

UC Berkeley

IURD Working Paper Series

Title

Oakland Youth's Views of Working Experiences and Other After-School Activities and Programs

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/26t7v0nz>

Authors

Palmquist, Kirstin
Pascual, Ami L

Publication Date

1989

Working Paper 89-04

(formerly Working Paper 009)

Oakland Youth's Views of Work Experiences and Other After-School Activities and Programs

Kristin Palmquist

Amelita Pascual



The University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum is a partnership of the University of California at Berkeley; California State University, Hayward; Mills College; Holy Names College; the Peralta Community College District; and the Oakland community.

University of California at Berkeley
Institute of Urban and Regional Development

**UNIVERSITY-OAKLAND METROPOLITAN FORUM
Education & Youth Panel**

**OAKLAND YOUTH'S VIEWS OF WORK EXPERIENCES
AND OTHER AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS**

by Kristin Palmquist, PhD,
Coordinator, Education & Youth Panel
and
Ami L. Pascual
Department of City & Regional Planning

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1988, after several meetings to discuss and review research on the situation of children and youth in Oakland, the Education & Youth Panel of the University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum selected work experiences and after-school activities for youth ages 12 to 18 for its first in-depth project.

The Work Experience Task Force and Panel staff proceeded to conduct a study which would take into account youth's previous experiences in the world of work, their preferences for future job training, their awareness of programs and activities in their neighborhoods, and the types of activities that they preferred to learn or participate.¹ Data also were obtained on survey respondents' college and career plans and demographic characteristics.

This report is based on that survey, which included 226 Oakland youth, ages 14 to 18, attending the 1988 summer session of the Oakland Public Schools. Pre-test telephone interviews had been conducted previously with seventeen 11-18 year-old students, four teachers, and three work experience administrators. Their ideas substantially influenced the design of the subsequent survey.

¹Research assistant Ami L. Pascual conducted pre-test interviews with youth, teachers, and directors of work experience programs. The survey was a joint data collection effort of the Forum and the Urban Strategies Council. Maria Casey and Brett Mahoney of the Council were instrumental in the development, administration, and coding of the survey.

HIGHLIGHTS

Youth welcome unpaid work experiences of many kinds--an adult mentor to "shadow" or provide ongoing guidance in the world of work or volunteer work in a career field of interest. Youth want assistance with preparing resumes and job interviews. Youth appreciate Career Day speakers.

Youth also are eager to work in many types of jobs, not necessarily for high pay, in order to gain a foothold in the labor force. Most prefer jobs in the retail or office sector, but some want jobs in technical or human services fields.

The desire to work contrasts sharply with actual job opportunities. Actual labor force participation rates of survey respondents are only half of those desired or planned. Restaurant jobs are the staple of available work, whereas youth prefer to work in a variety of more stimulating settings.

Females are particularly enthusiastic about guidance from adults into the world of work, and about working, in general.

Youth display energy, activity, and creativity in their preferences for after-school activities. Besides sports and singing groups, youth are eager to learn intricate, labor-intensive, or worldly skills such as minor car maintenance, foreign language proficiency, photography, and making videos.

Males and females express many stereotypically gender-typed preferences for after-school activities. But organizations can encourage more equal opportunities to learn various skills, as schools already do.

Survey respondents, despite their at-risk status, were well informed about educational requirements--years of schooling and grades--for the professional careers to which they aspired. But the quality of public schooling, as reflected in attrition and dropout rates, as well as statewide test score rankings of five out of six Oakland high schools, is unlikely to prepare most Oakland youth to perform well in college or the work force.

FINDINGS

The World of Work

Survey responses indicated that youth have a strong desire to participate in the work force. Many had prepared resumes (40%) or interviewed for jobs (65%). Furthermore, most youth cited several reasons for liking to work: (Figure 16)

- *The vast majority wanted to earn money (85%).

- *Most wanted to learn more skills (63%).

- *Sizable numbers also appreciated the intrinsic, human qualities of working, such as "Work allows me to interact with people" (43%), work "makes me feel good" (35%), and I like to work "so I won't be bored" (30%).

Similarly, most youth interviewed by telephone liked their jobs, except for those that worked in fast-food restaurants. Interviewees cited dislike of people on the job, boss or co-workers, as reasons for not liking previous or current jobs.

Labor force participation

Youth's past opportunities to participate in the labor force had been disappointing, compared to their eagerness to have paid jobs and unpaid work experiences.

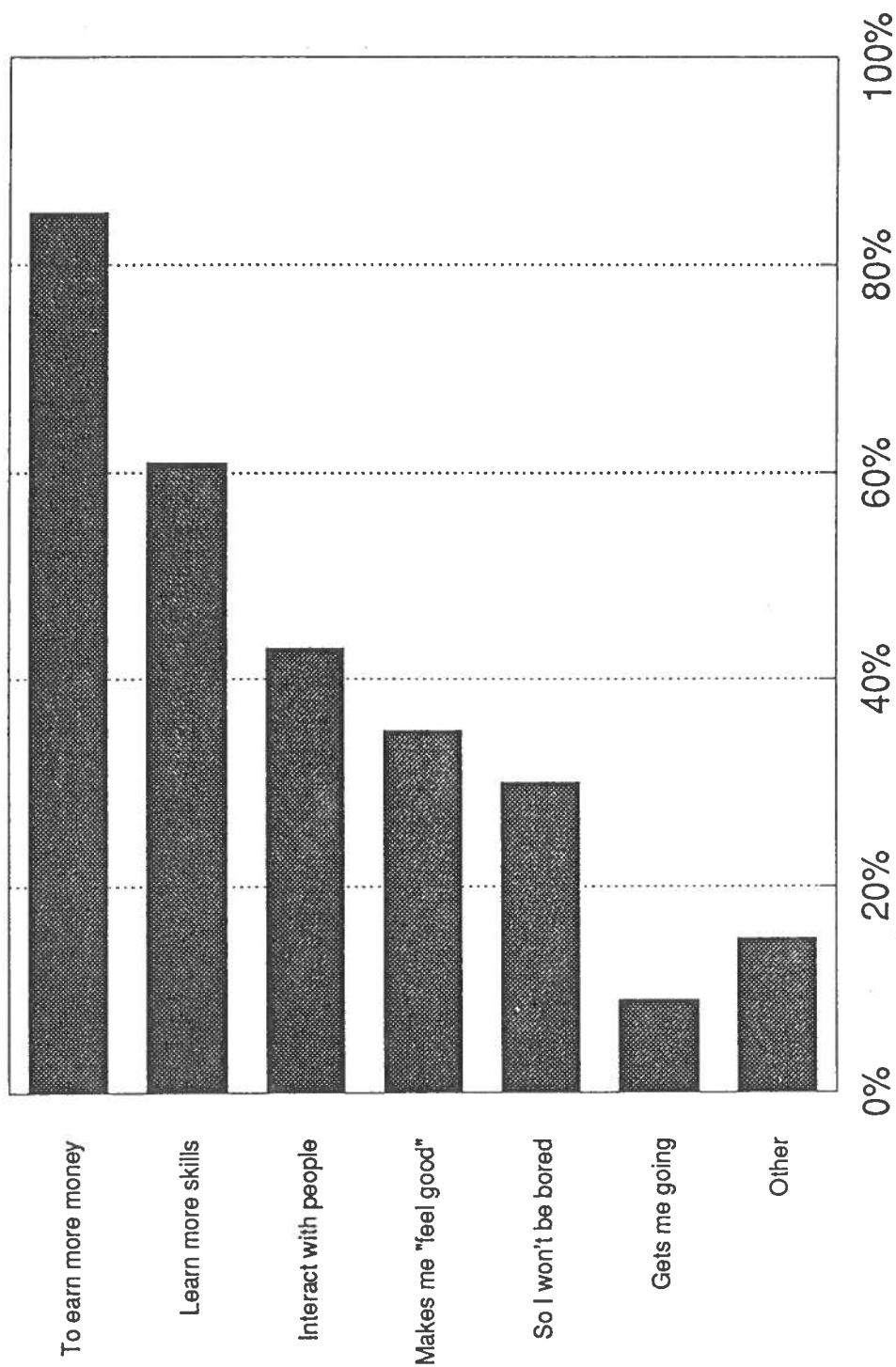
Youth were not likely to have recently held an after-school or summer job. Only 30% had an after-school job in 1987-88, just 39% had a summer 1988 job. In contrast, 70% planned to get an after-school job in the fall of 1988.

