Research Update

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME DATABASE

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ABOUT THE DATABASE

Our online Out-of-School Time Database includes profiles of and research studies about OST programs and initiatives. This valuable and easy-to-use resource can help you learn about and improve OST research and evaluation; it can also support policy and program development.

The database is located in the OST section of the HFRP website at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html. By using the search mechanism on the website, you can refine your scan of the profiles to specific program, study, evaluation characteristics, and findings information.

Introduction

Harvard Family Research Project's (HFRP) Out-School Time (OST) Program Research and Evaluation Database provides accessible and timely information about research and evaluations involving OST programs and initiatives. The searchable database, which includes narrative profiles of OST evaluations and research studies, is designed to help researchers, evaluators, practitioners, and policymakers learn about and improve OST research and evaluation.

HFRP's series of *Research Updates* builds upon this resource by providing key insights from each update to the database—highlighting new and innovative methods and findings in the increasingly sophisticated and growing field of OST research and evaluation. As the second in the series, this *Research Update* synthesizes findings from the profiles of 13 research and evaluation reports added to the database in August 2007. (For more information about these 13 research and evaluation reports, see Appendix I.)

Conducting OST Research and Evaluation: Innovations and Developments

As the number and size of OST initiatives continue to grow, pressing issues are emerging in the field of research and evaluation. Evaluation tactics that work for local, small-scale OST programs are not necessarily effective or feasible for systems or large-scale initiatives. Programs that achieve desirable outcomes at a single time and in a single place may not always succeed in other instances and locations. Moreover, there exists an increasing need to evaluate not just youth outcomes, but also programs' impacts on and partnerships with families, schools, and communities. On top of all that, programs face the added task of evaluating professional development's role in achieving intended outcomes.

The 13 reports added to the database in August 2007 acknowledge these challenges and introduce some new and innovative solutions to them. From these research studies, several ideas key to the development of OST emerge:

■ **Replication.** Researchers and evaluators work hard to demonstrate whether programs are successful in achieving their intended outcomes. Such individual evaluation efforts are vital to building support for OST programs and improving the quality of supports for youth and families. But it is also important to understand whether what succeeds in one context is also effective in others. A program

that achieves intended outcomes at one time and in one location may be successful because of unusual circumstances, such as exceptional leadership or high levels of buy-in from families and the community. Only by replicating and studying successful OST programs can we build confidence in program models and practices that are effective and worthy of implementation across times and locations.

An evaluation of the Across Ages program addresses the issue of replication. Across Ages is an intergenerational mentoring program for at-risk youth first implemented in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1991. In 1996, researchers at Temple University conducted a random assignment study of three schools hosting the program and found that Across Ages effectively boosted participants' academic and social well-being and reduced substance use. Based in part on these results, the program was then replicated at over 50 sites across the country.

In 2000, researchers in Massachusetts set out to replicate the positive benefits of Across Ages by conducting a random assignment study in Springfield, Massachusetts. The results were promising, showing improvements in school and family bonding, lower alcohol use, and increased self-control, self-confidence, and cooperation among participating youth. Together with the Philadelphia study, the Massachusetts evaluation shows the value of replication and suggests that the program can be effective in multiple contexts.

■ **Evaluating large-scale initiatives and systems.** Today, OST programs and initiatives are becoming larger and more complex, and cities and states are beginning to develop their own full-fledged OST systems. Such efforts are vastly larger than the local OST programs more commonly evaluated in the past—and understanding the implementation and effectiveness of these new, large-scale efforts can prove challenging. With financial constraints limiting the resources devoted to evaluation, finding effective, feasible ways to evaluate these efforts is especially critical.

The evaluations of three OST initiatives conducted by Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (PSA) are therefore instructive. In the evaluations of two large-scale initiatives—New York City's Department of Youth and Community Development's OST Initiative and New Jersey After 3—PSA took a systematic yet focused approach, gathering progressively more detailed infor-

mation from smaller numbers of sites and stakeholders. Site coordinators and youth tend to be a relatively easy group of stakeholders from whom to collect information because program sites are often required to take part in evaluations and staff can ensure that youth complete surveys during the course of the program. For this reason, PSA evaluators selected a large number of sites from which to collect coordinator and youth surveys. They then focused their more labor- and cost-intensive data collection efforts, such as parent surveys or staff interviews, on a smaller subset of programs.

