

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

POCANTICO HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



AFTER THE BELL RINGS: **A NEW VISION FOR THE** **AFTER SCHOOL HOURS AT** **POCANTICO HILLS**

Prepared by:
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To the Members of the Board of Education and Dr. Fred D. Smith:

As you begin to close out the 2008-2009 school year and look forward to the 2009-2010 school year, here is an assessment of the current After School Program and a new vision for the programs and activities offered during the after school hours at Pocantico Hills School for your consideration. ***After the Bell Rings*** explores the current status of the After School Program and proposes a new vision for the After School Program. In keeping with the commitment to a high quality education for all students at Pocantico Hills, an integrated high quality program during the after school hours should be a critical component of that high quality education.

After the Bell Rings has several components:

1. A Summary of Findings
2. A New Vision for the After School Hours
3. The Fee Structure and Options for Families
4. Next Steps with a Time Frame

I trust that you will find ***After the Bell Rings*** helpful to you as you continue to improve the learning experiences for all students at Pocantico Hills.

Sincerely,

Margaret P. Olson

Dr. Margaret P. Olson
Consultant

I. A Summary of Findings

Introduction and Methodology

In the fall of 2008, the Superintendent, Dr. Fred D. Smith, asked Dr. Margaret P. Olson to review and assess the Pocantico Hills After School Program. Dr. Olson presented a proposal for this assessment, which was approved, to the Superintendent and the Board of Education. Dr. Olson began work with focus groups with parents in October and November. After a medical leave for spinal surgery and recovery, Dr. Olson resumed work on the project in the Spring of 2009. *After the Bell Rings*, The final assessment and recommendations were available for the June 2009 meeting of the Board of Education.

Dr. Olson gathered data for this assessment from a variety of sources:

1. Three focus groups with parents that were open to all; the Superintendent sent letters home to all parents; the group discussions were scheduled in the evenings to accommodate parents' work schedules. In all, 25 parents attended one of the focus groups.
2. A formal survey, designed by Dr. Olson, was sent home to parents in December. The response rate was low.
3. Interviews with Dr. Smith, Mr. Scotto-Friedman, the Assistant Superintendent for Business and Mr. Steele, the Principal of the Pocantico Hills School.
4. Extended interviews with the current staff of the After School Program, Mr. Chanin and Mrs. Kraemer.
5. A site visit to the After School program.
6. Focus group discussions with the Primary School teachers.
7. Focus group discussions with the Intermediate School teachers.
8. Review of written materials about and by the program

9. Research on fees charged by other after school programs in similar communities in Westchester County
10. Review of some of the research available on high quality after school programs.

The Findings

- 1. Key Component:** The After School Program is not a key component in the learning and development of students at Pocantico Hills School. At best, it is perceived as a basic service to a particular group of working parents who need child care. At worst, it seems to be almost an after thought, disconnected from the goals and work of the school. Thus the potential value of such a program is not realized at Pocantico Hills.

- 2. Views of the Parents:** Parents express both satisfaction and dissatisfaction about the After School Program. The focus groups mostly drew parents who raised concerns and wanted to make suggestions for improvement. Parents who are working full time and whose children are generally below 4th or 5th grade seem to be the most satisfied with the program. Some parents expressed satisfaction with the homework time which helped them. Several working parents of children older than 4th or 5th grade expressed dissatisfaction because their children grew bored in the program and because their perception was that the program activities were more suited for younger children. Parents of younger children raised concerns about safety, supervision and communication from the staff about their children and the program's activities. Several parents requested longer hours because of their work and travel schedules. Some parents wanted their children to have the opportunity to participate in

the ELO program and expressed confusion about the lack of coordination between the two programs. Several parents mentioned concerns about current and past staff; about frequent staff changes; about the rules issued by staff this year; about the level of staffing in the program and about the training of staff to work with younger children. Many suggestions for specific programs and activities emerged from these discussion groups. Many of the parents' comments and recommendations are included here.

3. Views of the Primary Teachers: The primary teachers expressed many concerns about the after school program and the coordination with them. "Our kids hate to go to the after school program and cry when they have to go," said one teacher. Another teacher spoke about what she perceived as the mishandling of the time of transition between the school day and the after school program. Another decried the quality of the supervision and the lack of equipment, space and activities in the program. It was apparent that there was almost no connection between the teachers and the after school program and much of the interactions are perceived negatively.

