

**Universal Programs and Unintended Divisions:  
A Case Study of After-School Program Legislation**

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## **Abstract**

In 1999, legislation in California provided new funds for school-based after-school programs. Unlike other state-funded child care programs, these programs were not targeted to particular groups. Parents and teachers hoped that this universal approach would eliminate the existing situation in which, after sharing a classroom during the day, children joined either the targeted or private after-school programs that divided largely along lines of race-ethnicity and class. In this working paper, I describe the processes that were set in motion by legislatively-mandated program restrictions and inadequate funding – processes which served to reproduce socioeconomic and racial-ethnic divisions in school-based after-school programs.

One afternoon during the autumn of 1999, I observed twenty first- and second-grade children in an after-school program located in their elementary school. Of the twenty children, sixteen were black, three were white, and one was Latino. Picture them for a moment: spilling into the multipurpose room after the end of the school day, they are boisterous and excited. Directed to sit at the cafeteria-style tables for their afternoon snack, they slide onto benches, nudging and pushing each other. One little girl grabs for an apple as she passes the counter where the snacks are. “No,” she is told sharply by one of the after-school aides, who goes on to explain that snacks will be passed out when everyone is sitting quietly at the table. Waiting, the children tease, punch, and call out to each other. The din is deafening. Not only are the children talking loudly and shrieking with glee or displeasure, but the child-care workers are yelling to be heard over the noise. “James – I saw that, James – your mama’s gonna know about that!” Two adults, a middle-aged African-American woman and a white woman in her early thirties, are supervising the children; one is busy taking attendance and checking a list to be sure that every child who *should* be there *is* there while the other tries to keep the children sitting down as she begins passing out the snacks – a small red apple and a dixie cup of fruit loops for each child. Snack time over, they are directed to line up to go outside. But “lining up” takes longer than it did to eat the snacks. Just released from school, the children’s energy is palpable, but they are told that only when the line is completely quiet and calm will they be able to go outside to play.

During that same fall, I also observed a different after-school program that was, like the first program, based at a public elementary school. On this particular day, twelve children, nine girls and three boys, gathered in the multipurpose room of the school for a lesson in circus arts. Although they attend a school that is ethnically and racially diverse, all of the children in this

program were white. On large athletic mats that cover the floor, the children practice the skills they have been taught. Picture these children: one young girl balances a rod on her nose; another stands on a board atop a ball, feet apart as she tries to gently roll the board back and forth over the surface of the ball. These children are concentrating so completely that it is actually very quiet in the midst of all their activity. While some children perform, others watch; a white woman in her late thirties, a professional circus performer who has been hired to teach this class, doesn't raise her voice as she gives a pointer here or a word of praise there. The children are practicing, concentrating, engaged.

I made these observations when I conducted research on recent California legislation that provided funding for school-based after-school programs for children. One of the important aspects of this particular legislation is that the programs it funds are not restricted to a targeted group of children within the schools; rather, it is intended to fund a program of after-school care and enrichment that is open to all public school children – a *universal* program. Although a truly universal program would be open to all children in the state or in the country, in this case, it was only children in the school districts that had been awarded funding under this California legislation who were eligible to enroll in the program.

Many social programs are not universal, but are targeted toward categories of children identified as “at risk.”<sup>1</sup> Although some children are categorized as at risk because of their own individual characteristics, such as low test scores or severe disabilities, government funding for child-care programs usually operationalizes the concept of “at-risk children” on the basis of their parents’ characteristics. Programs target children whose parents fall into certain categories. In

California, for example, there are child-care programs for the children of adolescent parents, migrant workers, welfare recipients, students attending community college, and low-income parents. The kind of program to which a child has access depends on the category into which his or her parent is put. A targeted approach to meeting some needs is necessary because the United States, as a society, under-invests in children in general and privatizes the social cost of raising the next generation.<sup>2</sup> Privatizing the cost of children works against their equal opportunity and access to resources, thus creating the need for targeted programs that attempt to redress some of the consequences to those with more limited access to resources and opportunities. Although many of those involved in designing and running such programs are motivated by the desire to help children who are educationally and economically disadvantaged, the very act of providing “targeted” services can create and reproduce structures of segregation and inequality.

The two after-school programs described would appear to be explicitly or implicitly targeted – one group designed in some way that disproportionately serves African-American children, the other in some way that disproportionately serves white students. The circus arts program was a relatively expensive fee-based program paid for directly by parents and attended by some of the children in a costly private school-based after-school program run by the YMCA.<sup>3</sup> The composition of the group therefore reflected not only those with an interest in circus arts, but those with both the interest *and* the ability to pay the fees. In this community, white families were more likely than black or Latino families to be able to afford circus arts and the private after-school program. The other program, however, was one of the new *universal* school-based after-school programs that had been funded by the California legislation I was

studying. We might, therefore, expect this program to reflect the racial-ethnic makeup of the school as a whole, but instead it was disproportionately attended by children of color. African-American children in this particular state-funded after-school program were overrepresented, while Hispanic and white students were under-represented.

School district officials, teachers, and parents had hailed the new universal legislation as a way to end the racial segregation that largely defined the existing school-based after-school programs, but this was not happening. While the after-school program I observed was *de jure* universal, it operated, *de facto*, as a program targeted to low-income children who, *in this community*, were disproportionately children of color. In a statewide study of California schools, researchers found a positive and high correlation (0.73) between the percentage of children participating in the free or reduced price lunch program and the percentage of nonwhite students (Betts, Rueben, and Danenberg 2000:58). Although there were almost twice as many white as black families with children in the school district in 1989, there were twice as many black as white families in poverty. A black family with children was four and a half times as likely to be below the poverty level as a white family.<sup>4</sup> By operating as a *de facto* targeted program, the state-funded after-school program reproduced class and racial-ethnic divisions in the public school setting. How did this come to be? How did a program that was intended to be open to all come to be used by relatively few white families? And how did this happen despite intentions to achieve exactly the opposite result? Those are the questions I address in this paper.

### **Methods of Inquiry**

My analysis is based on an examination of legislation that established state-funded school-based after-school programs, on observations of two of the programs it funded, and on interviews with a variety of people involved with the legislation and the programs. The legislation that I am discussing was passed in the 1997-98 legislative session and provided \$50 million for school-based after-school programs in California. Funds for approved programs became available for the 1999-2000 school year. I began my research in 1999 while in residence at the Center for Working Families at the University of California, Berkeley, and conducted interviews and observations between 1999 and 2001. I focused my research on one school district in northern California that had received funding under the new legislation, and I observed in and talked to people from after-school programs in two schools in that district. In this paper, I refer to the two schools as “School A” and “School B,” which are pseudonyms, as are all names used in this paper. Each school covered grades K to 5 and had an enrollment of around 350 children.

Schools in the district are required to reflect the proportion of black and white non-Hispanic children in the citywide school-age population, and the district attempts to achieve this through a combination of parental choice of school and by bussing.<sup>5</sup> The proportions of black and white non-Hispanic students were, in most elementary schools in the district, within a few percentage points of each other.<sup>6</sup> School A (the school in which the programs described were located) was situated in a low-income neighborhood of small houses and apartment buildings. In 1999, the racial-ethnic composition of School A was 40% African American, 13% Hispanic, 7% Asian, 12% interracial, 27% white, and 0.2% other ethnic categories (category descriptions used

by the school district).<sup>7</sup> School B was located in an upper-middle class affluent neighborhood of two-story, four-plus bedroom detached houses. In 1999, the racial-ethnic composition of School B was 34% African American, 19% Hispanic, 4.5% Asian, 13% interracial, 29% white, and 0.1% other ethnic categories.<sup>8</sup> Table 1 compares ethnic composition for the schools with the composition of the state-funded after-school programs.

In addition to observing in the schools, I attended program collaborative meetings, after-school program parent meetings, a meeting of county level agencies, and a conference on school-age care in which several sessions were devoted to the new legislation and the programs it funded. I spoke with officials in the California Department of Education (CDE), principals and teachers in the schools where the programs were based, coordinators of the after-school programs, school district officials, the grant writers who had written the school district's successful proposal, child-care advocates, and some of the parents whose children attended the schools where the programs were based.

Although I have mentioned the title of this legislation elsewhere, I have purposely not named it in this paper because I wish to underscore the fact that my analysis is not a critique of the particular legislation or an evaluation study of the programs it funded. The problems with this particular legislation are not unique to it, and the more important point is how programs that are intended to address a particular social issue may unintentionally create circumstances in which class and racial-ethnic divisions are reproduced.

### **The Promise of Universal Programs**

Programs that separate children on the basis of socioeconomic characteristics, whether intentionally or not, create a structure for differential treatment. Although there may be some targeted programs of high quality, the truth is that in most cases the finding that “separate is not equal” still holds. In addition, programs that highlight children’s targeted status, such as free-lunch programs, may stigmatize these children and contribute to divisions based on the targeted characteristic (poverty, educational deficits, and so forth). Elaine Bell Kaplan has shown, for example, how teenagers scorn free school lunch programs to distance themselves from the stigma of poverty. Kaplan writes:

I asked all the girls: “Do you get free lunch here?” Amanda was the first to respond: “You can get free lunch. I mean I can, but I don’t choose to. I don’t know why.” Stacey had the answer: “I think it’s kinda [a stigma] they put on free lunch. You’re suppose to be poor.” Stacey, Amanda, and Letia responded in unison: “[You’re] on welfare!” To the girls, free food was what Goffman (1965) refers to as “stigma symbols.” Whoever is caught receiving free food is assumed to be of a devalued status (1999:29).