In the evaluation of Supplemental Educational Services (SES), a large-scale system of supplementary academic instruction instituted as part of No Child Left Behind, PSA took an even more targeted approach, collecting in-depth information across nine districts in six states in order to more fully understand how SES was being implemented, as well as its challenges and successes. This evaluation, like the two described above, demonstrates that, in evaluating a large-scale program, it is important to determine what information is central to addressing a particular evaluation's or study's questions and then target limited research and evaluation resources accordingly.

■ **Examining programs in context.** When researchers and evaluators seek to understand OST programming, they often confine their attention to what goes on inside a program's doors—focusing on activities, staff, and youth participants. But OST programs also take place within larger communities and schools and connect to other systems of support for youth's learning and development, such as youth's families. Understanding, therefore, how OST programs link with other supports and work within communities and schools can help programs to better serve youth and their families.

A study by researchers at RAND demonstrated the importance of context when it examined the availability of high school sports programs in Los Angeles County Public Schools. The RAND study looked not only at the effectiveness of sports programs in preventing risky behaviors, but also at the question of youth's access to a variety of sports programs within their schools. Researchers administered a survey to school personnel at nearly 200 schools across Los Angeles County, in order to see where and in what types of schools an array of sports programs were available to students. The study showed a link between greater access to activities and

student outcomes—evidence that research into issues of program context, such as access, is critical to understanding questions about OST programs.

A study by researchers at Brandeis University's Community, Families & Work Program looked at context in a different way. It examined how after school programs fit into parents' work lives. Specifically, researchers surveyed parents of school-age children at three large companies to examine the nature and extent of "parental concern about after-school time" (PCAST), as well as the consequences of these concerns and the existence of workplace supports that might alleviate these concerns. Research like this, which looks beyond the program's doors, helps illuminate important aspects of OST programs—not only how they affect participating youth, but also how programs impact parents, as they try to balance work, child care, and the management of their children's safety, education, and development in the nonschool hours.

■ **Evaluating professional development.** As they grow in scope and sophistication, more and more OST programs and initiatives have begun to offer professional development to their staff. Not surprisingly, programs and their funders want to know whether, how, and in what ways these investments are paying off. So far, much of the research on and evaluation of OST professional development focuses on descriptive information—such as what proportion of staff receive services and whether they found those services worthwhile. While such data are useful, more detailed information—about how professional development services are implemented, how OST staff experience them, and what influence they have on OST programs and participating youth—will provide a more complete and valuable picture of professional developments' impact on OST programs.

The evaluation of the Afterschool Literacy Coaching Initiative (LCI) in Boston begins to address some of these questions. LCI places trained literacy coaches in after school programs in Boston to work with after school staff to improve the delivery of literacy activities, such as reading aloud, to youth. To evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the professional development initiative, evaluators collected in-depth information from interviews of site directors, staff, and literacy coaches, as well as detailed logs of activities conducted by coaches at participating sites. These data were complemented by surveys of youth at the beginning and end of the program, so that evaluators were able to examine such questions as whether staff who worked more intensively with reading coaches improved their literacy activity skills and whether this led to different youth experiences in participating programs. Only with detailed information, which focused specifically on the implementation and effectiveness of professional development strategies, could the program see what strategies succeeded in improving staff skills.

OST Benefits to Youth, Families, and Communities: What Works and Why

Research on and evaluation of OST programs and initiatives frequently look at programs' impact on youth outcomes. A number of the profiled studies and evaluations added to the database in the August 2007 update do just that, while others also look at the important benefits OST programs can provide to participants' families, communities, and even the companies that employ their parents. Here, we highlight key findings on the outcomes of these OST programs for youth, their families, and others, with an eye toward how and why those outcomes are achieved:

■ **Access.** Youth cannot participate in OST programs if those programs are not there. For youth to reap the benefits of regular participation in quality OST programs, they first need to have access to such programs in their schools and communities. Getting hard data on access to programs and how access matters for youth is a difficult task, since researchers and evaluators typically do not collect information on the availability of different types of programming across schools and communities but instead tend to focus on individual programs and initiatives.

However, researchers examining Los Angeles County high school sports programs bucked that trend. They surveyed 200 LA high schools about the availability of sports programs in their facilities and found that schools with more sports programs also had higher youth participation rates. Moreover, neighborhoods containing schools with more sports programs had lower juvenile arrest and teen birth rates than neighborhoods with fewer high school sports options. Taken together, these findings suggest that access is critical for building high levels of participation and thereby achieving positive outcomes for youth.