4. Views of the Intermediate Teachers: The intermediate teachers raised many concerns, including a discussion about the responsibilities of the program to provide homework help and time to students. Teachers were critical of some parents' expectations that the student complete all homework during the program and at the beginning of the program. Some teachers were concerned that students were bored in the program and that there was not enough to do. All of the intermediate teachers indicated that they had little to do with the after school program.

5. Views of the Staff: Mr. Chanin described his attempts to create a balanced and structured program, with themes related to literacy throughout the year. He stated, with some chagrin, that “parents see me as a baby sitter.” Mr. Chanin spoke at some length about his credentials and training in Elementary Education and Literacy in Education. He did describe his efforts to communicate with parents about the program and about their children. Mr. Chanin seems very oriented to the middle range of elementary students rather than to the younger or older students. His perspective is the perspective of a classroom teacher. The tasks of coordination of the program and communication are tucked in between his direct work with children. He did not include any mention of external enrichment resources for the program, or field trips or special activities to engage the students.

Observations of the Evaluator

The Pocantico After School Program has a foundation in the school but is not a high quality after school program for these reasons:

1. Mission and Goals:

The After School Program does not have a clear mission and goals that would support a quality program, a mission and goals that are developed by and accepted by all the stakeholders: parents, students, teachers, administrators and the Board of Education. There is no shared vision of learning for the seamless time that children spend in school.

2. Safety and Supervision:

The first rule of all education and after school programs is that the children must be safe and be properly supervised. It is not at all clear

that the necessary work and support to ensure that children are safe and always well supervised in the After School Program is available.

3. Menu of Activities:

The program does not offer a rich and developmentally appropriate menu of activities so that children can grow, learn and have fun during the after school hours. Such a rich array would include dance, music, art, sports, social emotional development, and interdisciplinary literacy themed projects that students could choose and create a product of their own. There is very minimal intentional programming that occurs in the After School Program; and the vast array of resources in the school are generally not used. The vast array of local resources are also not used for field trips and collaborations with local programs such as Historic Hudson Valley or the Jacob Burns Film Center; the School has working collaborations with both organizations but their rich resources and program potential are not utilized by the After School Program.

4. Age and grade ranges:

The program is not structured to accommodate all the age and grade ranges in the school so that younger children and older children can take advantage of its offerings. In particular, it is clear that the After School Program fails to address the interests and needs of emerging adolescents.

5. Links to the school day:

The program is not linked in a thoughtful way to the curriculum of the day school nor to the New York State Education Department Learning Standards, so that children miss the opportunities to enhance and explore the skills and topics they learn during the day. The school day staff is not engaged in the After School Program and information about specific

students is not shared, so that the After School Program misses more opportunities to support student learning. Such linkages are now considered key components of high quality after school programs and considered important contributions to children's learning and development.

6. Mechanisms for student and parent feedback:

All high quality programs have put in place formal mechanisms to get feedback from students and parents. The common methods for student feedback are surveys and youth councils that promote leadership opportunities. The common methods for parent feedback are surveys and parent advisory councils that can also include students. Thus the program misses opportunities to ensure that it is serving its constituencies to the best of its ability.

7. Staff assignments:

The current staff assignments do not support all the coordination, scheduling, planning, external connections and parent communication that is necessary to operate a high quality program. A Coordinator cannot provide direct programs and activities for students while being expected to perform the duties related to coordination. These are two separate sets of responsibilities and should be recognized as such.

8. Numbers of staff:

There is not enough staff to create a high quality program and to ensure that this program meets commonly accepted standards in the appropriate professional fields. For example, the accepted (and in some cases regulated) staff to student ratio for children under the age of 9 is 1 to 10;

over that age, it is 1 to 15. Only accidentally does the Pocantico program meet these ratios – when children are not in attendance.

9. Staff selection and development:

There are a specific set of skills and values that an effective after school staff must have or must develop to support a high quality after school program. These include communication skills, organizational skills, commitment to positive youth development and effective age appropriate programming. There is no evidence that these skills have been part of the staff selection process nor is there any evidence of professional development for after school staff.

10. “A Place in the school:”

The program does not have “a place in the school.” It has no office or space of its own; the staff does not participate in the life of the school; it has very limited contact with teachers; there is very limited communication with school administration. Teachers generally know little about what actually goes on in the program. The program only seems to come to people’s attention when a parent complains about it.

