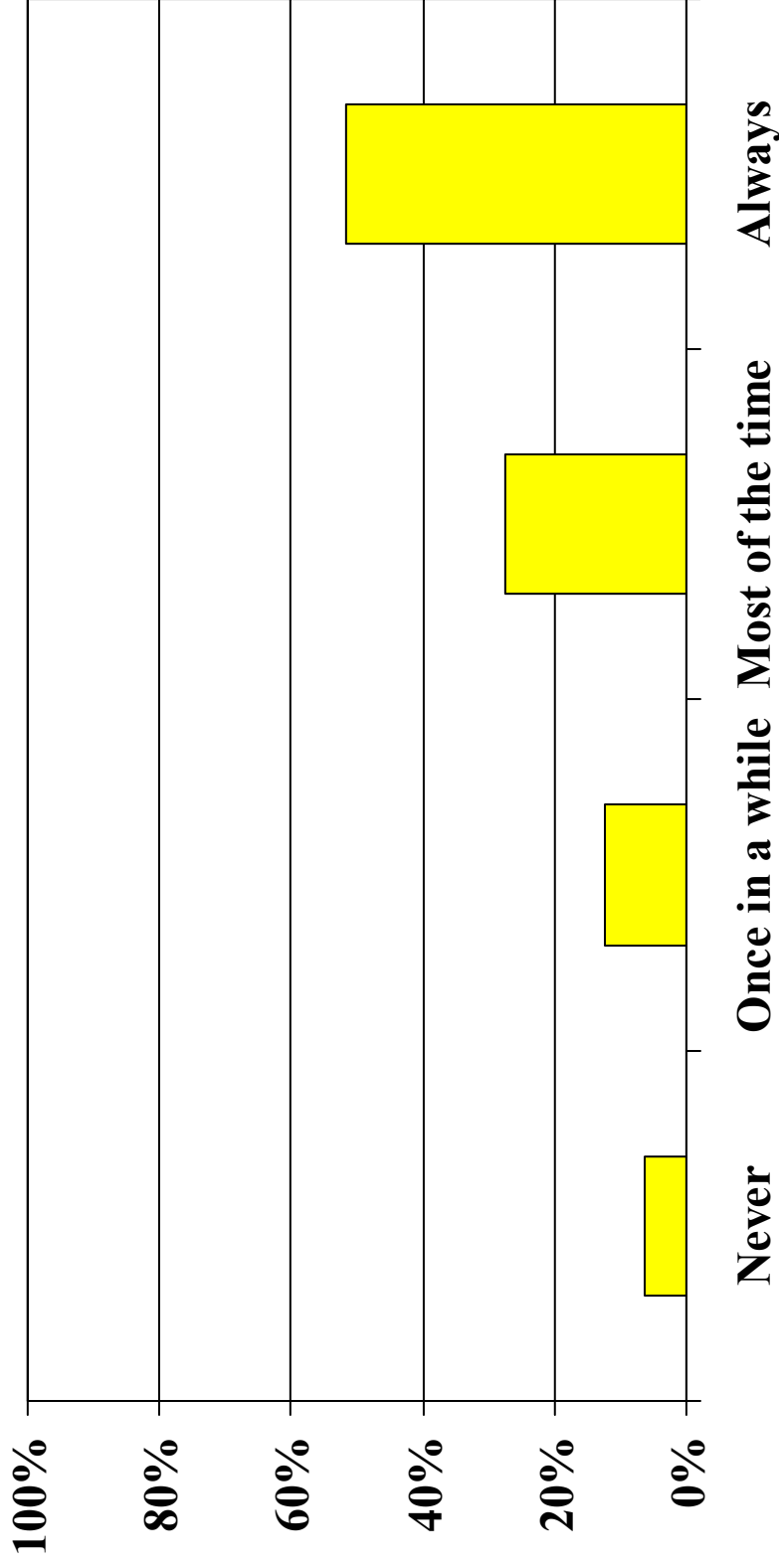
*Are there enough things to use here so that everyone gets a turn?*



# Figure 18

10-13 years old (n=290)

