

BEYOND THE HEAD COUNT

Evaluating Family Involvement in Out-of-School Time

Harvard Family Research Project's (HFRP) Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation briefs are short, user-friendly documents that highlight current research and evaluation work in the out-of-school time field. These documents draw on HFRP's research work in out-of-school time in order to provide practitioners, funders, evaluators, and policymakers with information to help inform their work. This fourth brief, Beyond the Head Count: Evaluating Family Involvement in Out-of-School Time, offers an overview of how out-of-school time programs involve families and how programs can evaluate family involvement.

Why Consider Family Involvement in Out-of-School Time Programming?

Engaging families is one of the many strategies that out-of-school time (OST) programs use to create quality, adult-supervised experiences for children ages five through nineteen during non-school hours. Therefore, like many OST program components, it is critical that the field build a knowledge base to understand how families are involved in their children's out-of-school time, and how that involvement influences children's development. Evaluating family involvement in OST is an effective means to build this knowledge base, thus enabling OST programs to understand and improve their family involvement strategies and services, while expanding opportunities for families to be together. Both the potential gains from evaluating family involvement and the increasing demand from the U.S. Department of Education, other funders, and the public to assess program impact and to use data for program improvement, render evaluation of OST programming, including fam-

ily involvement, essential to ensure quality programming and sustainability of public and financial support.¹

This *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation* brief draws on evaluation findings from the Harvard Family Research Project's Out-of-School Time Evaluation Database² and key informant interviews and email correspondence to define and propose a framework for understanding family involvement in OST. The brief then examines ways for OST programs to evaluate their own family involvement strategies and practices.

A Note on Our Methodology

HFRP's Out-of-School Time Evaluation Database is a collection of evaluations of both large and small out-of-school time programs and initiatives. Evaluations included in the database meet the following three criteria: 1) the evaluated program/initiative operates during out-of-school time, 2) the evaluation aims to answer a specific evaluation question or set of questions about a specific program/initiative, 3) and the evaluated program/initiative serves children between the ages of five and nineteen. Of the 21 profiles currently in the database, 6 reported family involvement findings.

To augment the database information, HFRP conducted 15 key informant interviews with OST program directors and evaluators across the nation. Additionally, HFRP staff monitored the School Aged Child Care Issues and Concerns listserv (SAC-L)³ and Promising Practices in Afterschool listserv (PPAS)⁴ and elicited responses from over 40 OST professionals regarding their family involvement practices (see Appendix A for the list of questions). This brief brings together information from these sources to answer the following questions:

- How do out-of-school time programs involve families?
- How are out-of-school time programs evaluating family involvement?
- What can out-of-school time programs do to evaluate family involvement?

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How Do Out-of-School Time Programs Involve Families?

Out-of-school time programs that involve families tend to do so in a variety of ways. Our exploratory research suggests that these programs may create opportunities for families to:

1. Enrich their own adult educational development.
2. Engage with their children in meaningful shared OST experiences.
3. Participate in program governance and community leadership.
4. Build stronger links with schools.

These four dimensions comprise our definition of family involvement in OST. The following section of this brief establishes these four conceptual dimensions and illustrates their implementation with examples from OST programs from across the nation. These four dimensions can be viewed as a dynamic template for OST programs to use to implement family involvement. Further, these four dimensions can serve as a basis for evaluating family involvement in OST programs.

1. Adult Development

Definition

This dimension of family involvement in OST considers parents' development as a context for children's growth and success. Guided by the premise that a parent is a child's first teacher, OST programs might offer a variety of activities and peer networking opportunities that enable parents to assist their children in learning at home and to enrich their own language and literacy skills, educational progress, and self-confidence. Many programs include this dimension of family involvement among their services. In fact, the newly reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, includes a provision to "offer families of students served by community learning centers [federally funded OST programs] opportunities for literacy and related educational development."⁵

From the Field

Communities In Schools (CIS) in South Carolina is an example of an OST program whose family involvement activities promote adult development. CIS consists of 29 local OST programs (and in-school programs) operating at 90 sites. They employ the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program as one element of their family involvement curriculum to build the parenting skills

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Morton Weeks, coordinator of the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program for **Communities In Schools** in South Carolina comments, "Families are coming closer together and parents are taking more active roles in their children's education ... We've seen that once parents get involved, grades, behavior, everything improves. Barriers that existed between families and other community agencies, like schools and mental health service organizations, have crumbled as a result of the program. People from these other agencies come to FAST meetings and talk to families about what is available to them in the community and alleviate some of the hesitancy and fear people have about accessing [community services]."

of families who participate in the OST programs. FAST is a 14-week research-based program developed by Lynn McDonald of the University of Wisconsin and is designed to empower parents and enhance family functioning. Participating families gather once a week in the evenings for dinner and to engage in activities designed to build family cohesion. Transportation and childcare are provided.

