

# VIRGINIA'S FAIRFAX COUNTY SACC *reviewed*

Celebrating 40 years of high-quality  
afterschool programming



BY DR. ALICE HALL, FORMER SACC EMPLOYEE,  
NAA BOARD MEMBER, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR  
AT GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

The Fairfax County Virginia Office for Children's School Age Child Care (SACC) program helps families succeed and children thrive by providing high-quality out-of-school time programs for children in kindergarten through sixth grade, as well as older children and youth with multiple disabilities.

In fall 1974, the first SACC programs opened their doors to children and families in eight Fairfax County Public Schools. Today, SACC centers are located throughout the county, in 137 schools, one recreation center, and one community center serving more than 10,000 children each day. SACC operates before and after school, on teacher workdays and school holidays, and during the summer.

Unique hallmarks of the Fairfax County SACC include a well-established partnership with the public schools and dedicated classroom space; full inclusion of children and youth with special needs; and a sliding fee scale to keep SACC within the financial reach of families. The SACC staff are afterschool professionals committed to a long-term career in youth programming. The program staff exceeds 700 employees, in full- and part-time positions, and the program maintains a low thirteen percent turnover rate, with many employees being in merit- or benefits-eligible positions. Staff participate in a variety of professional development opportunities, including an annual school-year orientation one-day event and a competency-based training program that provides continuing education throughout the year. New employees

and new supervisors participate in cohorts that meet regularly for trainings developed specifically to support their new roles.

SACC's knowledgeable and talented staff provide an innovative curriculum that contributes to the goals and priorities families have for their children, such as building self-confidence, developing friendships, having fun, and participating in physical activity. SACC's dynamic programming provides opportunities for children to expand their interests, develop their talents, and enhance their learning. With important input from families, SACC staff develop a yearly curriculum focus that supports the public school program of studies, STEM, and understanding of culture and community.

The 2014 – 2015 curriculum focus inspires children to identify, explore, and develop the unique interests and talents that make them amazing innovators, movers and shakers, word weavers, community connectors, and creative expressionists. Movers and Shakers make connections between food, fitness, and health. The Creative Expressionists focus on the performing and visual arts.

Several times a year, SACC centers have the opportunity to come together for multicenter events such as flag football tournaments, track and field events, performance showcases, and a cardboard boat regatta. Children participate in all aspects of the performance showcase, including writing scripts, choreographing dances, set and costume design, and operating the

lights and sound system. The boat regatta provides the opportunity for children to design and construct a large themed boat out of cardboard, as well as the opportunity to ride in the boat during the regatta. Summer SACC Camp Discovery provides children the opportunity to explore the unique programming of three "cabins," each offering a different focus. In these cabins children participate in a variety of fun experiences that appeal to the artist, performer, and athlete in every child.

SACC is multigenerational—the program serves working parents who, as children, attended SACC—and is fortunate to have staff who participated in the SACC program as children. SACC is part of the fabric of Fairfax County; part of the fabric that makes Fairfax a great place to live and work, and a great place to be a child. As one parent shared, "It is always a good feeling walking into this center and actually experience the staff providing a variety of activities that foster exploration, creativity, problem-solving and teamwork."

The Fairfax County SACC program was unique at the time it began in 1974. In fact, the program is mentioned as a model program in the one of the first books published by the Wellesley College's School-Age Child Care Project, which was later renamed the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST). The book, *School-Age Child Care: An Action Manual* (Baden, Genser, Levine, & Seligson, 1982), was written to help communities start SACC programs. •