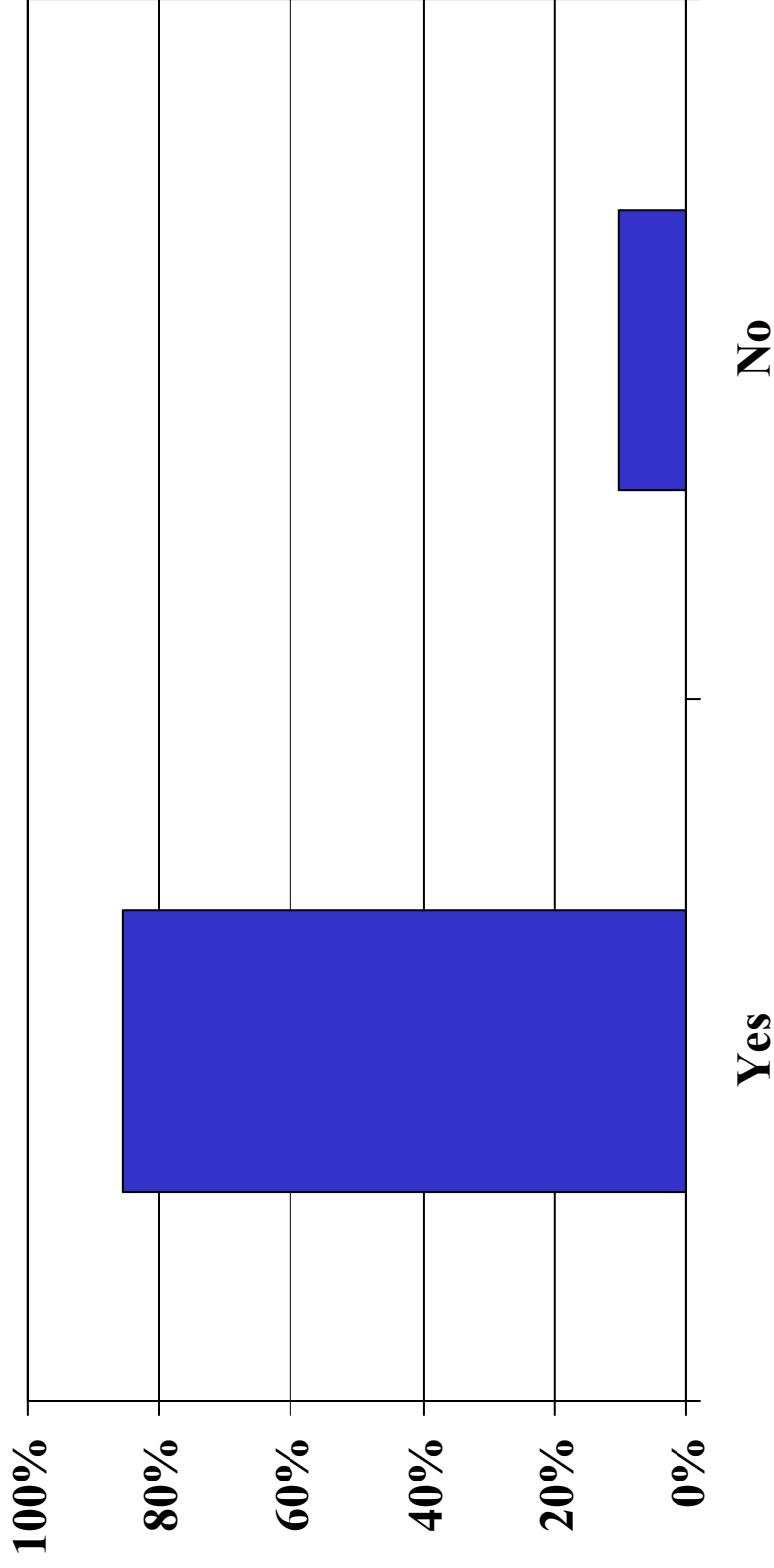
*Are there enough things to use here so that everyone gets a turn?*



# Figure 19

Site Staff (n=174)

