

## CHAPTER 6

# TALENT SEARCH SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

In describing the services and activities provided by Talent Search projects, this chapter begins at a general level and moves toward greater detail—from a focus on national statistics to a discussion of project-level variation in service plans. It provides a general overview of the many different types of services offered by Talent Search, addresses services for particular groups such as dropouts and parents, presents some general observations about the nature of Talent Search services, and describes and explains service variation between and within projects.

### Overview and Selected Highlights

- From 82 to 98 percent of Talent Search projects offered test-taking and study skills, academic advising/course selection, and tutoring, and 61 percent offered assisted (computer) labs.
- Over 90 percent offered college orientation activities, college campus visits, cultural activities, referrals, and counseling, 80 percent offered family events, and 65 percent offered mentoring.
- Large majorities (71 to 98 percent) of projects provided various financial aid services, including: individual financial aid counseling, financial aid workshops for participants and/or parents, assistance with the aid applications, and scholarship searches.
- About 82 percent of projects provided some participants with waivers to cover the cost of SAT/ACT registration fees, and 78 percent provided waivers for college application fees.
- About 60 percent of all projects offered a summer component. Middle school students were the most commonly targeted group for this service.
- At case study projects, services for dropouts were generally limited. Staff saw dropouts as difficult to serve and preferred to stress dropout prevention by working with students.
- Generating parent involvement was seen as challenging; case study projects were trying, but felt they had not been very successful.
- Talent Search is generally a non-intensive program. For example, about 48 percent of high school students spent less than 10 hours in program activities during 1998-99.
- Most services are provided at target school, during the school day, but pulling students out of their regular classes to participate in Talent Search was sometimes problematic.
- Talent Search service plans varied greatly, both between and within projects, in terms of types of activities, frequency, delivery methods, and target groups. Factors affecting diversity include target area size, target school receptivity, and perceptions of needs.

## OVERVIEW OF SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

Drawing on national data, this section focuses on six categories or types of services: academic support services, personal and career development services, financial aid services, fee waivers, use of computer technology, and summer services. The first two categories include the 10 major services that projects report on in their annual performance reports (APRs).

### ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

Academic support services are intended to guide students to the appropriate courses and to help them perform well in courses and on examinations that are important for successfully pursuing a postsecondary education. Our project survey asked about the provision of four such academic services: tutoring, assisted (computer) labs,<sup>1</sup> test-taking and study-skills development, and academic advising/course selection. The results showed that virtually all projects (98 percent) offered test-taking and study-skills development activities and that an almost equally large proportion of projects (94 percent) advised students on academic requirements and course selection (table 6.1). Large majorities of projects also provided each of the other two types of academic support services. Furthermore, almost half of all projects (49 percent) provided all four of the academic support services we asked about, whereas 13 percent provided two or fewer of the services. The mean number of academic support services offered by projects was 3.3. Finally, the percent of projects offering various academic support services was generally similar for projects operated by different types of host institutions.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 6.1—Provision of academic support services**

	All projects	Host institution			Community org.
		Public 4-year	Private 4-year	2-year	
<b>Percentage of projects providing:</b>					
Test-taking and study-skills development	98%	99%	100%	97%	97%
Academic advising/course selection	94	91	100	94	95
Tutoring	82	82	91	78	82
Assisted (computer) labs	61	61	68	61	58
<b>Percentage of projects providing:</b>					
All four of the above	49	44	65	47	50
Three of the above	39	45	29	38	35
Two of the above	11	9	6	13	12
One or none of the above	2	1	0	2	3

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

<sup>1</sup>This type of service is defined in the APR as academic support or tutoring provided through a learning or computer center and can include computer-assisted instruction.

<sup>2</sup>APR information on academic support services, including the percentages of students receiving those services, is presented in appendix C.

Just because the large majority of projects provided some academic support services does not necessarily mean that the projects considered those services a high priority compared with other services. In fact, when asked to rate the priority they currently placed on tutoring, only 34 percent of projects rated it as high. In comparison, many more projects (51 percent) rated college campus visits a high priority (table 6.2).

**Table 6.2—Projects’ ratings of current priorities for working with various participants and providing various services, and how likely they would be to increase their emphasis on these groups and services if they had more resources**

	Current priority level			Likelihood of increasing emphasis if project had more resources		
	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
<b>Participants</b>						
Senior high component	65%	27%	8%	80%	14%	6%
Work with dropouts or returning students	22	41	38	52	38	10
Serving more target schools	16	19	65	52	29	19
Work with parents	14	45	41	68	28	4
Work with welfare recipients or former welfare recipients	9	22	69	29	39	31
Work with veterans	5	8	88	15	21	64
<b>Services</b>						
Workshops	56	36	8	77	19	4
Campus visits	51	43	6	80	14	6
Time for Talent Search counselors to meet one-on-one with participants	48	38	14	88	7	5
Tutoring services	34	29	37	72	22	6
Use of technology to facilitate college admissions and financial aid	28	41	31	78	17	5
Provision of mentors	6	28	66	49	41	10

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

APR data suggest that a greater proportion of Talent Search projects were providing academic support services at the end of the 1990s than at the beginning of the decade. A review of APRs for the 1990–91 program year found that 57 percent of projects provided “tutorial assistance,” 20 percent provided “computer-assisted instruction,” and 15 percent helped students with study skills (Eisner 1992). Mathematica Policy Research’s comparison of 1998–99 APR data with that reported by Eisner showed that academic support services (particularly tutoring and study skills) are now provided to a substantially higher percentage of participants than a decade ago (U.S. Dept. of Education May 2002).

*Projects appear to be providing more academic support services than a decade ago.*

Based on discussions with ED officials and Talent Search project staff around the country, we concluded that academic support services were a subject of widespread interest; therefore, we selected some of the case study sites specifically because of their strong focus on these services. Even though appendix A discusses academic support services in detail, we provide some examples below of how the case study projects were providing these services.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Test-taking and study-skills development*

- Two or three times each year, Project T invited participants to attend test-taking workshops held at the host college. High school students focused on college entrance examinations (ACT and SAT). The workshops were videotaped for the benefit of interested students who could not attend.
- Project C's curriculum featured a series of workshops at target schools for students in different grade levels. In seventh grade, students learned how to manage their study time; in ninth grade, they learned about general test-taking skills; in 10th grade, they focused on critical thinking; and in 11th grade, they focused on taking the ACT or SAT.

#### *Academic advising/course selection*

- At Project B, we observed a Talent Search counselor providing academic advising and course-selection services on a drop-in basis during lunch period to three high school seniors. All three students needed to register for college courses at the host institution. The counselor mentioned the minimum unit requirement for full-time enrollment, explained the concepts of subject-area majors and minors and the difference between undergraduate and graduate courses, pointed them toward appropriate courses in their areas of interest, and, for one student, helped make arrangements to take an English placement test.

#### *Tutoring*

- Project N offered individualized tutoring and homework assistance after school four days a week at the host institution. Middle and high school students could attend as often as they liked. On a typical day, six to eight students showed up. The tutors were college students.

---

<sup>3</sup>As explained in chapter 1, we do not reveal the identity of the projects we studied.

- Project H provided tutoring services four days a week for one or two hours a day at each of its four target high schools. The tutors were teachers from the same schools. Students attended on an as-needed basis, but those struggling in school were encouraged to participate regularly.

