

# Learning What Works: An Evaluation Overview

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# Workshop Overview

- Out-of-school time (OST) programs: What do they offer?
- Landscape of OST evaluation
- What do we know about program participation and participant outcomes?
- Special focus on evaluation strategies to increase rigor



# OST Programs: What Do They Offer?



# Specific OST Program Foci

- Positive youth development (132)
- Academic/enrichment (114)
- Tutoring/extra instruction (69)
- Multi-component/comprehensive (53)
- Prevention (55)
- Science/technology/mathematics (42)
- Family/community involvement (34)
- Literacy (27)
- Mentoring (30)
- Sports/recreation (30)
- System-building (24)
- Arts (24)
- Youth leadership (22)
- Cultural/heritage (17)
- Service-learning/civic engagement (13)
- Vocational education (13)
- Health (7)
- Adventure (2)
- Faith-based (7)



Note: Numbers in parenthesis are the number of programs in our Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Bibliography at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/bibliography](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/bibliography).

# Landscape of OST Evaluation



# Reasons for Evaluation

## Accountability

- Performance measurement

## Program Improvement

- Using data to strengthen programs



# Formative Questions

- Recruitment/participation (67, 85)
- Activity implementation (60, 84)
- Staffing/training (56, 78)
- Program context/infrastructure (49, 66)
- Satisfaction (43, 55)
- Parent/community involvement (33, 43)
- Cost/revenues (27, 39)
- Program/school linkages (26, 34)
- Systemic infrastructure (24, 27)



Note: Numbers in parenthesis are the number of programs and evaluations in our Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html).

# Summative Questions

- Academic achievement (74, 111)
- Youth development (65, 91)
- Prevention (32, 47)
- Family (24, 28)
- Community impact (11, 12)
- Workforce (8, 10)
- Systemic (5, 10)



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# Evaluation Designs

- Non-experimental (61, 91)
- Quasi-experimental (46, 65)
- Experimental (18, 20)



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# Evaluation Methods

- Surveys/questionnaires (71, 102)
- Secondary sources/data review (55, 77)
- Interviews/focus groups (54, 71)
- Testing/assessments (47, 57)
- Observation (41, 56)
- Document review (37, 53)



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# Which Data Collection Method Is Right for My Program?

- Using single versus multiple methods
- Selecting data sources
- Selecting a sample of individuals
- Collecting data before and after the program
- Cost considerations



# Where We Are

- Programs use evaluation to answer multiple questions
- Programs conduct formative and summative evaluations—many do both
- Most evaluations are non-experimental
- Most evaluations use multiple data collect methods, primarily surveys and questionnaires



# Program Participation and Outcomes: What We Know and What We Need to Know



# Participation Is Important for Academic Success

- Better attitudes toward school and higher educational aspirations
- Higher school attendance (as measured by attendance and tardiness)
- Less disciplinary action (e.g., suspension)
- Better performance in school, as measured by achievement test scores and grades



# Participation Is Important for Social/Emotional Development

- Decreased behavioral problems
- Improved social and communication skills and/or relationships with others (peers, parents, and/or teachers)
- Increased community involvement and broadened world view
- Increased self-confidence and self-esteem



# Participation Is Important for Healthy Physical Development

- Avoidance of drug and alcohol use
- Decreases in delinquency and violent behaviors
- Increased knowledge of safe sex and avoidance of sexual activity and pregnancy
- Increased skills for coping with peer pressure



# Participation Is Important for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skill Development

- Expert Thinking: Identifying and solving new problems
- Complex communication: Eliciting critical information and conveying a convincing interpretation of it to others
- Proficiency in the “basics”



# Developmental Research Relating Participation to Outcomes

- Participation during the ages of 5–12 is related to value and self concept of children's abilities in math and sports (Simpkins, Fredricks, Davis-Kean & Eccles, 2003)
- Participation in after school activities during middle childhood is critical for the development of competencies and values, adolescent activity participation, and adolescent outcomes (Simpkins, Fredricks, Davis-Kean & Eccles, 2003)
- Participation in structured after school activities is associated with positive social behavior, higher satisfaction with friendships, and higher math scores (Ripke & Huston, 2003)
- Participation in structured activities (sports, lessons, and clubs) is associated with better overall achievement and social behavior than participation in unstructured activities (trips to the library, reading, etc.; Morris & Kalil, 2003)



# Factors That Influence Participant Outcomes

- Age
- Socio-economic status
- Program quality
- Participation



# Age and Outcomes

Academic outcomes appear stronger for adolescents than for elementary school children, but elementary children do show improvements in conduct and work habits related to participation.



# SES and Outcomes

Outcomes appear stronger for children from low SES families.