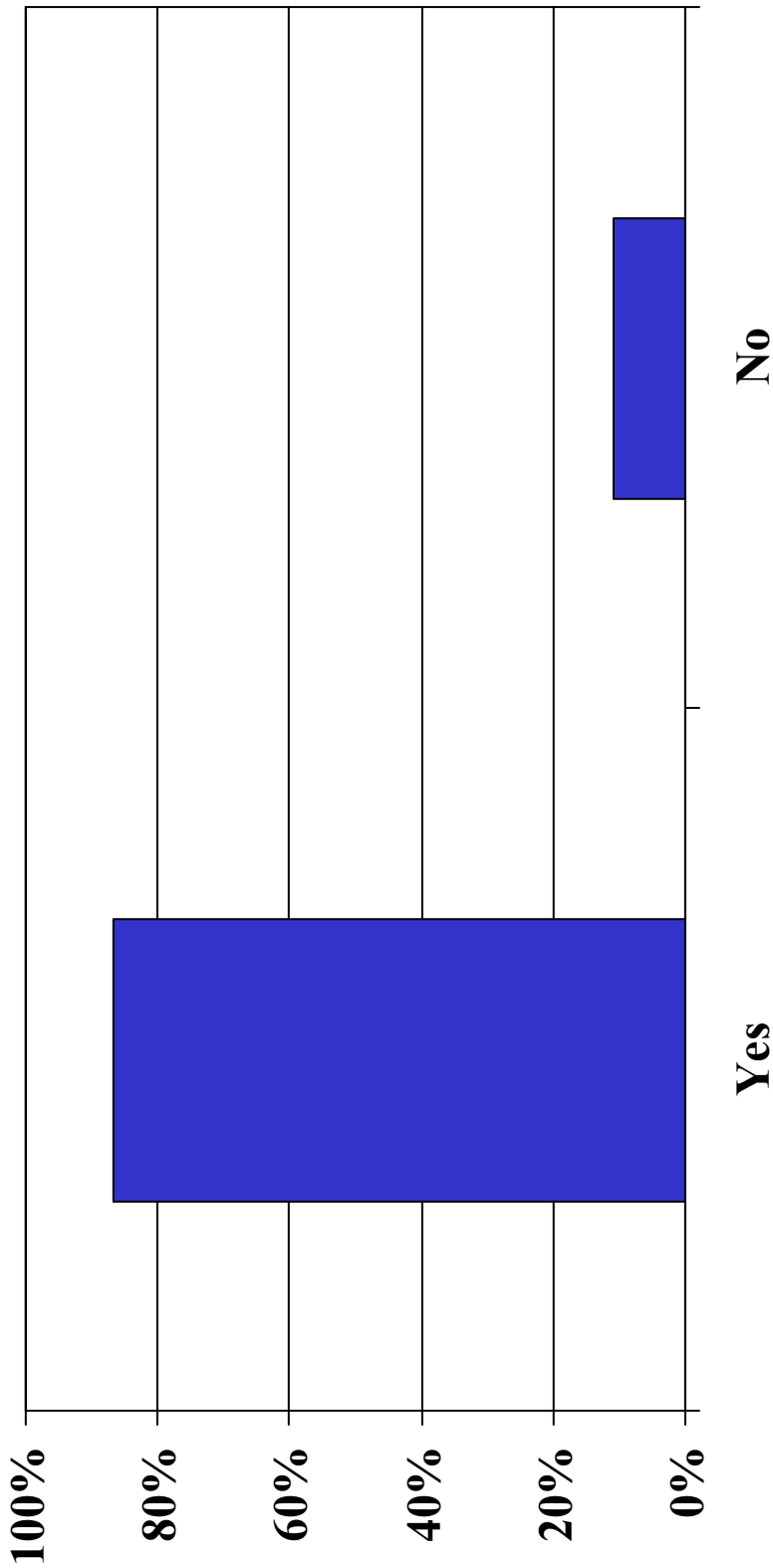
*Do you know your program's policies for accident prevention procedures?*



# Figure 20

Site Staff (n=174)

