



Harvard Family Research Project
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Since 1983, we have helped stakeholders develop and evaluate strategies to promote the well being of children, youth, families, and their communities.

United States House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education

Hearing on "After School Programs: How the Bush Administration's Budget Impacts Children and Families"

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On Behalf of
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Chairman Kildee and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony at this important hearing on after school programs. My name is Priscilla Little and I am the associate director of the Harvard Family Research Project at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. I have spent the past ten years of my work devoted to building the knowledge base for after school, compiling literally hundreds of research and evaluation studies into a national database and helping people understand what these studies are telling us about effective programming and how best to use research for policy and practice. I also sit on numerous evaluation advisory boards, including the technical working group for the 21st CCLC implementation study and the evaluation task force for the 21st CCLC Profile and Performance Information Collection System (PPICs), the monitoring and evaluation tool used by all 21st CCLC programs.

I want to start with a very simple message: **After school programs are a critical component of children's education and development and, in part thanks to the 21st CCLC grants program, we have a good solid evidence base to support this claim.** The 21st CCLC grants program spawned new money, new programs, and new research and evaluation studies. In addition to the studies conducted of 21st CCLC programs directly, many other evaluations that I have tracked, read, and written about, like the TASC programs in New York and LAs BEST in Los Angeles include programs which receive 21st CCLC funding as one of many blended funding sources they have leveraged to support their work. And it is this larger evidence base on which I base my testimony to you today. The studies that I have chosen all employed rigorous research designs that involved either a comparison or control group, thus increasing the generalizability of the findings.

Even though the 21st CCLC program began in the 20th century, it was aptly named as a program that could support the development of the skills necessary for young people to support America's effort to stay competitive in a 21st century global economy. Since its inception 10 years ago we have learned a lot about the enormous potential after school programs have to support a range of positive learning and developmental outcomes, outcomes that can help young people succeed in school and in their community and prepare them for post secondary success, including attending college, getting competitive wage jobs, and being engaged community and family members.

Participation in well implemented after school programs can support academic achievement and school success. It can result in: less disciplinary action; lower dropout rates; better academic performance in school, including better grades and test scores; greater on-time promotion; improved homework completion; and improved work habits. For example:

- A statewide evaluation of Louisiana's 21st CCLC programs revealed that participants showed significant improvements over nonparticipants on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, particularly for those students who attended the programs regularly. ¹
- A two-year longitudinal Study of Promising After-School Programs examined the effects of participation in quality after school programs among almost 3,000 youth in 35 elementary and middle school after school programs located in 14 cities and 8 states. New findings from that study indicate that elementary and middle school students who participated in high-quality after school programs, alone or in combination with other activities, across two years demonstrated significant gains in standardized math test scores, when compared to their peers who were regularly unsupervised after school.

Further, regular participation in after school programs was associated with improvements in work habits and task persistence.²

- A recent meta-analysis combined the results of 56 quasi-experimental and experimental studies of after school programs for at-risk youth and found that programs demonstrated positive effects on both reading and math achievement.³
- Evaluations of the school-based TASC programs in New York, which emphasize academic enrichment, homework assistance, the arts, and recreation, have demonstrated that participants outperform similar nonparticipants on math test scores and high school Regents Examination scores, as well as high school credits earned and school attendance rates.⁴
- Foundations, Inc. operates extended-day enrichment programs before school, after school, and during the summer. Its evaluation of 19 elementary school after school programs in three states found highly statistically significant improvements in both reading and math scores between pretest and posttest.⁵

Many research studies that I have reviewed go on to say that the most successful programs are ones that foster engagement in learning as a precursor to getting good academic results. For example:

- Evaluations of Citizen Schools, which provides hands-on apprenticeships, academic skill-building activities, leadership skills development, and homework help found that participants outperformed comparable nonparticipants on many measures of academic success, such as selecting higher quality high schools, school attendance, promotion rates, lower suspension rates, and some measures of grades and test scores.⁶
- In addition to focused academic content, the TASC evaluation revealed that including a broad variety of enrichment activities, in addition to activities devoted to developing skill building and mastery, was one of the primary common features of high-performing programs.⁷
- A review of academic achievement programs conducted by Child Trends, as well as first year findings from an evaluation of 550 out-of-school time programs sponsored by New York City's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), conclude that developing a highly focused academic component aligned with academic goals may be important for producing good outcomes. However, an all-encompassing and exclusive focus on academics may be detrimental. In other words, the more multifaceted after school programs are likely to reap the biggest academic gains.⁸
- A meta-analysis of 93 studies of summer school programs found that they led to increases in participants' knowledge and skills. In particular, programs aimed at remediation of learning deficiencies and programs focused on learning acceleration both produced positive impacts on youth's knowledge and skills.⁹

