

A National Perspective: Improving the Quality of Afterschool Programs

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Beyond School Hours XI

Jacksonville, FL

February 15-16, 2008

A Decade of Progress and Challenge

- Increased access to afterschool programs over the past decade has been extraordinary –
 - In 1995, fewer than 30 percent of schools had afterschool programs; today, the estimate is 70 percent.
 - In 1997, the U.S. Department of Education had no programs specifically for afterschool learning; in 2008, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program was funded at nearly \$1.1 billion.
 - Similarly, states are expanding support for extended learning programs, e.g., California's \$500 million After School Education and Safety (ASES) program.

A Decade of Progress and Challenge

- Afterschool programs continue to show strong public support –
 - Annual polls show that around **90 percent of voters support afterschool programs** for their communities, and would be willing to pay for them through taxes.
 - Support for afterschool programs is consistent between young and old, Democrats and Republicans, and parents and non-parents.

A Decade of Progress and Challenge

- Commitment across the country to expand access to afterschool programs is very strong –
 - **On October 18, 2007, 7,500 communities and over 1 million people participated in “Lights On Afterschool” events**



A Decade of Progress and Challenge

- The national commitment to expand access --
 - **With support from the C.S. Mott Foundation, 38 states now have established statewide networks to promote broader access to programs. Networks have three main goals:**
 - **to pursue solid policy to enhance afterschool programs;**
 - **to pursue strong partnerships to support increased funding of afterschool programs; and**
 - **to help states develop systems of quality.**



A Decade of Progress and Challenge

➤ For example:

- In **Iowa**, legislators provided \$1 million for afterschool grants and an additional \$2.5 million for supplemental educational strategies that schools can use to ensure kids are keeping up with their peers academically, including before- and afterschool programs.
- In **Massachusetts**, the Governor approved a \$1 million increase to the After School and Out of School Time grant program for FY 2008, which prioritizes partnerships between schools and community-based organizations.
- In **Ohio**, the afterschool network figured out how to tap into unused federal funds, resulting in \$9 million in new spending last year on afterschool programs for needy youth.
- In **New York**, the NYSAN Quality Self-Assessment Tool, the result of collaboration among more than 200 afterschool program providers, stakeholders and advocates, uses a common set of quality standards for ongoing program improvement. All programs receiving 21st CCLC funds are required to use the Quality Self-Assessment Tool.

A Decade of Progress and Challenge

- The national commitment to expand access to afterschool programs is very strong –
 - **National initiatives are seeking to use schools, community resources, and time in new ways, e.g.:**
 - **“A New Day for Learning” (C.S. Mott Foundation and George Lucas Educational Foundation)**
 - **Expanded Learning Time schools (Mass 2020)**
 - **Community schools**



A Decade of Progress and Challenge

- The national commitment to expand access to afterschool programs is very strong –
 - **Afterschool providers are taking on the difficult challenge of serving older children through more high school and middle school programs**



A Decade of Progress and Challenge

- So what have we learned about afterschool programs?
 - Are they effective in promoting academic achievement?
 - Are they effective in promoting positive behavior?
 - If so, are there particular program characteristics that make a difference?

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Have We Learned?

- Early research and evaluation studies, e.g., the MOST evaluation, tended to focus on **implementation, quality, participation and sustainability**.
- Over the past decade, **studies have increasingly looked for academic and behavioral effects**.
- However, most studies used correlational or, at best, quasi-experimental methods.

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Have We Learned?

- Many studies showed strong program effects, but critics remained doubtful because the study methodology was not “gold standard.” Examples include:
 - Quantum Opportunities (Philadelphia and 4 other sites)
 - L.A.’s BEST
 - The After-School Corporation (NYC)
 - After School Matters (Chicago)
 - Beacons Schools (NYC, San Francisco)
 - Foundations, Inc. (Philadelphia)
 - 21st CCLC Annual Performance Report (APR) and Profile and Performance Information Collection System (PPICS) data

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Have We Learned?