2. Shared Out-of-School Time Experiences

Definition

In this dimension of family involvement in OST, families, children, and programs come together to share meaningful out-of-school time experiences, i.e., those that promote communication, bonding, and mutual learning among family members. This dimension takes many forms, ranging from family activity nights, field trips for the whole family, family volunteering, parties, networking events, youth performances, and orientation activities. Programs collaborate with families to exchange information and support the development of relationships between the parent and child. OST programs view themselves as catalysts to enrich parent and child interactions in ways that directly or indirectly promote positive child development. Two-way communication between families and OST program staff facilitates shared experiences and contributes to their success.

From the Field

Citizen Schools, a Boston-based nonprofit organization, founded in 1995 and now serving 1,200 children at 13 campuses, offers after school internships (called “apprenticeships”) taught by Boston area volunteers (“Citizen Teachers”). Citizen Schools supports family and child relationships in a variety of ways:

- The program offers weekday and weekend excursions where children, families, and staff have time to bond. These excursions allow families to get out of the area and participate together in family activities that they might not otherwise have access to.
- It sponsors family basketball nights to provide time to discuss children’s academic performance in a fun and lively atmosphere.
- It maintains strong program-family communication by scheduling staff to call participants’ homes once a week to debrief families about children’s achievements and progress in their apprenticeships.
- It recruits Citizen Teachers from among the parent base, with an awareness that not all parents have the time to make such a commitment.
- Staff photograph each child with his or her family at orientation and keep the photos near the phone logs so that they feel connected to and familiar with each family.
- Staff invite parents to offer their voices by sharing stories and advice at pick-up time.

PROFESSIONAL INSIGHTS

John Werner, Founding Campus Director and Director of the 8th Grade Academy at **Citizen Schools**, explains, “When parents’ come in to pick up their kids, I might have them get up in front of the group and tell the students to brush their teeth or read more. I’ll introduce them by their favorite television show or book. If they speak Creole or Spanish, I’ll have them give their advice in their own language and have a child translate. For a lot of these families who are line workers or work in the service economy where they’re not in front of people, talking in front of an audience is a big deal. They remember it and refer later to the experience.”

TRAINING TIPS

Quality OST programs are dependent on the quality of practitioners and their professional development experiences. Yet, professionals who are prepared to work with children are often not prepared to work with families (Schorr, 1988; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider & Lopez, 1997). To support successful partnerships with families, OST programs must consider ways to train staff in approaches and strategies to work effectively with families. The National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA) Standard 33 clearly states that “staff receive training in how to work with families” (Roman, 1998). OST professionals need to consider their beliefs and attitudes about the families they work with and hone their strategies to work with them, both critical to building a base for successful partnerships.

Three resources to train OST staff in family involvement are:

Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE): Sponsored by Harvard Family Research Project, FINE offers training materials in the area of family involvement, including teaching cases that develop practitioners’ abilities to think critically and consider various perspectives in context. Learn about FINE and access its resources at: www.finenetwork.org.

Building Relationships With Parents and Families in School-Age Programs: This training handbook by Roberta Newman presents a number of professional development workshop ideas to train staff in family involvement activities. This resource is published by School-Age Notes. For a free after school resource catalog, featuring this book and many other publications, go to: www.afterschoolcatalog.com.

Making Parents/Families Feel Welcome & Valued: Parents United for Child Care has developed 50 ideas for increasing parent involvement/engagement in out-of-school time programs. To obtain this resource email **Tania Buck** at buck@pucc.com.

3. Governance and Leadership

Definition

Family involvement in program governance and decision making is another fundamental avenue through which parents are involved in OST programming. The underlying assumption behind this dimension is that OST programs will be more responsive to family needs and make programming accessible to them if families have a voice in the process. Families may become involved at two distinct levels: the leadership they take in their child's OST program and the degree to which they engage in the larger community to leverage public support for the program.

From the Field

Kansas City, Kansas, is currently involved in an initiative to systematize OST opportunities for the city's youth. Funded by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Youth Opportunities Unlimited has convened multiple stakeholders, including parents, to engage in a planning process with the goal of expanding OST opportunities and making underused OST programs more responsive to community needs. The initiative develops connections to parents through existing school-related parent activities and makes use of parent liaisons for outreach to others. They engage parents in two fundamental ways:

1. *Input via surveys and focus groups.* Parents provide input about their wants and needs for OST services,

what they value and why, and insight as to how to mobilize other parents as advocates for quality OST programs.

2. *Collaboration in the planning process.* The initiative hopes to find a core group of parents to serve on several committees that address issues such as: access to and supply of OST programs, quality, sustainability, and building public will for OST services.

Through input and collaboration in the planning process, families ensure quality programming for their children and serve as leaders in the larger community.

4. Linking to Schools

Definition

OST programs can serve as a link between families and schools. In this type of family involvement, parents' contact with OST programs provide an avenue to learn about school policies and programs and to improve communication with and participation in children's schools. This linkage function occurs because OST programs tend to be less bureaucratic than schools, with parents more likely to develop informal, trusting relationships with OST staff. Many OST programs, especially those based in schools, have contact with school staff at the end of the school day and with parents at the end of the OST program. This makes OST programs natural and physical links between schools and families.