*Assisted (computer) labs*

- At Project M, computer labs were a new but regular part of the services (along with tutoring and counseling) offered to middle school students after school three days a week. Students wore headphones and worked individually on a variety of self-paced learning programs to improve their reading, writing, and mathematics skills. On the day we observed a session, sixth graders were working on onomatopoeia; seventh graders on vocabulary, spelling, and reading comprehension; and eighth graders on prefixes and suffixes.

**PERSONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

Personal and career development services is a broad, diverse category. It includes seven types of services that are designed to help move participants along the path toward a postsecondary education: counseling, mentoring, cultural activities, college orientation activities, visits to college campuses, family services, and referrals. Personal and career development services encompass most of the major nonacademic services that Talent Search projects offer, with the exception of financial aid services, as discussed later.

The project survey found that five of the seven personal and career development services were provided by more than 90 percent of projects nationwide: college orientation activities, college campus visits, cultural activities, referrals, and counseling (table 6.3). A substantial majority of projects also provided the remaining two services, family activities and mentoring. In addition, 79 percent provided six or seven personal and career development services, with the mean at 6.1. Finally, there was no substantial or systematic variation in the provision of personal and career development services between projects operated by different types of host institutions.<sup>4</sup>

---

*Most projects provided several types of personal and career development services.*

---



---

<sup>4</sup>APR information on personal and career development services is presented in appendix C.

**Table 6.3—Provision of personal and career development services**

	All projects	Host institution			Community org.
		Public 4-year	Private 4-year	2-year	
<b>Percent of projects providing:</b>					
College orientation activities	98%	99%	97%	97%	98%
Visits to college campuses	96	97	91	96	97
Cultural activities	93	94	91	97	87
Referrals	92	93	97	87	95
Counseling	91	91	97	88	95
Family activities	80	84	79	78	78
Mentoring	65	63	65	65	68
<b>Percent of projects providing:</b>					
All seven of the above	44	43	38	44	48
Six of the above	35	38	44	33	30
Five of the above	15	14	15	14	18
Four of the above	4	3	3	7	2
Three or fewer of the above	1	1	0	2	2

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

The project survey also shed a little light on the value and priority that Talent Search projects placed on two types of personal and career development services: mentoring and campus visits. Mentoring was a relatively low-priority function. Six percent of projects reported that they placed a high priority on providing mentors, whereas 66 percent indicated that they placed a low priority on providing mentors. Asked how they would react to having more resources, about half (49 percent) indicated a high likelihood of increasing their emphasis on mentoring (table 6.2). It should also be noted that mentoring was not added to the list of Talent Search services until the most recent legislative reauthorization.

In contrast, projects assigned a relatively high priority to college campus visits. About half (51 percent) of all projects placed a high priority on campus visits, and four-fifths (80 percent) reported that they would be highly likely to increase their emphasis on visits if more resources were available. In addition, given an opportunity (in another survey question) to list up to five program activities that they thought contributed most to achieving their performance objectives, 38 percent of responding directors mentioned campus visits—the second-most frequently listed service. In our case studies, students frequently described campus visits as a particularly memorable, enjoyable, and worthwhile experience that not only helped give them a general sense of what college was like but also helped them narrow their choices of the institutions they might attend.

visits were a  
ity service.

Finally, whereas the preceding discussion focused on aggregate data for groups of Talent Search projects, the case studies illuminated some of the diverse ways that individual projects provided various personal and career development services.<sup>5</sup>

#### *College orientation activities and visits to college campuses*

- Project X offered all students opportunities to visit at least two college campuses each year. Middle school students visited colleges in the metropolitan area where they lived; high school students had the chance to visit at least one university located farther away.
- Each year, Project O arranged for interested high school students to shadow college students (often Talent Search alumni) at the host institution for a day. Participants would also sit in on classes, eat lunch in a dormitory dining hall, and attend workshops on the transition to college.

#### *Cultural activities*

- At Project S, a subset of high school students who were participating in a more intensive service component could take after-school classes in dance, music, or poetry reading at the host institution's offices. Staff also arranged opportunities for the same students to perform in public.
- Project O tried to offer one field trip each year to students at each target school. Sometimes the trips involved visits to local history or science museums. Space in the passenger vans was limited, with spots filled on a first-come, first-served basis. Some of the project's more intensive services, including a senior retreat and a college study tour, also included cultural experiences such as attending a stage play or musical.

#### *Counseling*

- At Project A, we observed a workshop held at a target high school that focused on the Myers-Briggs personality-type indicator. The Talent Search counselor explained the background of the instrument and told the 12 participants that the results would increase their self-awareness and help them discover normal differences in people with respect to energy level, information gathering, decision-making, and lifestyle. Students discussed the extent to which their personal assessments seemed accurate.

---

<sup>5</sup>Family services are described in the section entitled "Services for Nonstudents and Nonparticipants."

- At Project I, we observed a Talent Search counselor leading a pull-out counseling session for six high school students. The students spent the first 20 minutes in an exercise on values. The students had a chance to bid an imaginary \$2,000 silently on various life experiences and outcomes, such as to be a famous rock star, to help underprivileged children, to live a long life, to travel around the world, and to have a great relationship with their parents. The counselor then led a discussion of what the students had bid on and why.

### *Mentoring*

- Project T arranged for group mentoring sessions in which individuals from the host college and professionals from the community would talk about their career choices and experiences with small groups of interested participants.

### *Referrals*

- At Project P, we met some alumni who had been referred to an Upward Bound Math/Science program for an academically enriching summer experience. At Project M, dropouts were usually referred to alternative schools or other programs that could help them prepare for the GED examination.<sup>6</sup>

## **FINANCIAL AID SERVICES**

As described in an earlier chapter, a statutory goal of the Talent Search program is to provide information and assistance related to financial aid. Project staff try to ensure that students are aware of and apply for important sources of aid (grants, scholarships, loans) so that their access to a postsecondary education is not limited by a lack of funds. Virtually all Talent Search projects provide financial aid related services to their participants in one way or another. And although financial aid information and assistance were an implicit or explicit part of some of the services discussed in the preceding section—for example, a college visit might include discussions with financial aid officials; family activities might include a workshop on applying for scholarships—we sought more detailed information through separate items in the project survey.

The results show that virtually all projects (more than 95 percent) provided individual financial aid counseling, financial aid workshops, and assistance in completing hard copies of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) (table 6.4). Furthermore, 56 percent of projects provided all seven of the financial aid services listed in our project survey, and 28 percent provided six; the mean was 6.3.

---

*Projects provided financial aid services in several different ways.*

---

<sup>6</sup>Additional information on referrals is presented in appendix C.



Projects operated by the four types of host institutions showed relatively little variation in the provision of financial aid services. One exception was that projects hosted by private 4-year colleges were distinctly less likely to offer assistance with FAFSA on the Internet than were each of the other types of projects. The reasons, however, are unclear.

	All projects	Host institution			Community org.
		Public 4-year	Private 4-year	2-year	
<b>Percent of projects providing</b>					
Individual financial aid counseling for participants	98%	98%	97%	99%	97%
Participant financial aid workshop	97	100	90	95	98
Assistance with pencil-and-paper FAFSA	96	96	90	97	97
Scholarship searches	94	98	92	90	98
Parent financial aid workshop	87	94	74	81	95
Individual financial aid counseling for parents	84	86	82	80	92
Assistance with Internet-based FAFSA	71	69	54	77	76
<b>Percent of projects providing</b>					
All seven of the above	56	57	36	57	68
Six of the above	28	31	36	24	25
Five of the above	9	9	15	10	3
Four of the above	3	2	5	5	2
Three or fewer of the above	3	1	8	5	2

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

APR data from 1998–99 showed that, on average, projects nationwide had a goal of assisting 90 percent of “college ready” students<sup>7</sup> in applying for financial aid (U.S. Dept. of Education May 2002).