It is important to note that the common thread among all these studies is not just that the programs intentionally tried to improve academic performance and therefore offered academic support, but that they combined it with other enrichment activities to achieve positive academic outcomes, and this is what many 21st CCLC programs strive to do. Extra time for academics by

itself may be necessary but may not be sufficient to improve academic outcomes. Balancing academic support with a variety of engaging, fun, and structured extracurricular or cocurricular activities that promote youth development in a variety of real-world contexts appears to support and improve academic performance.

But to succeed in a competitive global economy young people need to be equipped with a set of skills that goes beyond the 3 R's...they need to become effective communicators, know how to develop and sustain relationships, solve problems, and have a strong sense of self. Turning to the research there is solid evidence that 21st CCLC and other after school programs can support a range of behavioral outcomes including: social and communication skills; relationships with others; self-confidence; development of initiative; and feelings and attitudes toward self and school. For example:

- A random-assignment evaluation of the Go Grrrls program in Arizona, which provides girls with structured group sessions built around tasks considered critical for the healthy psychosocial development of early adolescent girls in contemporary society, found that the program improved girls' body image, assertiveness, self-efficacy, self-liking, and competence.¹⁰
- The Siblings of Children With Developmental Disabilities After School Support Program, which combines group discussion, structured and unstructured recreation, and homework help, found positive impact on participants in outcome areas like lower depression, lower anxiety, and increased self-esteem.¹¹
- Evaluations of mentoring programs also reveal that participation in programs primarily targeted at supporting student academic performance actually can significantly impact social/emotional development. For example, Across Ages pairs older mentors (age 55 and older) with middle school youth in and out of school, and teams the mentoring component with community service, a life skills curriculum, and family activities. An evaluation of Across Ages revealed that youth in the mentor group reported significantly higher self-control and self-confidence levels than youth who participated in other components but not mentoring.¹²
- In addition to these individual studies, a recent meta-analysis of over 70 after school programs that attempted to promote personal and social skills found that across studies, after school programs could improve youth self-esteem and self-confidence, particularly in programs with a strong intentional focus on improving social and personal skills.¹³ This is a particularly important finding: It speaks to the need for strong program design with an intentional focus on the desired outcomes, regardless of what those outcomes might be.

The hours from 3 to 6 p.m. present several potential hazards to a young person's development. These are the hours associated with the peak time for juvenile crime and juvenile victimization and the hours when teens ages 16–17 are most likely to be in or cause a car crash. Furthermore, based on a survey of 2,000 high school students that looked at the relationship between after school supervision and sexual activity, the American Academy of Pediatrics found that 56% of youth surveyed reported being home for 4 or more hours unsupervised after school. Youth who were unsupervised for 30 or more hours per week were more likely to be sexually active than those who were left alone for 5 hours a week or less. In addition, those left unsupervised for more than 5 hours per week had more sexually transmitted diseases, particularly among boys.

Participation in after school programs gets children and youth off the streets and under supervision and potentially prevents some risky behaviors. Beyond a safe haven, research and evaluation studies have also demonstrated the positive impact of participation in after school programs on a range of prevention outcomes including: avoidance of drug and alcohol use, avoidance of sexual behaviors, and reduction in juvenile violence. For example:

- The Children's Aid Society Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program showed positive impacts on reducing pregnancies, teen sex, and boys' marijuana usage.¹⁴
- Girls Inc.'s Friendly PEERsuasion program, which provides girls with a structured curriculum of fun activities focused on preventing substance use, found that participants showed positive benefits on outcomes such as delaying the onset of alcohol use and avoiding situations where alcohol was present.¹⁵
- Project Venture, which provides skill-building, community service, and leadership opportunities and outdoor experiential learning activities, reduced youth's increasing substance use over time.¹⁶
- A longitudinal study of the effect of participation in LA's BEST programs on juvenile crime tracked students from 1994 through 2003. It compared LA's BEST participants to two matched groups of students who either attended LA's BEST schools but not LA's BEST programs, or attended schools that did not have an LA's BEST program. Results indicate that participation in LA's BEST was significantly related to lower incidences of juvenile crime. Researchers estimate that this translates into an average savings to society of \$2.50 for every dollar invested in the program.¹⁷ While participation rates were a key factor in crime reduction (see discussion of participation below), this is powerful evidence of the potential long-term effects of and benefits to society from after school programs.