FACTORS THAT SHAPE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

There are numerous factors that mediate family involvement in out-of-school time programs:¹

- **Logistical** – Time, economic resources, and workplace flexibility and stability all contribute to families' ability to become involved in their children's OST lives.
- **Cultural** – Language and culturally-based beliefs about parents' roles may affect the degree to which program and family members interact. Culturally sensitive programming and practice is critical to a program's success in involving families.
- **Psycho-social** – Often parents' history with school and how their own parents were involved in their non-school lives shapes their own involvement. Many OST programs are located in schools that parents themselves may have attended and where they may have had negative or unsuccessful experiences.
- **Organizational** – Family involvement is more likely to happen when programs welcome parents and extended family members and facilitate their involvement. In studies of families involved in their children's education, these families tend to agree that their level of involvement depends on outreach from teachers and school administration members (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2001).

¹ Based on email correspondences and key informant interviews conducted February through April 2002.

PROFESSIONAL INSIGHTS

Phyllis Berger from the **Firelands Local School District 21st Century Community Learning Center** in Oberlin, Ohio reminds OST professionals, “You have to keep in mind that what you think is good for people not necessarily always is. We have to keep our ear to the ground ... You need to listen to parents in terms of what they want us to do and what they need. Some of our colleagues have these wonderful plans, but no one bites because no one wants to do them. We have to keep in mind what the families want.”

From the Field

An example of an OST program that links families to schools is the St. Louis Partnership for Children and Youth. This partnership among the Wyman Center (a youth development organization), Kingdom House, and Guardian Angel Settlement, all on the south side of St. Louis, Missouri, works collaboratively to coordinate youth development services and family and community development programs for their neighborhood. They sponsor OST programs and other family-related activities and events during the non-school hours.

As part of the partnership’s efforts to work more closely with schools, the Wyman Center family coordinator has developed a working relationship with a neighborhood elementary school. Touching base with the school frequently, she advises the school leaders on how to execute outreach efforts and what to do to engage parents more actively in their children’s education. Conversely, she reports back to the community with explanations of school policies and reform efforts. While this role is largely informal, it is evident that the partnership is leveraging its position in the community to serve as a link between families and schools.

How Are Out-of-School Time Programs Evaluating Family Involvement?

Few resources have systematically compiled information about family involvement in OST programs. However, HFRP’s Out-of-School Time Evaluation Database provides information, in an accessible way, about evaluations of both large and small out-of-school time programs and initiatives (available on the Web at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html).

Each profile in the database contains an overview of the out-of-school time program or initiative that was evaluated, as well as detailed information about each evaluation report produced about that program. Six of the OST programs included in the database looked at family involvement in OST as part of their overall evaluations. The table on pages 8 and 9 highlights these six programs and the performance measures and data sources employed to evaluate family involvement practices. Each of these OST program evaluations also examined many other aspects of program functioning and impact.

Types of Programs Evaluating Family Involvement

The six programs in the Harvard Family Research Project Out-of-School Time Evaluation Database that evaluated family involvement are:

- Austin Eastside Story Afterschool Program (AES)
- Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP)
- Los Angeles’ Better Educated Students for Tomorrow (LA’s BEST)
- New York City Beacons Initiative (NYC Beacons)
- The After-School Corporation (TASC)
- YouthPlaces Initiative (YouthPlaces)

These six programs, with varied size, scope, and program mission, represent a range of OST approaches. Some initiatives have just 350 participants per year, as in the Austin Eastside Afterschool Program, while others are large, such as New York City Beacons Initiative, which serves 76,000 youth and 33,000 adults annually. Four of the programs are local in scope, but TASC operates throughout the state of New York and the Juvenile Mentoring Program serves youth nationwide. LA’s BEST has been in operation since 1988 while YouthPlaces was founded in 1999. The six programs have a variety of missions, including increasing the quality and quantity of OST opportunities (YouthPlaces and TASC), broadening supports for youth and families (NYC Beacons), and reducing juvenile delinquency and enhancing academic achievement (JUMP).

Types of Evaluation Design

All of the OST evaluations that examined family involvement had a non-experimental design⁶ component. Additionally, two of the six employed a quasi-experimental design, in which program participants were compared to non-participants who attended the same schools. However, the two programs that used a quasi-experimental design did not use it for an analysis of the impacts of family involvement, but rather focused on other

ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

Following are the activities and approaches that OST programs are using to involve families along the four dimensions described on pages 2–5. It was compiled from a review of the Harvard Family Research Project Out-of-School Time Evaluation Database,¹ email correspondences with OST practitioners and directors, OST key informant interviews, and training workshops done with OST practitioners by HFRP staff members. It shows that programs are already engaging families in multiple ways across the four dimensions. Communication, respect, and relationship-building are viewed as critical to all of these activities and, as such, are not present in any one category, but rather span all of them.

