

Extra Learning Opportunities and After-School Programs:

What Does the Research Tell Us?

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A Convergence of Factors Has Contributed to the Growing Interest in After-School Programs

- ▶ High rates of maternal employment
 - 69% of married mothers and 71% of single mothers of 6- to 17-year-olds are employed
- ▶ Concerns about
 - poor academic performance
 - needs of English-learning students
 - negative effects of self-care
 - youth as victims and perpetrators of delinquent activities
- ▶ Evidence of the beneficial effects of sustained participation in high quality programs and activities

After-School Programs Typically Offer a Diverse Set of Activities

- ▶ Academic enrichment in reading, science & math
- ▶ Homework time
- ▶ Computer-based activities
- ▶ Music, drama
- ▶ Arts and crafts
- ▶ Organized sports and recreational sports

These activities, in combination, provide important extra learning opportunities

Do After-School Programs Make a Difference?

Sometimes....



*When Are Programs
More Likely to have
Beneficial effects?*



When program quality is higher

Study of After School Program Quality (NIH funded; *Child Development*, 1999)

150 children who attended 38 programs in WI

Program quality assessed during systematic observations

- ▶ Positive & negative emotional climate
- ▶ Positive & negative interactions w/ peers
- ▶ Autonomy and choice of activities

Controlling for prior child performance and family background,

- ▶ Positive emotional climate > fewer behavior problems at school
Negative emotional climate > poorer academic performance
- ▶ Greater variety and choice in activities > more socially competent at school
- ▶ More negative interactions w/ peers > more negative relations with peers at school

A Second Study

NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (Vandell, Pierce, & Lee presented at SRCD, 2005)

- ▶ Studied 137 children who attended after-school programs in 10 sites
- ▶ Child developmental outcomes examined at the end of first grade after controlling for family background, child gender, observed mother-child interaction, and classroom quality
- ▶ Program quality indicators
 - Staff-child relationship (closeness, conflict)

Children's relationships with the after-school program staff predicted changes in academic, social, and behavioral functioning across the school year

Staff-child **closeness** predicted **gains in reading achievement and academic grades**. Findings are consistent with other research that has found teacher-child closeness predicts academic gains.

Staff-child **conflict** predicted **increases in externalizing problems** according to teachers and mothers. Findings are consistent with other research that has found teacher-child conflict is linked to increased aggression.

Staff-child **conflict** also predicted **decreases in reading and math achievement**.

These effects underscore the potential importance of social relationships for academic outcomes as well as social outcomes.

Programs can make a difference if students attend them regularly

- ▶ Safe Haven Evaluation (Vandell & Pierce, 2001)
 - 588 low-income children (3rd- 5th grades)
 - Program attendance varied widely within (1 –163 days) and across programs (mean 60 days to 111 days)
 - Controlling for family and child background, children who attended for more days, were had better work habits, social skills, and school attendance

A second study of effects of consistent program participation

NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, *Child Development*, 2004

Mothers reported after school care arrangements in fall and spring of kindergarten and first grade for 933 children

Consistent participation in an extracurricular activity (sports, music, clubs) predicted gains in academic achievement in kindergarten & 1st grade, controlling for family background and classroom quality.

Study of Promising After School Programs (Vandell, Reisner, et al., SRA, 2006)

Conducted in 8 states and 14 communities that included NYC, LA, Oakland, San Diego as well as rural areas of Michigan and Montana.

