

LOB #173:

MIDDLE SCHOOL AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

Purpose

The Middle School After-School Program (MSAS) is a free, five day per week program offered at all Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) middle schools. It provides a safe haven for middle school youth to improve academic achievement, improve student behavior, and reduce risk-taking behaviors such as substance use and gang involvement. The program provides young people with a positive alternative to spending time in unsupervised activities or being home alone an opportunity to develop skills, build character, and to partake in challenging and fulfilling activities.

Description

Management and oversight of the partnership with FCPS for the MSAS program resides in the Regional Services and Center Operations division. Every FCPS middle school currently has a regularly scheduled after-school program five days a week, from dismissal until as late as 5:30 or 6 p.m. Each middle school offers a broad spectrum of rich and engaging activities, including: academic support and enrichment; social skills and youth development; physical, health, and recreational activities; and family and community involvement. The Middle School After-School program is a key element in the schools and County's initiatives to improve academic performance, develop healthy and successful youth, and embed prevention within fun and engaging activities. MSAS is neither child care nor an extension of the school day. These after-school activities provide each youth with greater opportunities to form relationships with caring adults; contribute to the community; acquire new skills in a supportive environment; be safe and secure; form healthy relationships with peers; and develop the attitudes, skills, and knowledge to thrive in school, the community, and eventually the workplace.

MSAS is operated as a County-FCPS partnership. NCS provides approximately 75 percent of the funding for the program, covering full-time staff (i.e. the MSAS program specialist at each school) and operational costs. NCS also provides technical assistance, trainings, joint facilitation, and direct services to each middle school and to the program as a whole. FCPS funding covers part-time staffing for clubs and activities, snacks and supplies, and late bus transportation. The program is a FCPS program and therefore major changes to the program must be approved by the School Board.

This County-School partnership also supports summer programs and activities, including a five-week summer camp initiative at five middle school sites (each serving a geographic area of the County) and a one-to-two week Jump Start initiative for rising middle school students at all middle school sites. Both efforts provide a safe structured environment that helps students with their transition to middle or high school.

Each middle school employs a MSAS Specialist who plans, develops, and implements after-school activities and schedules all community use of the school buildings and grounds. The specialist is a 12-month school employee and is part of the school's administrative team. This structure facilitates a strong link between after-school and in-school activities and programs – one of the keys to the success of this initiative. Programs and activities are delivered by a mix of part-time employees, teachers and other school staff, volunteers, partners (including County agencies), and contractors.

Each middle school develops and implements its own annual budget and program based on a planning process in which (a) needs are initially identified, (b) specific programs and activities are selected to address those needs, (c) outcomes are aligned to the goals, and (d) performance measures are established for assessment. As the needs of each school are different, the goals, program activities, and outcomes also differ. Each program must address the four key MSAS program strategies: academic support and enrichment; social skills and youth development; physical, health, and recreation activities; and family and community involvement. Each activity is linked to one of these strategies and, in turn, is aligned with one or more of the FCPS student achievement goals: academics, essential life skills, and responsibility to the

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community – thereby linking all activities to the school day. Individual program budget and program plans are approved by both FCPS and NCS.

Benefits

Essential services: After-school programs fill the invaluable role of providing essential services – such as a safe and supervised environment, academically enriching activities, healthy snacks and meals, and caring and supportive mentors – to children and families most in need of support. The need for these afterschool and summer learning programs is especially vital in African-American and Latino communities, communities that are experiencing disproportionately higher levels of poverty, homelessness and food insecurity, and facing disparities in educational outcomes. In Fairfax County, frequent after-school attendance (60 or more days per year) for African-American and Hispanic students exceeds the demographic profile of middle school students by 10 and 4 percentage points respectively.

Juvenile crime and risky behaviors: After-school hours are the peak time for juvenile crimes and risky behaviors, including alcohol and drug use. Some national studies find that youth who do not spend any time in after-school activities are 49 percent more likely to have used drugs and 37 percent more likely to become a teen parent. Youth are also at the highest risk of becoming a victim of violence after school, particularly between the hours of 2:00pm and 6:00pm. The highest amount of juvenile crime occurs between 3:00pm and 4:00pm, the hour after most children are dismissed from school. A recent survey distributed to FCPS middle school parents showed that 37 percent of after-school participants would be home alone if not for the program.

Academic benefits: Students attending the MSAS program also benefit academically from the program. Among middle school students receiving one or more F's in a core subject, 88 percent attended fewer than 60 days (i.e., about two days per week) of the after-school program. Among those receiving one or more D's in a core subject, 88 percent attended MSAS fewer than 60 days. Classroom teachers surveyed also recognize the academic benefits of MSAS; 92 percent agreed that MSAS benefits students academically, and 83 percent reported that the performance of students who attend MSAS has improved. Sixty-eight percent of parents reported that their children are doing better academically since attending after-school programs.