<p><i>Adult Development Activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GED classes • ESL classes • Job skills training • Parenting classes • Family literacy programs 	<p><i>Parent and Child Shared Activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family activity nights • Weekend family excursions • Parties • Program orientations • Newsletters • Phone calls • Conversations at pick-up and drop-off hours • Employing parents as staff • Using parents as volunteers • Incorporating parents' culture and experiences into the curriculum 	<p><i>Governance and Leadership Activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents serving on program advisory boards • Parents serving as program evaluators • Parents maintaining voting rights on different program initiatives • Networking events • Conducting parent needs and satisfaction assessments • Parents and programs partnering with other community stakeholders to build and change OST services • Hosting conversations about issues important to the community • Cultivating parents as leaders of children through work in the program 	<p><i>Activities That Link Parents to Schools</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OST staff sitting in on meetings between families and schools regarding individual children • OST staff attending parent-teacher conferences • OST staff passing information between school and home • Programs linking with Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and school-sponsored family nights • OST staff spending time in children's classrooms • OST staff providing both teachers and parents with updates about children's homework progress and understanding • OST programs holding meetings to discuss how to get children ready for the next academic year • OST programs helping families select appropriate schools for their children
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¹ The Harvard Family Research Project Out-of-School Time Evaluation Database is available at: www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html.

OST program impacts. This distribution of designs is similar to all OST program evaluations: most evaluations focus on how the program is being implemented and examine participants' experiences (formative evaluation) rather than on the impacts that the program is having on participants (summative evaluation).

Performance Measures

Performance measures allow a program to quantify the services or interventions offered in the areas of activities, efficiency, capacity, or quality. A program acting alone can affect performance measures, of which there are two types. Measures of effort are the direct outputs of program strategies and activities. Measures of effect

are changes in the target population that come about as a result of program strategies and activities. For example, a measure of effort for family involvement may be the number of families attending a family picnic; a measure of effect may be feelings of closeness between parents and children as a result of the picnic.⁷ It is important that program objectives drive performance measure development so that the data will be relevant to program stakeholders.

The evaluations that examined family involvement used a wide array of performance measures to do so. Performance measures fell into the following categories:

- Rate of participation in family involvement activities (4 out of 24)⁸

- Type and frequency of family involvement activities (6 out of 24)
- Type and number of communications/interactions between program staff and families (4 out of 24)
- Familial satisfaction with the program (3 out of 24)
- Parents' relationship with schools (2 out of 24)
- Organizational capacity for family involvement (2 out of 24)
- Other (3 out of 24)

As this broad selection of performance measures indicates, each evaluation included in the HFRP database that assessed family involvement did so in a unique way. The performance measures that evaluators used to evaluate family involvement were a reflection of the mission of the OST program, the program's philosophy on family involvement, and the strategies and activities the program employed to engage families. The majority of the performance measures that OST evaluations relied on to measure family involvement were descriptive. In other words, they measured what the programs were doing to engage families and how this involvement was implemented.

Data Sources

These six programs relied on a number of data sources to measure family involvement, but the most common source was interview data. In particular, evaluators interviewed parents, program staff, youth, and principals, in that order of frequency, to gain a better understanding of family involvement practices and experiences. Program documents were also a data source for some evaluations, allowing evaluators to examine family involvement policies and parental outreach materials. Some evaluations made use of survey data to gauge family involvement, but far fewer than the OST evaluations in the database that did not assess family involvement.⁹

What Can Out-of-School Time Programs Do to Evaluate Family Involvement?

Evaluation allows for a systematic assessment of family involvement practices that will benefit all programs striving to engage families. OST programs can use evaluation to learn what family involvement activities they are currently engaged in, whether those activities meet the needs of program stakeholders, what can be done to improve family involvement practice, and what the outcomes are for families and children of the activities in each of the four dimensions of family involvement.

However, there is no one best way to evaluate family involvement in OST. This review of the evaluation of family involvement in out-of-school time programs dem-

onstrates that programs are using a wide array of evaluation designs, methods, and data sources to document and assess the level and type of involvement that families have in their children's OST programming. OST programs select the evaluation approach that enables them to answer the most pressing questions, based on the information needed to make program improvements and meet funders' requirements. For example, an OST program whose mission includes a goal to involve families in program governance might assess the degree to which parents participate in decision-making meetings, provide feedback about program implementation, or help interview staff. Similarly, a program aiming to strengthen family-school-youth relationships might interview school staff, family, and youth to determine the degree of continuity these stakeholders perceive among the home, school, and OST program venues.

Despite the variation in how OST programs are evaluating family involvement practices, there are some basic evaluation approaches that can help programs collect information to better understand how to serve and engage the families of the youth that participate in their programs. While a program's information needs will determine the evaluation approach it chooses, thinking carefully about each of the four dimensions of family involvement allows the program to broaden its scope of inquiry and study those aspects of family involvement that are most relevant to its programming.

