the evaluation exchange

Harvard Family Research Project
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Emerging Strategies in Evaluating Child & Family Services
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from the director's desk

Heather B. Weiss, Ed.D.

As the working parent of a teenage daughter, I have been aware of the importance of safe, fun, and challenging after school activities for quite some time. I am pleased, therefore, that a consensus is emerging about the importance of after school programs — both in policy circles and among the public. There is tremendous activity in the after school field, evidenced by the variety of organizations becoming involved in designing and administering programs and the substantial recent growth in public and private funding. From this activity, innovative partnerships and community-based collaboratives have formed and significant investments in evaluation and research are increasingly being made. The next few years will be critical as those who are invested in the field of after school — policy-makers, practitioners, funders, evaluators, researchers, parents, children, and youth — build on the current momentum and create high quality, sustainable after school programs for everyone who needs them.

Over the past year and with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, HFRP "mapped" the after school field. We identified the key stakeholders, talked with them in focus groups, one-on-one interviews and meetings, and gathered a variety of perspectives as we tried to identify the critical issues and opportunities facing the field. From this work, several challenges emerge that have important implications for evaluation and its contribution to the development of the after school field.

A substantial challenge that confronts many programs that serve families and children, including those in after school, relates to how to respond to the demand for outcomes measurement in the current era of accountability. After school programs increasingly must show results at the national, state, and community levels, creating an atmosphere that has changed how stakeholders need to think about the evaluation of their programs.

Evaluations of large-scale initiatives will continue to provide, as in the past, crucial information regarding the effectiveness of large public and private investments. Equally important are local evaluations that help local programs make their case to state and community stakeholders. The new landscape of accountability dictates that local programs need a range of supports to build capacity to identify and measure results in ways that are both manageable and cost effective.

A second challenge is ensuring that information gathered at the local and national levels is widely available and used. Gathering and reporting data to demonstrate accountability is important, but information should also be used to make improvements to programs and policies. In order to continually improve, evaluative information must be relevant, particularly to program stakeholders who need critical feedback to guide program improvements and long-term plans.

More and more, programs are expected to demonstrate their success through measuring program outcomes, making the challenge of determining appropriate outcomes for evaluation measurement more critical than ever. Currently, programs within the field have outcomes ranging from improving academic achievement and developing more effective juvenile justice to strengthening athletic and physical ability and promoting life skills, with companion goals and objectives. Program expectations should be tied to the kinds of activities they offer, and funder investments in evaluations need to reflect the wide variety of programs in the field. Like the other challenges, determining the key outcomes for after school programs requires continuing conversations and broad access to evaluation results among the many stakeholders in the field.

Finally, we are in the early stages of developing theories linking interventions and outcomes. As this work progresses and more evaluations become available, stakeholders will begin to come to consensus about what kinds of programs and activities have the best chance of achieving positive outcomes for children in after school programs. Bringing the developmental research theories and findings together with information from program evaluations to inform long-term planning, decision making, and day-to-day activities of programs is critical as we lay a solid foundation on which to build the field.

In many ways, these four challenges — building evaluation capacity, incorporating continuous improvement as a component of good practice, selecting appropriate outcomes,

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the **evaluation exchange**

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The Evaluation Exchange accepts contributions from policy-makers, practitioners, and researchers in evaluation and related fields. Contributions are welcome for regular *Evaluation Exchange* columns, as well as articles that highlight the training component of evaluation practice.

Please send a query letter outlining your proposed article to:

Leslie Goodyear
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> watch for

A forthcoming document in spring, 2001, by the **National Academy of Sciences, Board on Children, Youth, and Families** synthesizing youth development research and assessing the strengths and limitations of indicators, data sources, and methodologies used to evaluate community-level youth development programs.
Contact Jennifer Gootman, study director
Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth
202-334-2034
http://www4.nationalacademies.org/cbsse/bocyfweb.nsf/web/promoteyouth

The **National Governor's Association** database of state level Extra Learning Opportunities (ELO) programs, a Web-based resource for state policy-makers seeking to coordinate programs and resources that provide ELOs for school-age children.
Available On-line in October, 2000.
Contact Theresa Clarke, policy analyst
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444 North Capitol St., Suite 267
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(202) 624-5387, e-mail: tclarke@nga.org
http://www.nga.org/CBP/Activities/ExtraLearning.asp

> clarification

Our last issue included an article on the evaluation of the national replication of the Middle School Families and Schools Together program. In the article we neglected to mention that the FAST program was developed by Dr. Lynn McDonald, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. McDonald and her colleagues at the FAST National Training and Evaluation Center were involved in previous evaluations of FAST and they continue to conduct research on the program. Additional information and reports may be found at **http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/FAST.** We regret the oversight.

