ED458010 2001-11-00 Academic Effects of After-School Programs. ERIC Digest.

ERIC Development Team

www.eric.ed.gov

Table of Contents

If you're viewing this document online, you can click any of the topics below to link directly to that section.

ERIC Identifier: ED458010
Publication Date: 2001-11-00
Author: Shumow, Lee
Source: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education Champaign IL.

Academic Effects of After-School Programs. ERIC Digest.

The current emphasis on performance standards and testing has led schools to look to

the after-school hours as time that can be spent developing children's academic skills (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2001). Previously, principals and teachers tended to focus on after-school programs as a means to provide supervision for children whose parents were employed during the before- and after-school hours. Research has substantiated educators' concerns that children who are unsupervised during the after-school hours can suffer an array of negative developmental outcomes, especially when those children come from high-risk circumstances.

Few children attend after-school programs. Fourteen percent of primary grade children attend formal after-school programs compared with 27% of children who are cared for by relatives or by family child care providers after school (Brimhall, Reaney, & West, 1999). Most families who need care for their elementary school children depend on a patchwork of programs, lessons, structured activities, and self-care each week. Although federal government and private foundation funding has increased recently for after-school programs, research indicates that there are not enough programs available to meet demand (Halpern, 1999; National Institute on Out-of-school Time, 2001). This Digest describes types of after-school programs and discusses recent research on who participates and the effects of participation on children's school performance.

TYPES OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

After-school programs are sponsored and operated by for-profit businesses, community organizations, public schools, private schools, church groups, and by government agencies such as municipal park and recreation departments. More importantly, with respect to the impact of school-age programs on children's academic adjustment, after-school programs vary in terms of their philosophy, goals, and programming. Many programs continue a tradition of providing safe places for children to have fun. Such recreational programs tend to emphasize sports activities. Other programs focus on academics by providing tutoring in school subjects and by assisting with homework completion. Yet other programs center on enrichment, providing children with opportunities to develop skills and interests in activities such as dance, music, science, or arts and crafts. Some programs pursue multiple goals and offer an array of activities.

RESEARCH ON PARTICIPATION IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Early studies of after-school programs reported inconsistent results in comparing children who attended programs with those who did not. Researchers have determined that where children go after school, what they do after school, and how their activities affect them depend on characteristics of the children, families, communities, and programs.

In general, between first and fifth grades, children's participation in formal after-school programs declines while their participation in lessons and in self-care increases greatly. Children's maturity and prior adjustment also predict their activities after school. For

example, one study of low-income children found that children with better academic skills in third grade were more likely to select and attend enrichment activities in fifth grade and less likely to spend time with peers in unsupervised settings. The same study found that less well-adjusted children were more likely to remain in formal child care programs until fifth grade, probably because their parents recognized that they needed supervision (Posner & Vandell, 1999). Gender is another factor in children's after-school activities. Boys participate in more sports activities than girls; girls are more involved in academics, art projects, and socializing (Hofferth & Jankuniene, 2001; Posner & Vandell, 1999). Race may be yet another factor in children's participation. In one study, program participation was similar for White and African American third-graders, but by fifth grade, the number of White children attending programs decreased dramatically while the number of African-American children attending programs increased (Posner & Vandell, 1999).

Parents with higher educational levels and more income tend to influence their children to participate in educationally beneficial activities and can pay for more enrichment lessons than can parents with lower education and less income. However, some parents living in inner-city neighborhoods expend great amounts of energy to seek out resources for their children. Importantly, after-school program attendance provides children from low-income families with access to the types of enrichment activities that middle-class children typically experience (Hofferth & Jankuniene, 2001).

Community characteristics also bear on who participates and how this participation affects them. Program shortages are most pronounced in urban and rural areas, and programs for children from low-income families struggle with limited funding and resources. These limitations affect their quality (Halpern, 1999; National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2001). There is some evidence that after-school programs are more beneficial for children from high-risk communities than for middle-class children.

RESEARCH ON ACADEMIC EFFECTS OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

In evaluating the effects of programs on children's school performance, it is important for researchers to consider the individual, family, or community differences in children participating in programs in their research design so that the effects of those preexisting differences among participants and nonparticipants are not mistakenly attributed to programs. The research on program effects cited here does consider possible selection effects but is based on small, nonrepresentative samples of children.
Attendance is an important factor in evaluating the effects of after-school programs on children's school adjustment. Some researchers (Pettit et al., 1997) found that children who participated in some (1-3 hours a day) activities after school were rated by their teachers as having better social skills and fewer acting-out behavior problems than children who participated either in no activities or more activities each week. Pierce and

Vandell (1999) demonstrated that academically at-risk children who attended after-school programs more frequently, as compared with children who attended less often, developed better work habits in their school classrooms, attended school more often, and endorsed less aggressive strategies to resolve conflicts with peers. Program attendance was related to program quality. That study and others found that children resist attending programs where staff is negative and activities are limited, boring, and inflexible.

Some research has established links between regulatable program features, staff-child interactions, activities in programs, and children's school adjustment. Lower adult-child ratios and higher levels of staff education are associated with more positive interactions, less negativity, and more flexible and age-appropriate activities in after-school programs. Pierce, Hamm, and Vandell (1999) found that classroom teachers reported that boys had fewer behavior problems when staff were more positive with the children in their after-school programs. Exposure to more negative emotional climates in after-school programs was associated with lower reading and mathematics grades for boys. Those boys who attended programs that allowed them to make choices about activities were rated by their first-grade teachers as having better social skills with peers in the classroom than were boys enrolled in less flexible programs.