The case studies offer some sense of how projects may structure their financial aid services. Until students reached the point of needing to fill out applications, the information provided on financial aid often was fairly general. The point was to assure students that sources of assistance were available and that family income should not be a barrier to postsecondary education. (A related service objective was to make sure that students and their parents had an accurate sense of the costs

<sup>7</sup>Participants who are “college ready” include high school seniors and individuals who graduated from high school or received a GED but have not enrolled in college.

of attending college; often they believed it was more expensive than it is.) This type of information was commonly conveyed during one-on-one meetings between students and staff or in workshops. When students reached their junior or senior year of high school, they might be invited to informational workshops held at their schools, with parents sometimes invited as well if sessions were held in the evening. Project staff would then make a point of following up with seniors to be sure that they filled out the necessary forms properly and on time, offering individual assistance on an as-needed or as-requested basis.

Some projects also assist students in looking for scholarships—need- or merit-based funds from private and nonfederal public sources. At the sites we visited, students commonly used computers to perform scholarship searches.

Project survey results suggest that project staff consider financial aid services particularly important. An open-ended question in the survey gave project directors an opportunity to list up to five program activities that they thought contributed most to achieving their performance objectives. Over 260 directors listed a total of 1,268 activities or services. Financial aid services were mentioned by more respondents (39 percent) than any other service.<sup>8</sup> The importance placed on financial aid services probably stems from an understanding that, for many Talent Search participants, especially those from low-income families, financial assistance to help pay for educational expenses will be critical if students are to achieve the program's ultimate goal—enrollment in a postsecondary education program.

## **FEE WAIVERS**

One tangible service provided by many Talent Search projects is to arrange for waivers for college entrance examination fees and college application fees. The registration fees for the ACT and the SAT are currently \$24 and \$25, respectively, and college application fees may range up to \$50 or higher, so waivers can provide meaningful savings to some economically disadvantaged Talent Search participants.

---

<sup>8</sup>Campus visits were a close second, mentioned by 38 percent of responding directors. Other results of note: tutoring was cited by 19 percent, assistance with postsecondary applications by 18 percent, career counseling services by 17 percent, academic advising by 13 percent, and college orientation activities by 12 percent.

Roughly 80 percent of projects obtained SAT or ACT registration fee waivers for at least one participant; a similar percent obtained college application fee waivers (table 6.5). On average, projects obtained SAT or ACT registration fee waivers for about 61 participants and college application fee waivers for about 71 participants. The numbers are equivalent to about 33 and 39 percent, respectively, of the average number of high school seniors served by Talent Search projects. The differences in the number of waivers secured by type of host institution reflect differences in project size. For example, projects hosted by community organizations served an average of 1,124 participants, whereas projects hosted by 2-year colleges served an average of 728 participants.

---

*Many projects provide fee waivers for some of their participants.*

---

**Table 6.5—Provision of fee waivers**

	All projects	Host institution			Community org.
		Public 4-year	Private 4-year	2-year	
<b>Percent of projects providing waivers for</b>					
SAT or ACT registration fees	82%	84%	87%	74%	87%
College application fees	78	81	75	73	83
<b>Average number of participants provided with waivers for:</b>					
ACT or SAT registration fees	61	63	56	43	90
College application fees	71	73	50	50	115
<b>Total number of participants provided with waivers for:</b>					
ACT or SAT registration fees	15,476	5,234	1,744	3,727	4,771
College application fees	16,884	5,884	1,422	4,023	5,555

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

Talent Search projects that responded to our project survey provided ACT or SAT fee waivers to 15,476 participants and college application fee waivers to 16,884 participants. Assuming that item and survey nonrespondents were as likely as respondents to provide waivers and that they provided the same average number of waivers, then the estimated total number of participants nationwide who received SAT or ACT registration fee waivers would be 22,169, and the estimated total number of participants nationwide who received college application fee waivers would be 25,822.

## SUMMER SERVICES

Talent Search services are not limited to the school year. Well over half (61 percent) of all Talent Search projects offered at least some of their participants a summer component (table 6.6). The percent was similar across projects operated

---

*Most projects offer some services during the summer.*

---

by different types of host institutions. Overall, the group targeted most often for summer services was middle school students: 89 percent of projects with a summer program served middle school students, 69 percent served high school students, and 35 percent served graduating seniors, presumably to help them make the transition to college. A closer look reveals that 28 percent of projects served all three groups, 31 percent served just middle and high school students, and 27 percent served only middle school students.

	All projects	Host institution			Community org.
		Public 4-year	Private 4-year	2-year	
<b>Percent of projects with a summer component</b>	61%	65%	59%	54%	68%
<b>Percentage of summer components serving:</b>					
Middle school students	89	85	96	93	85
High school students	69	68	70	71	68
Graduating seniors	35	30	22	38	48
<b>Percent of summer components serving:</b>					
Middle school students only	27	27	30	25	30
High school students only	6	10	4	2	5
Graduating seniors only	1	0	0	2	0
Middle school and high school students	31	32	43	36	18
Middle school and graduating seniors	2	3	0	2	3
High school and graduating seniors	5	3	0	4	10
All three groups	28	23	22	30	35

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

The case study projects gave some indication of how summer components may be structured. Project H, for example, ran an enrichment program for middle school students. It operated half a day, five days a week, for three weeks on the host college campus. Participants took a variety of classes ranging from nutrition to computers. Project O offered three short residential programs: one to help eighth graders make the transition to high school, one to help rising high school seniors with the college application process, and one to assist high school graduates with the transition to college. Officials at these projects saw the summer as an opportunity to provide more intensive services than during the school year, and the experiences were well received by the students who participated in them.

## SERVICES FOR NONSTUDENTS AND NONPARTICIPANTS

In this section, we shift our focus from services for participants as a whole to services for certain groups—in particular, people who are not typical participants: dropouts and out-of-school adults, parents, nonofficial participants. We present data on the types and extent of services offered to these groups and describe some of the major issues involved in serving them.<sup>9</sup>

### SERVICES FOR DROPOUTS AND ADULTS NOT ENROLLED IN A POSTSECONDARY PROGRAM

Thus far, we have focused on services for middle school and high school students, but a small percent of Talent Search participants are not enrolled in school. About 5 percent of participants served in 1998–99 were secondary school dropouts, postsecondary “stopouts,” or people who had received a high school diploma or GED but had never enrolled in a postsecondary program.

Relatively little national information is available on services to nonstudent participants. APR data presented in appendix C show that adults were less likely than enrolled students to have participated in test-taking and study-skills development services, tutoring, cultural activities, and mentoring but more likely to have received academic advising/course-selection services and referrals. APR data also showed that, for the four academic support services, Talent Search projects offered far fewer sessions for adults than for either middle or high school students for the simple reason that students so greatly outnumbered adults.

In the years since the EOC program was established, Talent Search projects have generally decreased their emphasis on serving dropouts. Indeed, project survey data in table 6.2 show that 22 percent of directors reported that they placed a high priority on working with dropouts or returning students, whereas 38 percent reported that they placed a low priority on working with dropouts. (In contrast, 65 percent of directors reported that their high school component was a high priority while 8 percent reported that their high school component was a low priority.) Furthermore, although about half (52 percent) of all projects indicated that there was a high likelihood that they would place greater emphasis on serving dropouts if they had more resources, they rated several other groups and services as higher priorities. (For example, 80 percent of projects reported a high likelihood of increasing their emphasis on the high school component.)