# Quality Matters

- Physical and psychological safety
- Appropriate structure
- Supportive relationships
- Opportunities for meaningful youth involvement
- Positive social norms
- Learning-oriented/skill-building activities
- Autonomy/balance of autonomy and structure
- Connections with other contexts (school, home, community)



# Program Quality and Outcomes

## Vandell Studies

- High quality programming linked to positive interactions with adults, less solitary behavior, less unoccupied behavior
- Higher child-staff ratio associated with negative child-staff interactions, range of activity offerings associated with positive staff-child interactions



# Program Quality and Outcomes

## Smith/Smoll Studies

- Interventions in staff quality lead to better outcomes for participants, including lower anxiety and higher self-esteem

## Gambone, Klem, and Connell Study

- High quality supportive relationships in early high school are twice as likely as those with average relationships to have optimal developmental outcomes at the end of high school



# Program Staffing and Outcomes

- TASC Evaluation: Positive outcomes linked to a site coordinator who was licensed to teach
- San Francisco Beacons Initiative Evaluation: Number of supportive adults the single most significant predictor of sustained participation



# What Is “Participation”

Participation =

Enrollment + Attendance

+ Engagement



# Enrollment

- Getting youth in the door
- Contextual/external predictors
- Program recruitment strategies
- Program implementation



# Attendance

- Participating vs. not participating
- Intensity (number of hours per week/month)
- Duration (history or participation)
- Breadth (number and variety of activities within and across programs)



# Intensity and Outcomes

## Academic Outcomes

- GPA, test scores
- Homework completion
- Feelings about school, goals, and educational aspirations
- College attendance
- High school completion

## Social Outcomes

- Lower problem behavior
- Higher community service
- Better emotional well-being (e.g., happiness)

## Participation Outcomes

- Higher intensity in elementary school is associated with higher attendance in middle and high school



# Duration of Participation

- Learning a specific skill, higher developmental assets scores (4-H Youth Development Program)
- Time on homework, self-reported grades, school volunteer work (Rodriguez, Hirschl, Mead & Goggin, 1999)
- Gains in math (TASC)
- Higher math grades, English grades, math test scores, reading test scores, self-esteem, locus of control, homework, academic peer group, talking with parents, talking with teachers (Broh, 2002)



# Breadth of Participation

- Lower cigarette and marijuana use (Elder, Leaver-Dunn, Wang, Nagy & Green, 2000)
- Overall life satisfaction (Gilman, 2001)
- School drop-out rates (Mahoney, 2000)
- For boys, a higher number of activities was associated with positive academic outcomes (Pierce, Hamm & Vandell, 1999)



# Combining Indicators

## San Francisco Beacons

### Combined

- Duration: Number of sessions—fall, winter, spring
- Breadth: Educational activities, other activities, or educational and other activities

### Results

- **3 sessions plus educational and other activities** lead to increases in leadership, non-family support for participants, school effort, and sense of efficacy
- **3 sessions plus educational only activities** lead to increases in school effort only



# Engagement

- More than just “being there”
- Behaviors such as persistence, effort, and attention
- Emotions such as enthusiasm, interest, and pride in success
- Motivation
- Active cognitive involvement
- Quality is key to engagement



College Guidance Counselor to  
parents of a high school senior:  
“Unfortunately, evidence of your  
son’s intelligence is purely  
anecdotal.”



# Special Focus on Evaluation Strategies to Increase Rigor



# “Shoestring Evaluations”

Bamberger, M., Rugh, J., Church, M., & Fory, L. (2004). Shoestring evaluation: Designing impact evaluations under budget, time, and data constraints. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 25, 5–38.



# Planning and Scoping Evaluation Needs

- Define client information needs
- Define the program theory of change—inputs, implementation, outputs, and outcomes
- Identify budget, time, and data constraints



# Addressing Budget, Time, and Data Constraints

- Simplify the evaluation design
- Clarify client information needs
- Reduce sample size
- Reduce costs of data collection
- Simplify and speed up data input and analysis



# Simplify Evaluation Design

- Pre-/post-test design
- Matched group of similar youth
- Comparison group using an existing data set
- Examine within program variations
- Comparison of participation in similar programs
- Retrospective pretest



# Clarify Client Information Needs

- Only collect the data you need
- If you are interested in implementation information you do not need a comparison group
- Each comparison statement you try to make has sampling implications (e.g., outcomes for low SES, different ages, etc.)



# Reduce Sample Size

- Rule of Thumb: The larger the size you plan to detect, the smaller your sample can be



# Reduce Costs of Data Collection

- Only ask questions for which you really need answers
- Be clear about which indicators are the most relevant to your evaluation
- Consider each survey question carefully—a shorter survey means less data entry and analysis
- Use focus groups rather than individual interviews
- Use self-administered surveys
- Integrate qualitative and quantitative methods
- Use document review and secondary source data review, including project records
- Use “recall” to reconstruct baseline data



# Simplify and Speed Up Data Input and Analysis

- Reorganize program monitoring records and data collection forms to be in line with evaluation questions
- Use technology to speed up data collection: hand-held devices, swipe cards, MIS, optical scanners (for surveys)

