

RESEARCH-BASED MESSAGING GUIDANCE

Understanding What Parents Value

When speaking about the value of programs, focus on the benefits parents see for their children and the reasons parents enroll kids in these programs:

- ★ **Top Messages:** Emphasize how programs are child-centered and expose children to new experiences, ideas, and perspectives beyond their everyday home and school lives, and help them find their passion, purpose, and voice.
- ★ **Focus on Social and Emotional:** Parents view programs as successful when their children are happy, gain confidence, are exposed to new experiences, develop social-emotional skills, and pursue their interests and passions. Highlight that programs are fun, safe, nurturing, and welcoming.
- ★ **Speak to Academic Benefits:** Parents connect program participation with academic outcomes. Across race, ethnicity, and income groups, parents with a child in an out-of-school-time program report their child is getting higher grades and doing better academically than parents of non-participants, and they are more confident their child is prepared for the next school year.
- ★ **Role of Staff Support:** Parents view staff qualifications as a basic requirement rather than a strong driver of program quality. Explain clearly how staff supports the development of children's skills and experiences in a fun, safe, and nurturing environment.

Supporting the Whole Child

Parents see distinct, yet reinforcing, roles for home, school, and out-of-school-time programs in developing children's social, emotional, and academic skills.

- ★ **Life Skills to Emphasize:** Parents view social skills, teamwork, confidence, respect, and self-esteem as the most important skills to develop through out-of-school-time programs.
- ★ **Speak to Your Specific Audience:** Parents of middle school children look for programs to develop leadership skills more than parents of younger children do. Black and Latino/a parents rate communications skills in the top tier of importance.

Increasing Access

Despite their value, access to high quality programs is not equitably distributed. Parents with a child in an out-of-school-time program report higher income and education levels than non-participants, and the more parents pay for programs, the more likely they are to rate those programs as "excellent."

- ★ **Highlight Accessibility:** Communicate the quality features of free and low-cost programs and use equitable strategies that engage families to sign up for and access these programs, including addressing barriers -- fees, meals, transportation, and waiting lists.

Parents primarily use the term "extracurricular" over out-of-school-time, afterschool, youth development, recreational, enrichment, or summer learning.