---

*Most projects place relatively little emphasis on serving dropouts.*

---

---

<sup>9</sup>Appendix C presents survey data on special services for persons with disabilities.

Our case studies reinforced the impression that services for dropouts and adults were generally a limited, marginal aspect of overall program operations. At one project we visited, the usual approach was to refer dropouts to vocational or alternative schools or other programs that could help them prepare for the GED examination. According to another project director, dropouts typically receive at most five hours of service in a program year.<sup>10</sup>

---

*dered dropouts  
difficult to*

---

The minimal emphasis that case study projects placed on working with dropouts was a result of both practical and philosophical considerations. From a practical point of view, staff saw project resources as insufficient to be effective in working with large numbers of dropouts. Several staff commented that dropouts are a difficult-to-serve group. They are out in the community, not conveniently accessible at target schools, and likely to need academic remediation—a type of assistance many projects cannot afford to provide. Working with dropouts, one project director explained, requires a different orientation and level of effort than serving enrolled students. To serve dropouts properly, she said, would probably require one staff member to be devoted solely to reaching out and to serving the dropout population. Philosophically, many project staff were much more interested in preventing students from dropping out than in working with dropouts.

#### **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES**

Some Talent Search projects seek to serve not only school-aged participants but also their parents. Activities that involve parents in their children's educations and provide them with information on the college admission process, according to project staff, are useful ways to increase the chances that students will ultimately achieve their educational goals. In this section, we address the level and type of parental involvement in Talent Search projects as well as some of the issues related to serving parents.

---

<sup>10</sup>When asked about working with dropouts, staff in a few projects mentioned their connections to alternative high schools. At one project, for example, staff described visiting two such schools on an as-needed basis to work individually with interested students. But youth attending alternative high schools are not dropouts; they are enrolled in a secondary education program and working toward a high school credential, although some may be former dropouts who returned to school for that purpose.

The project survey found that 80 percent of projects offered some type of family activity; APR data from 1998–99 showed that 84 percent of projects offered such services.<sup>11</sup> Nationally, one common type of service provided to parents is information on financial aid and assistance with financial aid forms. In the project survey, 87 percent of projects reported that they offer workshops for parents on financial aid, and 84 percent indicated they provide individual financial aid counseling to parents.<sup>12</sup>

---

*Many projects offered at least some services for parents.*

---

The case studies further illuminate the various ways that parents are involved in Talent Search. Common activities targeted specifically to parents, or jointly to parents and their children, included information and orientation meetings or open houses at both the start of the school year and the start of certain other program components, such as summer sessions; workshops on financial aid and college admissions; and year-end award ceremonies. Parents were also commonly invited to participate in regular Talent Search activities, such as serving as chaperones during college visits and community service activities.

Staff at the case study projects also noted that they tried to keep parents abreast of their children’s project activities and passed along useful information—ranging from college preparation steps to parenting tips—via newsletters, other mailings, and, in rare cases, home visits. (In addition, several parents we interviewed for the case studies said that they felt free to call project staff with questions or concerns at any time.) Table 6.7 presents project survey data on projects’ communications with parents. Telephone calls were the most common method, used by 95 percent of all projects. Home visits were the least common, used by less than one-third of all projects. There was some variation between projects operated by different types of host institutions. For example, projects hosted by community organizations were less likely than other projects to use newsletters to communicate with parents. Over three-fourths of the projects used at least three of the methods listed. In addition, 34 percent of the projects indicated that they also communicated with parents by some other means, most commonly in meetings at target schools or project offices or during activities.

---

<sup>11</sup>This is defined in the APR instructions as “events, workshops, meetings, and counseling designed to provide families with information on postsecondary educational opportunities and financial aid available and to involve them in the educational decisions of their children.”

<sup>12</sup>One reason why these percent are higher than the percent of projects that reported providing family services (80 percent) could be that the term “family services” was undefined in our survey, whereas the APR explicitly mentions providing families with financial aid information in its definition of family service. In addition, the items about family services and particular financial aid services appeared in different questions in different parts of the questionnaire.

**Table 6.7—Ways in which Talent Search projects communicated with participants' parents: 1998–99**

	All projects	Host institution			Community org.
		Public 4-year	Private 4-year	2-year	
<b>Percent of projects using various means of communication:</b>					
Telephone calls	95%	93%	95%	96%	95%
Personal letters	93	94	100	91	90
Newsletters	80	88	82	79	67
Home visits	31	28	44	30	33
<b>Percent of projects using</b>					
All four of the above	25	24	38	23	21
Three of the above	52	57	44	54	45
Two of the above	20	14	18	19	33
One of the above	3	4	0	4	2

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

However, it is important to look beyond the percent of projects that offer certain services and to consider the extent of project offerings and the level of involvement among the target groups. APR data indicate that projects provided an average of 94 family activity sessions in 1998–99. By way of context, the number of family activity sessions was far below the average number of academic advisement and tutoring sessions (673 and 547, respectively) but greater than the number of cultural activity sessions (59). In addition, the number of opportunities for a given parent to be involved would have been lower than the total number of sessions offered, because not all events would have been open to all parents; some would have been designed for parents at individual target schools or for parents of students in particular age groups.

The 1998–99 APR data also show that a relatively small proportion of participants was involved in family services: overall, the average was 30 percent, including 27 percent of high school participants and 36 percent of middle school participants. For comparison, consider that 65 percent of participants were involved in academic advising/course-selection services and that 77 percent received counseling. Our project survey found that during 1998–99, projects served at least one parent or guardian of, on average, 25 percent of their student participants.

The relatively small number of parents involved in Talent Search projects reflects two closely related factors. First, Talent Search projects place less emphasis on parent services than on direct services to students (table 6.2). According to the project survey, 14 percent of projects reported that working with parents was a



high priority while 41 percent reported that working with parents was a low priority.

Second, project staff seem to find parental involvement a particularly challenging service area. Among directors who took the opportunity to list up to three aspects of their projects that they considered “particularly problematic,” 19 percent mentioned parental involvement; it was the second most frequently cited problem. Some case study project staff admitted that their efforts to increase parental involvement in their programs had not been particularly successful. Our impression was that, in most cases, limited parental involvement did not result from lack of trying. Rather, projects’ efforts simply had not succeeded as planned. At one project, for example, a staff member recalled that when a financial aid workshop was offered in the evening at one target school, no parents came. At another project, a staff member had tried hosting parent “coffee” in the evening but soon canceled them because of low attendance. Thus, the difficulty of involving parents can lead to a reduced emphasis on parental participation.

---

*Staff saw serving parents  
as a serious challenge.*

---

Project staff cited several reasons for lower-than-desired levels of parental involvement, although the most common reason was lack of time. Parents were reportedly too busy working or fulfilling other family responsibilities to attend program-sponsored activities. According to two middle school teachers, hard-working but low-income parents were often so focused on present necessities, such as earning enough money to provide their families with food, shelter, and clothing, that they did not always focus closely on their children’s educational futures. Other factors that reportedly affected projects’ ability to generate parental involvement included transportation difficulties, particularly in projects serving large, rural areas; cultural backgrounds that did not fully embrace the pursuit of higher education; limited English proficiency; parental avoidance of situations in which parents might be embarrassed about their own lack of education; and children from “dysfunctional families” who did not reside with their parents.

