



**Youth Transportation Needs
Within Poudre School District
Fort Collins, Colorado
May 2007**

Prepared by :





May 2007 – This report summarizes the results of a community survey about youth transportation needs within Poudre School District, Fort Collins, Colorado.

The Big Picture

Children and youth need to be safe - physically and emotionally - wherever they may be. They also need a balance between structured, supervised activities and unstructured time to explore the world on their own. To participate in activities, they need a safe means of transportation to and from those activities.

Many studies indicate that there is an inverse relationship between participation in after-school programs and risky youth behaviors (violence, drug use, sex, etc.). Undeniably, providing access to safe, positive places with caring adults (especially after school) should be one of a community's top priorities. Consider the following:

Children's participation in structured, supervised after-school programs positively impacts educational achievement. Students who participate in high-quality, constructive after-school programs demonstrate higher school attendance, higher language re-designation rates and improved performance on standardized tests.¹ Educational researcher Reginald Clark documented that economically disadvantaged children who participate from 20-35 hours per week in constructive learning activities during their free time get better grades in school than their more passive peers. These activities include discussion with knowledgeable adults or peers, leisure reading, writing, homework, hobbies, chores, strategy games, museum visits, theater, movies and sports.²

Teenagers who participate in community-based youth development programs experience more positive academic and social outcomes. Stanford education professor Milbrey McLaughlin found that adolescents who participate regularly in community-based youth development programs (including arts, sports and community service) have better academic and social outcomes—as well as higher education and career aspirations—than other similar teens.³

Non-school hours represent the single largest block of time in the lives of American children and youth. About 32% of American youths' waking hours are spent in school and about 40% are discretionary—that is, not committed to other activities such as school, homework, meals, chores or working for pay.⁴ While providing an ideal opportunity for promoting children's learning and development, the after-school hours simultaneously pose great risk. Violent juvenile crime triples from 3-8 pm,⁵ and it is during these same hours that children face the most serious danger of becoming victims of crime.⁶ Unsupervised after-school hours represent a period of significant risk in other arenas as well, including increased risk of substance abuse and early sexual activity.⁷

After-school programs help to reduce youth crime. Recent studies confirm the relationship between availability of after-school programs and reduced juvenile crime. For example, just one year after the Baltimore police department opened an after-school program in a high-risk area, illegal acts dropped 44%. In another city, juvenile arrests in a public housing project declined by 75% after establishing an after-school program while they increased by 67% in a comparable housing project that offered no such activities.⁸

In addition to improved academic achievement, children experience multiple benefits from participation in high-quality after-school programs. In several studies spanning more than a decade, researcher Deborah Vandell and colleagues have shown that a host of benefits result from elementary-age children's participation in after-school programs, including better grades, work habits, emotional adjustment and peer relations.⁹ Other studies have reported similar benefits, including improvements in students' social skills, the ability to maintain self-control, avoid conflicts and make constructive choices about their personal behavior.¹⁰ Parents and teachers also report that students are more excited about school and more confident, especially about their academic ability.¹¹

Closer to Home

Poudre School District (PSD), which encompasses the City of Fort Collins and neighboring towns and communities of Livermore, Red Feather Lakes, Timnath and Wellington, offers a plethora of safe, non-school hour programs and activities from school-based extracurricular programs to the Boys and Girls Club to City-operated or private club activities.

In fall 2005, the Healthier Communities Coalition of Larimer County (HCC) – a nonprofit coalition focused on addressing the needs of children and youth within Larimer County's communities – convened a group of stakeholders concerned that all youth within PSD boundaries have access to safe places when not in school. Members of this group included representatives from the City of Fort Collins/Transfort, Poudre School District, Colorado State University, Boys and Girls Clubs, B.A.S.E. Camp, the District Attorney's Office, United Way 211 and the Public Transportation Action Group.

The group chose as its moniker "YoGo," which stands for "Youth on the Go," and had a logo developed. The group itself became the YoGo Task Force, and began to meet regularly.