In addition, targeted programs can create resentment and frustration on the part of those who must pay for private sector services at the market rate (Folbre 2001; Wilson 1996:202). Many high-end low-income working families and less-than-affluent middle-class families are ineligible for programs targeted to the poor and can’t afford programs targeted to the affluent (Skocpol 2000). Economist Nancy Folbre notes that middle-class people do not so much begrudge social programs for the poor as feel that their own child-rearing efforts are socially unsupported: “the anger directed at welfare recipients in the 1990s did not all come from the assumption that poor families were getting something for nothing. Much of it came from the perception that other [middle-class] families raising children were getting very little public support for an enterprise crucial to the future of our society” (2001:135).

The problem of targeted programs has been recognized and discussed by a number of scholars (Gordon 1994: 281-85, Wilson 1996). One solution is to move away from providing targeted services and toward providing universal programs and services. Making the case against social programs targeted specifically for African-Americans, William Julius Wilson quotes from a 1975 article by economist Vivian Henderson, who argued that “politics designed in the future to cope with the problems of the poor and victimized will also yield benefits to blacks. In contrast, any efforts to treat blacks separately from the rest of the nation are likely to lead to frustration, heightened racial animosities, and a waste of the country’s resources and the precious resources of black people” (Henderson cited in Wilson 1996:201).<sup>9</sup> Programs do not have to be targeted at African-Americans, however, to become identified that way. Wilson notes that war-on-poverty programs instituted during the Johnson administration became increasingly

misrepresented as being intended for poor blacks alone. . . . Public services became identified mainly with blacks, private services mainly with whites. In an era of ostensible racial justice, many public programs ironically seemed to constitute a new and costlier form of segregation. White taxpayers saw themselves as being forced, through taxes, to pay for medical and legal services that many of them could not afford to purchase for their own families (1996:202).

Universal programs and policies are seen as one way of circumventing program designs that are based upon and reproduce class and racial distinctions and that foster prejudice and resentment.

Programs that are designed to serve all children not only eliminate the stigma of programs that are limited to groups labeled as “disadvantaged,” but they have the potential to be better quality programs because they have to respond in some way to the expectations of middle-class families and because middle-class families bring material resources into the programs they use. Universal programs also mobilize political support because they appeal to the value of

“equal treatment.” Social security, for example, is widely supported because it is seen as being universal and equitable. As with birthdays, everybody gets one. Public schools have had this kind of support for the same reason, but are increasingly under attacks that undermine them as universal programs.

Although part of the initiative behind providing services for children in a universal rather than a targeted manner is as a way of *improving* programs, a “universal” program does not necessarily imply a “quality” program. It should imply, however, that programs are not only open to everyone but also that, within reasonable limits, they meet more than people’s minimum needs. A universal program without this premise is a travesty. For a hypothetical example, a free lunch program that is open to all students, but that serves only gruel for every meal, will be used only by those whose choice is gruel or nothing – reminiscent of the old adage that the rich person and the poor person are both free to sleep under the bridge.

The fact that the new California after-school legislation provided for universal programs that were “open to all” was publicized at various levels, and parents were enthusiastic about this for a number of reasons. Some parents expressed appreciation that their needs for after-school care were being addressed by the state. Many of these parents had been ineligible for publicly funded targeted programs, but were priced out of the private after-school programs. In addition, many parents were relieved that their children would no longer be part of the bifurcated group of schoolchildren who, after sharing a classroom during the day, joined the existing “targeted” and “private” after-school programs that divided largely along lines of race-ethnicity and class.

## Learning About the “Other”

There is another facet to my description of the two after-school programs. The state-funded program and the circus arts group were not only going on *within the same school*, but they were also going on *simultaneously in the same space* – in a multipurpose room in the elementary school that was about forty by thirty feet in area. On one side of the room were the children having snacks and lining up, and on the other side were the children practicing circus arts. The sharing of space highlighted the differences between the two programs and revealed class-specific patterns of socialization and education (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Lareau 2000a).

Not only did this contrast stand out to anyone observing the scene, but the children in each group were aware of each other, although not equally aware. As they waited in line to be released to the playground, the children in the state-funded program looked across the room and watched the circus arts children performing. One little boy had edged closer to the circus arts group and, from behind a pillar, followed the activities with rapt attention. His longing was so evident that, at the end of the session, the circus arts teacher sought out the coordinator of the other program to discuss whether there was some way to enable that *one* little boy to participate in the circus arts class.<sup>10</sup> It is more difficult to know what the circus arts children saw. None of them turned his or her attention to the other side of the room, but what impressions were they forming of this other group of children – this group of *others*? Margaret Andersen notes that “whites tend not to see the persistent structural disadvantages that other racial groups encounter” (Andersen 2001:194). Are they likely to see a poorly structured program that serves children whose families lack the money or cultural capital with which to make different choices, or will

they see children who need to be regulated because they are rowdy, noisy, and “out of control”? What is each learning about the other?<sup>11</sup>

My descriptions of the two after-school programs are descriptions of the everyday world. But how does it get this way? As Dorothy Smith has asked, what are the “social processes that extend outside the scope of the everyday world and are not discoverable within it” (1987:152)? The local everyday world of the after-school program is shaped by larger social and economic processes that are embedded in the local and operate through texts (e.g., laws, regulations, policies, job descriptions), material practices (e.g., funding, fees, space), language (e.g., the meanings of “care,” “enrichment,” “after-school,” and “universal”), and the daily practices and actions of people (program coordinators, child-care workers, state officials, school district personnel, teachers, parents, children). Asking “How does it come to be this way?” leads to a web of connections. The actions of legislators, program personnel, parents, and children are all involved — connected by filaments of social relations. Understanding the way these social relations operate enables us to see how sincere attempts to achieve integration and diversity by means of a universal program can nevertheless result in the unintended consequences of racial-ethnic and class division.

### **The Legislation**

The need for after-school care for school-age children is great, and studies indicate that there is twice as much demand as available programs can meet. By 2002, existing programs in some urban areas will be able to meet only 20 percent of the demand for after-school programs

(United States Department of Education and United States Department of Justice 2000:5-6). A 1998 survey estimates that out-of-school-time programs are serving less than 20 percent of the five to fourteen year-old children who need such care (Bundy 1998). In addition to high demand and need, there is strong public support for after-school programs. A 1998 Mott Foundation poll found that “four of every five respondents said they would be willing to raise their taxes to fund after-school programs in their communities. This support crossed party lines and was equally strong between [*sic*] parents and non-parents” (Children's Defense Fund 1999:55). A 1999 national survey by the Mott Foundation found that two-thirds of respondents thought that federal or state taxes should be used for daily after-school programs (United States Department of Education and United States Department of Justice 2000:6).

Funding for after-school programs is aimed at meeting a variety of overlapping but separate goals, such as enabling parents to be employed, supervising children in order to reduce juvenile crime and increase juvenile safety, supplementing the school day with more educational opportunities, and building a sense of neighborhood community (Bundy 1998:2). One of the challenges of designing after-school care legislation is trying to further, or at least making it appear to further, these various goals. Legislation is also shaped by the concerns and lobbying of various stakeholders, such as school teachers and principals, child advocacy groups, parents, school board members, school custodians, employee unions, and elected officials. I discuss the effect of competing interests on this particular after-school legislation elsewhere (Garey 2000), but here I am interested in how the legislation in its final form begins a process of reproducing class and racial-ethnic divisions, *despite the fact that it was supposed to be a universal program serving all children.*

The legislation provided a total of \$50 million over a three-year period for school-based after-school programs in California. For a program to receive funding, school districts, organizations, or groups that wanted to run an after-school program had to submit a proposal to the State Department of Education. These initial conditions undermine attempts at universality in two major ways: first, not every school or school district in California could be funded to have an after-school program under this legislation because the number of programs was limited by the amount of money appropriated; second, the ability of groups to submit a proposal varied by initiative and resources. To write a grant takes resources in people, time, and skills; and communities most in need of social programs may be those that are also most lacking in the resources to obtain them. A truly universal program, however, is available to all. With social security, for example, each person must apply for a social security card, but people are not competing for a limited number of social security slots.

The application process thus might have worked to favor communities and schools that were more resource rich. Indeed, the legislation and the CDE's call for proposals both stated that the criteria for selecting programs to fund would be the strength of the educational component, the quality of the educational enrichment component, the strength of the staff training component, and the scope and strength of collaboration and support from the school principal and staff. In other words, the content of the program rather than whom it served was the primary criterion of selection. The legislation did state, however, that priority for funding would be given to schools where a minimum of 50 percent of the pupils were eligible for free or reduced-cost meals through the USDA school lunch program, but the proposals were to be ranked on this basis only in the event that more acceptable proposals were received than could be funded. This

was not the case. There were fewer applications than had been anticipated. Some schools and organizations did not apply because they didn't think they were income eligible, thus removing themselves from the pool. After the first round of funding, CDE officials speaking at a workshop on this legislation urged schools and groups to apply for funding and referred to the misapprehension that the funding was reserved for low-income schools.