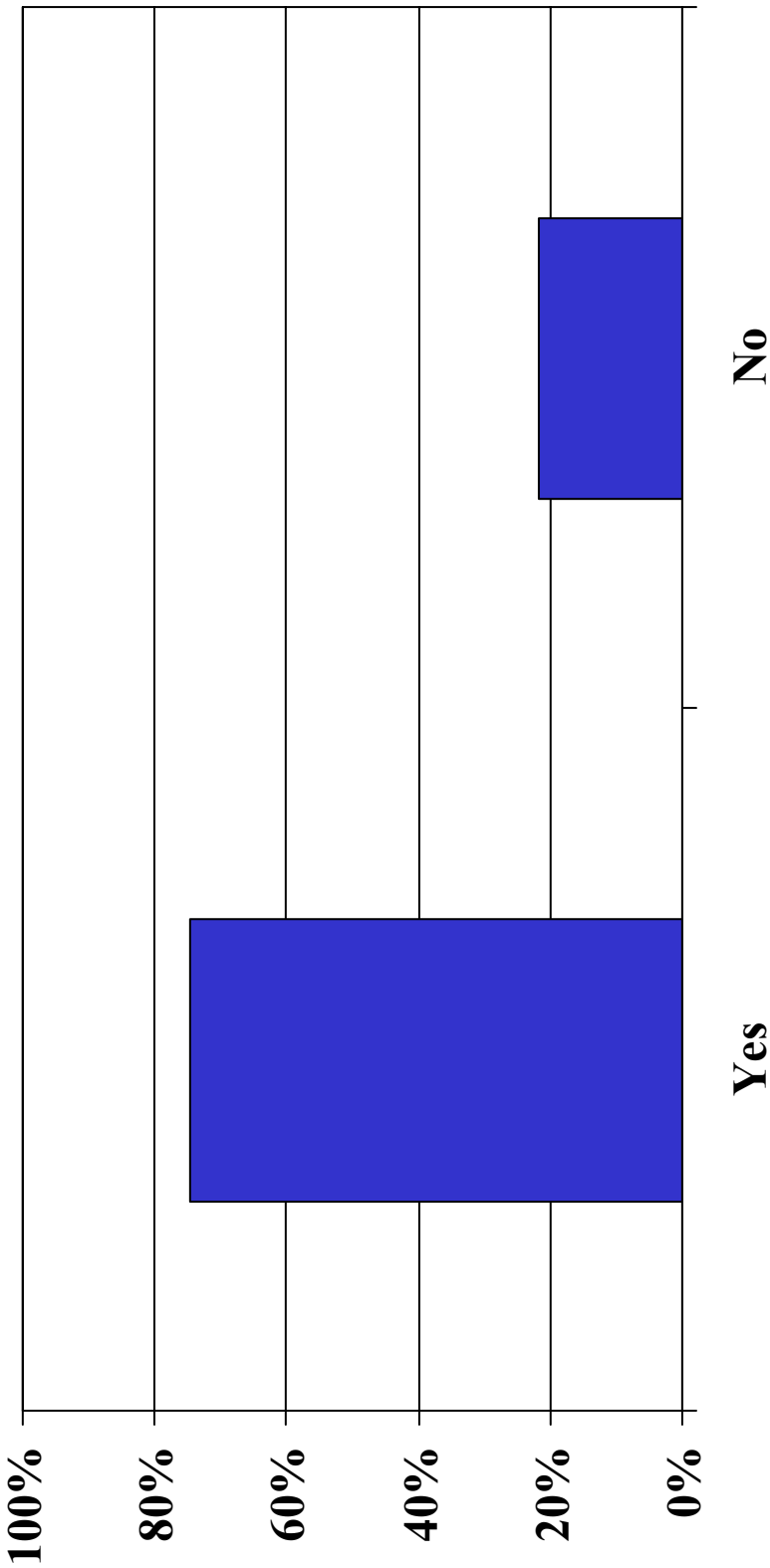
*Do you know your program's policies for fire drills and evacuation procedures?*



# Figure 21

Site Staff (n=174)