■ **Focused, intentional approaches to programming.**
Youth seem to benefit most from programming that uses focused, intentional approaches that work to achieve distinct, predetermined outcomes. For instance, an evaluation of the Citizen School's 8th Grade Academy—which combines structured activities designed to promote academic success with experiential learning activities—found numerous academic benefits of the program, such as higher levels of school attendance and better grades in comparison to youth who did not attend the program.

Similarly, in a meta-analysis[1] of 49 evaluation reports of 73 after school programs, Joseph Durlak and Roger Weissberg found positive benefits to youth in 7 of the 8 outcome areas they studied—including improved academic performance, decreased problem behaviors and drug use, and increased self-confidence and self-esteem. Durlak and Weissberg looked at the program characteristics associated with these outcomes and found that positive effects were concentrated in programs that focused on improving youth's social skills using "evidence-based training approaches"—defined as strategies that demonstrated *sequence* (using a sequenced set of activities to achieve objectives related to skill development); *active* (using active forms of learning to help youth learn new skills); *focus* (including at least one program component devoted to developing personal or social skills); and *explicitness* (targeting specific personal or social skills). Taken together, these two studies point toward the importance of providing focused, intentional programming aimed at achieving specific outcomes for program participants.

■ **Promoting summer learning.** School-year OST programs are important but are not always enough. A recent research synthesis by Beth Miller[2] finds that the summer months are a key period during which disadvantaged youth fall academically behind their more advantaged peers. Summer is therefore a major contributor to the widening of achievement gaps over the school years, which suggests the importance of summer learning

programs geared toward helping youth keep pace and not lose academic momentum during the summer months.

One such program is Teach Baltimore, which recently released an evaluation spanning 3 years. This summer program combines intensive reading and writing instruction with a series of activities focused on hands-on science and math, recreation, art, and drama. In addition to academics, youth take part in weekly afternoon field trips and cultural enrichment experiences. Results showed that youth who attended the program frequently for multiple summers demonstrated increased vocabulary, reading comprehension, and reading scores compared to randomly assigned control group youth who did not attend the program.

OST PROGRAM QUALITY RESOURCES

The Quality of School-Age Child Care in After-School Settings   This brief by HFRP's Priscilla Little offers an overview of the features of high-quality after school settings, including an examination of key research on links between program quality and developmental outcomes, a review of current practice in program quality assessment, and a set of quality-related considerations for policymakers. www.researchconnections.org/location/ccrca12576

Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools   This report, published by the Forum for Youth Investment, compares the purpose, history, structure, methodology, content, and technical properties of nine different program observation tools for assessing youth program quality. www.forumfyi.org/Files//Measuring_Youth_Program_Quality.pdf

Quality Time After School: What Instructors Can Do to Enhance Learning   This report from Public/Private Ventures identifies the characteristics of after school activities that are linked to youth engagement and learning across a rich diversity of out-of-school-time activity areas. The report suggests a road map for program operators and policymakers to create engaging learning environments in after school programs. www.ppv.org/ppv/youth/youth_publications.asp?section_id=8

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1 In essence, a meta-analysis synthesizes the estimated effects of a large number of studies to make broader statements about the effectiveness of a certain type of program or intervention, in this case after school programs.

2 Miller, B. M. (2007). *The learning season: The untapped power of summer to advance student achievement.* Quincy, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

■ **Partnering with schools.** Many OST programs take place in school buildings and work to achieve academic outcomes with youth participants; yet, despite their common space and goals, schools and OST programs do not always work together. When they do partner, good things can happen. For school-based programs focused on academic outcomes, effective relationships and partnerships with host schools can be critical.

For instance, the evaluation of SES, which utilizes outside providers of extra academic instruction in low-performing schools, found that programming quality suffered when there were not effective partnerships between schools and providers. School staff were necessary to help coordinate SES and identify and recruit appropriate participants, especially because parents often relied on school-day teachers to help select appropriate SES services for their children. Without these partnerships, it was also difficult to identify student learning needs and align programming with the school day. When these partnerships were in place, however, programming ran much more smoothly.