Although some groups did not apply because they misunderstood the guidelines, others did not apply because they understood them too well. Fifty million dollars may sound like a lot of money, but it amounted to only \$75,000 a year for each eighty-student program – reimbursed at the rate of \$5 per child per day.<sup>12</sup> Nonprofit groups like the YMCA or parks and recreation agencies, which are experienced in running after-school programs, were eligible to apply for the funds as long as they were partnering with a public school as the site of the program. Of the ninety-one applications that were funded statewide, however, the vast majority (eighty-two) were from school districts and county departments of education; only nine cities applied and were funded. This is telling, given that there are 510 parks and recreation agencies in California, 60 percent of which offer after-school programs, 40 percent of which are based at school sites (Karpilow, 1999:14). Referring to the \$5 per child per day budget stipulated under the legislation, one recreation specialist commented: “Parks and recreation people know they can’t run a good program on that amount of money.”<sup>13</sup>

Underfunding is a problem that affects every aspect of a program, but the legislation also included specific regulations that shaped the programs it funded, created additional costs, and contributed to class divisions. The after-school program was required to operate at least three

hours a day and at least until 6:00 p.m. on every regular school day. The effect of this and other regulations varied by school district. In the school district I was studying, for example, kindergarten and first-grade children were released from school at 1:00 in the afternoon, and elementary school children were released at 2:15 p.m., except on Wednesdays, when K-3 grades were all released at 1:00. In order to serve children from the time they were out of school until 6:00, programs had to operate and be staffed for five hours every day. The legislation did not have any mechanism for funding programs based on their hours of operation, so a program operating twenty-five hours a week was reimbursed no more than if it had operated the minimum fifteen hours a week required by the legislation. Having an after-school program that covered the hours from the end of the school day until 6:00 was appreciated by parents, but problems arose because the legislation required that each participating student must attend five days a week, for at least three hours every day. The legislation reads:

It is the intent of the Legislature that pupils participate in the full day of the program every day during which pupils participate, except when released early in accordance with the early release policy described in paragraph (1) or as reasonably necessary.

The three-hour-a-day requirement was aimed at children who would otherwise be unsupervised, to keep them safe from harm and to keep neighborhoods safe from children. The regulations thus served to target these children. But, by doing so, legislators unintentionally made it unpalatable for parents who did not want or need their children to be in an after-school program for three full hours every day. One program coordinator explained: “The program was designed for latchkey kids, so they [the legislators] didn’t consider families who want to spend time with their children” [laughs ruefully].

During the first months of operation, program coordinators were afraid they would not be reimbursed by the state if children were not there for three full hours every day. The CDE, which was still interpreting the legislation, could not give the programs any definitive answers about how reimbursement would be calculated when children were released early. Program coordinators and CDE officials interpreted the legislation to mean that children had to be present for three full hours every day to remain in the program and for the program to be reimbursed. This interpretation is understandable. Preferring to play it safe rather than risk losing needed funds, program coordinators defined “reasonable early daily release of pupils” very narrowly and used the same guidelines used by the school for excused school day absences: illness, doctor appointments, or a death in the family. One program coordinator emphasized the point by saying: “even if a child’s grandparents come to visit for three weeks, the program doesn’t allow for that.” My conversations with program coordinators during the second year of the program indicated that this regulation had not changed much. I was told: “kids can now be picked up early if it would be a hardship for a parent to pick the child up later – but parents must *prove* this.”

What the program “allowed for,” however, and what was actually done were not necessarily the same. The “minimum of three hours a day” restriction may have been ignored selectively, particularly by parents who were not dependent on it for child care or were in a position to take advantage of other alternatives for after-school care. One mother, who had removed her children from the program after two months, explained how she had dealt with the restriction:

I suppose they could threaten to kick you out of the program. Although the staff said things to me, I just picked my kids up whenever I felt like it. I basically

found the idea so insulting I just ignored it. Middle-class privilege, I guess. I don't know how other parents dealt with it. I wasn't in the program long enough to create a major stir.

Had many parents taken this approach, the program coordinators would probably have had to do something. As one CDE official told me: "If a child is there less than three hours, we don't get any money."

What was not included in the legislation was as critical as what was included. There was no provision for staff development or training or for the care of children in the program on the days that staff development and training might occur. Had it not been for the outcry and pressure from child advocacy groups, legislators would not have included any stipulation of a minimum child/staff ratio. In the end, the legislation provided for a "pupil-to-staff member ratio of no more than 20 to 1." This is much higher than the 14 to 1 child to staff ratio required by the state of California for school-age child-care centers under Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations, but the legislation explicitly stipulated that programs established under the act were not required to comply with this requirement.

In practice, because the programs were so poorly funded, the program coordinators were often counted into the 20 to 1 ratio. This meant that, instead of doing administrative work, such as hiring instructional aides and enrichment activity teachers, training staff, keeping attendance lists and records, writing reports, ordering materials, and talking with parents, the coordinators were on the floor doing child care so they could be counted in the ratio. The after-school program coordinators I spoke to told me that, especially during the first months of the program, most of the administrative and program planning work was done on their own time. As one coordinator said:

The grant is written so that coordinators are part of the 20 to 1 ratio. Within the first week, we realized that is impossible because none of the other work gets done. There is no time for prep time. I don't know what the legislature was thinking when programs run from 1:00 to 6:00. There is no time to do attendance, forms, the administrative work to *run* a program... For Gretchen [a coordinator who left the program after the first two months], the commitment was too much. She was hired to work twenty hours a week, and she was working fifty. It was overwhelming at the beginning... Everyone is working till 2:00 in the morning. The first three weeks of the program, no one took a day off. And there is no staffing to be sick.

This arrangement was doomed to fail as parents became frustrated with the chaos and disorganization of the program and its coordinators became burned out.

The legislation set the stage and created the circumstances in which the state-funded after-school programs operated, thus setting other processes in motion. These were the circumstances of the situation that confronted program personnel, parents, and children – a situation in which they all were actors.

### **Program Personnel**

The actions of after-school program personnel had unintentional consequences for the reproduction of class and racial-ethnic divisions. In the school district where I conducted my observations and interviews, the new legislation was seen as a vehicle to link or combine many of the various preexisting school-based after-school programs in a more coherent way. Coordinators of existing state-funded after-school programs, school district personnel, the grant writers, and parents all hoped that linking and combining school-based programs would open them to more of the school's children and would help eliminate the class and racial divisions between after-school programs. The school district's *Parent Newsletter*, for example, presented the new program as follows: "On September 13<sup>th</sup>, parents and students found a welcome

increase in high-quality after-school program opportunities at six elementary and all three middle schools.” These schools would have “extended day programs after school everyday until 6 p.m.” The new programs would, the article announced, “greatly enhance the groundswell of services for children and families in this community.” The programs were described as including academic enrichment, recreation, and a wholesome snack and, the article went on to promise, would be affordable for parents because state subsidies were providing a significant proportion of the program costs. The grant writers were quoted as saying that the program would offer “fun, exciting programs that kids will voluntarily want to come to.” Importantly, the article also stated that “each new extended day program is open to *all* students at each of the participating schools.”

In reality, the programs were not funded to accommodate all the children who tried to sign up. The legislation included an important proviso: “Every pupil attending a school operating an after school program pursuant to this article is eligible to participate in the program, *subject to program capacity*” (emphasis added). Each program that was selected for funding was reimbursed \$5 per child per day up to a total of \$75,000 a year for each school-based program, which worked out to be a maximum of about 80 students in a program. After that point, more students did not bring in more funding. Of the two elementary schools I observed with programs funded under this legislation in 1999, one had enrolled 127 children in the hopes that on any particular day there would be 80 reimbursable children present, and the other had enrolled 87 children and had a waiting list of 50. One parent who had confidently planned on having both her sons attend the program said: “I had initially interpreted “open to all” as meaning that they had enough slots for everybody in the school, and then I got put on a waiting list!”

## **Meeting Need**

Because there were not enough spaces in the after-school program to meet demand, program coordinators had to make decisions about which children got the available slots. The program was supposed to be open to all children, so a first-come, first-serve policy or a lottery would appear to be the only way to proceed fairly. But program coordinators know that “level playing field” approaches are not “fair” when the playing field is actually uneven. Their experience tells them that not only are the middle-class parents more likely to be first in line, but that those parents are also better able to avail themselves of other, more costly programs.