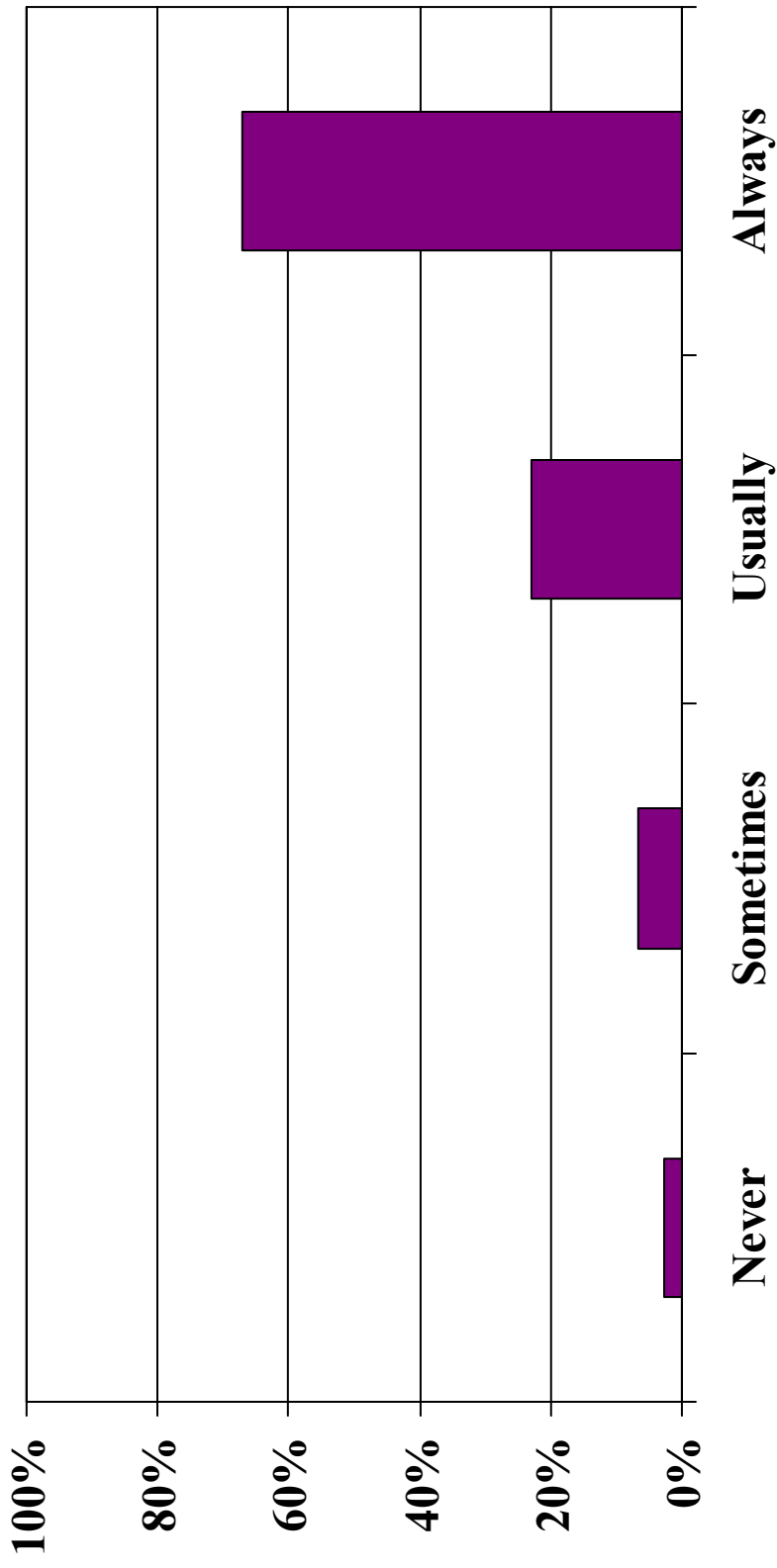
*Do you know your program's policies for fire emergencies and using a fire extinguisher?*



# Figure 22

Parents (n=570)