Initially, task force members gathered information about various youth transit programs in other communities across the nation, and reviewed potential federal and state funding avenues for transportation programs. They discovered that several communities had successfully implemented transit programs aimed at providing youth access to positive after-school environments. From large cities like Chicago, Illinois, to smaller rural towns like Ferndale, Washington, successful youth transit programs were being funded, implemented and managed.

Encouraged by these findings, task force members set their sights on the next objective: gathering data to document the community's real youth transportation needs. (Note that

the YoGo Task Force agreed to consider Fort Collins first, and then replicate the model in other Larimer County communities where possible.) Ultimately, the task force's intention was to measure the communities' demand for transportation support and formulate a practical transportation model in reaction.

Collecting the Facts

The YoGo Task Force considered a variety of survey methods before targeting the one that seemed to make the most sense. From the beginning, the task force discussed making the survey available in both English and Spanish.

First, the group considered conducting a combination of telephone interviews and on-line surveys with the parents at six elementary schools believed to have the highest transportation needs. Volunteers would have made the phone calls; one volunteer would have been bilingual. Phone interviews and an online survey were considered because they are relatively inexpensive ways of collecting data.

After further consideration, the group decided to conduct an online-only survey using the software called "Survey Monkey," and follow up with phone surveys in the areas of the district with the least online responses. An online survey tool with nearly 30 questions was created and revised several times.

The group decided that HCC's website would host the survey, but there would be links to it from the PSD and United Way 211 of Larimer County sites. The survey would have been online for one month beginning after spring break. The task force would work with the Coloradoan and PSD's communications department to get the word out to parents that the survey was available.

After soliciting the opinions of other people about the survey method, the task force changed direction again. Many people felt that the online survey would not reach the population needing transportation the most – lower income parents without access to, or who are uncomfortable using, the Internet. Thus more survey methods were considered including distributing the survey at all the back-to-school nights in PSD elementary and junior high schools, or maybe through PTOs and PTAs. The task force also thought about holding focus groups in all the schools and asking people to fill out the survey then.

Finally, the task force agreed to use an "old-fashioned" paper and pencil survey instrument. They used the survey designed for Survey Monkey and revised it slightly – refining some of the questions with the intention of making the survey as short as possible.

It was decided that the survey should be mailed to a random sample of 5,000 homes (believed to have school-aged children) with ZIP codes in the PSD boundary. Subsequently, labels were purchased from a local mail house.

The task force also agreed that an incentive would help to motivate people to fill out and return the survey. Schrader Oil Company donated \$200 in gas coupons to be used for four \$50 prizes. Respondents could choose to have their name included in a drawing for one of the prizes by adding their name and contact information at the end of the survey.

After many months of debating the best method for collecting youth transportation needs data, the YoGo Task Force mailed out a paper survey to 5,000 random homes within the PSD boundary on October 16, 2006. Each survey included a stamped envelope printed with HCC's return address. Recipients were asked to return the survey by October 31, 2006. As it turned out, HCC continued to receive and accept surveys throughout November.

Eight hundred and fifty-three (853) surveys were received by HCC representing a 17% return rate.

Survey Findings and Interpretation

The YoGo survey revealed many interesting facts, including:

- Nearly 60% of respondents seem to be from upper income segments of the community (27.61% were from the 80525 ZIP code and 25.26% were from the 80526 ZIP code).
- Sixty-seven percent (67%) of respondents say their child/children does/do not participate in after-school programs.
- Forty-seven percent (47%) indicated an interest in having their children attend after-school programs. (See the discussion in the "Survey Limitations" section about the wording of the question from which this percentage was derived.)
- Most or 78.82% say transportation does not prohibit their child/children from participating in after-school programs.
- Almost 84% (83.9%) of respondents say they are willing/able to pick up their child/children from programs.
- Only 45.6% said they would utilize a youth transportation system. Of those, 43.27% said they would be most comfortable if the transportation system used school buses and was free to riders.
- Respondents said they'd pay from \$.25 to \$1.00 for one-way transportation, but 11.51% said they could not afford to pay anything. Another 36.44% said they could pay \$.25-\$.50 for a one-way trip.