Program coordinators at School B and at another school that I did not observe told me that they had done intensive outreach to the parents of students they identified as being particularly in need of an after-school program and had signed them up before the slots were full. These were children who were deemed to be in “high-risk” situations – in dangerous neighborhoods with no reliable adult supervision, in poverty-stricken families, or in case-management status within the school.<sup>14</sup> I am not criticizing the program coordinators for their approach to these difficult issues. They were faced with impossible choices in a situation not of their making. In their place, I have no doubt that I would do exactly the same thing. What I will argue, however, is that their approach has unintended consequences that may work against or even undermine the very goals the program coordinators were trying to achieve.

## **Creating a Program**

When program funds first became available, program coordinators thought that they had to have a program in place immediately in order to be reimbursed. That all the program coordinators in the district were under this impression is just one illustration of the initial confusion in which the California Department of Education, the school districts, and the individual programs were operating. The legislation actually provided for start-up funds to plan the program and hire personnel, but the program coordinators didn't realize this until the programs had already been implemented.<sup>15</sup> Even with the push to open with the beginning of the school year, programs were still in the planning stages on the first day of school and did not begin until several weeks into the semester, leaving many parents scrambling to find temporary after-school care. When hiring began on August 31, many instructional aides were hired as temporary employees because there had not been enough time before the September 14 opening day to go through the school district's lengthy hiring procedure. By November, the staff was composed of permanent workers, but no formal training had yet been provided. Parents were upset.

The first day I sent the kids to the after-school program was logistically kind of nightmarish . . . the kids were herded . . . a hundred kids together. It was not a pleasant environment. . . Then [when you picked up your child] you had to find your kid in the school and it would take like twenty minutes, thirty minutes to get the kids out of the school. It was so badly organized, and the kids really resented the coercion of moving in these groups. . . Generally, I felt that the people who worked there were not experienced enough to deal with kids. They were not yet at a comfort level or ownership of their job to provide decent care for the children. *[mother of two elementary school children in the state-funded program]*

Bringing staff on a week before school started – who may not have had experience in these types of things is not always the best – and may not have had experience with kids necessarily. . . And they're all very nice people, and very

bright people, and have the best intentions... I'd go to pick up my kid, and it takes me ten minutes to find him because there's no established schedule of where they're supposed to be. . . . It's taken me ten minutes to find my kid, at 5:30 in the evening when I have two others in the car and my husband, and we want to go home. You know, again, it's just putting something by the sign-in sheet: it's Monday, third-graders are here. It doesn't seem so complicated to me. [mother of one elementary school child in the state-funded program]

Although aware of all these problems, program coordinators took the position that “something was better than nothing” and that the problems of getting the program up and running on short notice would be worked out over time. They knew that their program was providing some children with care, supervision, and activities that would otherwise be unavailable to them, and they asked concerned parents to be patient while they worked out the kinks. Despite concerns, many parents did decide to give the program a chance to get organized.

Basically, I decided [the program] would work for me for this year. Maybe next year I would have to change. The pickup I knew they had to change, because otherwise it was not going to be a viable program. [mother of two elementary school children in the state-funded program]

I had mixed emotions. I know the newness of the program. I know the budget doesn't support all the wonderful things that were promised... Up until about a couple weeks ago, I would walk into the cafeteria – if I could *get* in, you know, finding an open door to actually get in to find your kid is also a challenge – you know, which door is it today? It doesn't stay *one* door. So once you make it into the cafeteria, it's just pandemonium – kids *everywhere*, running and screaming. Meanwhile, it's bright and sunny outside... This just was symptomatic to me that the program is not much more than a whole lot of controlled chaos. Very little control of the chaos... Probably next year a lot of these things will be ironed out... I've tried to be patient. [mother of a child in the state-funded after-school program]

But many parents found that problems were not being worked out quickly enough for them to have faith that the program would substantially improve. One mother explained why she took her children out of the program during the first half of the school year.

It just didn't seem to me that they were any nearer to making these programs work, and they were trying just to do too much... I just didn't see that it would work... I tried to talk to the people around almost every day and spend some time observing . . . and watched this army moving around in this kind of tightness and rigidity and tension escalating, and kids starting to misbehave . . . and acting out and things like that. And I said this is not a good place for kids to be.

Parents who pulled their children out of the program had other options. These options were not, on the face of it, necessarily better than having a regular after-school program at their children's school, but became preferred options when the state-funded program did not meet their needs.

While parents whose children remained in the program may have been satisfied with it, for some of those parents, there was simply no other viable choice.

### **Charging Fees**

The legislation that provided funding for these after-school programs required that each program find matching funds.

Each program shall provide at least 50 percent cash or in-kind local matching funds from the school district, governmental agencies, community organizations, or the private sector for each dollar received in grant funds. Neither facilities nor space usage may fulfill the match requirement.

Although a portion of the needed matching funds was contributed by some of the school districts, programs could also charge parent fees and institute a sliding scale if they so chose.

An after school program established pursuant to this article is not required to charge family fees or conduct individual eligibility determination based on need or income.

Many of the state-funded programs under this legislation did not charge fees. Although it would be interesting to compare the dynamics of programs in school districts that charged parent fees with those in districts that did not, that was not the design of my research.

In this case study, the school district did decide to charge fees on a sliding scale. The decision was based on the conclusion that they simply could not run an adequate program without more cash income. Although some in-kind contributions, such as the use of volunteers to teach after-school enrichment activities, can help an inadequately funded program, there are often drawbacks, such as quality, reliability, and consistency of volunteer services. For some things, there is no adequate substitute for cash. One of the program coordinators, explaining that the fees were going up slightly in the second year, said: “We need parent fees so we can run a program. Other districts don’t charge at all and are struggling with \$75,000 to run a program.” If districts do charge parents, however, there are additional costs in staff time to assess and collect these fees. There is also the additional work involved in negotiating with families who cannot actually afford the fees even though their income would indicate that fees should be charged.

Program and district personnel were sensitive to the common problem of a mismatch between income-based fees and what a family can afford (Heymann 2000:125-31). The official sliding scale ranged from a low of \$30 a month to a high of \$300 a month. The program coordinator in School A estimated that, in the second year of the program, only 10 percent of the families paid the maximum amount of \$300 a month for one child, and about 50 percent paid only \$37 a month (see Table 2). But some families could not even manage the minimum fee, and 15 percent of families paid nothing for the program. The coordinator of the state-funded after-school program in School B, located in a more affluent neighborhood than the other program, said that 56 percent of the families in the program paid between \$2.50 and \$100 a month, while 18 percent paid more than \$100 but less than full fees, and 25 percent paid the full

\$300 a month fee. She noted, however, that “there are lots of exceptions to the fee scale – we negotiate with families if they can’t pay the indicated fee.” The work involved in assigning fees, negotiating with families over what they can pay, and awarding “scholarships” is both invisible work and an invisible cost to the program.

The charging of sliding scale fees also introduces a paradox. With the current funding, if programs do not charge fees, they will probably have difficulty running more than a bare-bones program that will be significantly inferior to private programs. This is likely to result in driving away, or not attracting in the first place, more middle-class parents who have access to what they perceive as better programs. Those programs that do charge parent fees may be able to offer better programs, but middle-class parents are then paying more than low-income families in the school and, within a consumer model, are likely to demand even more from the program. One program coordinator concluded, “Most families who can afford to pay more want more options.” For people at the top of the fee scale, the state-funded program still costs much less than the private programs in the area, but the difference between what they were paying for the state program and what a private program would cost, although significant, was not as vast as for parents who were paying less or who were being totally subsidized. One mother reported that although the state-funded program cost her only half of what she had been paying for two children in the YMCA program, she still took her children out of the state-funded program and enrolled them back in the private program during the first three months of the school year. Parents thought about what they were getting for their money. Another mother said, “The program is very expensive when you don’t quite qualify for a reduced rate.”

## Parents

Parents who wanted after-school care for their children either chose or were forced into one of four basic patterns: (1) placing their children in the state-funded school-based program, (2) placing their children in the more expensive YMCA program based at the school, (3) finding after-school care that was not based at the school, or (4) leaving their children to care for themselves or be cared for by older siblings after school. Some of the parents who had been using the latter three options before 1999 chose to put their children in the state-funded program when it began, and teachers recruited participants particularly from those children who were in self-care. Middle-class parents who had been using the YMCA program or non-school-based care the previous year chose to continue their children in those arrangements, were wait-listed for the state-funded program and so continued in or found other programs or arrangements, or enrolled their children in the state-funded program. Of those who enrolled their children in the state program, many withdrew their children during the first semester, for reasons I have indicated and that I discuss below in more detail. The spaces opened up by their leaving were less likely to be filled by parents who had already enrolled their children in other formal programs for the year. In other words, the options available to middle-class parents led to parental choices and actions that created a situation in which middle-class children were less likely to end up in the state-funded program.

The inadequate funding and legislative restrictions were also more likely to drive middle-class parents, disproportionately, from the state-funded program. One of the program coordinators explained: “We attract the lower-income families who cannot afford the Y program. Those families [who use the Y] had a problem with the way this program is structured to be

every day for at least three hours a day.” Parents complained about the quality of the program, the lack of experience and training of program personnel, the absence of adequate supervision because of the high child/adult ratio, and the confusion over which children were supposed to be in which activity group.