Finally, after school programs are viewed as one of many places that can tackle the growing problem of obesity among our nation's children and youth. Startling new statistics reveal that, by 2010, almost 50% of America's children will be obese; furthermore, almost two thirds of American children get little or no physical activity. Can after school programs promise to reduce body mass index (the common measure for obesity)? Probably not, although some evaluations have demonstrated improvements on this measure. Similar to impact on academic achievement test scores, it takes more than a few hours a week of after school participation to move the needle on significant markers of change. But after school programs can contribute to healthy lifestyles and increased knowledge about nutrition and exercise.

- An experimental study of the Girlfriends for KEEPS program in Minnesota, which includes fun skill-building activities and physical activity, showed benefits to girls' intentions to maintain healthy behaviors, knowledge about proper diet practices, and preferences for physical activity.¹⁸
- The experimental study of the Cooke Middle School After School Recreation Program found increases in participants' time spent on strength training activities.¹⁹
- The experimental study of the Medical College of Georgia's FitKid program, which combines academic enrichment, healthy snacks, and physical activity, found that

participants benefited from the program in terms of their percentage of body fat and cardiovascular fitness.²⁰

- The Yale Study of Children's After School Time, a longitudinal study of over 650 youth at 25 after school programs in Connecticut, found that youth who participated in after school programs were more likely than nonparticipants to experience reductions in obesity, after accounting for a variety of differences between participants and nonparticipants. This was true even after controlling for youth's initial BMI status at the beginning of the study, as well as demographic factors like poverty, race, and ethnicity.²¹

Now, do all after school programs deliver on all these outcomes? Of course not. First, different programs target different sets of skills and it isn't appropriate to think one program can do it all. Second, we have learned a lot from the research about specific factors that make a big difference in whether or not a program can get these outcomes, and these map onto some key aspects of the 21st CCLC programs.

First, the research I have conducted underscores **a consistent pattern of winners and losers when it comes to access to after school opportunities**, with middle and upper income children and youth getting access to and taking more advantage of enrichment outside of school.²² Specifically, children and youth whose families have higher incomes and more education:

- are more likely to participate in after school activities.
- do so with greater frequency during the week.
- participate in a greater number of different activities within a week or a month
- are more likely to participate in enrichment programs, while their disadvantaged peers are more likely to participate in tutoring programs, thus not reaping the benefits associated with enrichment experiences.

These findings are particularly troublesome given the many studies and research syntheses—such as those from Child Trends, American Youth Policy Forum, and Harvard Family Research Project—which conclude that youth experience greater gains across a wide variety of outcomes if they participate with greater frequency (more days per week) in a more sustained manner (over a number of years).²³

21st CCLC investments help level the playing field by targeting low income and poorly performing schools to ensure that all children and youth have access to programs, not just those who can afford them.

Second, as I said above, **sustained and frequent participation in programs is important in getting good outcomes.** The latest 21st CCLC PPICS data indicates that more mature programs are more likely to be able to deliver on quality (Learning Points Associates, 2007), which gets students participating more frequently, with higher levels of engagement, which then helps them reap maximum benefit from the participation. Other research studies confirm this.

- Following up on students with long-term involvement (at least four years) in the LA's BEST program revealed that greater participation was significantly related to positive achievement on standardized tests of mathematics, reading, and language arts, when the influence of gender, ethnicity, income, and language status was controlled for.²⁴

- *Teach Baltimore* is a summer academic program that proactively addresses the problem of summer learning loss by helping students develop and practice literacy skills over the summer vacation in a safe and fun environment. A randomized three-year field trial explored the effects of a multiyear summer school program in preventing summer learning losses and promoting longitudinal achievement growth. The total treatment group included 438 students from high-poverty schools. Results from the study indicate that students who participated at high levels for at least two of the three summers demonstrated statistically significant effects on learning across all three literacy domains that were tested.²⁵

These findings underscore the importance of programs being able to count on sustainable, multi-year funding that enables them the maturity to get good results.