11. Lack of integration after the bell rings:

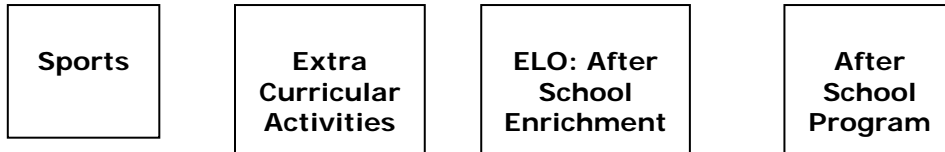
To this external observer, it appears that there are at least 4 major groups of activities going on after school, and they are not connected, they are not integrated and the people who coordinate them rarely talk with each other. Sometimes there is conversation over scheduling and the use of the space but that is all. Yet their constituents are the same: students and parents. The four are: school sports, extra curricular activities, the ELO program and the After School Program.

12. Professional connections:

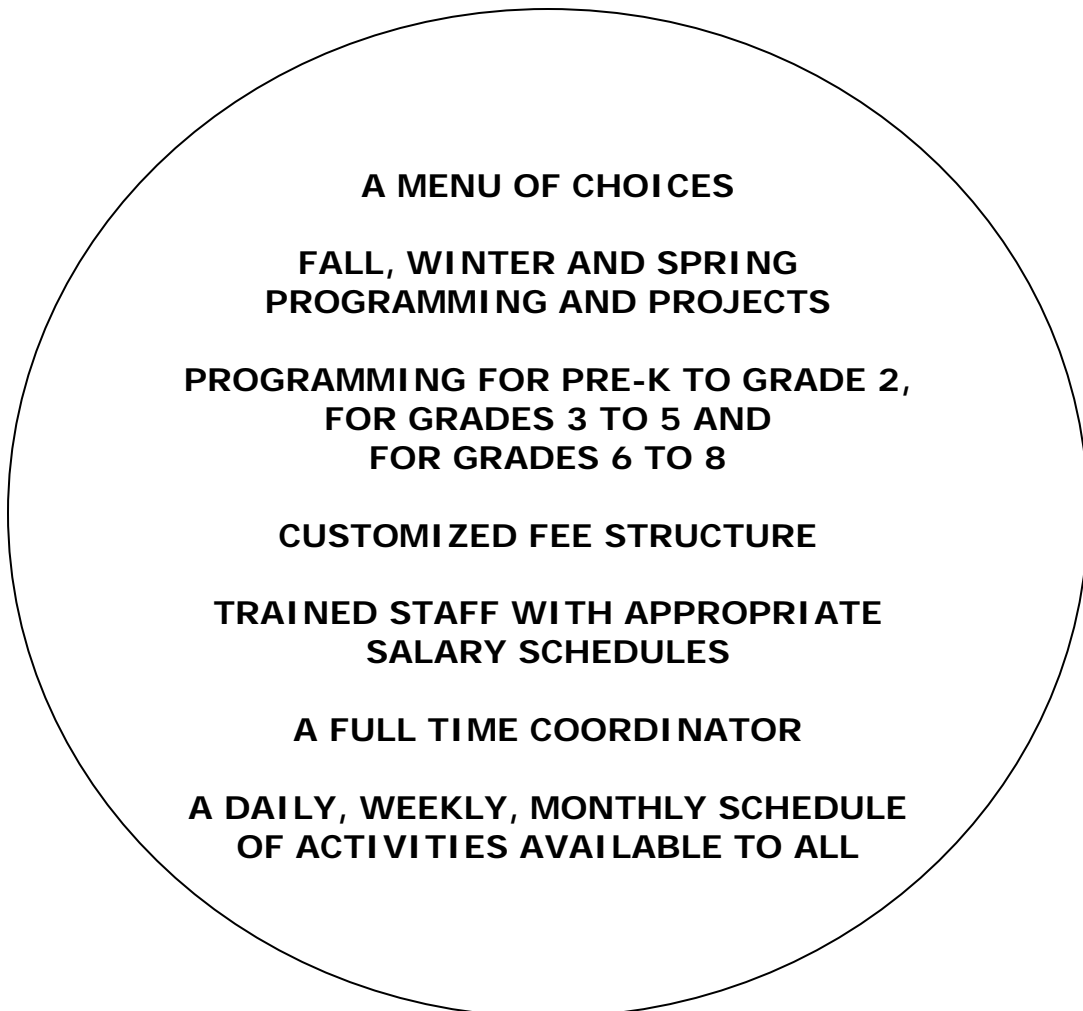
The After School Program has no connection to the professional after school community in Westchester County, in New York State and in the nation. The Program does not adhere to commonly accepted standards, it does not take advantage of professional development opportunities for after school programs, it does not use the vast array of resources and program models that have been developed explicitly for after school programs; the program does not take advantage of local enrichment opportunities, such as those offered through the Westchester Arts Council, Arts-Westchester; and it does not take advantage of the networking opportunities with colleagues in this profession, locally, regionally and nationally. For example, the Institute for School Age Care offers an array of workshops and trainings that the program staff could attend. At a minimum, the Coordinator needs the time and the direction to explore these professional resources. Thus the Pocantico program misses too many opportunities to be a quality program.