Staff in several of the projects we visited for the case studies wanted to do a better job working with parents and were interested in learning about effective approaches. They thought that parental involvement was important because, as one staff member put it, the more people students have in their lives pushing them toward college, the better. As for strategies to increase parental involvement, one staff member was considering the possibility of offering incentives to students—such as coupons or certificates that could be used toward the purchase of school supplies, candy, or other items—for bringing their parents to certain events. At another project, a staff member had found that telephoning parents to invite them to activities seemed to prompt a higher response rate. As in the case of other activities, though, efforts devoted to attracting parents require resources. One project director reported that she was interested in creating a parent advisory group but figured that staff and financial resources were insufficient to support such an initiative. The project survey revealed that 68 percent of projects

indicated a high likelihood that efforts focused on serving parents would receive increased emphasis if projects had more resources (table 6.2).

## SERVING NONPARTICIPANTS

Throughout this chapter, we have discussed services provided to official program participants—students (and dropouts or other adults) who had completed an application and would be served at least twice during the year. However, our case studies revealed some instances in which Talent Search projects provided services on a regular (or irregular) basis to students who were not counted as official program participants. We are not referring to initial, introductory sessions used to recruit new participants but rather to recurring services. Our case studies revealed various rationales for, and examples of, services provided to nonparticipants.

A fundamental reason why projects served unofficial participants was that the number of students in need of services exceeded the number of students the projects were supposed to serve. One project we visited, for example, served a large rural area wherein students reportedly had access to virtually no other precollege programs or services besides Talent Search. Many of the target schools were small and had limited resources; guidance counselors were either nonexistent or, by their own admission, too busy to provide students with much in-depth advice on preparing for college. Project staff tried to help by sometimes delivering informational workshops to literally all the students in certain grade levels, especially high school juniors and seniors, for whom career and college information was most salient. However, the project reserved the large share of its services, including individualized assistance and college visitation trips, for official program participants.

Staff at other projects explained that the occasional provision of services to unofficial participants was an important strategy for maintaining positive relations with target school officials. Providing a limited amount of service to unofficial participants—whether in a group, such as a whole classroom or a grade-level assembly, or individually on a drop-in basis—was a useful way to achieve and sustain good access to official program participants.<sup>13</sup>

Regardless of the rationale, however, project personnel felt that they could provide some degree of services to unofficial participants without diluting the services designed for official participants and at no additional cost. If they planned a workshop for 30 official participants, they reasoned, what could be the harm in expanding the group to include some unofficial participants as well?

---

<sup>13</sup>Such reciprocal arrangements were fairly common among the projects we visited and appeared to be a basic contextual feature of Talent Search program operations. Two of our case study projects, for example, routinely shared a substantial amount of computer software with their target schools; in turn, school officials were willing to host the program and generously provided Talent Search staff with office and classroom space, use of office machines and supplies, and access to student files.

## COMMON SERVICE THEMES AND ISSUES

Although the next section of this chapter emphasizes diversity and variability of services between and within Talent Search projects, some insights that emerged from our case studies seem broadly applicable to most sites or to the program as a whole. This section therefore describes a few such issues and practices, particularly those relating to overall program intensity, projects' responses to limits on service capacity, the emphasis on serving high school students, and serving students through a pull-out approach.

### SERVICE INTENSITY AND EXTENT OF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Talent Search is generally a nonintensive program, as reflected in two major features that were evident in the case study projects. The first feature is the limited number and types of services offered to any particular participant or participant group. In view of the average funding level per participant, projects are able to provide most participants with what might be termed a "light touch" rather than with a heavy dose of precollege services. In some projects we visited, for example, staff scheduled activities with most students once a month or less often. With the exception of field trips, such as college visits, the activities that most students participated in seldom lasted longer than one hour.

---

*Talent Search typically is not an intensive program.*

---

Even if staff visited target schools frequently, they did not necessarily make frequent contact with all participants. Table 6.8 illustrates the point with data on services provided by a Talent Search advisor from one of the case study projects. Although the advisor visited his three target schools once a week, he saw a majority of participants five times or less during the first seven months of the 1998–99 school year. Variation in the number of contacts was a function of both the number of times the staff member tried to reach the students (which in turn was a function of the staff member's sense of student needs and interests) and the students' responsiveness and initiative.

Number of times students were seen	By high school			All high schools combined (180 students)
	School A (63 students)	School B (42 students)	School C (75 students)	
Zero	11%	24%	9%	13%
1 – 5	56	48	60	56
6 – 10	17	21	15	17
11 – 15	14	2	5	8
16 – 20	2	5	8	5
21 or more	0	0	3	1

SOURCE: Project staff.

The second program feature that reflects Talent Search’s characterization as nonintensive is the limited time and commitment required of participants. While projects encouraged multiyear participation, most of the case study projects did not require students to make a multiyear commitment; furthermore, in some cases, students might not have participated in a project until their senior year of high school. In addition, across all the projects we visited, participation in many services was optional. Students were free to decide for themselves whether to attend a given workshop, sign up for a particular campus visit, participate in a project-sponsored cultural activity, and so on. A staff member at one project estimated that he saw perhaps 40 percent of the participants at his assigned schools on a regular basis. At another project, the attendance level at workshops in the year before our visit reportedly averaged 60 percent.

Some projects might have strongly encouraged certain students to participate in certain services—for example, students struggling in school might be urged to take advantage of project-sponsored tutoring services—but they did not require such participation and imposed no consequences if students did not avail themselves of the services. Rather, the underlying philosophy and message was that students could involve themselves in as many or few precollege services as they wanted. Staff in various projects commonly offered comments such as “You can’t force them to come to program activities.” Unless they violated certain project rules (e.g., unacceptable behavior or, in some projects, grades below a minimum GPA standard) or said explicitly that they did not want to be involved in the project any longer, even students with a minimal record of participation would typically be retained on the project roll from year to year in case they ever decided to increase their involvement.

National information also supports the depiction of Talent Search as a low-intensity experience for most participants. The project survey results show that, on average, 38 percent of middle school students and 48 percent of high school students spent less than 10 hours in program activities over the course of the 1998–99 program year (table 6.9). On average, fewer than one in five middle school participants and fewer than one in seven high school participants received more than 40 hours of service. Dropouts and out-of-school adults usually accumulated fewer contact hours than their in-school counterparts.

**Table 6.9—Hours spent in Talent Search services/activities: 1998–99**

<b>Average percentage of participants receiving:</b>	<b>Middle school participants</b>	<b>High school participants</b>	<b>Participants not in school</b>
One hour or less	7%	8%	15%
Two to four hours	13	16	35
Five to nine hours	18	24	25
10 to 19 hours	24	24	12
20 to 39 hours	19	16	5
40 hours or more	19	13	8

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

Despite the preceding depiction of Talent Search as generally nonintensive, it is worth noting that several case study projects did sponsor at least one more-intensive activity for some participants. For example, one project held a series of week-long “technology camps” during the summer; a second project offered a three-week summer enrichment program for middle school students; and a third project operated an intensive college preparation component during the school year for high school students, in which participants took structured academic classes after school.