More of the older survey respondents had after-school jobs the previous year, compared to younger youth. However, summer job rates were equalized by the Summer Youth Employment Training Program's jobs and other factors. Furthermore, younger respondents were just as likely as older youth to plan to have an after-school job in the fall of 1988.

Comparison of Oakland youth employment rates to other states

The labor force participation of these Oakland youth was unusually low, compared to national data. In the Pacific states in 1980, 63% of the 12th graders and 44% of the 10th graders were

Figure 16. What Youth Like About Working
What do you like about having a job? *



* Multiple responses do not sum to 100%

employed.² Only 38% of the survey respondents who had been in 10th and 11th grades the previous year, and 15% of those who had been in 8th and 9th grades, held a job during the 1987-88 school year.

Kinds of jobs currently available to youth

Youth's perceptions of what jobs were available to them right now often were limited to fast-food restaurants, office jobs, and babysitting. One 14-year old interviewed by telephone classified the working world into a dichotomy: executive or fast-food. Nevertheless, most interviewees and survey respondents held realistic expectations for possible after-school jobs and "ideal jobs for right now," such as office jobs, art/recreation attendant, teacher's aide, or working with children or the elderly.

Jobs that survey respondents regarded as "ideal for right now" provided a stark contrast to the jobs they recently had held. Many of the youth (38%) preferred to do sales or clerical work in a store or office setting, but only 10% had held such jobs. Instead most youth who had jobs worked in restaurants: For example, in 1987-88 half of the 30% of youth who had after-school jobs worked in restaurants. In the summer of 1988, one-third of the 39% of youth who had summer jobs worked in restaurants. A number of youth preferred technical jobs, construction, or community service, but only a handful had held such jobs (Figures 11 and 9b).

Locating jobs

The majority of survey respondents found out about jobs through relatives, friends, the newspaper, or signs in store windows. Youth interviewed by telephone summed this up as "being in the right place at the right time," or "finding jobs by accident." However, the fact that at least one-fourth of the survey respondents located jobs through work experience programs or the schools indicates the potential for informing students through organized programs (Figure 12).

Nevertheless, personal interviews found that youth's knowledge of the existence of work experience programs was vague. Most had not participated. Youth generally stated that work experience programs were "around," but they felt that the programs did not advertise themselves well.

²National Center for Education Statistics, Youth Employment During High School, 1981 (Noah Lewin-Epstein, National Opinion Research Center, Chicago, Illinois).

Figure 11. "Ideal Jobs For Right Now"

