



More than Fun & Games:

Quality Out of School Time for All Kids Makes a Difference in School



The hours that children spend out of school are ripe with opportunity to explore, grow, create and learn in ways that the school day does not allow time and space to accomplish. From the earliest years, children learn by experience. When well implemented, afterschool and summer programs provide both the time and space to allow for fruitful exploration and experience. High-quality, multi-faceted programming that support a range of positive learning outcomes, including academic achievement, are more successful at increasing academic accomplishments than programs that focus their efforts solely on remedial skills. This brief discusses the elements of programs that are successful at increasing educational outcomes and the use of quality out-of-school time programs as a tool for raising the achievement levels of children of color.

What Works?

Success in the academic world is generally measured by test scores. High achieving students and schools are rewarded. Each year, when test scores or graduation rates are reported, it is evident that as a state we are failing to provide opportunities to children of color. These scores reveal on an annual basis that on the whole kids of color are not achieving the same academic success as their white classmates. Studies reveal that children of color and children from low-income families gain the most ground when they have access to high-quality out-of-school time experiences.

Peter Gordon of Columbia University asserts that increasing access to supplementary education is a key to closing the achievement gap. According to Gordon, high achieving students have access to additional learn-

ing outside of the school day through exposure to the arts, travel, dance, scouting, tutoring, music, summer camp and other activities that contribute to the growth of the child.¹ New findings indicate that students who participated in high-quality after school programs alone or in combination with other activities demonstrate significant gains in standardized math test scores when compared with classmates who were regularly unsupervised after school.² In addition, children who participate in summer enrichment programs to a greater extent avoid the “summer slide.” The most promising long-term outcomes of all out of school time programs are those that show children gaining competency on a broad array of skills that are necessary for school success but are not measurable by exam scores.



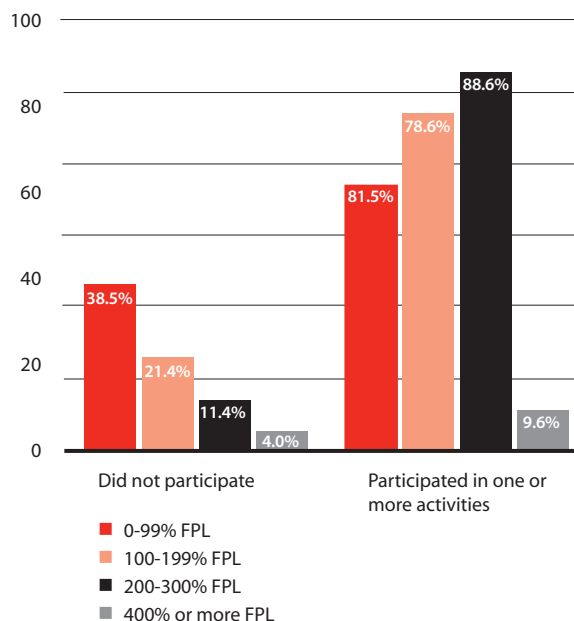
Quality Programs

Research has revealed several critical elements to producing positive outcomes from out-of-school time programs. Those factors are (1) access to sustained participation; (2) quality programming that includes appropriate supervision and structure, well-prepared staff and intentional programming; and (3) Partnerships with families, other community organizations and schools.³

Participation

High-achieving students at both the elementary and high school levels spend more time in out-of-school, high-yield learning activities. These include such diverse activities as leisure reading, community and school youth clubs, educational television, volunteering, hobbies, organized youth sports, writing and studying. In fact, better readers spend more time out of school involved in high impact language-rich activities that may include time spent talking with adults, youth club enrichment activities, regular study and homework routines with adult or peer monitoring and sup-