#### LIMITED CAPACITY

Resource constraints (for example, funds or even the number of seats in a passenger van) often prevented case study projects from providing various services to as many students as desired. When capacity was limited, projects usually handled participation on a first-come, first-served basis. In this way, Talent Search projects catered to the most interested and motivated participants. Sometimes eligibility to participate in limited-capacity events and activities was based on student performance in school or other factors. At one project, for example, high school students interested in a multiday trip to visit colleges in a distant state had to (1) earn at least a 3.2 GPA in the fall semester and (2) submit short written reports describing (a) their main career interest, colleges that would help them prepare for that career, and high school courses that would help them prepare for the specified colleges and (b) how they planned to pay for college. The 50 students who did the best job on the reports and met the GPA requirement were invited on the trip.

---

*In some cases, projects cannot meet the demand for services.*

---

The project survey collected information on the ability of Talent Search projects to provide services to all who requested them. Most of the projects that offered a given service were able to serve all the participants who requested the service (table 6.10). For example, 88 percent of the projects that offered counseling were able to provide it to all who requested it. In some cases, however, it was a slim majority. For example, 49 percent of projects that offered mentoring were unable to provide it to all the participants who requested it, and among projects that

offered tutoring, 47 percent were unable to provide it to all who requested it. Some projects that could not meet the demand for various services kept waiting lists for interested participants, although the exception of ever-popular campus visits—most did not maintain such lists.

**Table 6.10—Talent Search projects' ability to provide requested services**

	Of the projects that offered service, percent unable to provide it to all who requested it	Of the projects unable to provide it to all who requested it, percent that maintained a waiting list for the service
<b>Academic support services</b>		
Test-taking and study-skills development	14%	41%
Academic advising/course selection	13	38
Tutoring	47	42
Assisted (computer) labs	37	24
<b>Personal and career development services</b>		
College orientation activities	18	37
Visits to college campuses	40	54
Cultural activities	41	44
Referrals	13	20
Counseling	12	33
Family activities	22	20
Mentoring	49	31

SOURCE: National Survey of Talent Search Projects, 1999–2000.

It appears that the services for which projects had the most difficulty meeting demand are the ones that are most resource-intensive. Mentoring and tutoring, for example, require a low participant-staff ratio and sustained personal attention. Campus visits and, in some cases, cultural activities require transportation, which can be expensive.

#### GRADE-LEVEL EMPHASIS

Most of the case study projects placed a somewhat greater emphasis on services for high school students than on services for middle school students—or at least the emphasis on the two groups was about equal; certainly no projects did more for middle school students than for high school students. Data from the project survey support the notion that high school students were a major focus of the Talent Search program. First, projects served, on average, more than twice as many high school students as middle school students. Second, when asked about the priority they placed on working with various groups and providing various

focus more  
students  
school

services, 65 percent of projects rated their senior high component as a high priority; no other item rated higher (table 6.2).<sup>14</sup> The project survey did not ask a parallel question about projects' middle school components.

Interestingly, however, for some projects, the group that apparently provided the greatest service challenge was high school freshmen and sophomores. College was not as immediate a concern for them as it was for juniors and seniors, and, staff said, freshmen and sophomores did not necessarily respond as well to the types of services commonly provided to middle school students, such as workshops focused on personal development issues like self-esteem or interpersonal relationships.

### SERVICE SETTING AND APPROACH

Except for college campus visits and other field trips, most Talent Search services take place at target middle schools and high schools. Moreover, our case studies led to the firm impression that the pull-out approach to service delivery, in which students are temporarily pulled out of their regular classes to participate in program activities, is predominant in Talent Search. In fact, most of the case study projects provided many of their workshops, counseling and advising sessions, and other activities in the form of pull-out sessions. Depending on the activity and the school's class schedule, students pulled out of class might miss anywhere from less than half a class to an entire class period or more.

But sometimes the pull-out approach was problematic—and by some accounts was becoming increasingly so. It was not uncommon for some students to skip Talent Search workshops or other activities in favor of attending their regular classes. In addition, teachers occasionally refused to allow participants to leave classes for Talent Search activities. Some project staff felt that increasing pressure on schools to ensure that students meet certain academic standards (for example, passing high-stakes tests) has contributed to teachers' and administrators' reluctance to release students for extracurricular activities such as Talent Search and that such pressure would only continue to mount.

---

*The pull-out approach to providing services was sometimes a problem.*

---

What are the alternatives to the pull-out approach? One strategy is to provide services during school hours but at times when students are not committed to specific classes. In some cases, project staff scheduled services during lunch or other free times such as an activity period or study hall. A second alternative is to conduct activities outside regular school hours. One project we visited, for example, made an effort not to schedule college trips on regular school days, instead targeting district work days or vacation days. The projects that offered fairly extensive tutoring services tended to offer their sessions after school. A third alternative to the pull-out approach is to serve students in their regular

---

<sup>14</sup>Furthermore, when asked how they would respond to having more resources, 80 percent of projects reported a high likelihood of increasing their emphasis on the senior high school component. Only one item, time for staff to meet individually with participants, rated higher.



classrooms. The middle school section of appendix A provides some examples of how projects served students in their classrooms. Project survey data show that many Talent Search projects served at least some students in the classroom; 43 percent of all projects reported that they served entire classrooms once a month or more often. But, if our case studies are any indication, the in-class approach is probably limited to a small number of classrooms in a small number of target schools. It was the exception to the rule, not the main service method for any of the 14 projects we visited.

Rather than altogether abandoning the pull-out approach, some projects tried to minimize its potentially negative impact on students. One project, for example, scheduled workshops at different times during the school day from month to month so that students would not be repeatedly pulled out of the same class. At another project, staff timed their meetings with individual students so that students would not be pulled from their core academic classes. Finally, some staff members spoke of trying to design a cohesive set of activities that teachers would see as educationally credible, thereby increasing the chances that teachers would willingly release program participants from class.

Unfortunately, staff sometimes felt that they had few, if any, sound alternatives to the pull-out approach. Staff commonly saw the hours when classes were being held as the only feasible time to meet with most participants. Meeting only during lunch period clearly limits the time available for Talent Search activities at a given target school on a given day. After-school meetings would be less than ideal for students who hold part-time jobs, participate in sports or other extracurricular activities, or rely on a school bus for transportation (especially in rural areas where the journey home may be long and parents cannot easily pick up their children). Weekends also would be problematic because of students' work or personal commitments and project staff's preference for traditional hours. Furthermore, schools are usually not open on weekends, raising the question of where meetings would take place; in addition, distance and a lack of transportation would keep many students from traveling to the host institution. Serving students in their regular classes clearly avoids putting participants at a disadvantage relative to their classmates in terms of learning course material, but turning over instructional time to an outside group offering precollege services requires a high level of buy-in from school administrators and staff. Faced with these issues, one of the case-study projects had recently dropped a high school (and its two feeder middle schools) from its set of target schools because project staff felt that school staff were overly restricting their access to participants through the pull-out approach.

## **VARIABILITY OF TALENT SEARCH SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES**

The preceding sections of this chapter presented a fairly broad picture of Talent Search services and activities. The purpose of this section, based on our 14 case

studies, is to convey a more detailed sense of how projects serve participants. In particular, we describe the high degree of variability in services not only between projects but also within projects.

### **SERVICE VARIABILITY BETWEEN PROJECTS**

Although many of the case study projects provided a broadly similar set of services relevant to the goals of the program, a close look reveals some substantial differences in the services that individual Talent Search projects provided. There was variability in how services were delivered as well as when, where, to whom, and by whom. In some respects, when the details are considered, service differences are far more apparent than service similarities.