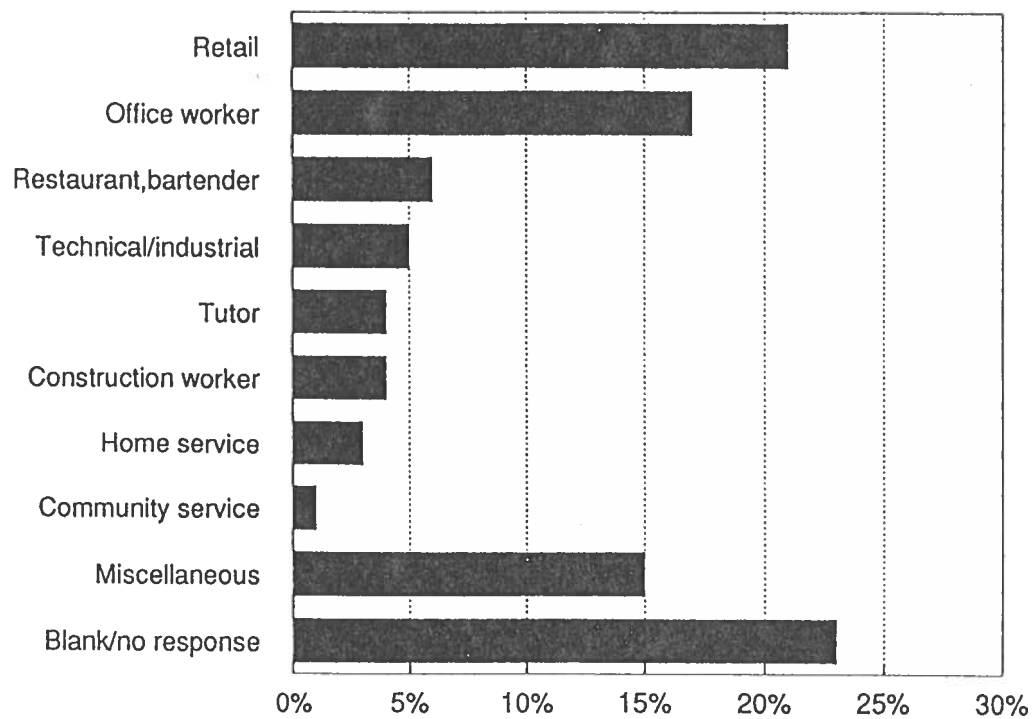


Figure 9b. Kinds of Jobs Youth Held During the 1987-88 School Year

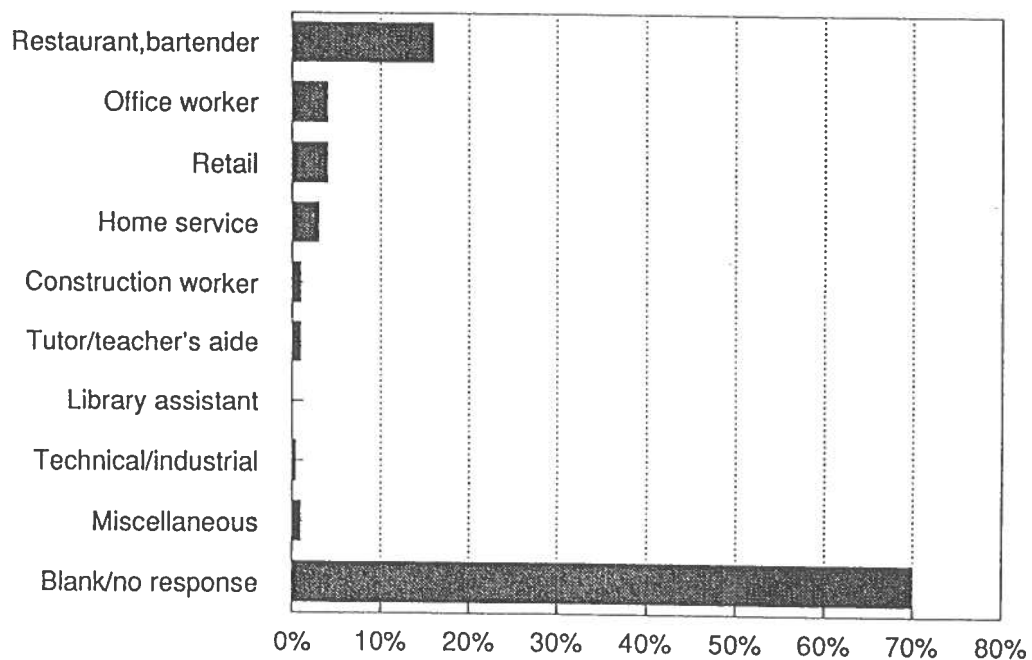
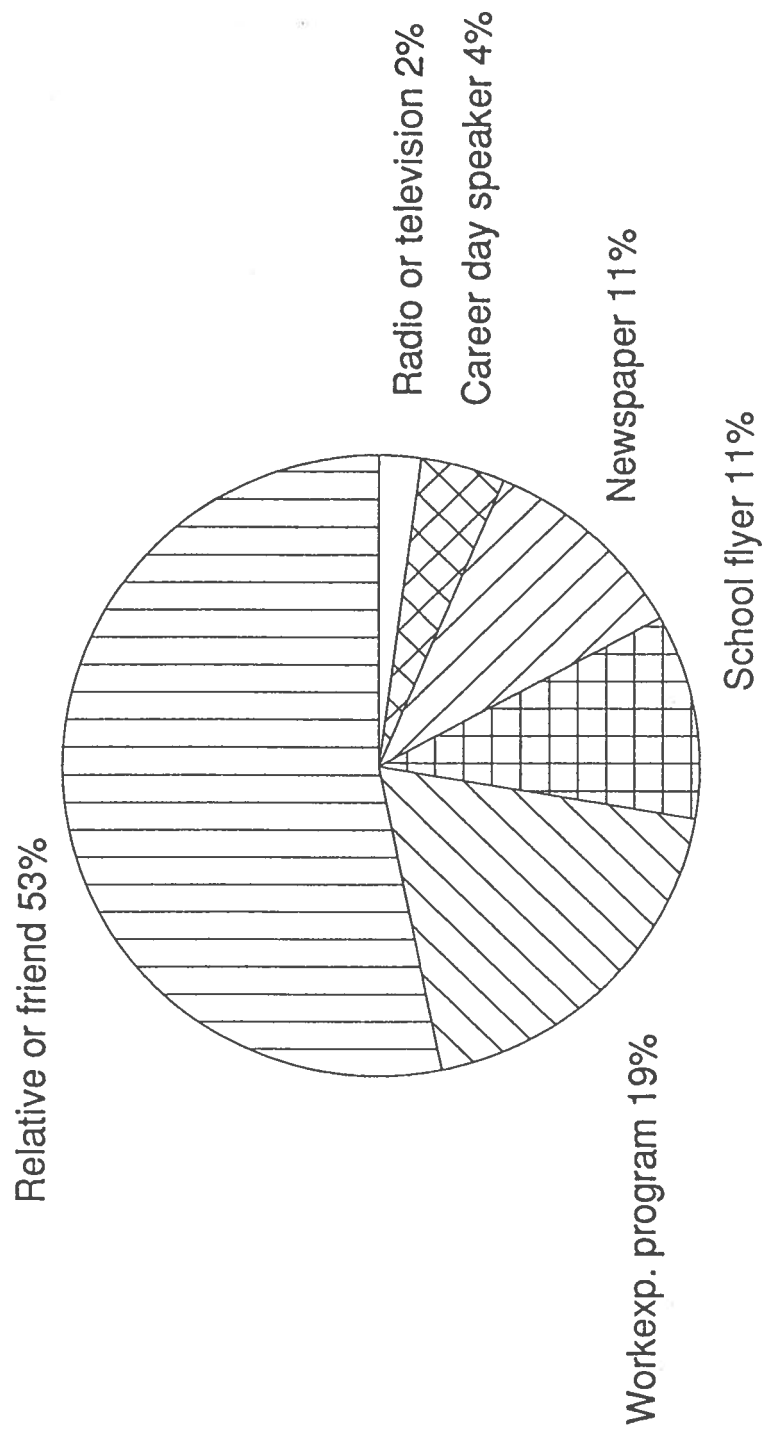


Figure 12. Sources of Job Information
How did you find out about your job?



Youths' responses to work experience opportunities

Survey responses reveal that Oakland youth view adults as helpful in a variety of ways to get into the work force. Both genders, all grade levels, and both at-risk and accelerating students were eager to hold jobs and have work experiences which prepared them for careers. Females' enthusiasm was even greater than that of males.

Youth were eager to work in a field that they liked. Fundamentally, youth viewed volunteer work leading to future, high-level careers versus the routine jobs which are paid right now as a trade-off. The most popular unpaid work experience included in the survey was "shadowing" workers for a day or a week to find out what they do every day on the job (78%). Fewer youth wanted to do volunteer (non-paid) work in a job that interests them (56%), which implies unpaid work on an ongoing basis.

Occupational preferences for volunteer work or "shadowing"

Sports and recreation, followed by communications, human services, and engineering, headed the list for interesting volunteer work (Figures 13a and 13b). Fashion designers and nurses or doctors were preferred by one-third of survey respondents for "shadowing" for a day or a week, especially among female youth. Males preferred shadowing skilled tradesmen--mechanics, carpenters, electricians (Figures 14a and 14b).