Children ages 6-17 participation in out of school time activities in Wisconsin



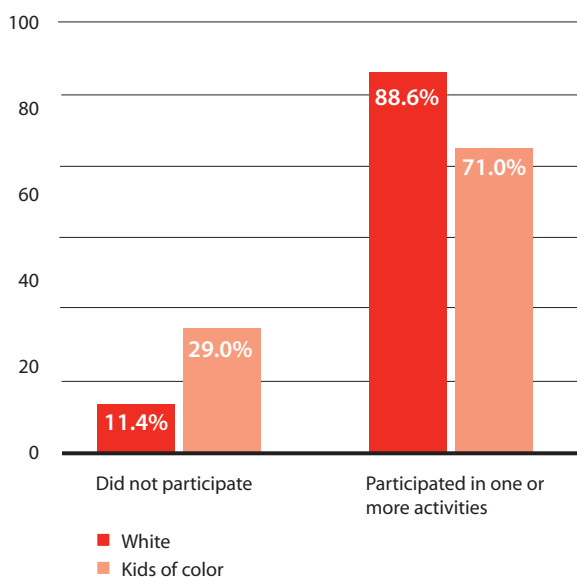
Source: National Survey of Children's Health



port, and reading and writing practice at home.⁴ Children from more affluent families with greater levels of education are more likely to participate in after school activities and do so with greater frequency.

Wisconsin data from the National Survey of Children's Health suggests that family income is clearly a determinant for participation in all out-of-school-time activities. Children and youth in families with incomes that are 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) and greater are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities than their peers who live in families with incomes 199 percent of the FPL or less. Children and youth of color are disproportionately represented in low-income communities nationally as well as in Wisconsin.

Children ages 6-12 participation in out of school time activities



Source: National Survey of Children's Health

For example, African American youth tend to be steered toward remedial or tutoring-based programs and do not have the same access to enrichment programs as their white peers. Research has found that in out-of-school time programs as a whole, Latino youth are consistently underrepresented, white youth are overrepresented, and the number of participating African American youth is somewhere in between. This



may reveal that factors such as cultural and language barriers are also restricting access to out-of-school time programs for some children and youth of color.

Participation in summer programming that provides enrichment and learning opportunities are especially valuable for children in low-income families. Research shows that these children experience greater reading loss over the summer months than do their middle- and upper-income classmates. According to researchers, "summer learning losses in reading are a main cause of the widening achievement gap in reading between lower- and higher-income youth." These dif-



ferences have the potential to follow a student throughout their academic careers.⁵

For kids in rural areas, lack of access to transportation can be a significant barrier to program participation. National research indicates that children in low income rural households are three times more likely to be without transportation than are children from non-rural families.⁶

Quality intentional programming and well prepared staff

Programs that plan with outcome goals in mind are more successful at promoting positive end results for kids. Although this seems straightforward, researchers found that positive results were concentrated in programs that used organized strategies and engaging activities to build children's competencies. Children are most likely to realize positive benefits from out-of-

school time programs when they form positive relationships with adult programs staff, coaches and teachers. A number of afterschool evaluations have therefore concluded that one of the most important features of quality programming is staff preparation. A study of the TASC evaluation found that there are specific staff practices that lead to the development of positive relationships. Specifically in programs that worked with middle school age children, observers found that kids were more successful in programs where staff modeled positive behavior, listened to children, provided individual attention, actively encouraged the mastery of skills and concepts by students, and established clear expectations for interactions with others.⁷ Low staff turnover and well-educated staff and directors who have opportunities for professional development also contribute to quality programming.⁸



Partnerships

The relationship between afterschool programs, schools, community organizations and parents form the foundation of a successful program. A number of studies have revealed favorable results in children's academic achievement when positive relationships exist with the school. Programs with ongoing community partnerships also gain additional resources for programming as well as opportunities for youth to experience community service projects and skill enhancement, ensuring that young people stay engaged.⁹ In rural areas of the state these partnerships are particularly vital, as resources are limited. Programs that successfully communicate with and include parents report that children were more successful in completing homework and had better school attendance, and the parents were more likely to volunteer at school or attend PTO meetings and open houses.¹⁰

Putting it all Together

Fond du Lac

Kids arrive at the Boys and Girls Club afterschool program with lots of unspent energy, hungry and usually with plenty of homework to take care of. The area's nine afterschool sites, run in partnership between the Fond du Lac School District and the Boys & Girls Club of Fond du Lac, serve 1,108 kids between kindergarten and 12th grade. In a given afternoon, kids may eat a full meal, get help with homework, write and perform a play, learn to bake or interview a veteran of World War II. Spending time this way has resulted in significant academic and psychosocial improvement for children attending the 21st Century Community Learning Center program. These gains have been especially pronounced for children who qualify for free or reduced school lunch, as well as for English Language Learners.