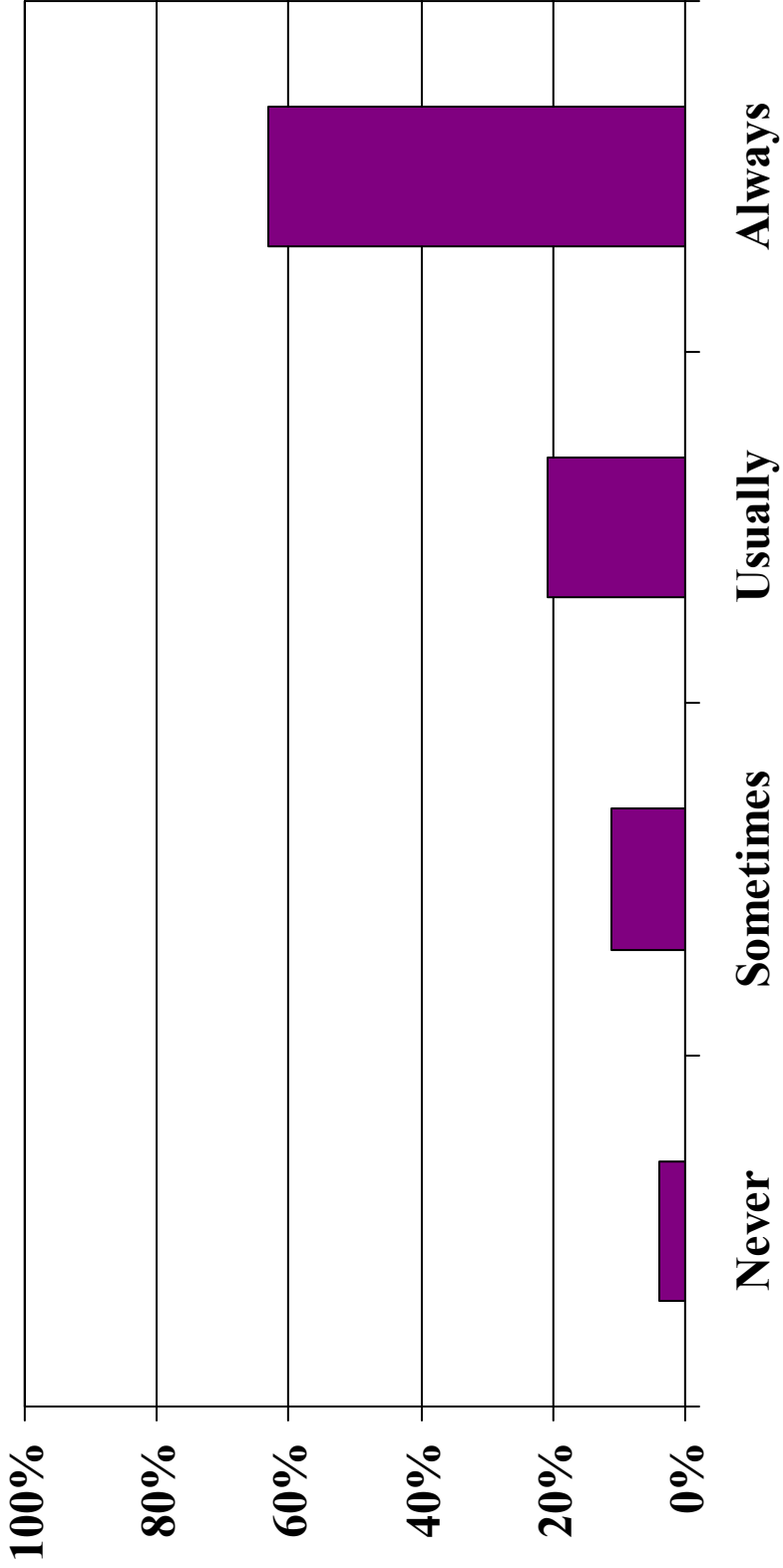
*Does the staff keep you informed about the program schedule, activities, staff changes, and decisions?*



# Figure 23

Parents (n=570)