Needs Assessment

"Need" can be defined as "the gap between the problem and the existing efforts, resources, and programs to deal with the need" (Linney & Wandersman, 1991). When assessing needs, a program must acknowledge the services already available and identify those that could potentially be of help if provided to the youth and families participating in the OST program. It is equally important to identify the strengths of the families and communities the program serves, and assess the ways in which these strengths can be capitalized on for maximum benefit to program participants. A needs assessment to better understand the needs of families could inform four areas:

- How are families already involved in their children's OST programming?
- How are families' needs being met through the OST program?
- How could families' and youths' needs be addressed by engaging families in OST programs, or, more broadly, in youths' non-school lives?
- What are the strengths of families and the community and how can they be used?

OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME EVALUATIONS OF FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Program	Brief Program Description	Evaluation Design	Performance Measures/ Indicators of Family Involvement ¹	Sources of Family Involvement Data ²
Austin Eastside Story Afterschool Program (AES)	AES serves 350 pre-k through 7th grade students from Austin, Texas. Goals of the program specific to families are to increase parents' empowerment and commitment to their children's education and foster the social and cultural development of parents and students. Parents are required to be involved in the program. As a condition of enrolling their children, all families must sign a form indicating their agreement to attend monthly parent meetings on parenting and community advocacy skills. They are also expected to volunteer four hours per month in a role that supports the program.	Non-experimental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parental attendance at monthly meetings and mandatory work requirement times Level at which program exhibits parental involvement in program design, operation, and improvement Extent of parental satisfaction with program characteristics, quality, and content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluator assessment scale Document review of program files (i.e., family characteristics) Interviews with approximately half of the program teachers and a sample of parents (parents were selected by AES program personnel based on their availability)
Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP)	JUMP is a federal program aimed at reducing juvenile delinquency, gang participation, and drop out rates and improving academic performance through the provision of one-on-one mentoring for youth at risk. JUMP serves approximately 13,000 youth from elementary to high school.	Non-experimental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which program includes provisions for parental participation in program policy statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data review: Grantees complete profiles, including policies for parental permission and participation, and submit narrative reports.
Los Angeles' Better Educated Students for Tomorrow Program (LA's BEST)	LA's BEST is an after school program serving 14,000 students per year. The program goals include creating a safe environment, enhancing educational support opportunities, providing educational enrichment and recreation activities, and developing youth's interpersonal skills and self-esteem.	Non-experimental/ Quasi-experimental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent of parental satisfaction with the program Measure of parents' expectations for children's future educational attainment Percentage of parents interested in being involved in planning and other OST program functions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews: Parents of participants were interviewed to gather information about after school care activities and costs prior to the program, perceptions about LA's BEST staff and programming, parent involvement in the program, effects of the program on participants, demographics, aspirations for children, and neighborhood safety. Interviews were also conducted with program and non-program parents about children's OST lives.
New York City Beacons Initiative (NYC Beacons)	Beacons are school-based community centers offering after school programming for children, youth, and families in the evenings, on weekends, and during	Non-experimental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which programs offer adult education classes and activities Number and type of adult education classes and activities offered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews/focus groups with youth, staff members, supervisors, and principals in host schools about issues including parent and family

the summer. Beacons also serves as a community resource, providing support and services to parents, senior citizens, and other community members. They serve over 76,000 youth (pre-school through high school) and 33,000 adults in 80 public schools.

involvement and support

- Focus groups with parents and other adult participants to understand their participation patterns and how they perceive the Beacon
- Observation
- Surveys

- Rate of parental participation in adult education classes and activities
- Proportion of programs to use adult volunteers
- Volunteers' self-reported changes in attitude toward children and community as a result of volunteering
- Proportion of programs to provide family support services
- Proportion of programs to foster community dialogue and problem solving
- Degree to which program-sponsored family and community events attract diverse audiences

The After-School Corporation (TASC)

TASC serves about 32,000 elementary through high school students in urban, suburban, and rural areas. TASC's two-part mission is to enhance the quality of after school programs and increase the availability of after school opportunities in New York by providing resources and strategies for establishing or expanding after school projects.

Non-experimental/
Quasi-experimental

- Document review of parent outreach materials
- Interviews with site coordinators, principals, project staff, teachers, parents, and students
- Surveys administered to site coordinators, principals, project staff, students, and parents of participants about project implementation and quality (e.g., goals, opportunities)

- Extent of parental involvement in the program
- Frequency of programs' contact with parents and community members
- Type of program-parent communication
- Number of parents site coordinators communicated with in the last month regarding individual children
- Number of site coordinator interactions with community members in the last month
- Percentage of parents reporting increased involvement with their child's school as a result of the program
- Proportion of school principals reporting that parents in their school are more satisfied with the school
- Rate of parental satisfaction with the program

YouthPlaces Initiative (YouthPlaces)

YouthPlaces is an after school program in Baltimore, Maryland serving an estimated 10,000 elementary, middle, and high school students. The program mission is to strengthen existing YouthPlaces in the city by providing training, technical assistance, and implementation funds to meet established quality standards and demonstrate the effectiveness of high quality after school programs in producing positive youth outcomes.