Recent state test scores (WKCE) for Chegwini Elementary School show that students who are economically disadvantaged and have regularly participated in the Afterschool Clubhouse programming for three or more years demonstrate higher academic proficiency in reading, language arts and mathematics than students



who are not economically disadvantaged. In the Language Arts category alone, students saw a 25 percent improvement in proficiency from 2005 to 2006. It is important to note that these gains are the result of a team effort, with after school programs working closely with day-school staff and administrators.

Data maintained by a principal at an additional site indicated that children participating in a Fond du Lac School District/Boys and Girls Club afterschool program recorded 75 percent fewer incidences of disruptive behavior during the school day.

Summer programming, offered in tandem with summer school, has also been instrumental in helping economically disadvantaged students avoid "summer slide" by helping them retain academic gains from the previous school year. Spring and Fall tests revealed that many students actually increased their reading comprehension over the summer months.

Racine—Lighted Schoolhouse

The stated goal of the Lighted Schoolhouse program centers for elementary and middle school age students is to offer diverse subjects that reinforce the importance of self-discipline, responsibility and service to others, along with academic assistance. Math and reading are a particular focus of assistance for students who have performed poorly on standardized tests. By engaging them through non-traditional math techniques and creative language and vocabulary activities, the program helps

Javon's Story

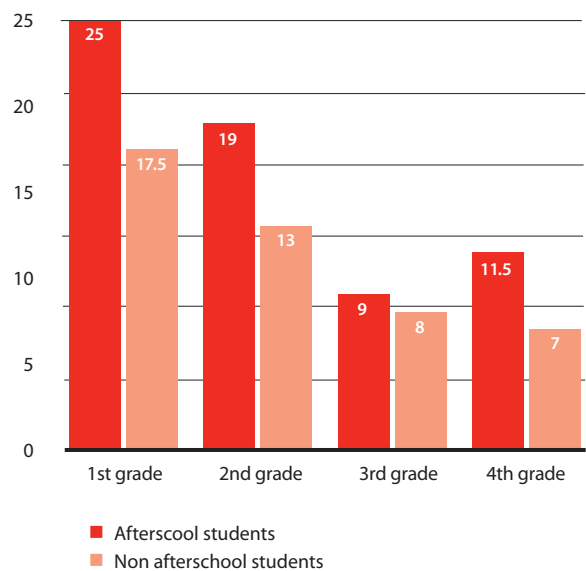
Javon is a 6th grade student who attends a Milwaukee 21st Century Learning Center (CLC) afterschool program. Javon has been struggling academically since 2nd grade. For the past four years he has been tested at a 2nd grade reading level. Although he is very involved in sports and dance, his academic struggles have had a negative effect on his self-esteem. This year Javon signed up for the intensive tutoring program offered in his afterschool program. In October of 2007 he began working with Mrs. A. twice a week in a small group or on- on-one setting. Within seven weeks his classroom teacher began noticing dramatic results. Javon began participating in class and his reading level slowly improved. Just before Christmas break, Javon read from his 6th grade science book for the principal and CLC afterschool director! Javon's participation in the tutoring program has dramatically improved his reading level and confidence. He now believes in his academic ability and is working towards testing at grade level in the fall. Part of Javon's determination to improve his academic level has come from his overwhelming success with the CLC Hip Hop Dance Team. He has been dancing since 3rd grade, and during this time he has won several competitions, a scholarship to the premier dance seminar Monsters of Hip Hop, and has even had the chance to dance for the nation's best choreographers...and received rave reviews. Once Javon was given the proper tools, the success he has had in dance gave him the confidence to tackle academic subjects without hesitation.

kids gain the skills necessary to succeed academically. This academic assistance is coupled with enrichment activities such as 4-H clubs, sports and recreation, and a Junior Achievement program that provides hands-on activities that promote social studies, math, reading and writing through "Dollars and Sense," an economics and business curriculum for kids in grades 3 through 5.

