

Afterschool Fosters Success in School

By: Afterschool Alliance (2008)

This brief describes how afterschool programs can contribute to student success by helping children's social and emotional development, avoidance of risky behaviors, improved school attendance, engagement in learning, and improved test scores and grades.

In the current climate of increased academic assessments, the discussion of student success in school is frequently limited to academic achievement. However, data show that when examining student success, it is vital to include components such as social development and prevention of risky behaviors, as well as academic achievement. These outcomes form a comprehensive picture of student success and underscore the fact that student success outside of the classroom is an indelible piece of student success inside the classroom. Afterschool plays a critical role in this equation.

- A study released in October 2007, found that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores. More telling perhaps, was the finding that regular participation in afterschool is linked to significantly improved work habits, overall behavior and reduced behavior problems, thus facilitating academic improvements.
- The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning reviewed data from 73 afterschool studies and concluded that afterschool programs employing evidence-based approaches to improving students' personal and social skills were consistently successful in producing multiple benefits for youth including improvements in children's personal, social and academic skills, as well as their self-esteem.

Evaluators use a broad array of performance measures to assess scholastic achievement outcomes including homework completion, grades and standardized test scores. Academic outcomes that are linked to afterschool programs include:

- Better attitudes toward school and higher educational aspirations
- Better performance in school as measured by achievement test scores and grades
- Higher school attendance
- Less disciplinary action

These 21st Century Community Learning Center programs provide afterschool activities that support student learning. Annual performance reports on Wisconsin community learning centers show increased grades, improved school attendance, and decreased behavior problems for youth who attend these afterschool programs.

— Elizabeth Burmaster
Wisconsin State Superintendent

Afterschool programs positively impact youth in key areas

Studies show that afterschool programs produce multiple benefits to youth's personal, social, and academic life. Youth who participate in afterschool improve in key areas that foster student success in school including social and emotional development and avoidance of risky behaviors.

- Healthy social and emotional development is critical to success in school. Participant behavior, interpersonal skills, goal setting and leadership skills are hallmarks of a successful student. Positive youth development outcomes associated with afterschool programs are:
 - Decreased behavioral problems
 - Improved social and communication skills
 - Improved relationships with others including peers, teachers and parents
 - Increased community involvement and broadened world view
 - Increased self-confidence and self-esteem
- Avoiding risky behaviors is critical to the well being and therefore the success of youth. Students who are dealing with issues of drug use, violence, or pregnancy out of the classroom have a difficult time succeeding in the classroom. Results from evaluations of programs that address prevention of risky behaviors show positive outcomes such as:
 - Avoidance of drug and alcohol use
 - Decreased delinquency and violent behavior
 - Increased knowledge of safe sex and avoidance of sexual activity and pregnancy
 - Increased skills for coping with peer pressure

When I walk through the door at the [Boys & Girls] Club, I feel like I am hugged. The Club has taught me different realities in life, like how to say no to drugs, step up for what's right, never be afraid to express yourself to others, and that there is good in life.

— Isaiah Buckanaga 8th Grader in the Boys & Girls Club of Leech Lake Area afterschool program Cass Lake, Minnesota

Afterschool improves school attendance and engagement in learning

- Children in LA's BEST improved their regular school day attendance and reported higher aspirations regarding finishing school and going to college. Drop-out rates among LA's BEST students are 20 percent lower than the overall district drop-out rate.
- Sixty-five percent of former Citizen Schools 8th Grade Academy participants enrolled in high-quality high schools compared to 26 percent of matched nonparticipants. Ninety-two percent of high exposure participants were promoted on-time to the tenth grade compared to 81 percent of matched nonparticipants. This is critical, since earning promotion to tenth grade on time is a key predictor of high school graduation (i.e. preventing drop-out).

- Youth in the Quantum Opportunities afterschool program were half as likely to drop out of high school and two and one half times more likely to go on to further education after high school than their peers.

Afterschool improves test scores and grades

- Active participants in programs offered by The After-School Corporation (TASC) were more likely to take and pass the Regents Math Sequential 1 exam by ninth grade than were nonparticipants. Thirty-two percent of active ninth grade participants took and passed the exam, compared to one percent of ninth grade nonparticipants. Fifty-two percent of active participants took and passed the Math Sequential 2 and 3 exams, compared to 15 percent of nonparticipants in the same grades.
- Participants in North Carolina's Young Scholars Program with at least 280 hours in the program averaged double-digit increases annually for proficiency in both math and reading. Promotion rates rose by 38 percent. Furthermore, the number of Young Scholars receiving A's and B's increased an average of 38 percent, while the number receiving F's decreased an average of 50 percent.
- Active participants in the Boys and Girls Club of America increased their average grades by 11 percent from baseline to the 30-month measurement while comparison youth and noncomparison youth, over the same period, increased their average grades by .4 percent and .3 percent, respectively.
- Participants of St. Paul Minnesota's 21st CCLC Pathways to Progress program received better grades in English and Math than nonparticipants and more of the grades received by these students were satisfactory ones - a grade of C minus or better.

Afterschool programs employ a range of techniques known to foster student success

The After-school Corporation (TASC) currently supports more than 250 programs in New York, reaching more than 40,000 children and their families. TASC has been instrumental in identifying the elements critical to a quality afterschool program. Quality programs should include these components:

- Operate at least three hours a day, every day school is in session
- Employ a full-time, paid site coordinator
- Provide a variety of activities connected to, but different from, the school day, including academic support, arts, sports, and community service
- Maintain a diverse staff of teachers, artists, college students, parents and other community members
- Maintain a low student-to-staff ratio (10:1 for elementary and middle schools)
- Provide a snack or supper
- Offer open enrollment

All TASC-supported programs incorporate these critical elements. Each site then integrates programming that is of most interest to the attendees, thus fostering student success.

- Children attending the New York Mission Society TASC afterschool program at PS 92 in Brooklyn learn how to cook, teaching them that preparing healthy food can be fun, as well as teaching them how to measure ingredients and read and comprehend detailed directions.
- Global Arts to Go provides elementary age children throughout New York City access to the arts and global and cultural literacy by traveling the world through music. Children study maps, create "passport" journals and do other activities that teach them geography, history, foreign language vocabulary and social studies.
- The Discovering Community Initiative is a nationwide program designed to foster positive attitudes and strengthen the bonds between middle school students, teachers and the broader school community through various afterschool activities. Through participating in a wide range of endeavors such as discussions on community issues, recycling projects, homework clubs and giving book talks to younger students, students interact with the wider community and gain an understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

The TASC program gives students enrichment opportunities, helps them build self-confidence and makes them feel more a part of the school community. I'm proud that my kids have access to museums, parks and other enrichments due to their participation in after-school.

— Christina Tettonis, Principal, P.S. 170 Brooklyn, NY

Conclusion

When students feel connected, supported and safe, they are more likely to make healthy choices for themselves, including avoiding risky behaviors and staying in school. Afterschool programs provide children and youth not only with academic support, but a safe, nurturing environment that can help bolster social and emotional development, critical to academic success. Further, afterschool offers students vital enrichment activities that they might not otherwise have access to, such as art, music, world cultures and sports that can motivate and engage them during the regular school day, leading to improved academic performance and success.