■ **Connections with families.** Consistent participation is key if youth are to experience the full benefits of OST programs. But participation depends on multiple factors, including youth's involvement in other activities with conflicting schedules, levels of interest in programs, household responsibilities, and program access. One major, but sometimes overlooked, reason for nonparticipation is participants' families—specifically, their parents' struggles to balance conflicts between work and family and thus support children's OST participation.

In the study of PCAST, researchers found that many working parents reported a great deal of worry about their children's after school time, including safety, travel, productive use of time, and reliability of arrangements. This suggests that programs should provide services that are sensitive the needs and anxieties of working parents in order to ensure sustained participation of youth. Furthermore, increased levels of PCAST were associated with more job disruptions, poor job performance, and reduced well-being on the part of parents, suggesting that providing quality programming can not only benefit youth, but also their parents in the context of their jobs and personal well-being and in turn, parents' employers.

Summing Up

Taken together, the studies and evaluations described here are helping to make crucial inroads in the field of out-of-school time research—both by tackling new questions and by developing a fuller understanding of questions that researchers and evaluators have previously addressed. As research and evaluation broaden their scope and size, new data collection methods will need to be developed, as will new research and evaluation methodologies capable of providing answers to key questions. This brief has highlighted some of the ways evaluations and research studies have begun this process.

Research and evaluation are also beginning to demonstrate just how complex it is to provide quality, effective supports for youth and their families. Many factors need to be considered, far beyond the program walls, including access to a broad array of enriching supports and how programming fits into parents' work lives and concerns about their children's OST hours. Programming must be focused and intentional in order to achieve its goals, and academically focused programs should have strong connections to youth's schools.

Furthermore, after school programs may not be enough. Summer is a time during which disadvantaged youth fall behind in their academic progress. This summer learning gap further emphasizes the need to develop and adopt a *complementary learning* framework with a seamless continuum of supports for youth's learning and development. Such a framework would cut across developmental stages and the different places where children learn and develop and consider a range of positive developmental outcomes.[3] Developing systems of supports that connect with youth's families, schools, and communities is a major challenge on the horizon for OST programs, as well as their researchers and evaluators.

While this *Research Update* has synthesized some of the major findings emerging from this recent research and evaluation, it is by no means a comprehensive synthesis of all the findings emerging from recent research and evaluation. For a much fuller picture, visit our OST Program Research and Evaluation Database at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html.

Christopher Wimer, Database Manager
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3 Bouffard, S. (Ed.). (2006). Building and evaluating out-of-school time connections. *The Evaluation Exchange, 12*(1&2).

Appendix Table 1: Research and Evaluation Studies Included in This Review

Program/Study Description	Citations/Profile
Across Ages Begun in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and now operating nationally, the Across Ages program uses older adults (age 55 and over) as mentors for youth. Originally school-based, the program now uses a wide-ranging prevention strategy suitable for a variety of settings during both school and out-of-school time. Mentors help at-risk youth develop awareness, self-confidence, and skills to help resist drugs and overcome obstacles.	Aseltine R., Dupre, M., & Lamlein, P. (2000). Mentoring as a drug prevention strategy: An evaluation of Across Ages. *Adolescent and Family Health, 1*, 11–20.
Afterschool Literacy Coaching Initiative of Boston The Afterschool Literacy Coaching Initiative (LCI) is designed to increase the literacy content of after school programs serving elementary and middle school students in Boston, Massachusetts, in two key areas: interactive read-alouds and independent reading.	Miller, B. M., Brigham, R., & Perea, F. (2006). *Afterschool Literacy Coaching Initiative of Boston: Final evaluation report.* Boston, MA: Massachusetts 2020.
Citizen Schools Citizen Schools (CS) operates a national network of apprenticeship programs for middle school students that connects adult volunteers to youth in hands-on after school learning projects. CS is designed to help youth develop academic and leadership skills needed to succeed in school, get into college, and become leaders in their careers and their communities.	Fabiano, L., Pearson, L. M., Reisner, E. R., & Williams, I. J. (2006). Preparing students in the middle grades to succeed in high school: Findings from Phase IV of the Citizen Schools evaluation. Washington, D.C.: Policy Studies Associates. Available at www.policystudies.com/studies/youth/Citizen%20Schools%20Phase%20IV%20Final%20Report_12-26-06.pdf
The Impact of After-School Programs That Promote Personal and Social Skills This study attempts to systematically evaluate the impact of after school programs that strive to enhance youth's personal and social skills.	Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). *The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills.* Chicago: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.
Los Angeles County High School Sports Programs This study of Los Angeles County High School Sports Programs was undertaken to examine the availability of extracurricular sports programs at schools and the impact of participation in these programs on youth involvement in risky behaviors.	Cohen, D. A., Taylor, S. L., Zonta, M., Vestal, K. D., & Schuster, M. A. (2007). Availability of high school extracurricular sports programs and high-risk behaviors. *Journal of School Health, 77*, 80–86.
New Jersey After 3 This initiative seeks to increase the number of after school programs in New Jersey that provide a safe environment for children during after school hours, offer enriching academic activities and homework assistance, and expose children to nurturing individuals and meaningful experiences that promote intellectual, physical, social, and artistic development.	Kim, J. H., Miller, T. D., Reisner, E. R., & Walking Eagle, K. P. (2006). *Evaluation of New Jersey After 3: First-year report on programs and participants.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, Inc. Available at http://www.policystudies.com/studies/youth/NJA3.html