Considering that many respondents actually worked in stores, relatively few youth were interested in volunteer work in retail sales (Figures 13a and 13b.)

Interviewees felt that working for low pay with the promise of moving up was not a bad idea. Similarly, most survey respondents were willing to start working at minimum wage, menial tasks in an interesting place with the chance to "move up" (87%). For example, youth would run errands or sweep the floor in a hardware store, dress shop, etc. if adult mentors helped them use the experience to gain greater skills.

Fewer respondents were interested in doing odd jobs--gardening, babysitting, running errands--where they distribute flyers advertising their services (58%). Most youth are losing interest in performing jobs in people's homes and prefer jobs in other settings, such as stores and offices (Figure 15).

Figure 13a. Interest in Volunteer Work?
Would you like to do volunteer work?

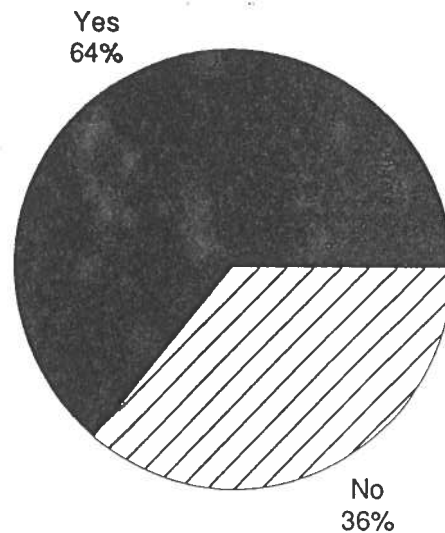
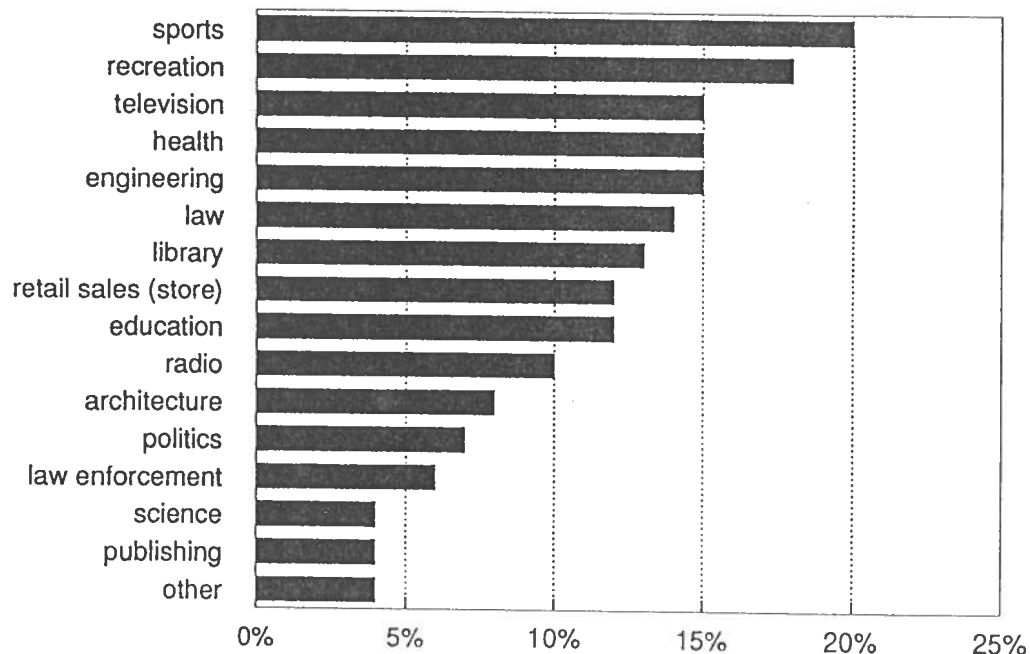


Figure 13b. Areas in which youth would like to do volunteer work *



* Multiple responses do not sum to 100%

Figure 14a. Interest in "Shadowing"
Are you interested in "shadowing" workers?

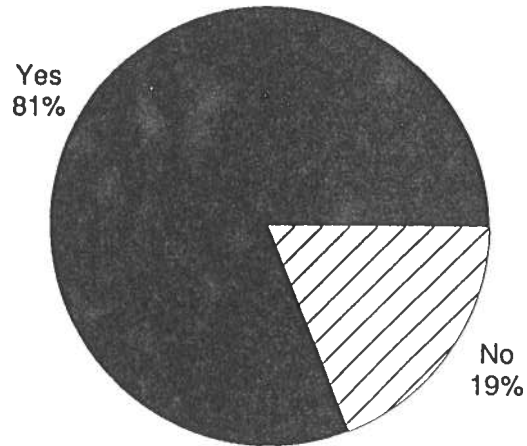


Figure 14b. Kinds of Workers to Shadow
What Kinds of Workers Would You Shadow?

