

What Works Clearinghouse



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WWC Quick Review of the Report “Outcomes Linked to High-Quality Afterschool Programs: Longitudinal Findings from the Study of Promising Afterschool Programs”†

What is this study about?

This study examines whether high-quality after-school programs operating in high-poverty communities improve the academic, social, and behavioral outcomes of participating students.

The study focused on 35 after-school programs in eight states. To identify high-quality programs, the authors consulted experts, interviewed program staff, reviewed program descriptions, and conducted site visits.

The study examined data on nearly 2,300 elementary and middle school students. To estimate effects, the study authors compared the outcomes of students who regularly attended high-quality after-school programs to those of students who regularly spent after-school time with no adult supervision.

The outcomes analyzed for the study are drawn from teacher and student surveys and school records.

What After-School Programs Were Studied?

After-school programs identified by the researchers as high quality

Elementary school programs for 3rd and 4th graders and middle school programs for 6th and 7th graders

Programs that offer a mix of tutoring, educational games, recreation, art, and community service activities

Free programs that offer services four or five days per week to at least 30 students from high-poverty, ethnically diverse communities

Programs that have strong partnerships with schools and community organizations

WWC Rating

The research described in this report is not consistent with WWC evidence standards

Cautions: The study compared students who regularly participated in high-quality after-school programs to students who regularly spent time with no adult supervision after school. The authors do not provide evidence that their research groups were initially equivalent. Because participation in after-school programs is not random, it is possible that there were initial differences between the two groups that could have influenced their later outcomes. Though the study authors adjust for a number of student background characteristics, with research groups created in this way, it is not possible to be certain that these statistical adjustments were adequate. Therefore, differences between these research groups cannot be attributed with confidence to the effect of after-school programs.

What did the study authors report?

The study reported higher standardized math test scores and better behavioral outcomes for students who regularly participated in high-quality after-school programs than for students who regularly spent after-school time without adult supervision.

However, the WWC does not consider these results to be conclusive because there is no evidence that the research groups were equivalent initially. The reported differences between the groups might reflect pre-program differences in their behavior or academic performance.

† “Outcomes Linked to High-Quality Afterschool Programs: Longitudinal Findings from the Study of Promising Afterschool Programs.” Deborah Lowe Vandell, Elizabeth R. Reisner, and Kim M. Pierce. University of California, Irvine and Policy Studies Associates, Inc., October 2007.