Program/Study Description	Citations/Profile
New York City Department of Youth and Community Development's Out-of-School Time Initiative This initiative provides funds to support OST programs across New York City (NYC). This initiative is designed to address a broad range of developmental objectives for youth and to serve the needs of NYC's families and communities.	Russell, C. A., Reisner, E. R., Pearson, L. M., Afolabi, K. P., Miller, T. D., & Mielke, M. B. (2006). *Evaluation of DYCD's Out-of-School Time Initiative: Report on the first year*. Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, Inc. Available at www.policystudies.com/studies/youth/OST.html.
Parental Concern About After-School Time (PCAST) This study examines the stress experienced by working parents across the U.S. due to concern about their children's welfare during the after school hours. PCAST is the degree to which employed parents are concerned about their school-age children's after school arrangements in several domains, including safety, travel, productive use of time, and reliability.	Catalyst. (2006). *After-school worries: Tough on parents, bad for business*. New York, NY: Author. Available at www.brandeis.edu/centers/cfwp/PCAST-report.pdf.
Supplemental Educational Services These services for low-income families include academic instruction (e.g., tutoring, remediation) that is provided outside of the regular school day. The program's goal is to improve youth's academic achievement. SES providers may include nonprofit, for-profit, and faith-based organizations, charter schools, private schools, and public and private colleges and universities. Local school districts can provide services but only if they have not been identified as low performing.	U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, Policy and Program Studies Service. (2004). *Early implementation of supplemental educational services under the No Child Left Behind Act: Year one report*. Washington, DC: Author. Available at www.policystudies.com/studies/school/nclb.html U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. (2005). *Case studies of supplemental educational services under the No Child Left Behind Act: Findings from 2003–04*. Washington, DC: Author. Available at www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/disadv/supplementalyear2/index.html Sunderman, G. L., & Kim, J. (2004). *Increasing bureaucracy or increasing opportunities? School district experience with supplemental educational services*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. Available at http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/esea/increasing_bureaucracy.pdf.
Teach Baltimore Founded in 1992, this intensive summer academic program recruits and trains university students to provide at least 7 weeks of instruction to low-income kindergarten to second grade students in Baltimore, Maryland. Its primary goals are to prevent summer learning loss, provide intensive reading instruction, and make learning fun.	Borman, G., Rachuba, L., Hewes, G., Boulay, M., & Kaplan, J. (2001). Can a summer intervention program using trained volunteer teachers narrow the achievement gap? First-year results from a multi-year study. *ERS Spectrum, 19*(2), 19–29. Borman, G. D., & Dowling, N. M. (2006). The longitudinal achievement effects of multi-year summer school: Evidence from the Teach Baltimore randomized field trial. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 28,* 25–48. Available at www.summerlearning.org/resources/index.html.

Acknowledgments

ABOUT HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT

Since 1983, we have helped stakeholders develop and evaluate strategies to promote the well being of children, youth, families, and communities. Our work focuses primarily on three areas that support children's learning and development—early childhood education, out-of-school time programming, and family and community support in education. Building on our knowledge that schools cannot do it alone, we also focus national attention on complementary learning. Complementary learning is the idea that a systemic approach, which integrates school and nonschool supports, can better ensure that all children have the skills they need to succeed. Underpinning all our work is our commitment to evaluation for strategic decision making, learning, and accountability.

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