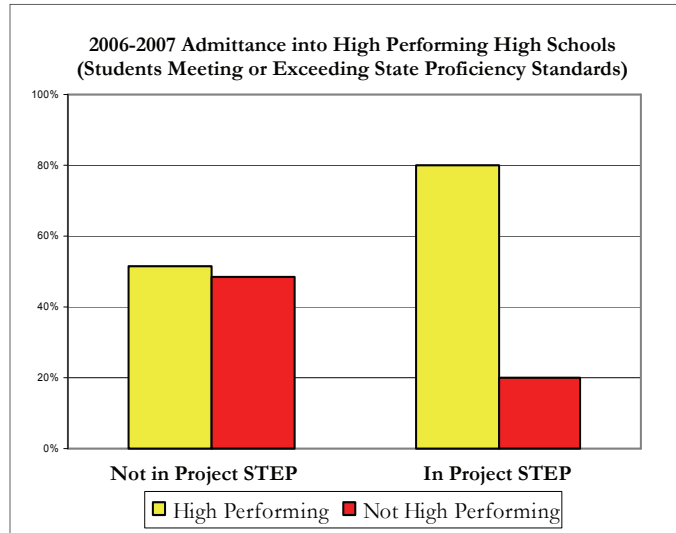




# EDUCATION & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT REPORT BRIEF

## EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS IN PROJECT STEP MORE LIKELY TO BE ADMITTED TO HIGH PERFORMING HIGH SCHOOLS

WHEDCo's Project STEP (Students Toward Educational Promise) is an After School program at PS/MS 218 for middle school students (in 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade) that combines critical thinking, social activism and academic enrichment. Through service-learning projects, students learn about an issue and then take on the role of advocates in their community. Eighth graders also receive comprehensive and in-depth support for the high school admissions process in the form of high school fairs (also open to 7<sup>th</sup> graders), one-on-one sessions with WHEDCo staff and exam preparation for the Specialized High School Admissions Test. The goal of this support is to help students find out about and gain admission to high performing schools, which are defined by proficiency tests, college readiness performance and graduation



rates.<sup>1</sup>

In 2006-2007, Project STEP served 87 students, 33 of whom were in the eighth grade. Twenty-six of these students (79%) were admitted to high performing high schools, which included two

of the nine Specialized High Schools of New York City. In the previous year, 92% of Project STEP students were admitted to high performing schools, including one Specialized High School and one private school.

In order to gauge the impact of the program on students, we compared high school admissions for these students to those for eighth graders at the same school who were *not* enrolled in Project STEP. Controlling for academic performance as measured by student performance on state proficiency tests, we find a significant difference between the high school outcomes for students participating and not participating in Project STEP.

The graph to the left shows high school admission results for the subset of students who are meeting or exceeding state proficiency standards. Eighty percent of students who are participating in Project STEP were admitted into a high-performing high school, compared to only about fifty percent of those not participating in the program.

*(Continued on reverse)*

### STUDENT PROFILE: IAN ASCUSCIATI, AGE 12



Ian Ascusciati is a 7<sup>th</sup> grader at PS/MS 218 participating in Project STEP. In his sixth year in WHEDCo's After School program, Ian is a "sports kind of guy" and likes learning new games, particularly Universal

Football with Kevin, René and Raymond. He also likes that the staff ask him how he's feeling every day. It shows him they care about him. Right now Ian is working on an anti-bullying project for Project STEP, designing and distributing educational posters around the school. He is also looking forward to continuing help with high school admissions, which started with a high school fair this past September. Ian sums it up best in his own words, "After School is cool!"

### EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAM

Studies show that youth who participate in After School programs on a "regular and sustained basis"<sup>2</sup> are more likely to receive substantial benefits from programming than those who do not. For this reason, After School programs are often evaluated on the level of student participation. WHEDCo's After School Enrichment program at PS/MS 218 demonstrates exceedingly high rates of participation, both in terms of intensity and duration, across age and gender.

Intensity of participation measures how often students attend. Over the past three program years, WHEDCo's participation rate as measured this way has far surpassed the average for comparable programs in New York and Los Angeles. A recent evaluation found that 78% of students in programs funded by The After School Corporation (TASC) could be defined as "active" participants, or those attending 60% or more of the time enrolled.<sup>3</sup>

*(Continued on reverse)*

## HIGH SCHOOL ADMISSIONS (CONTINUED)

This means that even if a student is doing well in school, his or her chances of getting into a good high school are significantly impacted by whether or not that student participates in Project STEP. This difference also appears when controlling for grades instead of standardized tests. Project STEP is therefore a crucial contributor to the academic success of middle school students.

<sup>1</sup> Sources include the *Directory of New York City Public High Schools*, [insideschools.org](http://insideschools.org), 2007 *U.S. News & World Report* "America's Best High Schools" and staff interviews.