Non-experimental

- Surveys of executive directors, staff, and site leaders

- Degree of program support for inclusion of youth and parents in program planning

¹ This table includes only the performance measures/indicators relating to family involvement. The evaluations employed other performance measures/indicators that are not included in this table.
² This table includes only the data sources relating to family involvement. The evaluations employed other data sources that are not included in this table.

OST programs can use several methods to carry out a needs assessment, including interviewing and surveying families about how they want to be involved in their youth's non-school time. Programs can also interview and survey other community members, businesses, cultural organizations, and religious associations. Further, other youth-serving organizations may provide valuable information about how they engage families and what they perceive the community needs. Although needs assessments are commonly associated with programs just starting to serve youth and their families, they can be conducted at any time in a program's development when staff members want to step back and assess the evolving needs and capabilities of participants and their families. Families can also be involved in continuous assessment and improvement of program offerings.

Service Documentation

OST programs may document their services to gather valuable information about the frequency, content, and quality of program activities offered in each of the four dimensions of family involvement. Programs can then report this data to multiple stakeholders, such as program staff, funders, parents, and community members. Many funders, including the U.S. Department of Education through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants, require that OST programs provide documentation of services. However, even programs whose funders have no such requirement can benefit from systematically assessing and describing the services they offer. Family involvement services and activities may be documented and measured as part of a larger effort to document all OST services.

The questions that OST programs use to guide the documentation of their family involvement services relate to the kind(s) of family involvement that the program practices. For example, programs that offer adult educational development may want to track the number and types of adult enrichment opportunities available. Similarly, OST programs that provide links between home and school may want to track how many times staff have participated in family-school meetings, or how frequently they distribute information about the participants' school(s).

Following are some service documentation questions to guide OST programs in documenting their family involvement services in each of the four out-of-school time family involvement dimensions.

1. *Adult Development*

- What adult educational activities/services does the program provide?

- How many adults participate in educational services and activities?
- What does the program do to ensure that families' interests are reflected in the program offerings?
- What does the program do to support parent participation in adult development (e.g., transportation, food, childcare)?
- What does the program do to enhance parents' ability to support their children's learning?

2. *Shared Out-of-School Time Experiences*

- What activities does the program provide to foster meaningful, shared experiences between families, children, and program staff (e.g., dinners, field trips, meetings, sports)?
- How often do families participate in these activities?
- How does the program capitalize on families' strengths in the design and implementation of family activities?
- How does the program communicate with participants' families?
- How often does the program communicate with participants' families?
- Does the program provide learning opportunities between parents/adults and children (e.g., literacy, library field trips)? If so, how?

3. *Governance and Leadership*

- In what leadership activities do parents participate?
- How many parents participate in program governance/leadership?
- How does the program solicit parent input about program governance (e.g., surveys, focus groups, informal parent meetings)?
- How does the program recognize and use family strengths (e.g., parents' leadership experience gained through OST staff positions or the PTA, organizing abilities, cultural understanding of other families) in program governance?
- Does the program use program governance/leadership opportunities to engage parents in dialogue about issues of importance to them (e.g., children's schooling, community problems)? If so, how?

4. *Linking to Schools*

- What activities does the program undertake to link participants' families with their children's schools?
- How frequently does the program link families with their children's schools?
- Is this linkage formal or informal?
- Who initiates these linkage opportunities (e.g., program staff, parents)?

- Does the program make an effort to learn about and address parent’s concerns about children’s schooling? If so, how?

Regardless of the type(s) of the family involvement strategies that OST programs pursue, there are some basic questions that all programs can ask to get a better sense of their service delivery:

- What activities does the program undertake to engage families in their children’s out-of-school time lives?
- How many families participate in family involvement activities?
- Which families participate in family involvement activities?
- How are staff resources allocated to family involvement activities?
- How are funds used to provide services that allow for family involvement in the program and children’s out-of-school time hours?

A variety of methods can be used to collect data for service documentation. These include, but are not limited to:

- Surveys of families, staff, and children about the engagement of families in the program
- Interviews with families, staff, and children about the engagement of families in the program
- Forms for staff to fill out about daily activities
- Parent communication logs for staff to record the date, time, and topic of conversations with parents
- Sign-in sheets for parents to fill out at family activities or adult classes

Program Impact Evaluation

Program impact evaluation is used to explore a program’s effectiveness in producing intended results. However, evaluating the impact of family involvement on the children and families who participate in an OST program is something that few, if any, OST programs have attempted. OST programs that have conducted impact evaluations of their programming tend to look at the effect of all program activities on the children and families they serve. Disaggregating particular program strategies or activities, such as family involvement practices, to see the differential impact of one area of service is more complex and beyond the scope of most evaluations. Nonetheless, including family involvement practices in the evaluation of overall program impact on participants is a viable strategy. This will allow programs who do value family involvement to prove to stakeholders that their comprehensive program, of which family

EVALUATION TIP

The National School-Age Care Alliance’s Standards for Quality may serve as a guide to programs in documenting family involvement practices. Three of the thirty-six standards for quality OST programming directly address family involvement (Roman, 1998):

- Staff and families interact with each other in positive ways.
- Staff support families’ involvement in the program.
- Staff, families, and schools share important information to support the well-being of children and youth.