➤ Examples of some of the study findings:

- L.A.'s BEST studies showed that children who participated throughout elementary school were far more likely to graduate high school.
- The After-School Corporation (NYC) found substantial gains in mathematics for regular participants.
- After School Matters (Chicago), a high school program, found that participating students are less likely to be truant, have fewer course failures, and are far more likely to graduate.

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Have We Learned?

- 21st CCLC programs report annually on program activities, participation, and outcomes through the Profile and Performance Information Collection System (PPICS). 2005-06 PPICS data show that:
 - As of December 2006, there were 3,309 active 21st CCLC grantees operating a total of 9,824 Centers and serving 1,456,447 students. Over 800,000 students participated for 30 days or more.
 - As centers mature over time, there is a movement away from an over-emphasis on recreation in programming to one more oriented toward the provision of academic enrichment.
 - More mature programs have a higher rate of average regular attendance than Centers that are relatively new.

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Have We Learned?

- **GPRP Performance Indicators: 2005–06**
 - Regular attendees demonstrating improved grades in reading/language arts: 43%
 - Regular attendees demonstrating improved grades in mathematics: 49%
 - Regular attendees demonstrating improved state assessment results in reading/language arts: 21%
 - Regular attendees demonstrating improved state assessment results in mathematics: 21%
 - Regular attendees demonstrating improved homework completion and class participation: 73%
 - Regular attendees demonstrating improved student behavior: 68%

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Have We Learned?

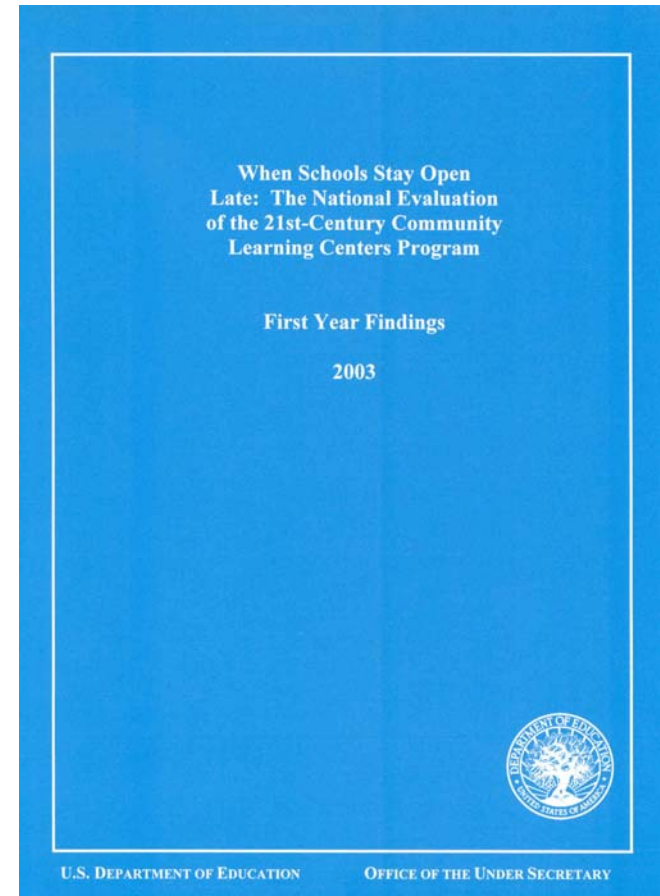
- **GPR Performance Indicators: 2005–06**
 - “Regular participants” are those who participate in Center activities for at least 30 days.
 - However, when students reach the 60-day attendance threshold, there appears to be a noticeable increase in the percentage who improve their grades.
 - Similarly, regular participation is correlated with gains on state assessments; however, the increase occurs at the 90 days or more attendance threshold.

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Have We Learned?

- As noted earlier, most of the afterschool research and evaluations used correlational or quasi-experimental methods from which you cannot conclude that the program ***caused*** the benefits observed.
- To address whether 21st CCLC afterschool programs ***caused*** academic or social benefits, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) sponsored an “RCT” (randomized clinical trial) study.

