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Chapter Title: INTRODUCTION

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Several long-term trends have led to increased interest on the part of the American public in how and where children spend their time after school. First, the percentage of parents at home when school lets out has steadily declined over the past several decades. A second trend is the growing number of highly publicized violent incidents involving children and adolescents. Third, a move toward academic accountability has increased attention to after-school programs as a means of improving school performance.

In response to these concerns, the number of after-school programs has steadily risen over the past decade. In 1997, 16 percent of children aged six to twelve years with employed mothers participated in a before- or after-school program (Capizzano, Tout, and Adams, 2000). Increased federal and state funding suggests that the number of such programs will increase in the coming years. For example, funding for the U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs increased from \$1 million in 1997 to \$40 million in 1998 and \$450 million in 2000 (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000).

Given the growing interest in and funding for after-school programs, it has become important to be able to identify which programs are effectively designed and managed. Sponsors need reassurance that they are supporting programs that are benefiting the children, parents, and communities they are serving.

RAND was commissioned by Stone Soup Child Care Programs, a nonprofit organization that administers school-based after-school programs throughout California, to measure the adherence of its

after-school programs to a set of recognized practices. Three tasks were carried out to achieve this objective. Task 1 was a thorough review of the published after-school care literature to identify practices that are generally accepted as characteristic of quality care. Task 2 involved the design and implementation of a data collection effort to measure adherence of a sample of the sponsor's after-school programs to the practices identified in Task 1. Task 3 involved analyzing the data collected as part of Task 2 and summarizing the results.

We anticipate that this report, which summarizes the final product of the three tasks, will prove useful to researchers, practitioners, and funding organizations with an interest in after-school care. Chapter One provides a systematic assessment of the state-of-the-art knowledge of after-school care and recognized practices. For practitioners, this will provide a guide to the processes and outcomes that are widely considered to be indicative of quality care. For researchers and funding organizations, it may serve as a useful and systematic summary of the state of the current knowledge base while also highlighting the lack of solid empirical research as to what characteristics of programs are associated with positive student outcomes. Chapters Two and Three summarize the approach we took to measuring adherence to the practices identified in Task 1 and the types of analyses that can shed light on a program's strengths and weaknesses. These chapters will be useful for practitioners or funding organizations interested in evaluating how well after-school care programs are adhering to currently recognized practices.