19 elementary school programs
1820 3rd and 4th grade students
90% free or reduced lunch
90% children of color

18 middle school programs
1119 6th and 7th grade studies
76% free or reduced lunch
70% children of color

Characteristics of the Promising Programs

Supportive relations w/adults

Supportive relations w/peers

Student engagement

Appropriate structure

Autonomy opportunities

Cognitive growth opportunities

Mastery orientation

Elementary School Findings

▶ Promising Program vs low supervised group

- Relative declines in
 - ▶ Aggression (T) (-.15)
 - ▶ Misconduct (C) (-.59)
- Relative Gains in
 - ▶ Work habits (T & C) (.15)
 - ▶ Task persistence (.23)
 - ▶ Academic performance (.23)
 - ▶ Social skills (.17)
 - ▶ Prosocial behaviors (.15)

▶ Promising Program Plus vs low supervised group

Relative declines in

- ▶ Misconduct (C) (-.45)

Relative Gains in

- ▶ Work habits (T & C) (.35)

Middle School Findings

Promising Program
vs Low Superv'd

less misconduct (-.32)
less substance use (-.32)

Promising Program Plus
vs low Superv'd

Less misconduct (-.31)
Less substance use (-.37)
Improved work habits (.23)

Other Studies Have found Larger Effects of After-School Programs For

- ▶ Low-income children (Marshall et al., 1997; Pettit et al. 1997; Posner & Vandell, 1994; TASC evaluation)
- ▶ Children with limited English (TASC evaluation)
- ▶ Low achieving students (TASC evaluation)



Why are after-school programs beneficial?

Experiences Study (Vandell, et al. 2005)

- ▶ 191 8th grade students of color,
- ▶ 8 middle schools in 3 midwestern states
- ▶ Students wore watches that beeped them 35 times during 1 wk in the fall and 35 times during 1 wk in the spring
- ▶ Beeps occurred at random times during the after-school hours, evenings, and weekends

Students Filled Out Logbooks

- ▶ For each signal, students recorded
 - Who they were with
 - Where they were
 - What they were doing
 - How they were feeling
 - Levels of effort, concentration, motivation

After-School Experiences Study

- ▶ On average, students responded to 33 of the 35 signals during the week.
- ▶ 12,143 after-school, evening, and weekend experiences were reported.
- ▶ 5,136 of the experiences occurred after school.

Student Activities at Programs and Elsewhere (% of beeps)

Activity	No program	Not at program	At program
Homework	6	7	11
Enrichment	6	7	19
Eating	11	8	3
TV	20	19	0.6
Sports	5	5	32

Choice/Concentration Combinations

% of Signals

	Nonprogram	Program not at program	Program at program
Hi choice Hi concentration	25	21	40
Hi choice Lo concentration	47	52	34
Lo choice Hi concentration	10	10	15
Lo choice Lo concentration	22	22	16

Conclusions

Afterschool programs have been linked to a number of developmental outcomes for children and youth

- Social -
- Behavioral
- Academic

Some program elements and processes have been consistently related to child developmental outcomes

- positive relations between staff and children
- positive peer relations
- engagement and interest in the activities

Additional research is needed to identify if some program models are more successful for particular students or particular goals

- Are “academic” programs needed to support “academic” outcomes?

Inequities in Access to Extra Learning Opportunities

- ▶ Extracurricular activities (NCES, 2000)
 - 90% - nonpoor families
 - 65% poor nonwelfare families
 - 59% welfare families
- ▶ Organized activities (NCES, 1999)
 - 5.8% - mothers w/ less than high school diploma
 - 18.1% - mothers are college graduates
- ▶ Lessons (1990)
 - 20% - incomes of \$50,000 +
 - 6% - incomes of \$15,000 - \$25,000
 - 8% - incomes of < \$15,000

Next Steps for Researchers: Testing strategies to improve program quality

▶ Classroom level

- Staff education & professional development
- Retention of high quality of staff
- Program activities & curriculum
- Strategies to foster supportive staff-child and peer relationships

▶ Program level

- Director education and & training

▶ System level

- Funding streams & sustainability

Recent summaries of after-school research findings

- ▶ Vandell, Pierce, & Dadisman (2005). Out-of-school settings as a developmental context for children and youth. In R. Kail (Ed). *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*. Vol 33. Elsevier
- ▶ Committee on Community Level Programs for Youth (2002). *Washington DC: The National Academies Press*.
- ▶ Committee on Work and Family Policies (2003). *Working Families and Growing Kids: Caring for Children and Adolescents*. Washington DC: The National Academies Press.

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[http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/
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