II. A New Vision for the After School Hours

Currently the after school hours at Pocantico Hills School look something like the boxes below: separate and autonomous, working at times with the Principal but certainly not with each other. And their constituents are exactly the same: the students and families who attend Pocantico Hills.



THE NEW VISION: ONE PROGRAM AFTER THE BELL RINGS



The New Vision: One Program After the Bell Rings

1. Student and family choices

In the new program after the bell rings at Pocantico Hills School, students and families will have choices of which programs and activities that they want to participate in. Choices will be offered at least 3 times a year. As described below, the menu of options will vary according to the age and grade level of the students and the seasons of the year. The menu will be extensive, the programs and activities will be intentionally linked to the school day, as much as feasible the programs will be project based and all will utilize best practices from the professional field of out of school time. In each of the components, the choices will include academic, cultural, social emotional, and physical programming; thus attending to the needs and interests of each child, connecting to the school day and to the New York State Learning Standards.

2. The Learning Center:

A key component in the program will be the Learning Center, which will be staffed by classroom teachers, teacher assistants and tutors who are college students and high school students. The Learning Center will be available to all students after school at least 2 hours per day four days each week. The Center will provide homework help, tutoring as requested by the student and/or student's teacher, test preparation, study skills workshops and preparation for state assessments as necessary. Students and parents can choose times that the student will work in The Center; teachers can recommend students spend time in The Center; students can sign up for workshops as they are offered throughout the year. Student schedules will be customized to accommodate time in the Learning Center. The Center will be located in

its own quiet space, with access to computers for learning support and projects. As a resource in The Learning Center, it is recommended that the District invest in Tutor.com which provides on line tutoring. Staff positions in the Learning Center will be posted twice each year. Teachers and teacher assistants who choose to work in the Center will be compensated accordingly. The Coordinator will work with high schools and Pace University to identify and select tutors.

3. Three Major Program Components: Suggested themes and projects:

- a. Pre-K to Grade 2:** Literacy through the Arts with an Around the World theme: activities can include: story telling, making books, dance, music and drama; character education that builds on the school's values and uses some of the components of the nationally recognized Second Step; martial arts, sports, games and physical activity from around the world; special events and field trips to supplement the day curriculum. The current morning/early afternoon Pre-K program will still be available to families and will be incorporated into this component, with adjustments for the age of the children and the time of day they will be participating.
- b. Grade 3 to 5:** Enrichment Projects in Literacy, The Arts, Science and Technology: activities can include: creative and persuasive writing, poetry, drama, music and dance instruction, visual arts and technology, architectural projects, science explorations, culinary and nutrition projects, chess; training in peer mediation and conflict resolution; community service projects; martial arts, sports, games and physical activity from around the world; special events and field trips to supplement the day curriculum. Projects would be offered on a rotating basis three times each year.

c. Grade 6 to 8: Clubs: A variety of clubs will be offered on a rotating basis to students in the Arts (visual and performing; film, photography, design); Law and Justice; Technology including web design and computer applications; the Environment and Ecology; Culinary and nutrition; Community Service; Career and College Clubs will explore various careers and college majors with field trips to colleges and related to careers; and **Sports:** incorporate the school's sports programs along with specialized sports clinics, strength and conditioning, martial arts, nutrition for athletes. A Youth Leadership and Development project will include a Youth Council, participation in debate teams and a youth court.

Along with The Learning Center, these three grade oriented program components will be the heart of the new after school program at Pocantico Hills. Students and families will have opportunities to choose activities and create schedules that fit the needs of the student and family. The program will have thematic coherence, will be age appropriate, will be linked to the school day, will incorporate all current after school activities under one umbrella, and will be open to all students in the school. Some of the programs will be offered at no cost to families, such as school sports and some extra curricular activities. Other activities will have varying costs posted at the beginning of the year, with options to fit the needs of families.

