

Latinx Participation in After School Matters

After School Matters Research Brief

June 2018



After School Matters (ASM) mission is to provide Chicago public high school teens opportunities to explore and develop their talents, while gaining critical skills for work, college and beyond. In 2015, our staff noticed participation rates for Latinx¹ teens in ASM programs were noticeably lower than their enrollment rates in Chicago Public Schools (CPS)². Because serving CPS students is critical to achieving our mission, this underrepresentation needed to be addressed. Additionally, Chicago population trends indicate that the Latinx population is now the second largest racial/ethnic group in the city and will likely continue to grow, widening the gap between the demographics of CPS students and the teens we serve³. To address this disparity, ASM convened a cross-departmental council to identify and address key obstacles to participation of Latinx teens and enhance ASM’s reach and impact across Latinx communities. ASM has worked on making this population a priority by targeting specific community areas, schools, and program providers; creating Spanish-language materials and a Spanish-language hotline; conducting research with Latinx teens; and setting Latinx enrollment targets.

	<u>Number & Percent of Latinx Students Enrolled</u>					
	2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017	
ASM (Fiscal Year)	4,844	31.3%	4,696	30.0%	5,106	29.9%
CPS (School Year)	48,823	43.6%	49,558	44.6%	50,155	46.0%

Research has suggested several best practices for engaging with Latinx youth. Studies suggest that parental trust and engagement is especially important for these families⁴⁵. Latinx youth report joining after school programs for personal development, to improve themselves and their communities, to learn life skills, and to have a safe haven. Reasons that

¹ ASM uses “Hispanic/Latino” as an Ethnicity option on the teen application, similar to the U.S. Census Bureau. However, in order to be more inclusive this brief is introducing the term “Latinx”. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines Latinx as a gender-neutral word for people of Latin American descent. For this purpose Latinx will refer to Hispanic, Latino, Latina, and Latinx teens. Retrieved from www.merriam-webster.com; www.census.gov

² Chicago Public Schools. (2015). CPS stats and facts [Students]. Retrieved from www.cps.edu

³ Chicago Tribune. (2017). Mexicans and ‘Hispanics’, now the largest minority in Chicago. Retrieved from www.chicagotribune.com

⁴ Riggs, N. R., & Medina, C. (2005). The “generacion diez” after-school program and latino parent involvement with schools. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 26(6), 471-84.

⁵ Mundt, K., Gregory, A., Melzi, G., & McWayne, C.M. (2015). The influence of ethnic match on Latino school-based family engagement. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 37(2), 170-185.

they may not participate include other responsibilities, lack of money or transportation, safety issues, and other external constraints⁶. The YMCA recommends being culturally sensitive, aware of other family and personal responsibilities, and addressing barriers, such as language, when working to increase Latinx participation⁷.

In the Fall of 2017, the ASM Research and Evaluation Department developed 14 questions about Latinx teens’ experiences in their programs and with the application process. We conducted focus groups in Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 with 76 teens from 11 different programs to determine why current Latinx participants join and stay in ASM programs and to identify reasons Latinx youth may not participate in programs. These 76 teens identified as Latinx in their application, and together comprised a good sample of teens across gender and grade-level (see *Figure 1*). We facilitated a focused discussion with staff members from various departments, including Communications, Programs, Finance and Operations, and Program Quality and Compliance. This group reviewed focus group results and discussed the themes that they noticed and how they relate to ASM programming. These themes are discussed in the next section of this brief.

Figure 1 Teen Focus Group Demographics



Themes

Parent Engagement

As was suggested in other studies, we found that parent engagement is essential in increasing participation for this population. When teens were asked directly what role their parents played in their participation, many responded that their parents simply supported their decision. Nonetheless, the frequency with which they mentioned their parents throughout the focus groups indicates that their parents greatly influence their involvement. For example, parents were mentioned when discussing cultural visibility, program location, real life work experiences, and competing responsibilities, as illustrated in *Figure 2* (pg. 3).

Cultural Visibility

The teen application and a portion of the ASM website were translated to Spanish in 2016. Through focus groups, we learned many teens did not know about these resources. Teens and staff suggested ASM increase Spanish visibility to accommodate teens and parents who have English language barriers. They also recommended having Spanish speaking staff available at events and showcasing more Latinx-focused events and programs. One teen mentioned having to translate for her mom during parent night and thought her mom would enjoy visiting her program more if there were staff available who could communicate with her in Spanish. Participants who had Spanish speaking instructors felt they were able to translate as needed.

⁶ Borden, L.M., Perkins, D.F., Villarruel, F.A., & Stone, M.R. (2005). To participate or not to participate: That is the question. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2005(105), 33-49.

⁷ The YMCA. (2012). Helping people connect and thrive: Strengthening inclusion, engaging Hispanic/Latinos in your YMCA. www.ymcacharlotte.org

Program Location

When asked about personal challenges and barriers to participation, teens talked about program location as a factor of their participation. If a program is too far from home or school, teens often take public transportation or rely on their parents to give them a ride. For this reason, many teens choose a program in their school or neighborhood. One teen said her parents would not let her take public transportation and she believed this was a reason why others may not participate, even though teens who travel to get to their program perceive the program neighborhood and building as a safe space both physically and emotionally. Participants who do travel outside their neighborhood or school mentioned that reduced fare for public transportation during the weekends would be helpful.

Real Life Work Experience

Many participants explained ASM programs help them plan for their future while gaining professional opportunities. As one teen explained, “it helps me put my name out there with the work I do here.” Teens also expressed that they gain 21st Century Skills such as communication and professionalism through their work in programs; things they could use on resumes and college applications. Although learning is a large theme, participants also mentioned that they want to gain perceived independence from their families by being able to pay for some of their own expenses or contribute to household income. Because ASM programs provide a stipend for participation, they explained this makes the program “close enough to a real job.” Some teens shared that the stipend is “the only reason [they] can join,” because otherwise their parents may not allow them to participate.

Competing Responsibilities

Many teens who participated in the focus groups shared that ASM was not their only after school or extracurricular activity. They have jobs, school obligations (such as required study hours, homework, school events, and classes), family obligations (including attending religious events and cultural events), and school clubs or sports. Almost all teens mentioned the need to prioritize school, sharing, “sometimes I have a lot of homework so I can’t make it to ASM” or “we have to stay for required class hours after school.” Although they chose their program based on interest there were often other activities teens were obligated to prioritize. These included activities suggested by parents, like “Sunday school for [their] confirmation,” or a “real job” to contribute to household income. Through these focus groups we learned these youth have many competing responsibilities which may explain why other Latinx teens may not participate in ASM programs.

Recommendations

In order to close the gap between Latinx representation in CPS high schools and ASM programs and achieve our mission, it is important that we continue current efforts to serve Latinx teens. The results discussed in this brief suggest a need for increased parental engagement and higher visibility of Spanish-language resources in order to showcase the value of ASM programming to the Latinx community. Outreach and marketing efforts should connect skill-building and responsibilities in programs to work experience, as personal responsibility and opportunities to contribute to household income are important to these teens. ASM should also continue to increase programming in predominately Latinx schools and communities, as these teens may be less likely to travel outside of their community area to access programs.

Figure 2 Latinx Participation Ecosystem