The program can boast some impressive results. Over the last three years, kids of color who participated in the Lighted Schoolhouse program achieved significantly higher gains in both reading and math scores.

Much of the program's success is attributed to staff sharing successful and innovative techniques for teaching math and reading in engaging formats.

Average growth in reading scores
from fall 2006 to spring 2007



Source: Racine Unified School District, Lighted School House Program



Conclusion

**"Closing the achievement gap, many of us believe, is America's new civil right,"
—Rep. John A. Boehner, R-Ohio, 2004**

The way in which children spend their out-of-school time can have a profoundly positive impact on their social and academic development. Participation in a high-quality program, whether it is a sports program with great adult coaches or an enrichment program at the neighborhood center, can provide essential elements for kids' success. The National Governors Association identifies quality out of school time experiences as one key to closing the achievement gap between children of color and their white classmates. In a 2007 four city study by the Mott foundation, Black parents reported that they are seeking programs that mirror the critical elements of successful programs outlined earlier in this brief.¹² The parents expect outcomes from these programs that assist their children to achieve better grades, learn discipline, grow positively in their experience with peers and increase their exposure to male role models. Unfortunately, the data suggests that low-income kids and children of color do not have equal access to quality programs either after school or in the summer months that fulfill these needs. The 116 programs funded by the NCLB only serve a small fraction of school age children in the state who need positive and productive activities in their out of school time. While these are not the only quality programs available, they are the only programs publically funded specifically to provide afterschool programming. The myriad of studies now available on the effects of quality programs point to the need to make these experiences available to all children. Policy makers and community leaders can play an integral role in expanding this network of opportunities for children across the state.

Wisconsin's 21st Century Learning Centers

In 2007 there were 721,729 elementary and middle school age children in Wisconsin. In School year 2006-2007, 33,021 kids attended Wisconsin after school programs funded through the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). According to the Department of Public Instruction, about 46 percent of the students (15,165) attended on a regular basis. In 2004-2005, the latest year for which enrollment data is available, 80 percent of the children attending 21 CLCs were economically disadvantaged, 76 percent were students of color, including 42 percent Black, 25 percent Hispanic, 4 percent Asian, and 4 percent American Indian. 11 percent were English Language Learners.¹¹



Endnotes

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⁵ Ron Fairchild, Brenda McLaughlin, Brendan P. Costigan, *How Did You Spend Your Summer Vacation? What Public Policies Do (and Don't Do) to Support Summer Learning Opportunities for All Youth*. Pg2

⁶ *Strategies for Improving Out-Of-School Programs in Rural Communities*, Research-to-Results Brief, Child Trends, May 2008

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⁸ *Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study (MARS)* <http://supportunitedway.org/files/MARS-Report.pdf>

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¹⁰ YMCA 21st CCLC Family Program in New York City's Chinatown, National 21st CCLC program evaluation

¹¹ *21st Century Learning Centers, Executive Summary 2004-2005*, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, <http://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/pdf/clcxsum0405.pdf>

¹² *More than homework, a snack and basketball: Afterschool Programs as an Oasis of Hope for Black Parents in Four Cities*, The Black Alliance for Educational Options, 2007

Acknowledgements

This policy brief was produced with the generous support of The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Mott Foundation, American Federation of State and County and Municipal Employees, Marshfield Clinic, Madison Teachers Inc., Heartland Credit Union, Wisconsin Education Association Council, Greater Green Bay Labor Council, Childrens Health and Hospital System of Wisconsin, Cuna Mutual Group Foundation, Physicians Plus Insurance Corporation, Herbert H. Kohl Charities, Wisconsin Counties Association, St. Mary's Hospital, American Family Insurance

Special thanks to Stan Kokos, Boys & Girls Club of Fond du Lac, Kathy Dunkerson, Racine Unified School District, Lynn Greb, Milwaukee Public Schools, and Alison Wineberg, DPI for their contributions to this brief.

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This policy brief is a publication of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families

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