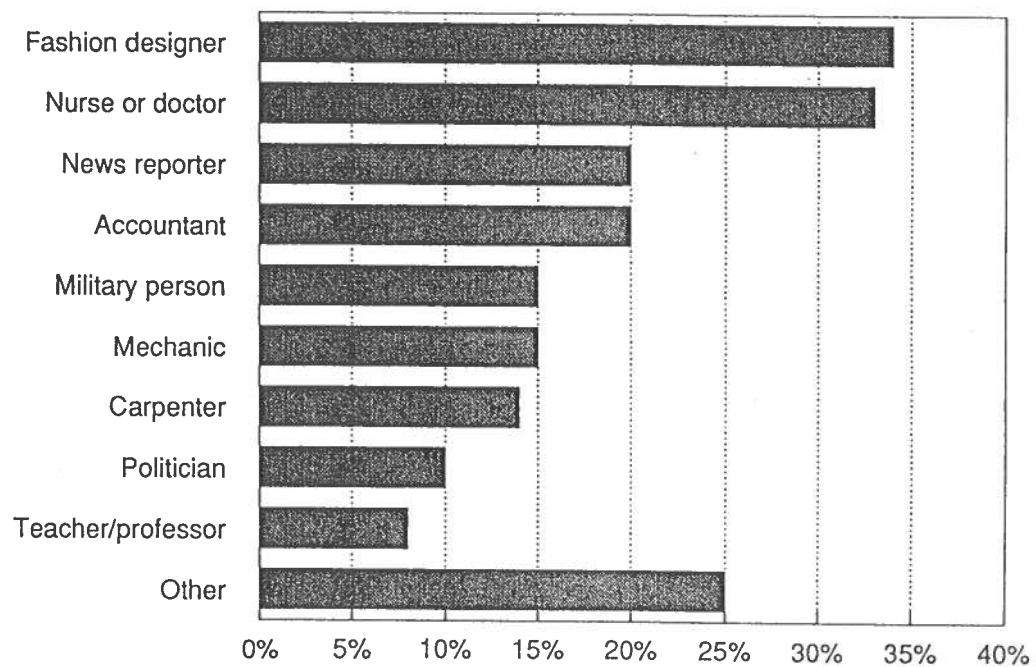
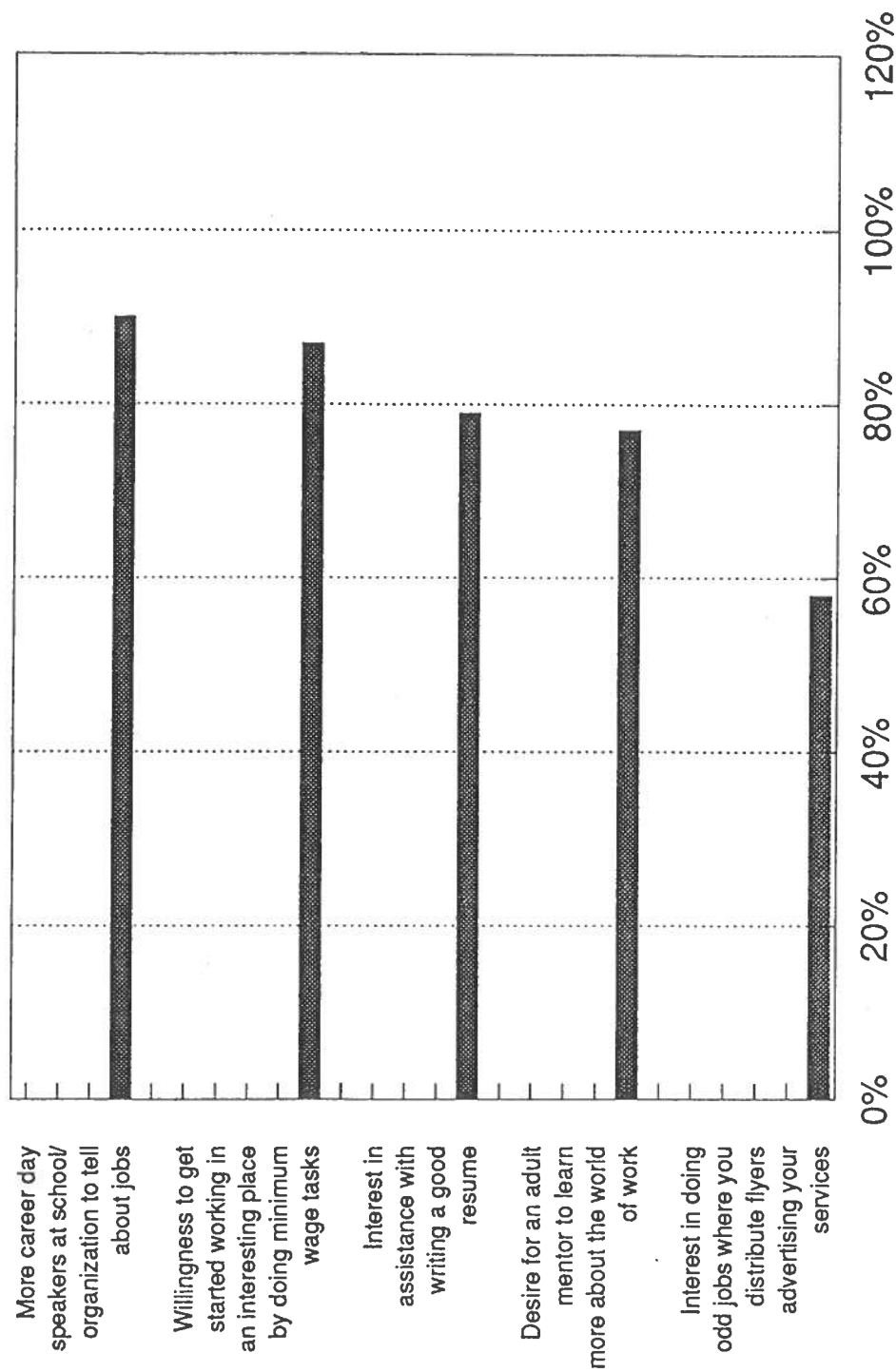


Figure 15. Interest in Adult Role Models Possibilities for Role Model Assistance*



* % yes responses

Adult mentors

Youth desire particular kinds of adult coaching for the work world. Youth interviewed by telephone wanted to have adults walk them through the step-by-step process of what it's like to work in a particular occupation. Similarly, most of the survey respondents desired an adult mentor with whom they could talk or meet on a regular basis to learn more about the world of work (77%). The mentor concept can be applied to shadowing and volunteer work.

Almost all of the youth responded affirmatively to opportunities for Career Day speakers and interview or resume workshops, short term efforts which adults can readily provide (Figure 15):

*90% wanted more Career Day speakers to come to their schools to tell about their jobs.

*80% wanted help with preparing resumes or how to have a good job interview.

Career and college plans

A majority of survey respondents who named a career goal preferred a profession requiring college, such as accounting, medicine, engineering, or teaching. These Oakland youth generally were aware of the years of schooling and grades required for the high level careers to which most aspired. Three-fourths planned to obtain at least a BA, consistent with their career goals. On the other hand, one-fifth preferred a career in athletics or fashion, glamour fields with few long-term, solid career opportunities. At-risk respondents were less oriented to high-level careers and the academic preparation they require, compared to accelerating students (Figures 6a and 6b).

Youth's ambitions far surpass the school preparation they were receiving or their current academic performance. Relative to the statewide average (the 50th percentile) on the California Assessment Program statewide tests, the academic achievement of students in five out of six Oakland high schools is at about the 7th percentile.³ Furthermore, the majority of the youth surveyed were enrolled in summer school to try to catch up to grade level.

³California State Department of Education, Report of California Assessment Scores, 1986-87.