The specific activities that children engage in after school are associated with where children are after school and with how well children do in school. Not surprisingly, reading after school is the activity most predictive of higher student achievement. Throughout elementary school, children in a nationally representative sample did more studying and reading at home than they did in programs (Hofferth & Jankuniene, 2001). On the other hand, several researchers have found that children watch far more television at home after school than they do at after-school programs. Time viewing television in numerous studies has been associated with lower reading achievement and more frequent behavior problems among children.

Posner and Vandell (1999) studied low-income and working-class urban children and found that those who attended after-school programs engaged in more nonsport extracurricular activities in third through fifth grade and more academic activities in third and fourth grades than nonprogram children. They then investigated the adjustment of fifth-grade children based on how they had spent their after-school time over a 3-year period. For the low-income African-American children in their sample, time doing nonsport extracurricular activities after school was associated with better teacher-reported emotional adjustment in school, time socializing was associated with better academic grades and work habits, and time in coached sports was associated with lower academic grades (Posner & Vandell, 1999). For the White children in their sample, time in unstructured activities outside was associated with lower report card grades, poorer work habits, and poorer teacher-reported emotional adjustment in school.

CONCLUSION

The research indicates that children from high-risk backgrounds have both the most to gain from after-school programs in terms of educational opportunity and the least access to after-school programs. Research findings also indicate that if educational benefits are the goal of after-school programs, then attention needs to be focused on the quality of programs and the activities that are offered. First, a positive emotional climate devoid of harsh, punitive, controlling adult supervision should increase attendance. Programs cannot benefit children who do not attend or resist participation. Second, the changing needs and interests of older elementary school children need to be considered in programming. Third, experts caution that the goal of improving children's school performance will not necessarily be attained by extending the school day with traditional classroom lessons and routines. Some research suggests that giving children activity choices, engaging them in enrichment activities, and supporting socialization with peers will pay academic dividends. Projects offer the potential to enhance children's learning (Alexander, 2000) as do activities such as music, art, theatre, computers, reading for pleasure, and writing for an audience (Hynes, O'Connor, & Chung, 2000; Vandell & Shumow, 1999), but the benefits of those approaches still need to be substantiated by research.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Alexander, D. (2000). The learning that lies between play and academics in after-school programs [Online]. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Available: http://www.niost.org/activity.html.

Brimhall, D., Reaney, L., & West, J. (1999). Participation of kindergartners through third-graders in before- and after-school care. Statistics in Brief. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. ED 433 147.

Halpern, R. (1999). After-school programs for low-income children: Promises and challenges. Future of Children, 9(3), 81-95. EJ 600 564.

Hofferth, S. L., & Jankuniene, Z. (2001). Life after school. Educational Leadership, 58(7), 19-23.

Hynes, K., O'Connor, S., & Chung, A. (2000). Literacy: Exploring strategies to enhance learning in after-school programs [Online]. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Available: http://www.niost.org/literacy.html.

National Institute on Out-of-School Time. (2001, March). Fact sheet on school-age children's out-of-school time [Online]. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Available: http://www.niost.org/fact_sheet_01.pdf.

Pettit, G., Laird, R. D., Dodge, K. A., & Bates, J. E. (1997). Patterns of after-school care

in middle childhood: Risk factors and developmental outcomes. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 43(3), 515-538. EJ 554 329.

Pierce, K. M., Hamm, J. V., & Vandell, D. L. (1999). Experiences in after-school programs and children's adjustment in first-grade classrooms. Child Development, 70(3), 756-767. EJ 595 706.

Pierce, K. M., & Vandell, D. L. (1999, March). Safe Haven program evaluation. Madison: University of Wisconsin Center for Educational Research. Available from Deborah Lowe Vandell (dvandell@facstaff.wisc.edu).

Posner, J. K., & Vandell, D. L. (1999). After-school activities and the development of low-income urban children: A longitudinal study. Developmental Psychology, 35(3), 868-879. EJ 586 559.

Vandell, D. L., & Shumow, L. (1999). After-school child care programs. Future of Children, 9(3), 64-80. EJ 600 563.

References identified with an ED (ERIC document), EJ (ERIC journal), or PS number are cited in the ERIC database. Most documents are available in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 1,000 locations worldwide and can be ordered through EDRS: 800-443-ERIC. Journal articles are available from the original journal, interlibrary loan services, or article reproduction clearinghouses such as Ingenta (800-296-2221).

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, under contract number ED-99-CO-0020. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

—

Title: Academic Effects of After-School Programs. ERIC Digest.
Document Type: Information Analyses---ERIC Information Analysis Products (IAPs) (071); Information Analyses---ERIC Digests (Selected) in Full Text (073);
Available From: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Children's Research Center, University of Illinois, 51 Gerty Dr., Champaign, IL 61820-7469. Tel: 800-583-4135 (Toll Free); Tel: 217-333-1386; Fax: 217-333-3767; Web site: http://ericeece.org; e-mail: ericeece@uiuc.edu. For full text: http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests.html.
Descriptors: Academic Achievement, After School Programs, Elementary Education,

Elementary School Students, Enrichment Activities, Enrollment, Extracurricular Activities, Outcomes of Education, Program Design, Program Effectiveness, School Age Day Care
Identifiers: Access to Services, ERIC Digests, Program Characteristics
###

—

[Return to ERIC Digest Search Page]