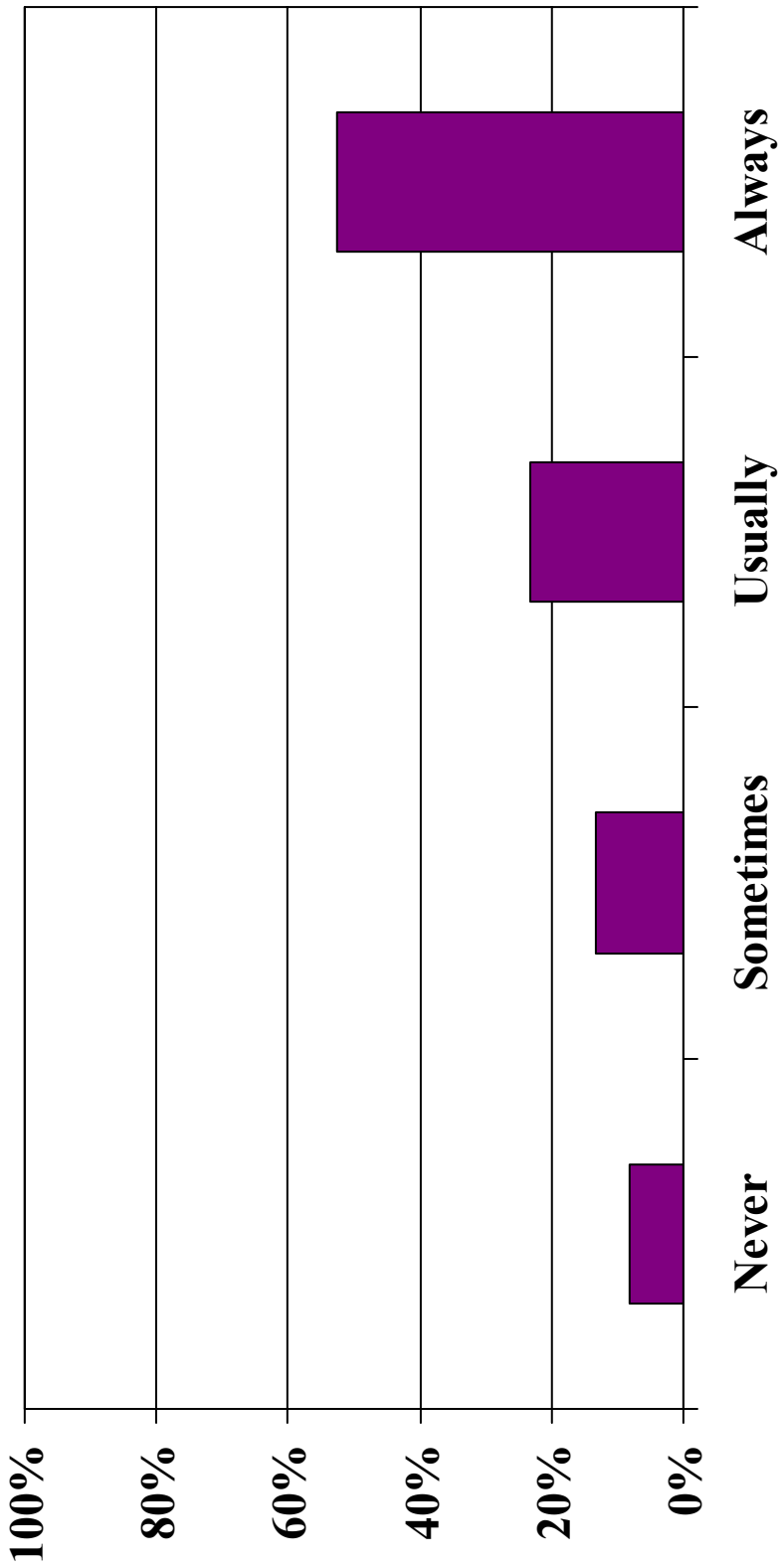
*Does the staff discuss your child's development and behavior with you?*



# Figure 24

Parents (n=570)