The regulation that children had to attend every day for at least three hours further frustrated middle-class parents whose children had formal lessons or sports activities to attend on some afternoons or who simply wanted to pick up their children before 5:00 p.m. One mother explained how the regulations pushed her out of the program.

Because they get reimbursed based on attendance . . . and they have to be a certain number of hours. Automatically, it didn't work for me anymore because of my working schedule. I took a really early shift in order to pick up my kids early – to spend more time with my kids, being able to do homework with them and follow them a little bit. And so basically they told me I couldn't pick up Jason [who is in kindergarten and gets out of school at 1:00 p.m.] until 4:00 and Jennifer until 5:00. That doesn't make any sense for me to do that. I was willing to lose all the money for the after-school program even if they were not going to use all the hours, [but] I want to feel free that I can come and pick up my child. I don't need to have this kind of restriction in an after-school program... It's like coercive – and to leave the kids there for a longer time than they really need. . . . Day one I believed the problems were going to be worked out eventually because I thought this is not going to fly for a lot of families because families need to have more flexibility than that. I get out of work at 4:00, and I cannot pick up my child until 5:00, so I wait for forty-five minutes in the car.

Parents were dissatisfied with the program for a variety of reasons. One mother, who had recently moved to the community and had enrolled both her first-grade and her fifth-grade child in the after-school program, told me that she had not “checked out” the program beforehand because she had assumed it was “part of the school,” which they had already evaluated when they moved to the city. Then, she said, she realized: “I don't know anything about the program. I have no information. I didn't know where to go to pick them up – or what the child/teacher

ratio is.” She called the school and left a message for the program coordinator to call her, but it was several days before she received a call from the coordinator, who explained that she had been “just too busy” to call her back sooner. The coordinators had indeed been extremely busy during that first month, but parents’ confidence in the program was shaken when they felt that their concerns about their children’s care were not being given appropriate attention. Another negative experience with the program was related to me by the same mother: one afternoon during the first week she couldn’t find her first-grader on the playground, but, looking around, she saw him outside the playground fence, walking away. When she caught up with him, the six-year-old explained that he had been “walking home” because he had seen her come into the school, then hadn’t seen her, and so had thought he should go home. She went on to say:

No one – parents or children – knew what the checkout procedure was – or if there was one. No one knew Sammy was leaving. . . . *Now* there is a checkout procedure. Each child wears a laminated name tag around their neck – they turn in their tags when leaving, and the parent is supposed to sign the child out – many times the child has never been signed *in!*

Another mother remarked:

I’ve generally been very disappointed with the program. I think that some basic things that should be happening aren’t. Such as the coordination between the [programs] – [the school] had tons of stuff going on after school: PTA classes, Hills Project classes, Title I after-school [classes] – and [the after-school program’s] lack of coordination between them! . . . My kid misses chorus class three weeks in a row – it can’t be that hard to figure out who’s going *where* when. . . . It’s not rocket science, and to see it *not* happen . . . [*mother of a third-grade boy*]

The lack of training and experience on the part of some of the coordinators and most of the instructional aides also concerned parents. One mother, who for a few years after college had herself been a children’s recreational worker, assessed the lack of skills by program personnel from both a parent’s and a worker’s perspective.

Basic staff skills – how to conduct yourself in a workplace [are lacking]. I walked in, and a parent was highly upset that their kid had been given “time out” and forgotten about. Which, you know, happens. I probably did it as a recreational activity leader, you know. It happens. They’re human. And that wasn’t what upset me *so* much . . . but a staff member was saying, “Well, that person is just temporary, and I wouldn’t have chosen her anyway, and she probably won’t get the job when it goes permanent.” And I just thought – just the basics of how you support your co-workers – how you present the program to the public. And you don’t want to say, “We have lousy temporary staff.” You don’t want to put that out there, and you also don’t want to do that to your coworkers. It’s just not the right thing to do, and you don’t appease a parent by saying how rotten a person was.

Forgetting a child who was serving a “time out” is seen by this mother as a mistake that anyone could make once, but the lack of what she saw as appropriate professional and workplace skills indicated to her something more troubling.

A number of parents reported that their children simply didn’t like the after-school program and that this was a major consideration in their decision to leave the program. In intensive fieldwork with both African-American and white working-class and middle-class families, Annette Lareau (2000b) found that working-class families tended to issue directives to children and to subordinate children’s schedules to the needs of the larger family group. Middle-class families tended to reason and negotiate with children, and children’s schedules often dominated parents’ time. One middle-class parent who had taken her two children out of the state-funded after-school program explained:

The program was extremely teacher directed. The kids were sent one place, to another, to another. It was not a good, constructive way for a child to engage in anything. There was a lot of waiting time in between and a lot of bossing. Like “You’ve been too noisy – go back and redo it again” and that kind of stuff.

The lines, the waiting, the authoritarian approach, group processing, and the absence of a child-centered organization ran counter to middle-class approaches to child rearing, but was much

more in line with the working-class patterns that Lareau (2000b) describes. One mother reported that older children in the program actively rebelled.

The third grade was a disaster. Kids were rebelling. They were saying “I won’t go do that.” The kids were saying, “This place really sucks.” “It’s so badly organized and you just make us march around.”

Another mother of a third grader said, “I’m going to pull my daughter out because I think it’s awful. My daughter hates it.” The mother of a ten-year-old boy reported that her son, who “never causes problems, is not a troublemaker, was causing problems during a dance class that they were having... I’d never gotten a report like that about *my kid*. He said, ‘But you know what, mom, it was just – nobody was listening, everybody was fidgeting, and I just couldn’t help it.’” A six-year-old boy in the first grade told his mother: “I don’t think they like kids there.”

Middle-class parents also found that their children were bored with many of the activities. The mother of a kindergarten child complained that the activities were planned simply “to keep them busy” and explained:

It was pointless in terms of the development of the child. They started to do the “Me Book” – which is nice, but most of these kids already did this in kindergarten. They are doing it in their regular school. They don’t need to do another teacher-directed activity like that with someone who is telling them what to do page by page, you know... And they did this “circle time.” I don’t know – I went there a couple of days, and I just sat there, and I just felt like these people needed more training and they needed to figure out a curriculum that was more useful to the child and not just to keep the kids engaged so they are quiet and don’t fight. That’s not the idea.

Middle-class parents were either selectively excluded from the state-funded program, or they left because they were frustrated with the restrictions or dissatisfied with the quality and they had other options. By physically removing their children from the state-funded “universal” after-school program, middle-class, predominantly white parents were also effectively removing

their voices and resources – and their political power. This is, of course, what also happens when middle-class parents remove their children from the public education system and place them in private schools. It is not parents' intent to weaken the position of public schools, nor do I think they should necessarily act differently, but their actions nonetheless have consequences.

### **Another Look**

A year after my observations of the program I described at the beginning of this paper, I revisited the school where it was based. I stopped at the school office to ask where I could find Jane Banks, the coordinator of the school's state-funded after-school program. I was informed that Jane was out sick that day, but that Ellen Sanders was with the program. I was directed to room 203. Entering room 203, I introduced myself to Ellen Sanders, a white woman in her late fifties, and explained that Jane Banks had allowed me to observe the program last year and that I would like to sit in today. Ellen welcomed me, and I sat down to observe. My inclusion of these details is necessary to fully explain what I observed and how I came to observe it.

The classroom was an average-sized kindergarten classroom with long, low tables, small chairs, and shelves with books and games and learning toys, cubbies for backpacks and coats, and an adult-sized rocking chair at the end of a relatively empty space covered by a bright floor rug. Ellen was taking role and checking off the children's names as they came into the room, stored their belongings in individual cubbies, and joined one of the groups of children already in the room. Each group of two or three children was playing quietly – working on a puzzle, building with legos, drawing pictures, or playing a board game. When all the children were

checked in, Ellen announced that it was time to put away the games and books and to gather together for circle time on the rug in front of the rocking chair.

I was impressed with the resources available to the children and with the small size of the group; there were twenty children in the room supervised by two adults: Ellen and an assistant, an African-American man in his early twenties named Jeremy. Ellen sat in the rocking chair, and the children sat cross-legged on the rug in front of her. There was a bit of chit-chat and giggling between some of the children, but they were relatively quiet and were a marked contrast to the shouting and pushing I had observed in the cafeteria a year earlier. Ellen nonetheless asked them to quiet down and seemed to want complete silence and their focused attention. Not getting this, she told them there must be sixty consecutive seconds of quiet before they could proceed. This was presented as “punishment” as well as a way to get them to quiet down, and she continued to restart the count anytime there was talking or giggling.

At this point, I noticed a striking difference in the demographics of this group compared to the group I had observed the previous year. Of the twenty children in the group, primarily between the ages of seven and twelve years and evenly divided between girls and boys, thirteen of the children were white (65 percent), four were Asian (20 percent), and three were black (15 percent).<sup>16</sup> Struck by the resources available and the racial-ethnic composition of the group, I began to wonder if I was in the right place. As the group got up to go outside for forty minutes of free time, after which they would have a snack and listen to the next installment of *Harry Potter*, I asked Jeremy if this was the state-funded after-school program. “Oh no,” he said, “this is the YMCA program.” Confused as to why I had been directed to this program when I had

originally asked for the coordinator of the state-funded program, I explained to Jeremy that I had been looking for Jane Banks. He then explained to me that Jane had resigned as coordinator of the state-funded program and now worked for the YMCA program.<sup>17</sup> Jeremy kindly pointed me in the direction of the after-school program I had been seeking, down the hall and into the gymnasium.

