



Harvard Family Research Project

Out-of-School Time Evaluation Snapshot

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Performance Measures in Out-of-School Time Evaluation

Harvard Family Research Project's series of Out-of-School Time Evaluation Snapshots distills the wealth of information compiled in our Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database¹ into a single report. Each Snapshot examines a specific aspect of out-of-school time (OST) evaluation. This Snapshot provides the academic, youth development, and prevention performance measures currently being used by out-of-school time programs to assess their progress. It also includes the corresponding data sources for these measures.² A future Snapshot will focus on the specific standardized assessment tools and tests that programs use to demonstrate impact.³

Increasingly, out-of-school time programs are being asked to provide data that documents their progress and demonstrates their results. But for many OST programs and their over-worked staff this added responsibility is the “straw that broke the camel’s back.” Across the country there is a cry from programs for help in deciding what to measure and how to measure it. Although there is no formal consensus regarding realistic outcomes for *all* OST programs, one of the unintended benefits of the release of the first national 21st Century Community Learning Centers impact evaluation⁴ has been increased attention to the question “What is realistic for OST programs to be held accountable for?” Proceedings from a June 2003 After School Summit hosted by the U.S. Department of Education and Arnold Schwarzenegger indicate that researchers and policymakers alike are interested and invested in helping programs measure and improve their performance.⁵

This *Snapshot* contributes to that conversation by providing a comprehensive listing of the performance measures that OST programs nationwide are currently using as well as the sources that they use to collect data on each measure. This *Snapshot* is based on a review of the outcomes reported in the evaluations posted in the Harvard Family Research Project Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database.⁶ While not an exhaustive listing of the universe of performance measures currently being used, this *Snapshot* provides information for programs making evaluation decisions as well as for researchers, evaluators, and others helping programs build evaluation capacity and improve performance.

¹ Our database contains profiles of out-of-school time (OST) program evaluations, which are searchable on a wide range of criteria. It is available in the OST section of the HFRP website at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html.

² Performance measure information for this *Snapshot* was adapted from *Documenting Progress and Demonstrating Results: Evaluating Local Out-of-School Time Programs*, a joint publication of the Harvard Family Research Project and the Finance Project, available at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/index.html#local.

³ This and future *Snapshots* in the series will be available in the OST section of the HFRP website at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/index.html. (To be notified when *Snapshots* become available sign up for our OST website change notification email at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/subscribe.html.)

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary. (2003). *When schools stay open late: The national evaluation of the 21st-Century Community Learning Centers program, first year findings*. Washington, DC: Author. Available at www.ed.gov/pubs/21cent/firstyear.

⁵ A summary report of the After School Summit is available at www.publicengagement.com/afterschoolsummit.

⁶ Our scan for this *Snapshot* was conducted in October 2003, at which time there were 54 profile posted in our database.

What Is a Performance Measure?

Performance measures assess your program's progress on the implementation of your *strategies and activities*. They assess the results of your out-of-school time (OST) program's service delivery. Ask yourself: In the work that my program does, what do we hope to directly affect? What results are we willing to be directly accountable for producing? What can we realistically accomplish?

There are two types of performance measures:

Measures of effort – Also commonly known as outputs, these are measures of the products and services generated by program strategies and activities. Ask yourself: What does my program generate (e.g., publications, training materials), What levels of activity do we produce (e.g., the number of children served or products developed), and What will measure the quality of our services (e.g., parent and child satisfaction rates)? Measures of effort assess how much you did, but do little in terms of explaining how well you did it or how well your program ultimately worked for the target population with whom you are working. These are the easiest of all the evaluation measures to identify and track (e.g., number of children served in the OST program and participant demographics, number of classes/sessions/trainings held, etc.).

Measures of effect – These are changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviors in your target population. Ask yourself: How will I know that the children or families I work with in my OST program are better off? What changes do I expect to result from the strategies and activities my program provides? Remember that measures of effect reflect changes that your program acting alone expects to produce (e.g., increased social competence, higher self-esteem and confidence, improved study habits).

Adapted from: Watson, S. (2000). *Using results to improve the lives of children and families: A guide for public-private child care partnerships*. Vienna, VA: Child Care Partnership Project. Available at nccic.org/ccpartnerships/results.pdf (Acrobat file) and Coffman, J. (2002). *Learning from logic models in out-of-school time*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Available at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/learning_logic_models.html.