<sup>2</sup> Grad % is the percent of students who graduated with either a Local or Regents' Diploma for the latest year

Selected Project STEP High School Admittance School Years 2005-2006 and 2006-2007		
High School Name	Type	Grad % <sup>2</sup>
All Hallows High School	Catholic	100.0
Bronx High School of Science	Public *	99.6
Beacon High School	Public	91.5
Foreign Language Academy of Global Studies	Public **	77.9
High School of Fashion Industries	Public **	80.3
High School for Math, Science & Engineering at The City College of New York	Public *	97.6
High School of Economics and Finance	Public **	92.1
Jacqueline Kennedy-Onassis High School	Public **	75.2
Manhattan Center for Science & Mathematics	Public **	84.4
Manhattan Village Academy	Public **	97.0
St. Jean Baptiste High School	Catholic	98.0
Stuyvesant High School	Public *	99.2
Trevor Day School	Private	100.0

\* Specialized High School of New York City  
 \*\* 2007 *U.S. News & World Report* America's Best High School  
 Note: Eighth graders who were not enrolled in Project Step were admitted to high schools with a median graduation rate below 60%.

## PROGRAM VIEWED AS SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE

Studies argue After School programs can promote adolescent well-being by providing positive development settings that offer, among other things, physical and psychological safety and supportive relationships.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, they can provide safe facilities, promote nonviolent conflict resolution, and develop and maintain an environment of warmth and connectedness among participants and staff.

In a 2006 survey, an overwhelming number of students (95%) felt that WHEDCo's After School program contributed to their safety and would recommend it to others as a safe place to be. Staff responses reinforced this finding, with over 80% reporting children were involved in fewer conflicts compared to the beginning of the program and 92% feeling confident about helping children resolve their conflicts peacefully.

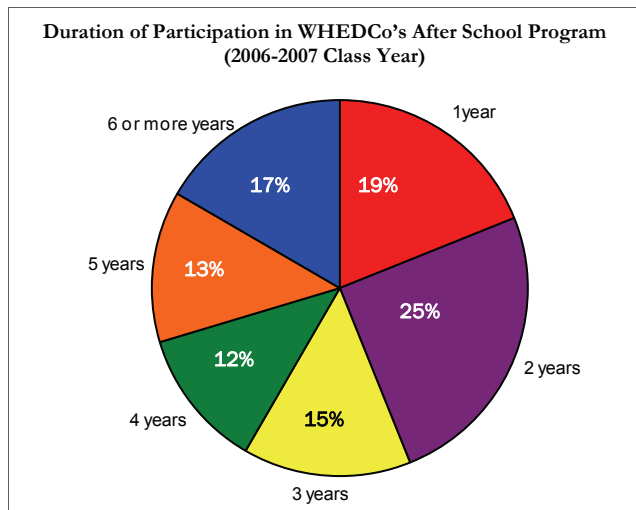
WHEDCo students and staff also felt connected to one another. Over 75% of students stated they had six or more friends and adults that look out for them, help them, and care about them even when they make mistakes. Staff felt students were more willing to help other students, were listening and using affirmative language more often, and were working cooperatively together more often than they were in the beginning of the program. Overall, this shows the program is succeeding in providing a safe and supportive environment for students, helping them on their way to a successful adulthood.

<sup>4</sup> Gootman et al. (2004) "Community programs to promote youth development: Report brief"

## PROGRAM PARTICIPATION (CONTINUED)

Comparatively, WHEDCo's active participant population grew from 92% to 97% of all enrolled students between 2005 and 2007. Average participation rates for the highly respected LA's BEST program topped out at 50% between 2000 and 2003.<sup>2</sup> The average participation rate for WHEDCo's students hovers around 79 to 84%, and is again consistent across age and gender.

Duration of participation, also known as the retention rate, measures whether students return the following year. Among 497 New York programs funded by the Department for Youth and Community Development (DYCD), WHEDCo's program stands out as one of only 52 with retention rates above 60%. In fact, for the past four years program participation has ranged from 87 to 96%, a considerable leap above the average rate of 40%. And unlike other DYCD programs, the retention rate for middle school students stays high at an average of 84% versus the drop off to 31% for middle



school students in other DYCD programs.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, studies show students who participate in the program for two years or more show the greatest benefits with respect to programming goals. Over 80% of WHEDCo's 2006-2007 class had been in the program for two or more years, with many attending for all the years under study. Remarkably, so many students in the program return for so many years that they form a cohort, traveling

through activities together from elementary through eighth grade. This creates a culture of mutual support, and is reflected in high levels of student satisfaction the program.

<sup>2</sup> Pearson et al. (2007) "Evaluation of OST programs for youth: Patterns of youth retention in OST programs 2005-06 to 2006-07"

<sup>3</sup> Reischer et al. (2002) "Supporting quality and scale in after-school services to urban youth: Evaluation of program implementation and student engagement in the TASC after-school program's third year"