4. An Organizational Structure to facilitate integration

A full time Coordinator will have the responsibility of planning, implementing and monitoring this new program after the bell rings. The tasks of the Coordinator will include:

1. work with the Principal to ensure the integration of all after school activities;

2. plan and publish the schedule with input from teachers, administrators, and parents;
3. conduct parent and student orientations throughout the year to ensure comprehensive information is available to all; register all students and maintain student records; maintain emergency contact and health information on all students; maintain pick up information on all students;
4. make and maintain connections to external resources and bring them into the after school program for the benefit of the students;
5. identify and select staff for all activities; train new staff as necessary;
6. ensure that the staff and the program meet all safety requirements;
7. provide all necessary supplies for the program activities and coordinate all required transportation;
8. create and maintain a communications network about the program, frequently disseminating information to school faculty and staff, to parents and to students as appropriate;
9. work with the Youth Council and the Parent Advisory Council to ensure that their feedback is incorporated into the program;
10. participate in professional after school organizations, networks and conferences, bringing program models and resources to the Pocantico after school program.

The current coordinator of the ELO program can be integrated into this structure. The Director of Athletics will provide information about athletic schedules and participating students to the Coordinator. Information about all extra curricular activities will be made available to the Coordinator so that it can be posted and made available to all students who choose to participate. All efforts will be made to facilitate and coordinate the use of all available space in the building.

5. A daily schedule

In this new program, each student will have a customized daily schedule that will be facilitated by the use of a web based data management system. This system has the capacity to register students; to record all program activities and staff; to print and maintain schedules; to record attendance; to provide information about the location of activities and students and to create reports as requested. The cost for a site license is \$500 per year and will be maintained by the Coordinator.

6. Professional staff

In the last decade, the field of after school, or out of school time, has grown to become a professional field, with nationally recognized standards for programs and staff; professional training and credentials, professional organizations and networks devoted to the field; independent research studies and organizations devoted exclusively to the field of out of school time and identifying best practices; university institutes and faculty devoted to out of school time; major local, state and national public and private funding streams; curriculum resources specifically devoted to out of school time programs and major publications in the field. Training courses, professional development workshops and even college degrees are now available to after school program staff to ensure that the programs are of the highest quality and students and families are being well served. The Pocantico Hills after school program should become part of this ever expanding and evolving professional field. The program deserves professionally trained staff who are utilizing the resources and best practices of the field. All staff in the program should be trained in the best practices of serving children and in safety practices,

including the school safety plan and its application to after school to ensure the safety and security of children at all times.

7. Community Collaborations

The Pocantico Hills School has many collaborations with external organizations that enrich the school day for all grades. Those collaborations, such as the ones with Stone Barns, Historic Hudson Valley and Jacob Burns Film Center, can be extended to enrich the after school program. For example, Jacob Burns does "Cinemanía" as an after school program for many school districts in Westchester. The after school program would be enriched with an artists residency program provided by Arts-Westchester and/or Sleepy Hollow Performing Arts and/or the Music Conservatory of Westchester. A partnership with Pace University in Pleasantville could lead to School of Education students working in the after school program and other schools providing workshops and faculty, such as the Lienhard School of Nursing. For the older students, exploring Pace would provide a good introduction to the world of higher education. Bringing in a variety of external organizations and resources will increase the learning opportunities for students in the after school program and will increase the richness and depth of the offerings in the program.

8. Youth Council

Incorporated into the after school program, a Youth Council will provide opportunities for youth leadership skills development and will give the program a formal mechanism to ensure that student feedback is incorporated into the program. The Council can have two groups, one for younger grades and one for the middle school. Each group can learn and apply leadership skills, including learning the characteristics of influential leaders and creating community service activities to apply the skills. The

Council can also make class presentations about the after school program, conduct discussions with students to get feedback about the program, solicit program ideas from students and families and incorporate their suggestions into the program. It is critical that the voice of the students who participate in the program be heard.

9. Parent Advisory Council

There is currently no opportunity for parents to participate in the design and development of the after school program. It was clear to this external observer during the focus groups with parents that they have many good ideas, many concerns and helpful feedback for the program. This council can be a subcommittee of the PTA if desired. It is critical that the voice of the parents whose children participate in the program be heard. Such a Council would be organized by the Coordinator who would provide information and set up a communications network for their feedback and guidance, including email, informal discussions and quarterly formal meetings.