I opened the door to the gymnasium and was met by the thunderous sound of many children's voices in a large, enclosed space and the sight of seventy-nine children sitting in a huge circle on the floor, their coats and backpacks next to them (no cubbies here). I was later told by the head after-school teacher that there are actually ninety-seven children enrolled in the program and that they had not expected so many.<sup>18</sup> Standing in the middle of the circle and calling the group to order was the after-school coordinator, Mandy Roberts, an African-American woman in her forties. Because the circle was so large and the room so big, Mandy had to raise her voice to be heard, and her instructions to the group therefore seemed to be shouted rather than spoken. To get everyone to settle down, Mandy had the group count down in unison from ten to one. This was clearly a practice with which the children were familiar, and they were quiet and focused on Mandy by the time the group reached "one."

With the children sitting quietly in their circle, I had the opportunity to record the apparent, to my eye, demographics of the group. It was similar to the YMCA program in terms of sex ratio, with thirty-eight girls and forty-one boys, but very different from the YMCA program in its racial-ethnic composition. Of the seventy-nine children in the room, sixty were

black (76 percent), twelve were white (15 percent), and seven were Asian (9 percent).<sup>19</sup> In addition to the coordinator, there were four other adults in the room: the lead after-school teacher, an African-American woman in her late twenties, and one white and two black male aides, all of whom appeared to be between eighteen and twenty-one. After some preliminary announcements, Mandy left the room to return to her office and her duties as coordinator, and the lead teacher took over, resulting in a child/adult ratio of twenty to one.

The first activity was to sing “Happy Birthday” to one of the aides who was leaving the program, after which the group became very animated again, and the teacher used the whistle that was hanging around her neck to issue a loud and quite shrill call to order. It was then snack time; each child took a cup of juice and a slice of birthday cake from a table at one end of the gymnasium and proceeded with it, as well as with coat and backpack, to the cafeteria across the hall. After snack time, they went out to the school yard, where they had been instructed to “check in with your adult.” On other days, they would participate in enrichment activities such as dance or art classes and then go outside at the end of the day.

My error in initially going to the “wrong” program had enabled me to observe the YMCA program and to notice the child/adult ratio and the resources available to the children in that program. A year earlier, the juxtaposition of two programs in the same room had enabled me to think about what each group learns about the other. Observing the start of the afternoon in the two programs I’ve just described prompted me to think about the hidden curriculum in each. In the YMCA program, children enter a room where there are spaces for their coats and backpacks; toys, games, and books for them to use; and expectations that they will engage in a purposeful

activity of their choice. The world is thus presented as a place in which material resources are provided and in which they are expected to show initiative and engagement. Similarly, this world provides a place for their belongings, conveying that those belongings are important, valuable, and worth caring for. The children in the state-funded program receive different messages. The room they enter is bare – no little tables, bright rug, or homey rocking chair. There are no books or games or art materials to choose from or engage with. Seventy-nine children wait in a large, empty room for the after-school activities to begin. With no place to store their belongings, they carry them along from room to room, slinging them on the gymnasium floor or piling them in a corner of the school yard, encumbered not by having so many things, but by having so little entitlement. What messages are being conveyed about their right to space or the worth of the things they own?

One of the parents who had taken her children out of the state-funded program and enrolled them in the YMCA program described the “feel” of the Y program: “It’s kind of ‘cozy,’ you know. They have carpets and the kids can play games.” The word “cozy” serves as a reminder that objects such as carpets and games are more than just material resources – they are also conveyors of intangible resources such as comfort and safety.

The size of the groups and the child/adult ratios create other differential messages. Sitting in the rocking chair, Ellen spoke quietly and was able to make eye contact with and address by name each of the twenty children sitting on the rug in front of her. Mandy, standing in the middle of a circle with a thirty-foot diameter, had to raise her voice to address the seventy-nine children seated on the bare floor around her. The structure of their respective situations enabled Ellen to use a conversational tone, but required Mandy to use the less personal and more

didactic tone reserved for addressing large groups. What messages do these different tones convey about individual self-worth and identity? In which situation are children more likely to feel individually valued or an invisible part of the mass? Although they are not within sight of the other, as they were the previous year, the children in each group are receiving a hidden curriculum about privilege, place, and personhood.

### **Change Over Time**

My discussion of the processes that operated during the first year of the state-funded after-school programs is not in any sense an attempt to evaluate these programs. Although it is useful to study program implementation, it is not reasonable to evaluate a program based on its first year of operation. Even if initial problems are ironed out and programs improve over time, however, processes that were initiated during that first year can be difficult to reverse. In the second year, both of the state-funded programs I observed were more stable and better organized than they had been in the first year. New coordinators at both School A and School B reported that some of the parents who had pulled their children out the first year had expressed interest in returning. Although this was reported as validation that their programs had improved, the basic conditions that deselected more middle-class families from the program were still operating. The improvements in level of organization, in staffing, and in stability, although important to the programs and the families they served, were not likely, for most middle-class families, to significantly counteract the limitations of the level of funding and the funding-linked legislative restrictions.

During the 1999-2000 school year, both School A and School B had YMCA after-school programs operating alongside the state-funded after-school programs at the school site. Parents thus had a choice of after-school programs at their children's school. During the second year of the state-funded program, however, the principal of School B did not renew the YMCA's contract for space in the school. The state-funded after-school program was now the only non-targeted on-site after-school program in School B. The after-school coordinator at School B reported that "parents were *furious*" with the principal's decision. The school finally agreed to bus children enrolled in the YMCA program to its location in a neighboring school. For a few families whose children had been enrolled in the YMCA program, however, the principal's action had "encouraged" them to try, for the first time or again, the state-funded after-school program.

The removal of a high-quality, expensive, competing program from School B raises another issue about universal programs – the ways in which they are or are not supported by public institutions. Although the public school brought in revenue by renting space to a private program, doing so also removed that space from use by a more universal public program and set up the conditions for class and racial-ethnic division between programs *within the school*. The principal of School B made a brave stand by not renewing the school's contract with the private program, thus illustrating that there are also processes that can be put in motion that work to reduce class and racial-ethnic division.

For parents who now wanted to enroll their children in the state-funded program, space was not always immediately available. In addition, the program coordinators, as gatekeepers, expressed ambivalence about the possible return of these more privileged families. The limited

number of places in the programs had been filled in the first year primarily by low-income children of color. The coordinator at School B said:

We want to serve the children who are *not* being served – and those are mainly kids of color. But we don't want to isolate those children. Our concern is with *servicing* them. But the program probably will be more integrated because of [white] parents coming back from the Y program.

On a similar note, the coordinator at School A explained:

White families pulled out the first year. That is not my major concern – my concern is I want to run a good program. A lot of families who could pay the maximum want to come back from the Y program, but we *have* a clientele now [those who stayed in the program]. We attract the lower-income families who cannot afford the Y program.

For the coordinators, the issue is one of serving children who need after-school care and whose families have few, if any, other acceptable options. If there were space in the program for everyone in the school, they would not have to serve as the needle's eye.

### **Conclusion**

I began this paper with a question: how did a program that was intended to be universal, and thus available to all the students in the school, become a *de facto* targeted program that reproduced class and racial-ethnic divisions? At the heart of the matter are unrealistic legislative regulations and inadequate funding. Those conditions set in motion processes of social relations.

Good-hearted and well-meaning program personnel tried to overcome the program and funding limitations and, by trying to help some individual children, often contributed to structurally reproducing class divisions and thereby racial-ethnic divisions. Parents, in trying within their means to do what they felt was best for their children, were also responsible for

reproducing this structure. Although, on the one hand, a needed service is being provided for these children, on the other hand, the actions of program personnel, parents, and legislators unintentionally helped to reproduce the bifurcated class and racial-ethnic character of after-school programs in this community see Figure 1).

Inadequate funding, however, was the vehicle for setting these processes in motion. School district officials, grant writers, and program coordinators all agreed that the funding provided by the state was inadequate for running a quality after-school program. Why, then, did they invest the time and effort to apply for the funding and launch a program? To understand this more fully, it is necessary to put social service funding in California in the context of a 1978 ballot initiative, still known infamously as “Proposition 13,” that drastically reduced the local property taxes that fund schools and social services.