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Have We Learned?

- The study, conducted by *Mathematica*, concluded that 21st CCLC programs were **not effective** at improving academic performance or positive behaviors.



A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Have We Learned?

- While debate over the validity of the *Mathematica* study has continued to flare, ED officials took seriously some of the study's major conclusions, in particular:
 - **many of the programs in the study were not of high quality;**
 - **programming was often haphazard and not intentional;** and
 - **attendance was very sporadic, particularly in programs serving older children.**

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Have We Learned?

- The policy consequences were severe – the President proposed a 40 percent funding reduction for the 21st CCLC program.
- Though the proposed reductions were not enacted, this was a wake-up call to the field.

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Happened as a Result?

- In response to the findings, ED established the **National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning**, managed by SEDL, to create engaging and accessible tools to promote high-quality programming.

- **Content areas include:**
 - reading and literacy
 - mathematics
 - science
 - the arts
 - technology
 - tutoring and homework help
- Materials are at:
www.sedl.org/afterschool

NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR QUALITY AFTERSCHOOL LEARNING

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Providing assistance, training, and tools to help state and local practitioners develop high-quality, balanced programming to engage student learning.

Announcements

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Afterschool Matters: Creative Programs That Connect Youth Development and Student Achievement now available through Corwin Press

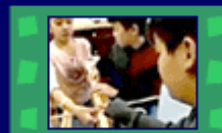
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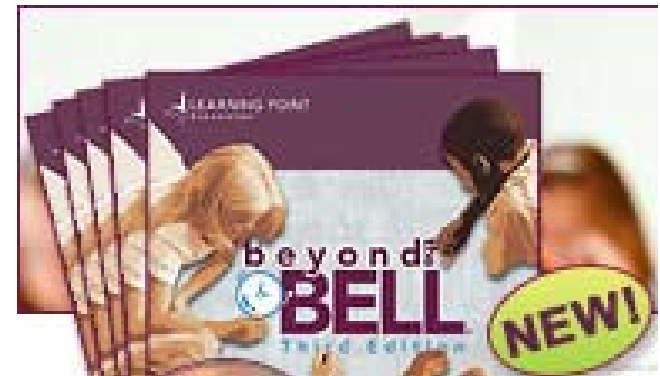


A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Happened as a Result?

- As a complement to the *National Partnership* work in developing engaging academic content, the C.S. Mott Foundation continued support for **a training approach** to ensure that afterschool program directors and front-line staff understand how to develop and sustain quality programs.
- The ***Beyond the Bell*** training materials, based on the newest research findings, encourage program developers to focus on several critical areas.

Building Quality Programs

- Management
- Communication
- Evaluation
- Linkages with the school day
- Collaboration and community building
- Parent and family involvement
- Program delivery
- Program design



Beyond the Bell® Toolkit—Third Edition
for Afterschool
Program Directors & Site Coordinators

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Happened as a Result?

- Due in part to the results of the *Mathematica* study, the evaluation and research questions also began to shift.
- Subsequent evaluations and research studies focused on assessing whether **high-quality afterschool programs could demonstrate significant academic and behavior effects**, i.e., a “proof of concept” strategy was adopted.

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Happened as a Result?

- Following this new paradigm, ED's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) funded an RCT evaluation of two well-supported afterschool academic support programs:
 - a reading program developed by *Success for All*
 - a mathematics program developed by *Harcourt*
- *MDRC* carefully monitored program fidelity and implementation, and collected two years of data (in 2005-06 and 2006-07) for treatment and control groups.
- **Results have not yet been released.**

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Happened as a Result?

- Meanwhile, recent reports and study results are strongly suggesting that *high-quality* programs that emphasize social skill-building as well as academic performance can have substantial positive effects.

What Do High-Quality Activities Look Like?