III. The Fee Structure and Options for Families

Current Fee Structure and Options:

After observing the program, reviewing the materials on the program and talking with parents, several concerns and issues were identified:

- 1. Different fee structures:** The variety of after school activities at Pocantico Hills School all have different fee structures which leads to creating the autonomous boxes of programs described above and inhibits the free flow of students among all programs.
- 2. Missing services:** After school programs in other schools offer a variety of cost options and services for parents, including credit for early pickup, a one day participation fee, a regular pick up time at 6pm and an extended hour option until 6:30. The extended hour option was requested by several parents during the focus group discussions with parents.
- 3. Missing programs:** Other after school programs offer activities for students on half days of school, on Superintendent Conference Days, on school vacations and before school, all for additional costs.
- 4. Low charges:** The Evaluator did some research on the charges of other local after school programs in schools. As can be seen on the following chart, the charges at Pocantico Hills are much lower than the charges in other communities. The other programs are all run by non-profit organizations and not by the schools; clearly they have to charge for administrative overhead. Yet they are all non profit, so that does not completely explain the differences in the pricing structure between Pocantico Hills and the other programs.

It is strongly recommended that a more current fee structure, with more options, be developed so that the high quality program vision of *After the Bell Rings* can be realized in Pocantico.

Comparative Fee Structures

Schedule	Current Pocantico After School Program 3 hours	Chappaqua Children's Workshop School based Elementary and MS****	Enrichment Center at Yorktown at all Yorktown schools***	Kids Space of Rye at elementary School**	KEEPS of Mamaroneck Program located in a church*	YMCA of Northern Westchester at schools in Somers, Pleasantville Mahopac
1 day	NA	\$97/mo	\$85/mo	NA	\$84/mo	NA
2 days	\$140/mo	\$194/mo	\$165/mo	\$220/mo	\$168/mo	\$215/mo
3 days	\$190/mo	\$291/mo	\$250/mo	\$300/mo	\$252/mo	\$270/mo
4 days	\$220/mo	\$388/mo	\$335/mo	\$340/mo	\$336/mo	\$335/mo
5 days	\$260/mo	\$485/mo	\$420/mo	\$365/mo	\$420/mo	\$370/mo

All the other programs listed are community organizations that run programs in schools. I was not able to identify an after school program operated by a school. These programs are licensed by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, with requirements for staffing, training, space and programming. Fees are generally for programs until 6pm; some programs offer hours until 6:30pm for extra fees. All programs have registration fees and sibling discounts.

****Chappaqua Children's Workshop: fees above are for Elementary programs until 6pm; fees are slightly higher for Middle School; has 5pm and 6pm pick up options; offers fee-based before school and vacation programming at all elementary and middle schools in Chappaqua.

***Enrichment Center of Yorktown: fees above are for grades 3-5 program; fees are slightly lower for K-2 program; have discounts for early pick up before 5pm.

**KEEPS of Mamaroneck: fees are 20% higher for the child to stay until 6:30.

*Kids Space of Rye also has a combined ½ day Kindergarten and after school program; for 5 days the maximum charge is \$565 per month; Pocantico's maximum charge is \$420 per month

IV. Next Steps with a Timeframe

1. **Work Group:** Convene a small working group of parents, faculty and administrators who will be charged with the responsibility of implementing *After the Bell Rings*, including a new mission and goals for the after school hours at Pocantico Hills, a schedule of activities for the Fall of 2009, and a fee structure. Submit plans to the Board of Education for final approval by July 20, 2009.
2. **Coordinator:** Develop a job description for a full time Program Coordinator. Disseminate the information about the position opening. Interview candidates. Select a Coordinator by August 10, 2009.
3. **Program Brochure with Activities and Fees:** Create the brochure and distribute to parents by August 15, 2009.
4. **Program Staff:** Circulate internal position openings for program activities instructors and club advisors among school faculty and staff. Develop descriptions of tutoring positions and others as appropriate. Disseminate at Pace University and at the high schools. Select staff by August 25, 2009.
5. **Staff Orientation and Training:** Hold Staff Orientation Days on August 31 and on September 1, 2009.
6. **School Faculty and Staff:** Attend initial meetings of faculty and staff before school opens and give a presentation on *After the Bell Rings* at Pocantico Hills.
7. **Program Registration and Enrollment:** Opens on August 25 and continues through the month of September for the Fall. Registration will reopen during the second and third program cycles. Set up web based student registration and attendance system. Distribute student schedules as students enroll.
8. **Board of Education:** Make a presentation on the opening of *After the Bell Rings* at the end of September meeting of the Board of Education.
9. **Parent Advisory Council:** Organize and hold first meeting of the Council by the end of September, 2009.