Figure 6a. Youths' College Plans

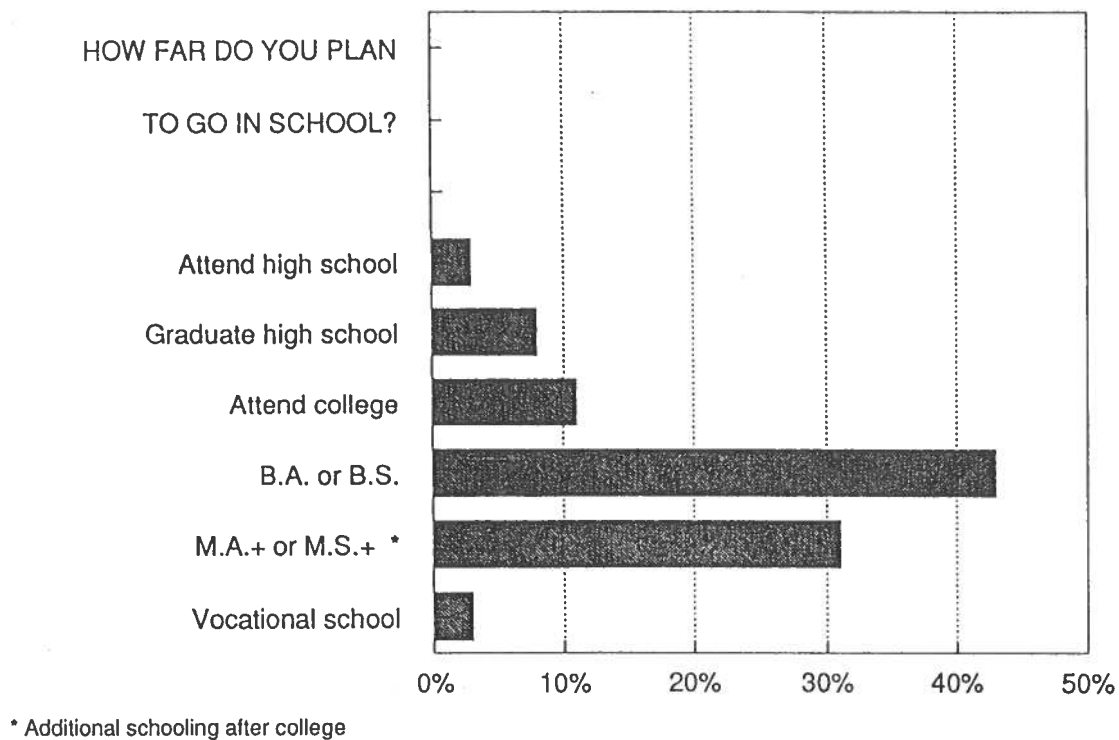
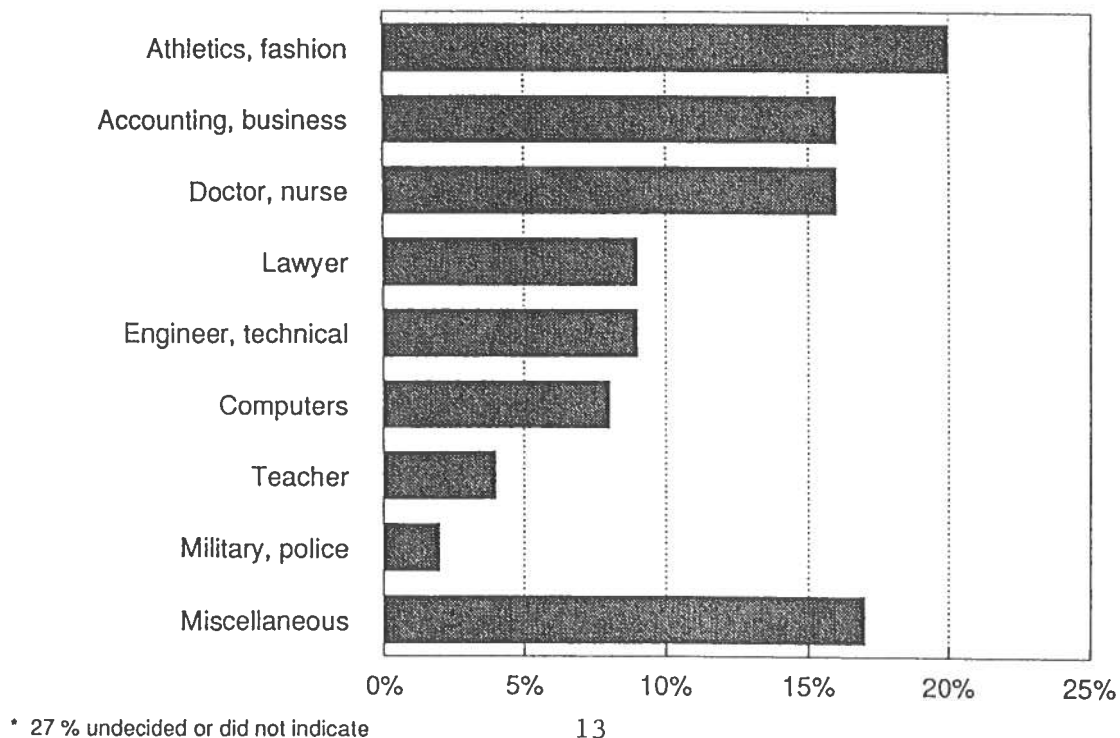


Figure 6b. Career Goals *



After-school activities and programs

Respondents indicated a tremendous array of preferred activities from a list of several dozen possibilities. Top choices included minor car maintenance and repair, foreign languages, a wide variety of sports, outdoor activities, and crafts and skilled trades of all sorts. Survey respondents, like most youth, do not want to be bored. They embrace energy, activity, and creativity. They like to move, participate in sports, join teen clubs, and take art and dance classes (Figure 19).

Two subgroup differences stand out: at-risk students displayed a dramatic interest in making videos, compared to accelerating students (37% vs. 14%). Younger students were much more excited about learning foreign languages, compared to older students (45% vs. 25%). Older youth may have already taken foreign languages, discovering the long-term struggle for language mastery required to enjoy fluency.

Currently, school and church activities are important to large numbers of youth. Outside of these institutions, however, survey respondents named relatively few places and programs where they can express their physical and artistic energies (Figure 18a).

Programs designed primarily for males were much more available than those for females, according to survey respondents. For example, 43% cited YMCAs while only 9% cited YWCAs (Figure 18b).

Vast differences were found between males and females in awareness, participation, and preferences for after-school activities. Males preferred sports of all kinds, especially team sports. Females preferred learning to sew, dance, and join singing groups.

Participation of males and females extra-curricular activities in school is more equal than the extreme gender differences would indicate. For example, many females participated in school sports and many males helped plan social activities. It is likely that organized after-school activities likewise might expose youth to activities usually sought out by only one gender (Figure 17).