#### **Different Service Plans**

One of the characteristics shared by virtually all Talent Search projects is the great diversity of their offerings. The projects we visited typically provided a wide variety of activities. Rather than focusing most of their resources and efforts on just a few types of services, they leaned toward offering a little of everything. But the specific mix of services, not to mention the delivery methods and groups targeted for those services, varied considerably. This variability is exemplified by the service plans of three of the projects we visited, as outlined on the following three pages.

---

*Projects had diverse  
service plans.*

---

## Project O Service Plan

At Project O, staff divided program activities into three major categories.

*Workshops* lasting 50 minutes are conducted at each target school approximately every two weeks. Students are pulled from their regular classes. All project staff follow a general curriculum through the year, but they may design the materials and offer the workshops in any order they prefer. Staff often use games to convey information in an entertaining and engaging way.

*Field trips* are (ideally) offered once a semester to participants at each school. Designed to provide both educational and cultural experiences, the trips have included visits to a university-sponsored exhibit on Chicano history and to a natural history museum.

*Intensive educational experiences* attempt to make long-lasting impressions on students' lives. In almost all cases, students must complete an application to participate; meet certain eligibility criteria, such as a minimum GPA; or both. In some cases, students must contribute money toward the cost of the activity. The yearly schedule includes the following activities:

- *College trips.* Three multiday trips take place each year, one each in spring, summer, and fall. One is to distant, out-of-state colleges; one is to several in-state colleges; and one is to colleges in adjacent states. Cultural and recreational activities are part of each trip.
- *Summer residential programs.* Three such programs are held on the host campus. One is to help eighth-graders make the transition to high school (described in detail in appendix A). The second is a four-day program to help rising seniors with the college application process. Finally, an eight-week academic "bridge" program reserves 10 slots for Talent Search graduates who will be entering college in the fall.
- *Knowledge Bowl.* A quiz-oriented program for middle school students, the Knowledge Bowl is held on a Saturday in the fall.
- *Senior retreat.* This springtime, two-day event, typically held in a hotel, helps seniors prepare for the transition to college. It includes workshops on campus resources, scheduling college courses, budgeting, college safety issues, time management, and multicultural issues on campus.
- *College student shadow day.* High school students can spend a day on the host campus shadowing a college student (often a Talent Search alumnus or alumna).
- *Campus discovery day.* This event at the host campus is designed to give juniors insight into how best to prepare for college. It offers workshops on writing a college essay, on admissions requirements, and on campus life as well as a question-and-answer session with faculty.
- *Recognition and awards ceremony.* Staff, students, and parents recognize the accomplishments of outstanding high school and middle school students; students may also attend a panel discussion by current college students; and parents may attend a workshop on financial aid.

### Project P Service Plan

This project's services can be grouped into four categories. One major program component is *contacts at school*. Advisors visit their target schools once a week. While on campus, they typically meet briefly—often for no more than 10 minutes—with individuals or small groups of students whom they pull out of classes. The point of the meetings is mainly to keep in touch; staff ask how the students are doing, talk about their plans, tell them about upcoming events and remind them of impending deadlines, offer encouragement, and help them fill out applications for college admission and financial aid. Advisors do not necessarily try to meet with every participant every week but rather choose students on the basis of their particular needs and interests. For example, when the SAT is approaching, advisors try to meet with students who need to register for the examination or to see how other students are progressing in their preparations. For some middle school students, school contacts may be much more frequent and intensive. In recent years, one advisor has provided in-class services once a week to several classrooms. The sessions feature a wide variety of activities and projects related to college and careers.

A second major program component is *use of computers*. On the days that advisors visit target schools, they typically lead an after-school computer club. Students are instructed and assisted in a variety of computer applications, such as file management, word processing, Internet research (e.g., into careers and colleges), Web page construction, multimedia applications (e.g., photo editing, PowerPoint® presentations, desktop publishing), and e-mail. Participation in the computer clubs is voluntary. (The middle school students served in their regular classrooms may spend some of that time working in the computer lab.) In addition, the project's main office features a computer lab for use by students just about any time.

A third, broad category of services is *special events*. From September 1998 through mid-March 1999, the program sponsored the following special events:

- Five test-taking and study-skills development activities, such as workshops on SAT preparation and how to excel in high school, all for high school students
- Three cultural activities for middle school students, including a football game at the host campus and an architectural tour of the city
- Two community service activities, including cleaning up the shore of a local lake
- Twelve career field trips for middle school students, such as visits to computer companies, the local humane society, and a court, and, for high school students, a general career fair at the host campus
- Thirteen college orientation activities, mainly trips to visit campuses conducted separately for middle and high school students
- One essay writing workshop for high school students

A fourth category of services might be called *miscellaneous*. Included are (1) providing eligible students with fee waivers for SAT or ACT examinations; (2) referring students to other enriching experiences, such as Upward Bound Math Science summer programs; and (3)

## Project C Service Plan

The core services in Project C take place at target schools during the advisors' twice-weekly visits. First, there are two or three *workshops* per year for students in each grade level. The workshops follow a specific curriculum that features a closer focus on college preparation as students progress through school (see table 6.11). Workshops typically last 45 minutes or less. Second, staff meet with students once a year for *one-on-one discussions* about their educational progress and plans. For both the workshops and individual discussions, students are pulled from their regular classes.

Other major services include *college trips* (all students have a chance to take at least one trip each year); *parent financial aid workshops* in the evening; a *family night activity* such as a visit to a science museum; and occasional social, cultural, or recreational *special events* such as TRIO Day, rock climbing, or a trip to the theater. A final service that Project C provides is *subscriptions to precollege publications*—one on financing higher education for 7th and 8th graders; one on careers for students in grades 9 and 10, and one on searching for a college for high school juniors and seniors.

**Table 6.11—Specific topics of Project C's workshop curriculum, by subject area and grade level**

Grade	Career development	Personal development	Study skills	College preparation
6	Introduction to Talent Search, career exploration, higher education	Consider how personality affects relationships, career, educational choices		
7	Career inventory or survey to evaluate students' interests as they relate to careers	Take personality inventory to identify preferences, strengths; improve relationships, self-esteem	Evaluate how students spend time, learn about time management	
8	Assess students' knowledge of the working world and its relation to school subjects	Evaluate communication skills in selves and others; learn importance of communication		Discuss reasons for obtaining college degree, how present choices affect college plans, classes needed to prepare for college
9	Explore whether careers of interest will fulfill future wishes	Learn how to organize and use a portfolio	Learn about test-taking skills	
10	Explore connections between interests and careers, including "hot jobs"		Learn about critical thinking	Visit the college and career resource center at students' home schools
11			Information on and test-taking skills for ACT and SAT	Learn about types of colleges, tuition reciprocity, importance of campus visits, college costs and financing options
12	Celebrate seniors' graduation and discuss future plans			Learn about college admissions process, selecting a college, financial aid process, and preparing for personal scholarship search

## Planning and Timing of Services

The case studies also revealed that projects varied in how they approached the planning of services and activities. Before the start of each school year, some projects developed detailed service plans for each grade level of each target school. The plans listed specific activities that would take place on specific dates, including workshop topics and the names of colleges to be visited. At the other end of the continuum, some projects did not produce a service schedule in advance of the school year. Instead, staff improvised by reacting to students' interests and developing service ideas and plans over the course of the year. Such an approach did not necessarily mean that services and activities varied dramatically from year to year. Indeed, the basic framework remained largely unchanged as staff were guided by general notions of the types of services that students needed at different grade levels and at different points in the year and, in some cases, by project-specific guidelines or goals for the number of different types of activities that would be provided each year. Finally, some projects used a planning approach that fell somewhere between the two described above. At one project, for example, staff members consulted with appropriate target school officials before the year began to agree on the general number and timing of workshops by grade level as well as on possible topics, with details to be addressed during the year.