Performance measures can be developed from each of these quality standards. For example, a program interested in achieving positive interaction between staff and families might measure parent and staff satisfaction with their mutual relationship. Or, a program aiming to facilitate information-sharing between staff, families, and schools might create a performance measure that documents the number of conversations these three entities have about children’s well-being.

involvement is one component, is making a difference.

As OST evaluation designs become more nuanced, programs can use program impact evaluation to answer the following questions about family involvement. Clearly, each OST program can focus on the outcomes most closely related to their mission, and design research questions accordingly.

- Do adult development programs offered by OST programs lead to parents’ increased capacity to assist their children in learning at home, improved language and literacy skills, educational progress, and self-confidence?
- Do shared experiences between families and children in OST programs lead to improved parent/child relationships?
- Does family involvement in OST programs lead to greater involvement of families in their children’s in-school education?

- Does family involvement in OST programs improve children’s developmental outcomes in the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical domains?

Impact evaluations strive to demonstrate a causal relationship between the services provided and the outcomes experienced by participants. The design of the evaluation determines the strength of the evidence for that causal relationship. An experimentally designed evaluation, which enables evaluators to assume that the only difference between the participants and non-participants is their participation in the evaluated program, provides the most powerful statistical support for a causal relationship. However, experimental studies require the identification of a randomly assigned control group, which may present evaluation challenges that are beyond the scope of many OST programs. Therefore, a quasi-experimental design, where OST program participants’ outcomes are compared to outcomes from demographically similar non-participants at a different school or from a national data set, may be a more practical solution. However, both experimental and quasi-experimental designs may be more resource-intensive than many local OST programs can manage by themselves. Further, many OST evaluation questions do not necessitate the use of experimental and quasi-experimental designs, and thus most OST programs prefer to assess their family involvement strategies using non-experimental approaches.

A Note on Evaluators

As an OST program begins the evaluation process, there are two possibilities as to who will conduct the evaluation. The first is the program itself—a director, staff member, or other program stakeholder. The second option is an outside evaluator. Which of these two possibilities is appropriate for any given OST program depends on the type of evaluation conducted and the resources that the program has at its disposal, including time, money, and evaluation expertise. Conducting a needs assessment or documenting services are two types of evaluation that an OST program might be able to conduct without the assistance of a professional program evaluator. An impact evaluation, due to the more complex design and methods required, may be better suited to an outside evaluator’s expertise. Outside evaluators also bring an objectivity to the evaluation that may be valuable in identifying areas for program improvement and inspiring credibility in program stakeholders, particularly funders and the public.

Hiring a consultant is not the only way to bring in an outside evaluator. Following are two examples of how

EVALUATION TIP

If an OST program chooses to hire an evaluator to conduct its evaluation, the program can expect the evaluator to:

- Observe the normal day-to-day activities of the OST program at length.
- Be sensitive to the needs of all program stakeholders, including children, families, and staff.
- Be willing to communicate and do so in a way that is easily understandable.
- Inspire change and assist in assessing processes to implement change.
- Help determine what the program needs to know, rather than dictate the program’s needs.
- Promote site ownership of the evaluation.

OST programs can partner with others to evaluate their family involvement practices.

Partnering With Universities

The Firelands Local School District 21st Century Community Learning Center in Oberlin, Ohio partners with Ashland University, a small local university, to conduct its evaluations. Graduate students working towards master’s degrees in Curriculum and Instruction are required to take a qualitative research methods course. As part of this course, these beginning researchers conduct non-participant observations, surveys, and interviews in the Firelands 21st CCLC to evaluate, among other things, its family involvement practices. Students get to know the families in the program by sitting in on adult education classes and attending weekend excursions. In each of these settings, the evaluators talk to the parents, observe group dynamics, and gather data on relevant performance measures.

This university-OST program evaluation partnership is a promising model for a number of reasons. To begin with, cash-strapped programs often do not have the funds to hire an independent evaluator. Expertise at the university level is a good alternative. Also, using student researchers provides programs with multiple evaluators who each bring different perspectives. Finally, by engaging students in evaluation early in their career, the OST field is training a new generation of evaluators sensitized to the importance of family involvement in OST.

Partnering With Parents

SHED, Inc., a school-age care program in Andover, Massachusetts, is using parents as evaluators. Sydney Bialo, Executive Director of SHED, Inc., has gone through the NSACA accreditation process. She explains, “one of the keys to program evaluation is to have a lot of family involvement in the process.” Her program engages 12 families on the assessment team. These families observe program activities and report their observations on the Assessing School Age Quality form.

Using parents as evaluators in this way generates many positive outcomes for the program and the families. First, relationships are formed among families as well as between families and OST program staff. The process of observing also brings parents into the daily activities of the program and enables them to better understand the program in action. Usually parents only see a snapshot at pick-up time, if that. These parents are in a unique position to both connect with their children’s daily experience and also to market the program to other families. As a result of the process, four of these families have formed a Parent Involvement Committee in response to their findings that other families are looking for ways to engage in the program.