Figure 19. Activities Preferred by Youth
 "Things I Would Enjoy Learning or Doing"

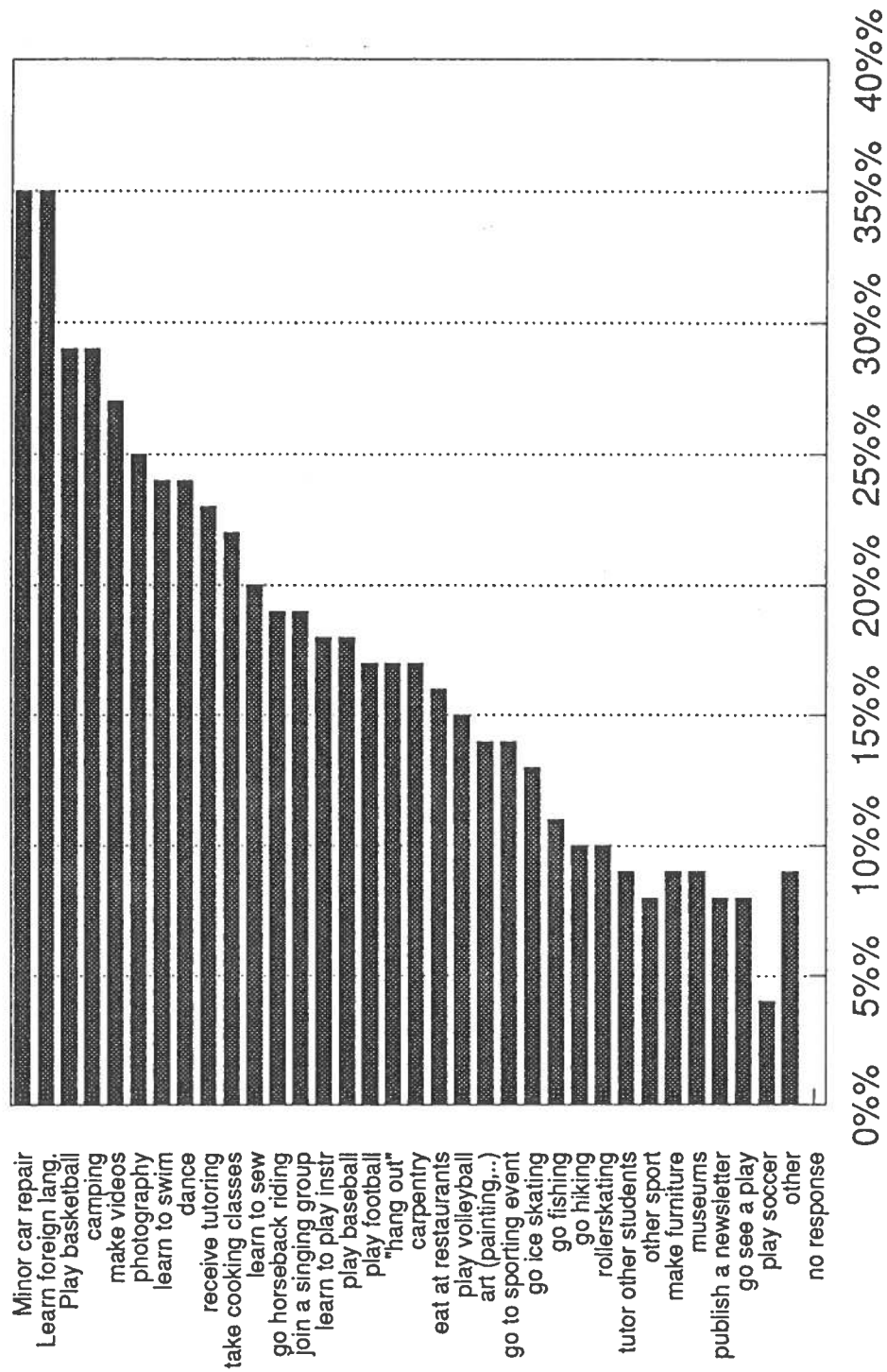
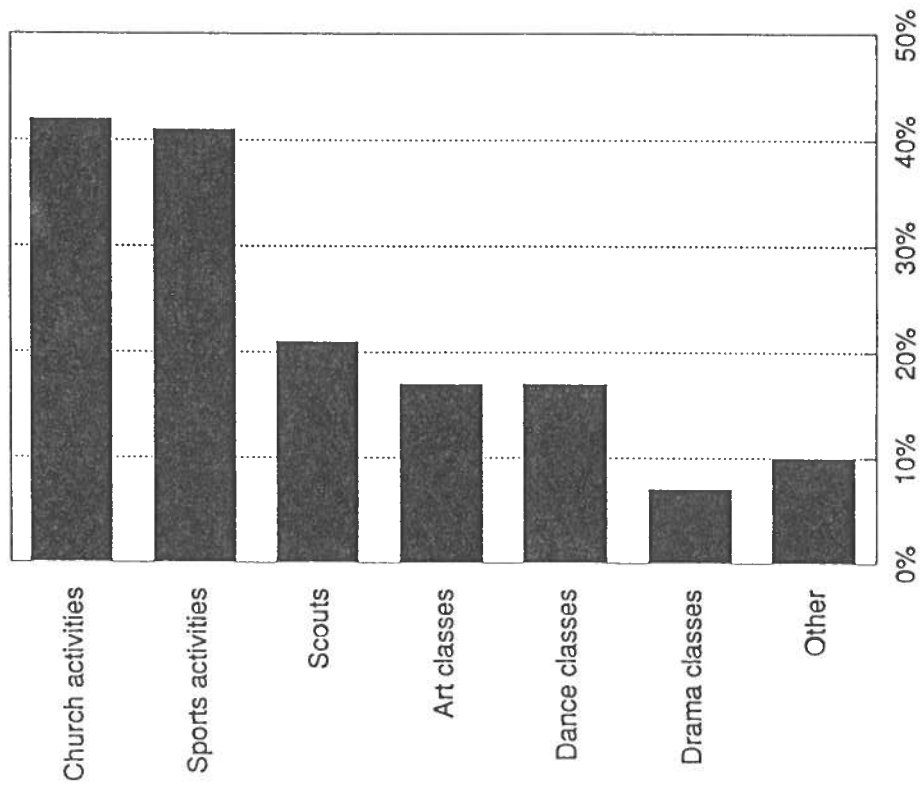
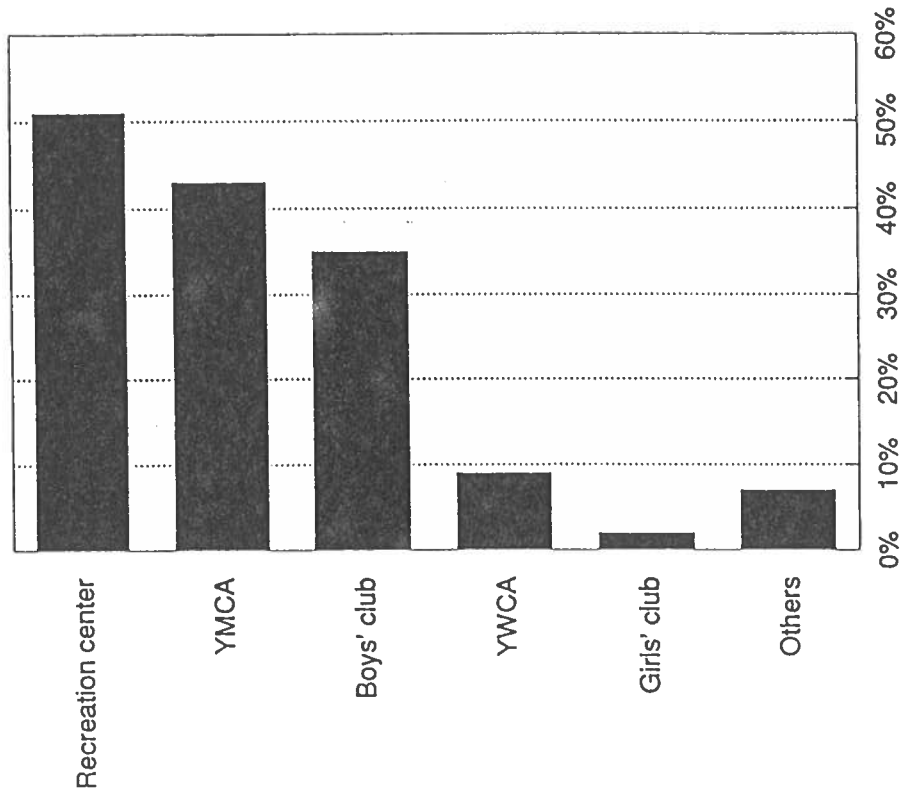


