

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Voluntary Participation and Parents' Reasons for Enrollment in After-School Programs: Contributions of Race/Ethnicity, Program Quality, and Program Policies

Wu, H.-C. J., & Van Egeren, L. A. (2010). Voluntary participation and parents' reasons for enrollment in after-school programs: Contributions of race/ethnicity, program quality, and program policies. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 42(4), 591-260.

**SUMMARY:** This article aims to understand youths' voluntary participation in afterschool programs (ASPs), as well as reasons their parents' reasons for enrolling them, taking into consideration: race/ethnicity, program quality, and program policies. Parents enrolled children in afterschool programs for a variety of reasons including childcare and academics, with race and program factors influencing these decisions.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Youth were more likely to report voluntary participation in an ASP if they were female and older, if they enjoy the program and feel they are adequately challenged, and if the ASP has a higher concentration of same-race peers and a more culturally responsive environment.
- Parents were more likely to enroll youth for both academic and childcare reasons in programs that formed a learning environment and had stricter attendance policies; however parents who felt the program spent the right amount of time on academics were more likely to enroll their children for academic reasons, and those who found that the program spent the right amount of time on recreation were more likely to enroll for childcare reasons.
- Black parents were more likely than White and Latino parents to enroll their children for both academic and childcare reasons.
- Middle Eastern/Arab adolescents were less likely than all other races to report voluntary participation, and their parents were most likely to report academic reasons for enrollment.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with organizations connected with military parents to emphasize the importance of ASPs
- Work with other professionals in the field about ways to facilitate cultural responsiveness in ASPs

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer curriculum and activities that sufficiently challenges military adolescent participants to facilitate active engagement in ASPs
- Offer ASPs specifically for military youth and take into consideration gender and racial composition
- Disseminate information about ASPs that work specifically with military youth

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend that ASPs for military youth maintain a balance between time spent on academics and recreation
- Encourage staff trainings focused on cultural responsiveness
- Continue to support ASPs that work with military youth

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## METHODS

- Participants included youth served in the Michigan 21st Century Community Learning Centers.
- No information regarding recruitment was provided.
- The focus of the article is on civilian children in grades 4-12.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Two thousand two hundred fifty-six youth and 1,849 parents were surveyed
- The majority of the youth participants were female (56%) and Black (60%).
- Most parents were female (87%) and Black (62%).

## LIMITATIONS

- The study did not address barriers to programs, which could significantly affect children voluntarily participating in ASPs.
- The parents and program administrators may have been responding in a socially acceptable manner when asked why they enroll their children and to describe the culturally responsive environment, respectively.
- Youth surveys were conducted at the end of the school year. For youth who were initially compelled to join a program and grew to enjoy it, they may be reporting voluntary participation which may not have been the case at enrollment.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Survey youth at the time of enrollment rather than relying on retrospective accounts
- Examine barriers and benefits of after school programs across cultures and ethnicities
- Replicate the current study with military youth

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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