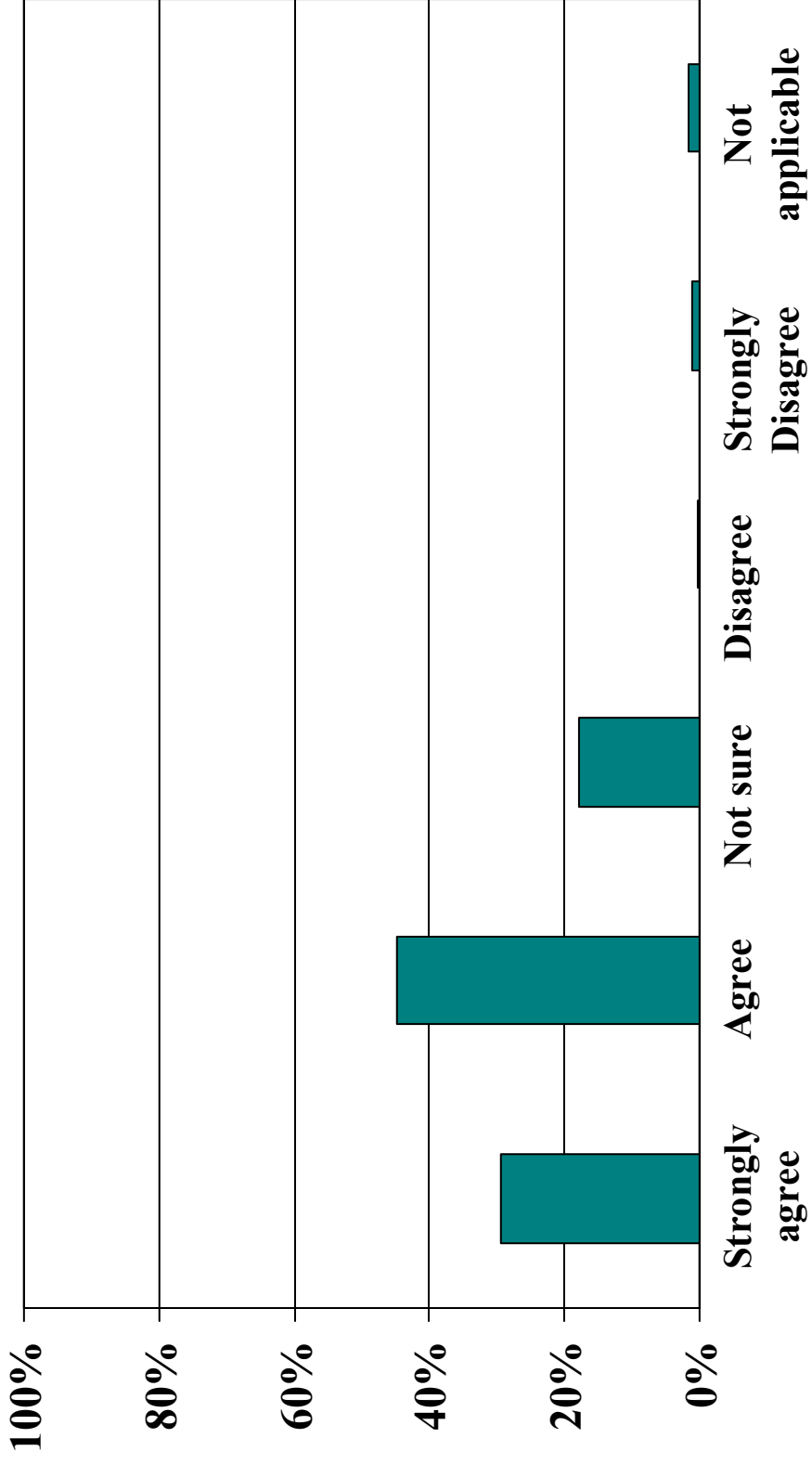
*Do you have a say in how your child spends time at the program?*



# Figure 25

Teachers (n=241)

*The Before and After School Program has made a difference in this school?*



# Figure 26

Site Staff (n=174)

*The Before and After School staff in this program  
work as a team*