The YoGo Task Force was initiated under the assumption that the Fort Collins community needed and would utilize a youth transportation system, which in turn would increase the number of youth who would participate in after-school programs and decrease the number who participate in risky behaviors. After tabulating the survey data three different ways, each time taking a more in-depth look at the responses, the group was quite surprised that only 20% of the respondents said they really needed help transporting their child/children. Regardless of how the data were sliced, the outcome

remained the same – only 20% need help with transportation. This hardly makes the case for the development of a city-wide youth-only transportation system.

Beyond discovering this important conclusion, the survey results emphasize that segments of the Fort Collins community have transportation challenges. The YoGo Task Force hopes this important finding will inform other transportation decisions making it possible for more youth from the segments in need to access non-school hour programs.

Respondents living in ZIP code 80521 experienced the highest incidence of transportation prohibiting program attendance – 29.3% – followed by residents living in ZIP code 80524, which had an incidence of 25%.

The number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch attending schools within the 80521 and 80524 ZIP codes suggests that poverty is more prevalent in those areas. The following table illustrates the problem (each individual school’s administrative office provided the data presented).

Name of School with Corresponding ZIP Code	Free / Reduced Lunch Eligibility
Irish Elementary (80521)	87% of the total of 363 students enrolled
Putnam Elementary (80521)	77% of the total of 385 students
Harris Elementary (80524)	56% of the total of 330 students
Dunn Elementary (80521)	24% of the total of 432 students
Lincoln Junior High (80521)	62% of the total of 470 students
Poudre High School (80521)	20% of the total of 1,674 students

Respondents for whom transportation prohibits after-school program participation were more than twice as likely than those without transportation limitations to be interested in after-school programs (84% interest versus 37%, respectively), suggesting the importance of providing transportation support to respondents for whom attendance is precluded for transportation reasons. Furthermore, 77% of respondents for whom the lack of transportation is a barrier to attending after-school programs expressed interest in 12-month programs.

One of the survey’s questions really got at the issue of the “need” for a youth transportation system versus “it would be nice” to have one. Eighty percent (80%) of respondents for whom transportation prohibits attendance indicate that they would use a youth transportation system, as opposed to only 34% of respondents without transportation challenges.

Another question asked respondents if they would use transportation for after-school programming if it were offered. Forty-six percent (46%) of all respondents said they would use a youth transportation system and another 27% said they might use a youth transportation system, resulting in a potential 73% of all respondents using transportation support. So, while perhaps only 20% of respondents are in dire need of help for

transporting their child/children, 46% of all respondents said they would use a youth transportation system and 73% might potentially use one.

All of the above information suggests that youth from lower-income families should be considered a special population when decisionmakers consider and plan for the transportation needs of those populations.

It also is important to note that 88% of respondents said that if their child/children were to attend after-school programs, they would prefer for the programs to be offered at their child/children's school. This could inform decisions regarding the support of on-site, after-school programs. This information also suggests that it would be prudent for other after-school hour programs to be located as near to schools as possible.

Survey Limitations

The YoGo Task Force feels the survey's 17% response rate was respectable, and the data collected proved valuable and educational. However, there also were limitations in the survey design and methodology that proved to be an obstacle in deriving sound conclusions about genuine transportation needs in the community.

First, the YoGo survey ultimately was available only in English. Given an estimated 10% of PSD parents use Spanish as a primary language, a Spanish translation survey would have possibly elevated response rates from typically low-income households indicating transportation demand.

Second, a definition of "after-school program" should have been provided at the beginning of the survey. The YoGo Task Force's definition included any and all non-school hour programs and activities. It was clear from some of the survey respondents' comments that some people think of an after-school program as child care. For example, one respondent said she was not interested in transportation for after-school programs because, "I am home and do not need an after-school program." Another commented that he would be interested "when my wife returns to work."