Conclusion

Research suggests that family involvement in children’s learning and development supports children’s school success (see Appendix B). This involvement is not only focused on what parents do to support their children’s learning in school, but also what they do to engage in children’s learning and development during the non-school hours. As an increasing number of children and youth take advantage of OST programs, providers must consider innovative ways to expand the range of opportunities for families to participate in out-of-school time learning so that these benefits are not lost. Four dimensions of family involvement seem particularly salient to out-of-school time programs: adult development, shared experiences for children and families, program governance, and linking to schools. This last dimension, which is unique to OST programs, holds high potential for future evaluation of family involvement impact on student outcomes because research has found that a predictor of student achievement is family involvement in their child’s education at school and in the community (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

To date, little evaluation work has been conducted to examine the nature and scope of family involvement, much less its impact on youth development. This review of OST program evaluations that do include family in-

volvement reveals that most programs are conducting formative evaluations to learn about families’ experiences and program practices along the four dimensions of family involvement in OST. Moving forward, especially in the current policy context which emphasizes a connection between OST experiences and academic achievement, evaluation of family involvement in OST programs—whether through needs assessment, service documentation, or impact evaluation—is key to improving family involvement practices and, ultimately, to fostering improved child outcomes.

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Appendix A

Questions Sent to SAC-L and PPAS Listservs

To inform this brief, HFRP staff monitored the School Aged Child Care Issues and Concerns listserv (SAC-L) and Promising Practices in Afterschool listserv (PPAS) and elicited responses from over 40 OST professionals regarding their family involvement practices. HFRP staff asked the following questions:

- What is your program doing in terms of family involvement?
- How has your program been successful in involving families and what are some of the challenges in doing this? What would help you address these challenges?
- Do you have any family involvement practices that you think are innovative and that you think other programs could benefit from learning about?
- If you have conducted an evaluation of your program, have you included questions about family involvement? Please describe.
- Have families been involved in the evaluation of your program? If so, how?

Appendix B

Research on the Benefits of Family Involvement in Education

Research over the last 30 years has shown the benefits that family involvement in education can confer on students, their families, and schools. The positive influence of family involvement in education on children’s achievement has been established (Chavkin, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). This positive effect endures throughout the pre-k through 12th-grade years and manifests itself in

areas such as literacy and mathematics (Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, & Fendrich, 1999; Lee & Croninger, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Beyond increases in learning and higher test scores, research has also demonstrated that family involvement improves student school attendance, fosters higher aspirations for post-secondary education, facilitates successful transitions between elementary, middle, and high school, reduces drop-out rates, and increases enrollment in higher level high school classes (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Ma, 1999; Scribner, Young & Pedroza, 1999). Students' social functioning can also be improved by family involvement in education in such areas as student behavior, motivation, social competence, and relationships between students and teachers as well as between students and their peers (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Marcon, 1999; Palenchar, Vondra & Wilson, 2001).

In addition to supporting the successes of individual students, family involvement in education has been shown to foster more positive outcomes for both schools and families. Research suggests that schools may enjoy an improved school climate, increased resources, and richer curriculum capacity when families are actively engaged in their children's learning (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Moll & Gonzales, 1997). Outcomes for families may include: changes in skills, knowledge, and beliefs (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001); access to more resources; and increased capacity to advocate for children's rights and school reform (Lopez, 2002).

Notes

¹ Little, P., Traub, F., & Horsch, K. (2002, April). *Evaluation of 21st Century Community Learning Center programs: A guide for state education agencies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. [Available at: www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/issuebrief2.html.]

² The Harvard Family Research Project Out-of-School Time Evaluation Database is available at: www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html.

³ For more information about the SAC-L listserv go to: www.lsoft.se/scripts/wl.exe?SL1=SAC-L&H=LISTSERV.UIUC.EDU.

⁴ For more information about the PPAS listserv go to: www.afterschool.org/communicating.cfm#listserve.

⁵ For the complete text of the No Child Left Behind Act, see www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/esea.

⁶ *Non-experimental* evaluation designs use purposeful sampling techniques to get "information-rich" cases and include: case studies, data collection and reporting for accountability, participatory approaches, theory-based/grounded-theory approaches, ethnographic approaches, and mixed method studies. In *experimental* evaluation design, participants are randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. *Quasi-experimental* designs are similar to experimental designs except that the subjects are not randomly assigned to either the experimental or the control group, or the researcher cannot control which group will get the treatment.

⁷ For more information on performance measures in out-of-school time see: 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.]

⁸ In other words, 4 out of the 24 performance measures included in this analysis fell into this category.

⁹ Based on information from the Harvard Family Research Project Out-of-School Time Evaluation Database, available at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html.

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ABOUT HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT

Founded in 1983 by Dr. Heather Weiss, Harvard Family Research Project conducts research about programs and policies that serve children and families throughout the United States. 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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