---

*Projects used different approaches to planning their services.*

---

Regardless of the planning approach, many projects' service plans had a similar rhythm from year to year. For example, projects commonly started the school year with a parental participation opportunity, such as an "open house" at the target schools, and many ended the year with a recognition or awards ceremony to which parents were often also invited. During the year, the timing of some standard but major services, particularly for high school students, was a function of the deadlines for important events in the college admission process, such as the scheduled dates of college entrance examinations and the deadlines for filing admissions and financial aid applications.

### SERVICE VARIABILITY WITHIN PROJECTS

The degree of service variability among projects, highlighted above, was at least matched by the variability of services within projects. That projects would design and provide different types and numbers of services for students in different grade levels is not surprising. After all, when it comes to preparing for college, the needs and interests of 6th and 7th graders differ markedly from those of 11th and 12th graders. In fact, given that service variation by grade level within projects is not particularly noteworthy, we pay little attention to it in this section. However, people unfamiliar with the Talent Search program may be somewhat surprised by the extent to which projects may offer different services even for students in the same grade level but at different schools.

---

*A project may have different approaches to serving students in the same grade but at different schools.*

---

The variability in service offerings for different students within the same project is illustrated by a few examples from sites we visited. First, table 6.12 shows the

service plans devised by one staff member for two target schools of roughly similar size. It reveals considerable variability by both grade level and school in the *frequency* of major services. For example, at school B, the project staff member planned to see sixth graders half as many times as seniors at the same school, but she would see seniors at school B less than half as many times as seniors at school A.

**Table 6.12—Number of workshops planned for 1998–99, by grade level, at two target schools in the same Talent Search project**

Grade Level	School A	School B
6	3	2
7	3	2
8	6	2
9	6	2
10	6	2
11	6	3
12	9	4

SOURCE: Project staff.

Second, table 6.13 illustrates *subject matter or content* variation. Even within one project, staff members serving different schools may devise different service plans for students at the same grade level. For example, the workshops at high school 1 focused more on personal development (for example, sessions on self-esteem and peer pressure) than did those at high school 2, and the two groups of students visited entirely different sets of universities on their respective college tours.

**Table 6.13—Service plans for sophomores at two high schools within the same Talent Search project, but served by different staff members: 1998–99**

	High school 1 (Talent Search advisor A)	High school 2 (Talent Search advisor B)
September	Workshop on self-esteem College tour (University R) and visit to art museum	Workshop on the PSAT exam Parent night
October	Parent night Workshop on time management and goal setting	Workshop on using high school to get ready for college College Tour (University V) Parent involvement: scholarship night
November	Workshop on career awareness and major selection College tour (University S) and lecture by a professor Community service project	Workshop on making campus visits College tour (University W) College tour (University X) Community service project
December	Workshop on essay writing	Workshop on choosing a college Parent involvement: college night Community service project
January	Workshop on note taking	Workshop on financial aid College tour (University Y and University Z)
February	Workshop on peer pressure and decision making	Workshop on test taking
March	College tour (University T and University U) Workshop on upcoming community service project Community service project	Workshop on careers
April	Workshop on the SAT exam Cultural trip to nearby town	Workshop on course, major, and career selection
May	Scholarship walk-a-thon End of year review	Scholarship walk-a-thon Workshop on military service End of year review (with parents)

SOURCE: Project staff.

Finally, a few projects used different *service delivery methods* for students in the same grade levels but at different target schools. In one of these projects, a staff member provided in-class services once a week to three sixth-grade classes at one school and to one sixth-grade class at a different school. His colleagues at other middle schools typically met with participants before or after school rather than in their regular classes. Similarly, at another project, the director provided in-class



services (for example, games and personal development exercises) every other week to literally every student in a particular middle school, whereas staff serving other target middle schools met with participants after school once or twice a week (primarily for tutoring).

### WHY SUCH VARIABILITY IN STUDENT SERVICES?

The variability in Talent Search services, both between and within projects, reflects several factors. One of the most significant factors was the size of the target area. Projects that served relatively large areas, for example, found it impractical to hold many events in a single, central location, such as the host institution, because of transportation issues. These projects tended to provide the vast majority of their services at target schools. In contrast, projects that served relatively small target areas could, and often did, provide services in a central location. For example, a project serving a cluster of inner-city schools provided a wide variety of services after school every day at its headquarters; another project in a similar setting offered drop-in tutoring every afternoon as well as Saturday morning test-preparation courses at its host institution offices.

A related factor was the number of target schools. Projects with a relatively large number of target schools tended to provide services less often than projects with relatively few target schools. In the case study project with the greatest number of target schools (36), staff seldom visited their assigned schools to meet with students and conduct workshops more than once a month, whereas, at the other end of the continuum, staff in two projects with seven target schools visited each school at least once a week and, in some cases, four days a week.

Target school receptivity also had an important influence on service variability. Project staff reported spending more time at and working more closely with target schools that welcomed and supported the Talent Search program and facilitated student access.

Clearly, some service differences reflected the different needs of various groups or types of participants as determined by project staff and school staff. For example, projects serving isolated rural communities may see a greater need for cultural activities than projects based in large cities, and a project may identify a greater need for tutoring among middle school students than among its high school participants. The service variability highlighted in table 6.12 resulted primarily from the views of chief school officials on the types of workshops needed by students at different grade levels and the number of times that students could and ought to be pulled out of class for such sessions.

Another factor behind service differences was resources. Federal funding levels are an issue underlying intraproject service variability. Average funding levels (about \$300 per participant) can force projects to make trade-offs. For example, if project staff want to implement a highly resource-intensive service in one place

ity can be  
veral factors,  
arget area  
ources.

---

or for one participant group, they may have to balance their plans with less resource-intensive services provided in other places or for other groups. Federal funding levels, however, are *not* an important issue in service differences between projects. All projects face generally similar constraints in terms of grant dollars per participant. Therefore, grant dollars alone are an unlikely cause of different projects adopting widely different service strategies. Much more important to explaining between-project differences is the availability of additional resources such as cash or in-kind contributions from other sources. In cases where projects provided uncommon services, the ability to underwrite those services was often attributable to extra resources. For example, extensive support from Microsoft® was pivotal to the ability of two case study projects to make heavy use of computers in serving students.

Yet another factor was flexible federal guidelines for program operations. Regulations list various categories of services that projects may provide, but they do not specify any services that projects *must* provide for any particular types of participants, let alone details such as service volume or frequency. Thus, Talent Search by design allows projects great discretion in how, when, where, and how much they serve participants to meet program objectives.

Finally, the initiative, preferences, and creativity of Talent Search project staff should not be overlooked. Inter- and intraproject service variation clearly derived in part from staff members' ideas about how best to conduct program activities and how best to take advantage of the discretion accorded projects by program rules. Some projects, for example, placed a relatively high priority on providing a generally consistent set of services across schools. At a project that had, overall, one of the least variable service plans we saw, the director seemed to think that introducing substantial variations in program offerings, such as a high-intensity versus a low-intensity component, would raise equity concerns among major stakeholders. Other projects, though, were more open to varying the type and amount of services available to different participants. Even in the absence of external circumstances that might force them to alter their service mix, such as unexpected changes in target school policies, some projects experimented with new ways of helping various students prepare for a postsecondary education. The scope and range of such efforts had a direct impact on service variability.