Although the YoGo survey methodology included some limitations, the task force feels its outcomes still confirmed that a good percentage of children in the community do not participate in after school programs, although conversely, a good portion of parents indicated a demand for such programs. Most notably, 20% of respondents indicated transportation hurdles do prohibit their children from participating in after-school programs.

If the sample data accurately represent the Fort Collins population, we would expect 20% of the 21,200 students enrolled in PSD to need transportation support to attend after-school activities. This figure is supported by the fact that one in four PSD children qualifies for a free or reduced-fee lunch program. Most likely, there also is a correlation between the 20% of parents who say they need help transporting their children and the

19% of all households in Larimer County who do not earn enough income to meet basic living costs.¹²

In Conclusion

While the YoGo survey did not produce the results the YoGo Task Force anticipated, it did document a definite demand for youth transportation to after-school programs and activities among 20% of households within the Poudre School District boundary – and the need seems to be dire among that 20%.

Given that the majority of risky youth behavior occurs after school between the hours of 3-8 pm, it follows that providing children and youth access to safe, supervised programs during those hours by providing transportation to those programs makes sense. Although measurable costs vary from state to state, it is undeniable that the cost of providing children access to safe places with caring adults is dramatically less expensive than processing and incarcerating young offenders in the juvenile justice system.

Recently, after a tour of a newly built Boys & Girls Club, former Secretary of State General Colin Powell profoundly stated, “We need to build children, not jails.”

The YoGo Task Force believes that providing safe, reliable transportation to our children and youth – especially the 20% who are most in need – will help with this worthwhile endeavor.

¹ Eccles., J., The Development of Children Ages 6 to 14, *The Future of Children: When School is Out*, Volume 9, Number 2, Fall 1999, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, pp. 30-44.

² UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation, *A Decade of Results: The Impact of the LA’s BEST After School Enrichment Program on Subsequent Student Achievement*, June 2000.

³ McLaughlin, M.W., *Community Counts: How Youth Organizations Matter for Youth Development*, Washington, DC: Public Education Network, 2000.

⁴ Timmer, S.G., Eccles, J. and O’Brien, I., How Children Use Time, in *Time, Goods and Well-Being*, Juster, F.T. and Stafford, F.B. (editors), Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, 1985.

⁵ Fox, J.A. and Newman, S.A., *After-School Crime or After-School Programs: Report to the U.S. Attorney General*, Washington, DC: Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 1997.

⁶ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: A Report to the Nation*, Washington, DC: 1996.

⁷ Carnegie Corporation of New York, *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours*, New York, NY: 1992, p. 33.

⁸ The After-School Corporation, *3:00 P.M.: Time for After School*, New York, NY: 1998.

⁹ Vandell, D.L. and Shumow, L., After-School Child Care Programs, *The Future of Children: When School is Out*, Volume 9, Number 2, Fall 1999, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, pp. 64-80.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹ Policy Studies Associates, Inc., *Building Quality and Supporting Expansion of After-school Projects: Evaluation Results from the TASC After-School Program’s Second Year*, February 2001.

¹² Pearce, D. M., *Overlooked and Undercounted: Struggling to Make Ends Meet in Colorado*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington, Center for Women’s Research, School of Social Work, March 2007, p. 4.

The Healthier Communities Coalition of Larimer County would like to thank all of the YoGo Task Force members for the many hours they spent working on this important issue. While the work will not be finished completely until youth who need transportation to and from non-school hour programs and activities is realized, the task force played an important role in gathering data that the Northern Colorado Metropolitan Planning Organization is using to help develop a regional transportation master plan.

Thank you especially to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Larimer County (BGCLC), specifically its Executive Director Kathi Wright for providing resources to YoGo and its Operations Director Sam Jack for his help in writing this report.

A special thank you goes to the Poudre Valley Health System Foundation and its Executive Director Ruth Lytle-Barnaby for generously providing resources to produce and mail the survey, as well as sage advice throughout the process. And the results would not have been the same without the contributions of Janet Craighead, a member of the PVHS research team, who analyzed all the data.

The Community Foundation of Northern Colorado is to be thanked for granting HCC monies for data analysis.

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