Connectedness: The after-school program also enables youth to feel connected to people and places. A large factor for students attending the program is being able to socially engage with their peers and teachers. Among teachers surveyed, 87 percent reported seeing improvement in the student-student relationships of after-school participants. Seventy-five percent of participants reported getting along better with both peers and adults, and 62 percent reported a stronger connection to the community due to attending the after-school program. Over two-thirds (69 percent) of student participants reported caring more about their school as a result of their MSAS participation.

Community engagement: Middle school students who regularly participate in the after-school program also report being engaged at higher rates than those who rarely attend. The most important reason cited for attending after-school is that there are interesting things to do. Almost three quarters (73 percent) of student participants reported learning things they previously did not know how to do. A broad spectrum of programs is offered at each middle school, from sports and homework help, to community service projects and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) activities. The after-school program partners with over 90 different organizations and businesses to offer programs and other opportunities; many of these are engineering or technology firms.

Mandates

This Line of Business is not mandated.

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Trends and Challenges

Increasing overall student enrollment: Schools are also experiencing a steady increase in overall enrollment. An increase in middle school enrollment signifies an increase in eligible after-school participants. Currently, there are no registration caps or limits for each after-school program. Attendance has increased each year, from 20,056 in the 2012-2013 school year to 25,075 in 2014-2015 (an 18 percent increase). An increase in after-school participants equates to a need for more staff, supplies, and other resources to implement the program.

Increasing low-income and minority student enrollment: In the last three years, the total number of FCPS total students receiving free or reduced lunch has increased from 47,874 in 2012, to 51,968 for the 2014-2015 school year. This increase is indicative of the increasing poverty rates for the County as a whole. The minority student population is driving most of that growth. Considering the frequent after-school attendance for African-American and Hispanic students exceeds the demographic profile of middle school students by 10 and 4 percentage points respectively, the increase in MSAS participation is likely to be disproportionately higher than the overall FCPS enrollment growth rate.

School bell change: A challenge for the 2015-2016 school year will be the change in the start time for middle school students, as most middle school students will now be starting their day much earlier than in previous years. Most middle schools will now end their day between 2:00pm and 2:30pm. The after-school program will continue offering programs until 5:00pm or 5:30pm. The earlier dismissal time will likely increase participation in the after-school program, as parents have already indicated they do not wish for their children to be home alone for longer periods of time. This change in dismissal time, and its accompanying increase in MSAS participation, will further strain existing program resources.

Late bus availability: Late buses continue to be a challenge for the after-school program. FCPS provides buses to take middle school students home from after-school activities three days per week. On the days late buses are provided, MSAS attendance is significantly higher. On days no late buses are offered, larger numbers of students tend to take the regular bus home. For some students, MSAS attendance depends primarily on the availability of late buses, as either their parents cannot provide transportation or they do not live within walking distance of their middle school. Attendance also dictates when programs are offered and, as such, some programs are only offered when late buses are provided.

Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
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FUNDING			
<u>Expenditures:</u>			
Operating Expenses	\$3,063,173	\$3,341,337	\$3,318,223
Total Expenditures	\$3,063,173	\$3,341,337	\$3,318,223
General Fund Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	\$3,063,173	\$3,341,337	\$3,318,223
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
<u>Positions:</u>			
Regular	0/0	0/0	0/0
Total Positions	0/0	0/0	0/0

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Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Weekly attendance in the MSAS Program	21,126	21,245	25,075	26,329	27,645
Cost per attendee in the MSAS Program	\$3.74	\$3.78	\$3.14	\$3.18	\$3.25
Percent of parents satisfied with MSAS activities and programs	84%	86%	86%	90%	90%
Percent of teachers reporting MSAS academic benefits	96%	95%	92%	95%	95%
Percent of teachers reporting MSAS behavioral benefits	87%	87%	90%	90%	90%

Weekly attendance at the MSAS program continues to increase. (Weekly attendance is the average number of attendees Countywide per week. This is a duplicated number – if one student attends twice in a week, it counts as 2.) Since the 2012-13 school year, weekly attendance has grown 19 percent. A major push by both FCPS and NCS to reducing staffing costs of part-time employees responsible for facilitation of programs has helped keep the per attendee cost down. The use of volunteers also keeps costs low. Currently, over 500 adults and 500 students volunteer in the after-school program each quarter. Parent satisfaction with the program, measured by an annual survey of MSAS parents, has remained consistently high.

Improved grades and improved behaviors have each been attributed to MSAS. Both of these depend on usage; that is, the more frequently a student attends MSAS, the more likely they are to see academic or behavioral improvement. Nearly all teachers surveyed in 2015 (92 percent) reported that students benefit academically from their MSAS attendance. Of those students who received one or more F's in a core subject, 88 percent attended less than 60 days of after-school. Of those students who received one or more D's in a core subject, 88 percent attended less than 60 days of after-school programs.

Teachers also recognize the impact of MSAS on behavior; 90 percent reported that student behavior improves based on attending the after-school program. Among middle school students who received a behavior infraction in 2015, 90 percent attended fewer than 60 days of MSAS. It is expected that these outcomes will remain consistently high, if not improve, in the future.