
What Works in Afterschool Programs---Achieving Educational, Prevention, and Youth Development Goals

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This review....

- Evidence of Effectiveness
- Factors that Promote/Inhibit effectiveness
 - Access
 - Participation
 - Program quality
 - Linkage to other learning supports, including families



What We Know About Student Outcomes



Spotlight: New Findings from Afterschool Matters

- ❑ Improved school attendance (high participation ASM students missed 7.5 days; non participants missed 9.6 days)
- ❑ Fewer failed courses (9.6% vs. 15.8% failure rates)
- ❑ Higher graduation rates (2.7 greater odds of graduating among high participating ASM students)
- ❑ Lower drop out rates

Findings particularly salient for those with highest levels of participation and two semesters after leaving the program, they fade out



What Factors Affect Outcomes?

- Access to Programs
- Participation in Programs
- Program Quality
- Linkage to Families, Schools, and other Components



Contextual Factors Promote/Inhibit Participation

□ Family Disadvantage Matters

- Family demographics provide a consistent picture of “winners and losers” when it comes to OST participation. In general, lower-SES and ethnic-minority children are at risk to lose out on these opportunities.

□ Neighborhoods Matter

- For younger youth, the neighborhood environment may limit their participation in OST activities...safety, transportation, and availability of programming are issues.

□ Parenting Matters

- Across families, neighborhoods, and both early and late adolescence, parent support, stimulation, and involvement promote OST participation.



Levels of Participation Influence the Attainment of ANY Outcome

- ❑ Participating vs. Not Participating
- ❑ Intensity (number of hours per week/month)
- ❑ Duration (history or participation)
- ❑ Breadth (number and variety of activities within and across programs)



How Participation Matters...

San Francisco Beacons

Combined

- ❑ Duration: number of sessions—fall, winter, spring
- ❑ Breadth: educational activities, other activities, or educational and other activities

Results: 3 sessions plus educational and other activities lead to:

- ❑ Increases in leadership, non-family support for participants, school effort, and sense of efficacy

3 sessions plus educational only activities lead to:

- ❑ Increases in school effort only



Being there isn't enough...Engagement Matters

- Behaviors such as persistence, effort, and attention
- Emotions such as enthusiasm, interest, and pride in success
- Motivation
- Active cognitive involvement



Boosting Participation

- ❑ Address Contextual/external predictors--SES, gender, ethnicity, community resources
- ❑ Overcome barriers to participation--Desire to relax/hang out; need to work; family responsibilities; boredom; safety/transportation
- ❑ Pay attention to particular program quality features--Activities + staff + safety
- ❑ Program recruitment strategies--Youth voice is key



Program Quality—2 key features

- *Structural* features include child-to-staff ratios and group sizes; program management; and, staff qualifications, educational level and training, and length of time in service. In part, the indicators of these features have been informed by in-school classroom practices.
- *Process* features examine aspects of the program that directly affect a participant's experiences, such as youth-adult relationships and interactions, variety in program offerings, availability of activities that promote sustained cognitive engagement, opportunities for autonomy and choice, and, the organizational supports necessary to promote effective staff practices.



Youth Development Community's Definition of Quality

- ❑ Physical and psychological **safety**
- ❑ Appropriate **structure**
- ❑ Supportive **relationships**
- ❑ Opportunities for meaningful **youth involvement**
- ❑ Positive **social norms**
- ❑ **Learning-oriented**, with skill-building activities
- ❑ Balance of **autonomy and structure**
- ❑ **Connections** with school, home, and community

From Eccles & Gootman (2002) *Community programs to promote youth development*; Washington, DC: National Academy Press



Research indicates that certain aspects of program quality are significantly related to the following student outcomes:

- feelings and attitudes
- behavioral adjustment
- academic and school performance
- School attendance
- misconduct
- task persistence
- work habits
- peer relations
- long-term developmental trajectory



Aspects of Program Quality Which Research Indicates Have a Positive Impact on Outcomes

- Using evidence-based approaches to behavioral skill-building
- Appropriate supervision and structure
- Positive staff-child and peer-to-peer interactions
- Continuity of programming
- Opportunities for choice
- Staff characteristics/staffing
- Intentional linkage to the school day



Effects of Poor Quality

- ❑ Increased cigarette use among teens in settings removed from direct or indirect adult contact
- ❑ Self-care adolescents whose parents know their whereabouts are less susceptible to peer influence
- ❑ More time socializing with peers, coupled with a lack of adult supervision, impacts problem behavior.
- ❑ Participation in unstructured youth recreation centers related to more offenses as a juvenile and an adult



Spotlight...the cost of quality programming*

- ❑ Estimates of costs of OST programs range from \$1,357 to \$7,160 per child per year.
- ❑ There is no standard methodology for determining costs, with many studies excluding in-kind resources, start-up, expansion, and system-building costs.
- ❑ Staff and facility costs constitute the largest and most consistent shares of total OST program expenses.

*http://www.financeproject.org/documents/Revised_executivesummary.pdf



Linkage Matters...Why Take a Complementary Learning Approach?

- Research-base is mounting that linkage matters (see the Evaluation Exchange, Vol XII, Nos. 1 & 2 in your binders)
- Linkage to...
 - Families
 - Community Institutions
 - Higher Education
 - Schools



TASC Evaluation – Features of High-Performing After School Programs*

- ❑ Varied enrichment activities
- ❑ Experiences for mastery and skill building
- ❑ Intentional focus on relationship-building
- ❑ Strong leadership, staff, and supports
- ❑ **Sponsoring organization support**



Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study (MARS)*

- Staff engagement
- Youth engagement
- Communication with families
- Staff training and education
- Strong relationships with schools**

*Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study at
<http://www.wcwonline.org/mars/marsfinal.pdf>



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Recruitment and Retention*

- In HFRP's review of promising recruitment and retention strategies, OST-school linkage was a determining factor in participation, with **strong linkages to school resulting in higher levels of participation.**

*Lauver, S., Little, P., and Weiss, H. (2004). Moving beyond the barriers: Attracting and sustaining youth participation in OST programs. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.



Five Strategies for OST-School Linkage

- Shared Space
- Shared Staff
- Supportive leadership
- Curriculum Alignment
- Shared Vision and Messages



What Works in Afterschool Programs?

Improvement in These Outcome Areas Is Possible

Safety
Health/Obesity
Prevention
Social/Emotional
Civic Engagement
Academic
21st Century Skills

But you need to consider these Factors

Access, Participation, Quality,
Linkage to Family, School and Community