Third, many new research studies indicate that **program quality is inextricably tied to student outcomes, with low quality programming actually doing harm in terms of supporting students' development**²⁶ (Vandell, Shumow, and Posner, 2005). Emerging research on after school program quality and its relationship to outcomes indicates that quality after school programs must do more than just ensure effective management practices and provide adequate physical and psychological safety. Quality after school programs also share the following features: appropriate supervision and structure, well-prepared staff; intentional programming with opportunities for autonomy and choice, and strong partnerships among the various settings in which program participants spend their day—schools, after school programs, and families.

Unlike research on outcomes, research on after school program *quality* is largely descriptive, with only a handful of rigorously designed studies. Evidence regarding the characteristics of program quality is largely dependent on correlational studies and expert opinion. However, a small but powerful set of studies provides an emerging picture of some of the key elements of after school program quality and how they affect a range of developmental outcomes.

- One of the primary conclusions of the Study of Promising After-School Programs was that children and youth benefit from an array of after school experiences which include quality after school programs *as well as* other structured school and community based activities supervised by adults. Specifically, researchers found that, in comparison to a less-supervised group, school-age children who frequently attended high-quality after school programs, alone and in combination with other supervised activities,²⁷ displayed better work habits, task persistence, social skills, prosocial behaviors, and academic performance, and less aggressive behavior at the end of the school year.²⁸
- In a similar vein, both a comparative case study of two urban after school programs and the Maryland Afterschool Community Grants Program evaluation found that low-quality programs had staff who engaged in very negative and punitive interactions with youth rather than engaging in supportive behavior and practicing positive behavior management techniques.²⁹
- In their meta-analysis of 73 after school programs' impacts, Durlak and Weisberg found that positive impacts on academic, prevention, and developmental outcomes were concentrated in the programs that utilized strategies characterized as *sequenced* (using a sequenced set of activities designed to achieve skill development objectives), *active* (using active forms of learning to help youth develop skills), *focused* (program components devoted to developing personal or social skills), and *explicit* (targeting of

specific personal or social skills). Moreover, the researchers found that, as a group, programs missing *any* of these four characteristics did not achieve positive results. These findings point to the importance of targeting specific goals, and designing activities around those goals intentionally.³⁰

21st CCLC programs are particularly well-poised to deliver quality programming. 21st CCLC is an extremely competitive program which means that only the best, well-implemented programs receive funding. Also related to quality, there is a 3 percent set-aside for states to use for training, technical assistance, and evaluation and State Education Agencies use this to provide ongoing training and technical assistance on resources and tools to promote quality implementation and staff development.

Finally, we all know that learning doesn't stop when the school bell rings. **Supporting learning throughout the day, throughout the year, and throughout a child's life requires partnerships.** Programs are more likely to exhibit high quality when they effectively develop, utilize, and leverage partnerships with a variety of stakeholders like families, schools, and communities. A few research examples illustrate my point:

- A review of over 20 years of research on Boys & Girls Clubs found that programs benefited from partnerships with schools, probation and police officers, and community-based providers by gaining referrals and access to information on youth, such as school records. Strong partnerships can also provide programs with important resources, such as information, in-kind resources, and other sources of support that can make individual programs become more efficient in accomplishing their goals of benefiting youth.³¹
- In the Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study, researchers found that programs with stronger relationships with school teachers and principals were more successful at improving youth's homework completion, homework effort, positive behavior, and initiative. This may be because positive relationships with schools can foster high-quality, engaging, and challenging activities and can also promote staff engagement.³²

Developing partnerships is an area where 21st CCLC programs are strong. The typical 21st CCLC program has six community partners who contribute to the project by providing services and resources not directly funded by the program itself. These partners serve to improve program quality, help engage children and youth throughout the community, and help 21st CCLC programs leverage additional resources for sustainability

In closing, I want to reiterate that we know a lot about what works for children and youth during the after school hours and underscore the importance of the 21st CCLC grants program as a core educational and developmental support for our nation's children. I encourage you to use the research I have presented to make informed decisions about resource allocations, and set reasonable expectations for participation in 21st CCLC programs.

Thank you.
Priscilla M. Little

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