Performance Measures and Data Sources for Academic Outcomes

Evaluators use a broad range of performance measures to assess participants' academic outcomes in OST programs. They range from grades to standardized testing to participants' homework completion. The list below shows the broad range of possibilities for OST academic performance measures. Obviously a single program would not use all these measures and may develop some not on this list. Data sources for these performance measures include: parent, teacher, principal, OST staff, and participant interviews and surveys; school records; and standardized testing results.

Data Sources for Academic Performance Measures

Performance Measure	Data Source(s)
Ability to get along with others in school	Parent
Academic knowledge in specific content areas	Participant
Academic performance in general	Participant, parent, principal, program staff

Attendance/absenteeism	Participant, school records, teacher, parent, principal
Attitude toward school	Participant
Behavior in school ⁷	Principal, teacher, standardized behavior scales
Communication skills in school	Parent
Cognitive improvement	Teacher
College attendance	Participant youth survey, school records
College preparation/plans/information	Participant
College retention/continuation	Participant
Comfort with taking tests	Participant
Disciplinary action/suspension/expulsion	School records
Dropout	Participant
Effectiveness of school overall	Principal
Effort (including grades for effort)	Participant, school records
English language development	Participant
Expectations of achievement and success	Participant, teacher
Family involvement in school events	Principal
General academic knowledge	Participant
Grade point average	School records
Grade retention	Participant, principal, school records
Grades – overall	Participant, teacher
Grades in content areas (math, reading, etc.)	School records, parent
Grades in OST program academic courses	Participant
Help seeking	Participant
Homework performance	Participant, teacher, parent, principal
Intention to graduate	Participant
Intention to remain in school	Participant
Interest in recreational reading	Program staff
Learning skills development	Teacher
Liking school	Participant, parent
Motivation to learn	Participant, principal
Overall happiness in school	Parent
Perceived competence	Participant
Quality of schoolwork	Participant
Recreational reading	Parent, teacher
Safety – viewing school as a safe place	Parent
Scholastic achievement assessed by knowledge about specific subjects	Standardized behavior scales
Scholastic competence	Participant
School vandalism	Principal
Special education placement	Principal

⁷ School behaviors included in the scales are: frustration, tolerance, distraction, ignoring teasing, nervousness, sadness, aggression, acting out, shyness, and anxiety.

Standardized test scores

SAT-9, PSAT, Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT-IV), Terra Nova Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics Computation Test, CTB/McGraw-Hill CAT-5 Math and Reading Comprehension Tests, Informal Reading Inventory, state assessments, school-wide assessments, program-specific tests
Participant

Study skills

Performance Measures and Data Sources for Positive Youth Development Outcomes

Many OST evaluations assess youth development outcomes, which are broadly defined as those outcomes that assess the social and emotional development of program participants. Outcomes that fall into this category range from standardized measures of self-esteem, participant behavior, and interpersonal skills to decision making and goal setting, leadership, and career development. The list below shows the broad range of possibilities for OST youth development performance measures. Obviously a single program would not use all these measures and may develop some not on this list. Like the data sources for academic performance measures, sources for youth development performance measures include: parent, teacher, principal, OST staff, and participant interviews and surveys; school records; and standardized assessments.

Data Sources for Youth Development Performance Measures

Performance Measure	Data Source(s)
Adult relationships	Participant
Awareness of community resources	Participant
Banking skills/financial skills	Participant
Behavior change toward new program component	Parent, participant, program staff
Communication skills	Participant
Computer skills	Participant
Conflict resolution	Program staff
Cultural awareness	Participant
Depression prevention	Parent, teacher
Developmental Assets ⁸	Participant youth survey
Exposure to new activities	Program staff, principal
Facing issues outside of OST program	Participant
Independence	Participant
Interaction with adults	Teacher, principal, program staff
Interaction with other students in OST	Participant
Interaction with peers	Participant, parent, program staff
Interest in nonacademic subjects (art, music, etc.)	Participant, program staff
Leadership development/opportunities	Participant, program staff
Life skills	Participant youth survey
Opportunities to volunteer	Participant
Peer relationships	Standardized assessment, program staff
Problem-solving skills	Participant
Productive use of leisure time	Participant

⁸ Search Institute 40 Developmental Assets. For more information on this assessment framework, see www.search-institute.org/assets.

Professional/workforce skills and development	Participant
Respect for others	Participant
Self-confidence	Parent, provider, standardized tests, employer
Self-esteem	Participant youth survey, standardized assessment, teacher
Sense of belonging	Participant
Sense of community	Participant
Sense of safety	Participant
Social skills	Parent
Sources of support for youth	Participant

Performance Measures and Data Sources for Prevention Outcomes

Performance measures that fall into the prevention category include participants' changes in sexual behavior, feelings of personal safety, changes in drug and alcohol use and abuse, and overall improvements in physical health. The list below shows the broad range of possibilities for OST prevention performance measures. Obviously a single program would not use all these measures and may develop some not on this list. Data sources for this information include: parent, participant, mentor, and teacher interviews and surveys and police reporting and records.