In 1978, almost 50 percent of California school districts’ funding came from local property taxes, and the other half came from intergovernmental transfers from the state and federal governments (Shires 1999). As property tax revenues shrank after 1978, the proportion of school and social service funding from intergovernmental transfers, often in the form of competitive grants, greatly increased. In 1978, for each property tax dollar in California, 53 percent went to schools (statewide average); in 1986, only 37 percent of each property tax dollar went to schools. (Chapman 1998:5). After the passage of Proposition 98, sponsored in 1988 by the California Teachers Association in response to plummeting school budgets, the percentage of each property tax dollar going to schools increased again and in 1997 was 52%. The increase was largely at the expense of the proportion of each property tax dollar that went to counties and was used for services such as parks, libraries, refuse collection, and law enforcement (Chapman

1998). Although Proposition 98 did increase revenues to schools, Chapman notes that “in many of the years since 1988, Proposition 98 has acted as more of a ceiling than a floor” (1998:16). It is no coincidence that since Proposition 13, the national standing of California schools has plummeted. Once one of the best school systems in the nation, California schools ranked 40<sup>th</sup> in per pupil expenditures in 1997-98 and 50<sup>th</sup> in the number of libraries, guidance counselors, and nurses per student in 1997-98 (EdSource Online 2000). One of the grant writers I interviewed tried to convey the impact of Proposition 13 by saying, “Just imagine that the schools were suddenly defunded!”<sup>20</sup> Ever since then, he went on to explain, social service programs have been desperate to get whatever crumbs are available:

Everybody jumps on any money that is on the table – it’s very hard to pass it up. We try to play the game, but it comes from a sincere desire to serve children – and to make integration work.

Although they knew the funding was not adequate, they also knew they were not going to get funding for an after-school program any other way. I think, too, they felt in their hearts that they could make it work, perhaps hoping that the long hours and free labor they were willing to commit would make up for other inadequacies. A number of sources, using the same phrase, told me that “the legislature wants a Cadillac program on a Pinto budget.” It is crucial to remember, however, that the Pinto was not simply an inexpensive car; it was, not unrelatedly, *unsafe*.

Proposition 13 was a mechanism that undermined universal programs, such as libraries, public schools, and parks and recreation programs, that provided services to all. It thus helped to create a bifurcated system in which the available alternatives were either high-quality, high-cost

private services or varied-quality, low-cost *de jure* or *de facto* targeted programs. A park and recreation agency director was noted as saying, “Before Proposition 13 we directed our resources to the areas of greatest need with free playground programs and after-school recreation programs plus low-cost sports programs. Today we direct our services to those who can pay for the services, which often precludes those who need our services the most” (Karpilow 1999:14). Lower-earning middle-class families as well as low-income families were priced out of the private programs, and many middle-class families were excluded or pushed out of the publicly funded targeted programs.

The removal of middle-class political power and resources is not only an effect of choosing private programs, but can also occur when parents choose between publicly funded alternatives. Folbre notes that “studies of the effects of magnet schools, charter schools, and other programs designed to give parents more alternatives for their children show that these programs often increase economic segregation” (2001:151). This means that cultural capital, economic resources, and political power become concentrated in schools or programs that predominantly serve the middle classes and are lacking in those that serve low-income families. In other words, the problem is not only that children are class segregated and, as a result, are segregated largely by race-ethnicity, but also that this division works to perpetuate significant differences in program quality. In her ethnographic study of family-school relations, Lareau concluded that “higher social class provided parents with more resources to intervene in school and to bind families into tighter connections with social institutions than are available to working-class families” (2000a: 172). Studies consistently find a positive correlation between family social status and children’s success in school (Epps 1995:597), but the cultural capital that

families bring affects the school environment as well as the individual child's success. Universal programs are therefore important not only because they would serve the very real and currently unmet needs of middle-class parents, but also because universal programs would harness the cultural capital that middle-class parents bring with them and employ for their children's benefit. When their cultural capital is used to improve universal social programs, then all children benefit.

Middle-class parents, however, will not avail themselves of universal programs unless they see a chance that such programs can meet their expectations. The demand for universal social programs that are available to all, therefore, must include the call for *adequately funded* universal programs. Adequate funding means funding that pays a living wage to workers in the program, allows for an adult/child ratio that meets current licensing standards as well as the recommendations of child development and education experts, covers staff training and development, and provides material resources to carry out the program design. In addition, adequate funding means sustainable funding. Too often, funding is provided for pilot programs that may or may not be renewable.

Funding should also be sufficient to meet clear goals that are tied to the well-being of those they serve. Class divisions between programs serve the interests of a dual labor market. Bowles and Gintis's analysis in *Schooling in Capitalist America* is as true today as it was twenty-five years ago: "The range of effective educational policy in the United States is severely limited by the role of schooling in the production of an adequate labor force in a hierarchically controlled and class-stratified production system. Capitalism, not technology or human nature, is the limiting factor" (1976:20). Jody Heymann, director of policy for the Harvard University

Center for Society and Health, notes that U.S. social policy differs according to whether it addresses “problems perceived as affecting only the poor...or problems affecting people of all social classes” and argues that, although universal programs are “essential to the well-being of middle-income families, ...developing policy responses that cut across social class is even more critical to the welfare of low-income families” (2000:135).

The well-being of families rests on the ability of a society to provide adequately funded universal programs. In order to avoid reproducing structures of inequality, offers of inadequate funding must be rejected. Legislators should no longer be allowed to “buy out” of their social responsibilities by “buying off” financially starved social programs. This may sound like an unrealistic strategy, and it *is* unrealistic as long as social service programs are competing for scarce funds. It is, however, essentially the same problem that people face as workers and that organized labor is meant to address. Just as the worker fears to make demands or strike because someone else is waiting to take his or her job, social service programs fear losing the pittance that are currently available to them. And just as the worker usually has others who are dependent on his or her wages, social service programs provide services that people need and depend upon. Although it is understood that workers are often willing to work for so little because they need to feed their families, it is also understood that doing so results, structurally, in keeping families poor and vulnerable. Similarly, accepting inadequate funding enables social programs to assist some people in some ways, but it also contributes to the inequality of services based on class and the reproduction of racial-ethnic divisions.

As unionized workers have done, social service providers need to organize and demand that programs be funded adequately.<sup>21</sup> These demands should include a respectable “living wage” for child-care workers.<sup>22</sup> Given that a program’s funding puts limits on the wages its employees earn, a coalition of social service providers, child-care workers, teachers, and parents could organize to demand higher wages for program personnel and quality services for all children. In the United States in 1999, there were more than forty-four million parents living with children under the age of eighteen (United States Bureau of the Census 2000:table 60). There are also over five million pre-kindergarten, elementary, and secondary teachers and 813,000 social workers (United States Bureau of the Census 2000:table 669). Some of these are, of course, included in the count of parents, but their occupational concerns added to their parental concerns should increase their strength, if not their numbers. Grandparents would swell the numbers still further, and adults who do not have children of their own but who are concerned about the welfare of children in general would surely join such a coalition. Some parents and teachers will not agree that the state should provide universal social programs for children, but the strong support received by universal programs such as social security and public schools gives leverage to the argument that, if adequately funded and truly available to all, universal programs would be supported in the United States as they are in so many other industrialized countries. Forty-four million voices should be able to make themselves heard.

## Notes

1. The term “at risk,” is, of course, not a neutral term. It is a social services and policy term that incorporates implicit class-specific definitions of success.
2. Nancy Folbre (1994) argues that non-parents in a society reap social benefits from children who are raised to adulthood. When a society under-invests in its children and privatizes the costs involved in raising them, these non-parent members of society are “free-riders” on the unpaid labor of parents.
3. The YMCA is one of the major providers of after-school care in the United States.
4. This is not to say that all children of color are in poverty or that no white children are poor. In some rural communities, for example, the most of the children and families in poverty are white. However, class and race are interconnected, and, in certain contexts, to target low-income children is to target children of color. Black and white families have very different income distributions in the city where these schools were located. According to the 1990 census (United States Bureau of the Census 1990), only 20% of white households in the city had an annual income of less than \$15,000, compared to 40% of black households. Conversely, 36% of white households, but only 13% of black households, had incomes over \$35,000. (Table P082). The connection between race and poverty is especially marked. Thirty percent of black families with children under the age of eighteen had incomes below the poverty line, compared to only 6.67% of white families with children under the age of eighteen (Tables P124A and P124B).
5. Parents submit a ranked choice of three of the schools in the district. The district attempts to accommodate parents’ first choices as long as the proportional racial balance can be achieved.
6. In the city in which I conducted my research, the proportions of children in African-American and Hispanic racial-ethnic categories differ from statewide proportions for children in grades K-6. Statewide, the K-6 population is 9% African American, 44% Hispanic, and 36% white non-Hispanic (Betts, Rueben, and Danenberg 2000:17).
7. Percentages do not add to 100 because of rounding.
8. Percentages do not add to 100 because of rounding.
9. Henderson’s article appeared in 1975 in *Crisis*, volume 83, pages 50-55.
10. The discussion between the circus arts teacher and the coordinator focused on two issues: the cost of the program and the need for a parent’s approval for the child to take the class. They decided that the cost (about \$85 per eight week period for the class, in addition to the cost of after-school care) could be dealt with by getting him one of the PTA scholarships, although there was still a \$15 fee that was expected of scholarship children. The coordinator indicated that she would find a way around that as well. The more difficult issue, now that the child had been

identified and selected for assistance, was getting his mother to sign the permission form. Whether this was an issue in general or understood to be an issue in this particular case I do not know.