- According to Nicole Yohalem, at the *Forum for Youth Investment*, there is a lot of similarity across a variety of instruments designed to assess the quality of programs and services.
- High-quality programs focus on:
 - Relationships
 - Environment
 - **Engagement**
 - Social Norms
 - **Skill Building Opportunities**
 - **Routine/Structure**

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Are We Learning?

- *Durlak and Weissberg (2007)* analyzed evaluations from 72 youth-serving programs and found that programs with certain quality characteristics had a **wide range of significant effects, including academic benefits.**
- Conversely, programs without those characteristics tended to show no effects.
- They summarized those characteristics with the acronym **SAFE.**

SAFE stands for --

- **Sequenced** ➤ Did the program use a sequenced set of activities to achieve the objectives related to skill development?
- **Active** ➤ Did the program use active forms of learning to help youth learn new skills?
- **Focused** ➤ Did the program have at least one component devoted to developing personal or social skills?
- **Explicit** ➤ Did the program target specific personal or social skills?

A Decade of Progress and Challenge- What Are We Learning?

- In October 2007, Vandell, Reisner and Pierce released **Outcomes Linked to High-Quality Afterschool Programs: Longitudinal Findings from the Study of Promising Afterschool Programs.**
- The research examined 35 programs serving 3,000 low-income, ethnically diverse elementary and middle school students from 8 states in 6 major metropolitan centers and 6 smaller urban and rural locations.
- The programs, all of which had been operating at least three years, were selected because of a record of success.

Benefits of High-Quality Programs

The study found that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to **significant gains in standardized test scores and work habits**, as well as **reductions in behavior problems** among disadvantaged students.

- **Academic Outcomes.** Elementary school students who regularly attended demonstrated significant gains in standardized **math test scores**, compared to their peers who were routinely unsupervised during afterschool hours. Participating students also posted gains in teacher reports of **work habits** and **task persistence**. The students also reported gains in their work habits.
- **Social Outcomes.** Participating students posted significant gains in teachers' reports of **students' social skills** with peers and pro-social behaviors. Students also posted significant **reductions in aggressive behaviors** with peers.
- **Problematic Behaviors.** Reductions in elementary students' reports of misconduct (e.g., skipping school, getting into fights) over the two-year period were reported by the participating students, relative to unsupervised students. **Middle school students** who regularly participated in afterschool programs also reported greatly reduced use of drugs and alcohol.

Characteristics of High-Quality Programs

- Vandell, Reisner and Pierce associated the outcomes they measured with the following program characteristics:
 - **Strong partnerships with neighborhoods, schools, and community organizations.**
 - **Students typically were highly engaged** with one another and in program activities, and group leaders **structured activities to maximize learning and positive relationships.**
 - Programs mixed recreational, arts, and enrichment activities to **nurture positive interpersonal relationships among students and to actively engage them.**
 - **Program staff was well-trained** and expressed satisfaction with their working environment.

High-Quality Programs -- Recommendations

- According to Vandell et al, their findings suggest that plans for high-quality afterschool programming should **span entire communities**. When communities and program providers unite to recruit and engage youth in high-quality afterschool experiences, programs can provide substantial benefits for the largest number of students.

In Summary

- The popularity of afterschool programs continues to grow and states and localities have begun to respond to increased demand.
- The debates around whether afterschool programs are – or can be – effective has not subsided, mostly because most of the evaluation studies and research currently available used less-rigorous methodologies. (Note: a review in February 2006 by Zief, Lauver and Maynard identified only **five** studies that used a rigorous research design; one of those was the Mathematica study.)

In Summary

- Nevertheless, consensus is emerging that high-quality programs yield benefits – including academic achievement gains (at least in math).
- Recognizing that only high-quality programs can be effective, there is an increasing national awareness on the part of afterschool funders – federal, state and local – of the importance of program design and service delivery.

For Additional Information

www.beyondthebell.org

www.sedl.org/afterschool

ppics.learningpt.org/ppics/public.asp

www.afterschoolalliance.org

www.mott.org

www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/

www.edutopia.org

www.casel.org/sel/meta.php