Data Sources for Prevention Performance Measures

Performance Measure	Data Source(s)
Aggression	Participant, mentor
Birth control use	Participant
Crime rate – youth perpetrators	Police records
Crime rate – youth victims	Police records
Delinquency	Participant, mentor
Delinquency – attitudes about it	Participant
Delinquent peer group membership	Participant, mentor
Gang membership	Participant, mentor
“Kept out of trouble”	Participant
Physical fitness	Parent
Pregnancy and birth rates	Participant
Race relations	Participant
“Risk taking”	Parent, teacher
Sex – attitudes about it	Participant
Sexual behavior/initiation of intercourse	Participant
Sexual decision making	Participant
Sexual knowledge	Participant
Substance use – attitudes about it	Participant
Substance use decision-making skills	Participant
Substance use/drug use/alcohol use	Participant, mentor
Weapons possession/use	Participant, mentor

Which Performance Measures Are Best?

There may never be a single set of performance measures that *all* OST programs can be held accountable for, but there are at least four important points that all OST programs must take into consideration when selecting performance measures for evaluation:

1. *The range of performance measures currently used to assess program OST outcomes reflects the diversity of OST programming.* The selection of which performance measures are best suited to any single program or initiative should be inextricably tied to the program’s goals, strategies, and activities. Being intentional about a *theory of change*—a way of articulating the program’s primary goals, strategies, and activities—can help to determine what measures to use to assess progress toward achieving program goals.
2. *Performance measures are not the same as performance indicators.* Indicators, such as “increasing the percentage of students graduating from high school,” are measures for which data exist that quantify and track community-wide progress toward results. They require *community-wide effort* to move and reflect substantial changes across a community. The selection of performance measures should reflect the context in which the OST program operates, recognizing the strengths and limitations of the program to affect overall change given that context. And they should contribute to understanding progress on the program’s performance indicators.
3. *Availability of data sources* is a consideration when selecting and developing performance measures. Many programs rely on parent, participant, and staff reporting as data sources, using program-generated surveys and questionnaires to collect data. This is a less costly option than using standardized academic and behavioral assessments that may require training to administer, but has less validity than standardized testing and assessment tools.
4. Performance measures should, in part, be selected because they will *yield useful information for program improvement* as well as to fulfill accountability requirements. A litmus test for a good evaluation, and consequently the list of performance measures selected, is to ask the question, “Will the information collected be useful to the program and its stakeholders?” The answer should be a resounding “yes.”

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Related Resources

Collaborative Communications Group. (2003, June 5–6). *After School Summit summary report*. The After School Summit was hosted by the U.S. Department of Education and Arnold Schwarzenegger in Washington, DC. The summary report available at www.publicengagement.com/afterschoolsummit.

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Harvard Family Research Project. **Out-of-school time program evaluation database**. Available at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary. (2003). *When schools stay open late: The national evaluation of the 21st-Century Community Learning Centers program, first year findings*. Washington, DC: Author. Available at www.ed.gov/pubs/21cent/firstyear.

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Harvard Family Research Project Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database

The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database contains profiles of out-of-school time (OST) program evaluations. Its purpose is to provide accessible information about previous and current evaluations to support the development of high quality evaluations and programs in the OST field.

Types of Programs Included in the Database

Evaluations in the database meet the following three criteria:

1. The evaluated program or initiative operates during out-of-school time.
2. The evaluations aim to answer a specific evaluation question or set of questions about a specific program or initiative.
3. The evaluated program or initiative serves children between the ages of 5 and 19.

Types of Information Included in the Database

Each profile contains detailed information about the evaluations, as well as an overview of the OST program or initiative itself. Electronic links to actual evaluation reports, where available, are also provided, as are program and evaluation contacts.

How to Use the Database

The database is located in the OST section of the HFRP website at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html. The search mechanism allows users to refine their scan of the profiles to specific program and evaluation characteristics and findings information.

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About Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP)

Founded in 1983 by Dr. Heather Weiss, HFRP conducts research about programs and policies that serve children and families throughout the United States. By publishing and disseminating its research widely, HFRP plays a vital role in examining and encouraging programs and policies that enable families and communities to help children reach their potential.

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