11. I am grateful to Margaret Andersen for pointing out that how and what children learn about “the other” is salient in this situation.

12. The legislative ploy of heralding what sounds like a large grant of funds to social programs, but is actually a pittance, is not uncommon. Heymann notes that in 1999, the \$10 million proposed by the Afterschool Children’s Education Act amounted to “less than fifty cents per year for each school-age child the bill defined in need” (2000:52).

13. Another reason that recreation specialists may not have applied is because of fundamental philosophical differences between their vision of serving children and the legislature’s regulations regarding the program’s homework and extended school day components, which I discuss elsewhere (Garey 2000).

14. Some of the schools that had state funding for “Healthy Start” services or federal “21<sup>st</sup> Century Funding” had the resources to case manage children who had been referred to them by teachers. These children received counseling, and there was an attempt to provide or connect families to needed social services.

15. It is unclear whether the reason programs did not use start-up funds to get a program in place before opening it to children was a matter of misunderstanding or was an impression fostered by the CDE. A grant writer on the project, who would be in one of the best positions to fully understand what the legislation provided, said: “The state gave the impression that programs had to be up and running [by the beginning of the school year] or they would only have people in the program who couldn’t find something else.”

16. Of the three children I categorized as “black,” one child appeared to be multiracial, and of the four children I categorized as “Asian,” two appeared to be multiracial.

17. The migration of people from the state-funded programs to the private and non-profit sectors was not an unusual phenomenon and is easily understandable when comparing wages and working conditions. The private and non-profit programs are thus able to siphon off teachers and administrators from the state-funded programs.

18. Almost a fifth of the students in the program were absent that day. I was told this is not unusual.

19. It is, of course, possible that I misassigned some children, but I do not think that any misassignment would alter the general overall racial-ethnic profile of the group. The coordinator of the program did not have statistics available when I spoke to her, but she estimated that about 90 percent of the children in the program were African-American. Of the twelve white children,

I did not feel I could adequately distinguish between those who would be categorized as non-Hispanic white and Hispanic white. It would appear, however, from my observations of both programs and a program at another school, that Latino children are less likely to use after-school programs. Whether that is indeed so and why would be interesting questions to investigate. Barrie Thorne's ethnographic research on schoolchildren may shed light on this question (1999).

20. It actually took a few years for the effects of Proposition 13 to be felt because the state had a surplus in the late 1970s that was used to make up the revenue lost after Proposition 13. By the time the effects were felt in cuts to schools and social programs, the recession years of the 1980s were in full swing and blamed for the program cuts. It is now fairly well established that Proposition 13 had a devastating effect on social programs in California.

21. The Bush presidency may indeed, as Ralph Nader suggested, push people into activism, as Bush and his administration dismantle what is left of programs that serve the needs of any but the wealthy and rescind environmental regulations that protect everyone.

22. Child-care workers earn less than workers with comparable education and experience who work in other occupations. The California Child Care and Development Compensation Study concludes that the artificially low wage "is likely a major contributing factor in explaining the high level of turnover in the child-care industry" (*California Child Care and Development Compensation Study: Towards Promising Policy and Practice* 1996:6).

## APPENDIX

**TABLE 1:** Racial-Ethnic Composition of Schools A and B  
and of the State-Funded After-School Programs in Them

<b>RACIAL-ETHNIC CATEGORY</b>	<b>SCHOOL A</b>		<b>SCHOOL B</b>	
	<b>School<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>After School Program</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>After- School Program</b>
<b>African American</b>	40 %	(76%) <sup>b</sup>	34 %	(66%) <sup>c</sup>
<b>Hispanic</b>	13 %		19 %	(18%)
<b>Asian</b>	7 %	(9%) <sup>b</sup>	5 %	(2%)
<b>White non-Hispanic</b>	27 %	(15%) <sup>b</sup>	29 %	(5%) <sup>c</sup>
<b>Multiracial</b>	12 %		13 %	(9%)
<b>Other ethnic groups</b>	0.2 %		0.1 %	

<sup>a</sup> The categories and percentages were provided by the school district

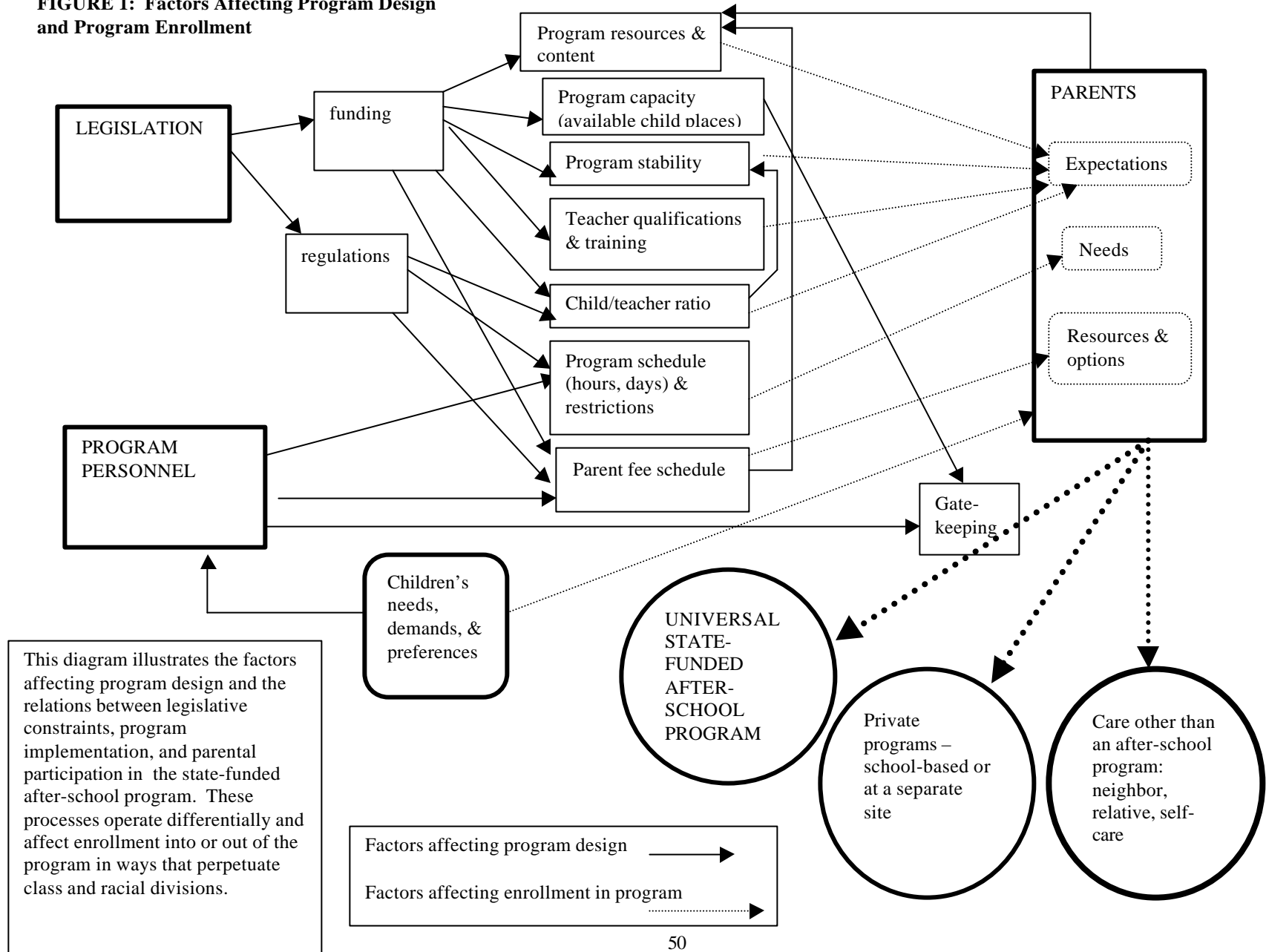
<sup>b</sup> The estimates are based on my categorization by observation. The program coordinator confirmed that this represented the racial composition of the after-school program, although she thought that the proportion of African-American students might be somewhat higher than 76 percent and the proportion of white Hispanic and non-Hispanic students might be lower than 15 percent. Exact statistics were not available. The estimates probably include some children who would be categorized as multiracial by the school, but it was not possible to conclude that for this estimate.

<sup>c</sup> The estimate is based on statistics gathered by the program coordinator of School B. These statistics were not based on the entire group of students in the after-school program. Because of the way the sample was chosen, it is likely that the proportion of African-American children is somewhat lower than stated here and the proportion of white non-Hispanic children is somewhat higher.

**TABLE 2:** Fees Paid by Families for State-Funded After-School Programs in Schools A and B by Percentage of Families in Each Fee Category

<b>Fees per Month for One Child</b>	<b>School A After-School Program</b>	<b>School B After-School Program</b>
\$0	15%	56% (includes fees \$0 to \$58)
\$2.50 to \$58	50% partial scholarship (\$37)	
\$92 to \$184	25%	18%
\$300 (maximum)	10%	25%

**FIGURE 1: Factors Affecting Program Design and Program Enrollment**



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