Figure 18a. Non-School Related Programs*
What programs are available in your area



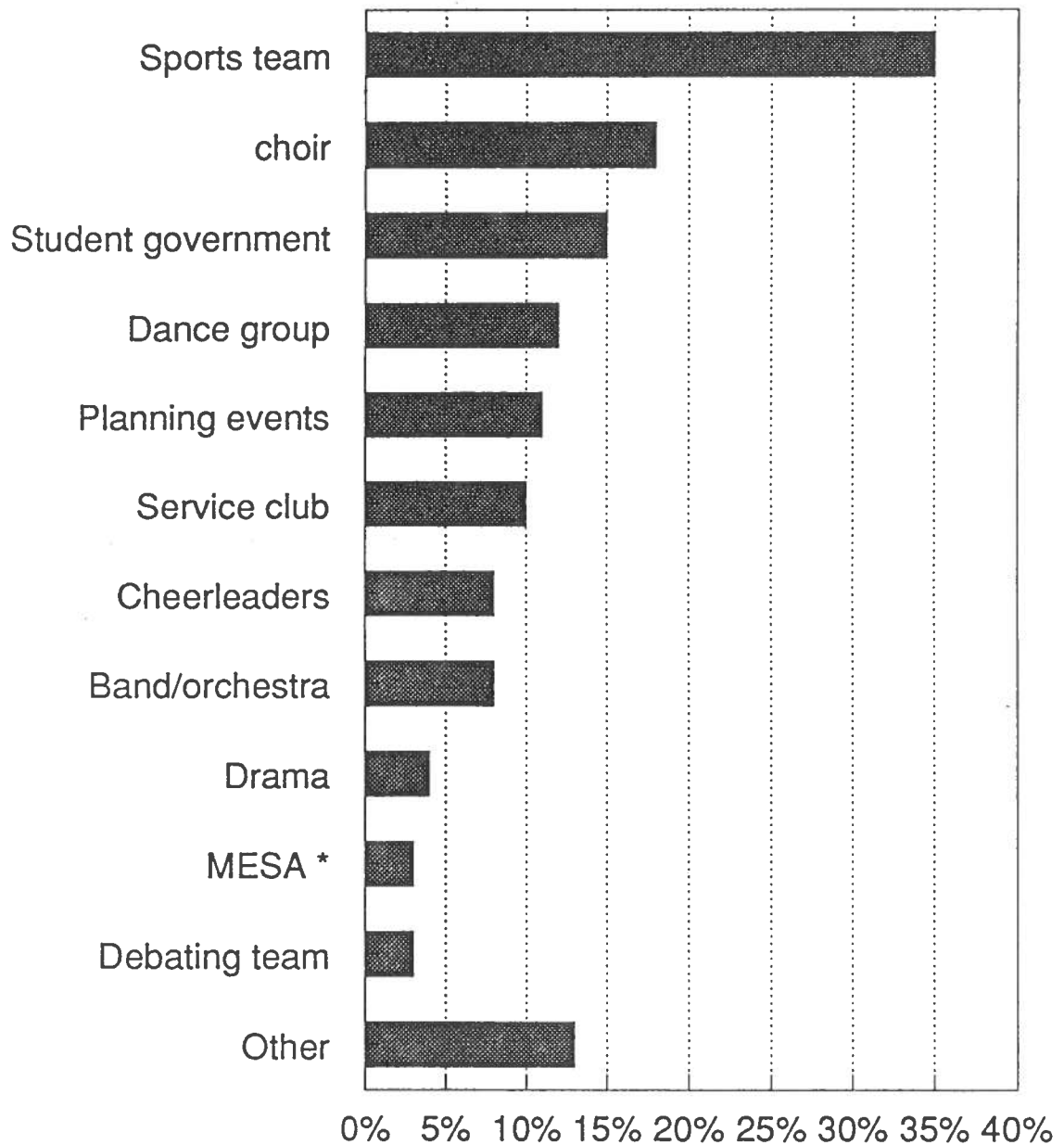
* Multiple responses do not sum to 100%

Figure 18b. Proximity of Programs *
Programs w/in close commuting distance



* Multiple responses do not sum to 100%

Figure 17. Participation In School-Related Activities



* Mathematics, Science, Engineering Achiev

Conclusions

Oakland youth need help from the adults of the community to realize their career ambitions. Despite their at-risk status in education, most survey respondents aspire to professional careers.

Youth are aware of the educational credentials required for professional careers and are trying to attain them.

Furthermore, they want to acquire the intricate, labor-intensive, and worldly skills required to prepare them for high-level careers. But opportunities for work experiences and skill acquisition fall far short of what youth need and desire.

The gap between aspirations and reality demands that the adults of the Oakland community provide opportunities for youth to learn a variety of skills, to participate in positive activities, and most of all to experience the incentives of the working world and what it means to the quality of one's life to hold a good job.

How can the adults of Oakland and the surrounding metropolitan area respond to the expressed desires of Oakland youth for the opportunity to work and to learn?

APPENDIX A:

SURVEY SAMPLE

In order to reach a population thought to be particularly at-risk, the Task Force decided to take advantage of the public schools' summer session.

The questionnaire was administered to 226 youth representing 7% of the 3300 students attending the three Oakland high schools--Oakland Tech, McClymonds, and Castlemont--where summer session was offered in 1988. Particular attention was focused on the at-risk youth population by selecting several proficiency classes and by not selecting gifted classes. Nearly half of the respondents enrolled in the regular academic courses surveyed were making up failing grades.

In total, more than half of the students surveyed attended summer session to make up grades or master basic skills, termed "at-risk" students. Fewer than half attended to hasten their already satisfactory progress toward graduation, termed "accelerating" students.

Males and females were about equally divided. Older youth (Grades 11 and 12 in Fall 1988) outnumbered younger youth (Grades 9 and 10) about 60% to 40%.