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and strengthening the connection between outcomes and theory — are not unique to after school, but they are particularly urgent for the field of out-of-school time. This is a fast-growing period in which there is a reassessment of the role of evaluation vis-a-vis social programs and policies. The work going on in after school programs can both stimulate and benefit from the debates in other fields about the purposes, audiences, and methods of evaluation.

In order to address these four challenges, we must think innovatively and creatively. Our focus group discussions point to several priorities: Among these are the need to build capacity not only to collect information and conduct sound studies but also to make productive use of information. This is basic to the field of evaluation (capacity building is, in fact, the theme of this year's American Evaluation Association conference; **http://www.eval.org**).

We need to continue ongoing dialogue among stakeholders at a variety of levels. We need discussions among evaluators from both large- and small-scale studies to share ideas about issues that affect evaluation in the after school field — those identified here and others that will emerge over time. Conversations among evaluators, researchers, policy-makers, funders, and practitioners are also important to ensure that evaluation addresses pertinent policy and practice questions.

Finally, we think these challenges require the development of an infrastructure to support the important work done not only by after school programs, but also by those who evaluate them and make policy that affects them. We talk more about this in the *Theory & Practice* section of this issue.

In keeping with this newsletter's goal to be open, accessible, and serve its readers, several format changes debut in this issue. The newsletter has a new look, thanks to HFRP's new publications team: Christine Phelan, communications manager, and Leslie Goodyear, editor of *The Evaluation Exchange* (the photo of me was their idea, not mine!). We've added a new section, *Ask the Expert*, and merged *New & Noteworthy* and *Electronic Resources* into a single column. These changes are in response to suggestions from the reader survey we conducted last year. We continue to make better use of electronic media — our Web site is continuously updated and now includes a section specifically on our after school work.

In the spirit of bringing together multiple perspectives in the after school field, we have increased our mailing list for this issue. To new readers, I bid a warm welcome. If you wish to receive a free subscription to *The Evaluation Exchange*, visit our Web site, or contact us directly. We strive, above all, to be an interactive newsletter examining timely and innovative issues in evaluation, research, and continuous improvement. We always welcome suggestions and comments — whether you are a first time reader or a regular one.

Building the After School Field

A Conversation with Evaluators, Researchers, Policy-makers, and Practitioners

Over the past year with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) "mapped" the after school field: marking the trends and issues, challenges, unifying themes, and the ways in which connections between policy-making, practice, and research and evaluation can be strengthened. As part of this work, HFRP hosted a series of round table conversations to gather perspectives. In fall, 1999, we conducted five focus groups with evaluators and researchers of after school programs. In June, 2000, we co-convened a meeting of after school stakeholders with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Successful Pathways Through Middle Childhood. These conversations sought to determine the salient policy, practice, and research issues in the out-of-school time field, to discuss the current state of research and evaluation in the field, and to identify the role research and evaluation play in supporting improved policy and practice. The following summarizes these discussions.

The after school field emerged from the national consensus that the out-of-school hours play an important role in the development of healthy children and youth and brings together a diversity of voices, experiences, and perspectives. In order to better understand existing needs, HFRP began by documenting the different "players" in the field, identifying three broad stakeholder groups: policy-makers, practitioners, and evaluators and developmental researchers. We defined policy-makers as elected officials and bureaucrats, as well as public and private sector staff, who develop, implement, and fund after school initiatives. Professional service practitioners, the staff and managers of out-of-school time programs, provide direct services in the field. Members of the research and evaluation communities include evaluators of local, state, large scale, and national initiatives and developmental researchers. These stakeholders represent a variety of programmatic emphases (school-aged child care, youth development, and education) and various institutions (schools, community-based organizations, universities, and businesses.)

The diversity of the after school field gives it the strength of different perspectives, but also inherent and substantial challenges. "After school" and "out-of-school time" vary in meaning among stakeholders. But for those who participated in the meeting and focus groups, mutual concerns began to emerge, including the focus for after school programs, their funding sources, which institutions should provide after school services and what types of individuals should staff them.

The Role of Evaluation and Research in Supporting After School Programs

The discussions surfaced several other key questions to be addressed by researchers and evaluators:

> Who is participating in after school programs?

Data on participation is needed to understand who is and is not being served, and which programs/activities are most popular and well attended.

> What are the key ingredients of a quality program?

Correlating key elements of quality programs with positive developmental outcomes offers insight into programs that are having an impact on children's lives.

> What do children want and what do parents need?

It is essential to ensure that programs are locally relevant and well used.

> What are the long term benefits of participation in out-of-school time programs?

There is little longitudinal information to date that examines this question; finding data to answer it will be critical to ensuring policy-makers' and communities' commitment to these programs.

> What are the most appropriate and important outcomes to measure?

Although research on outcomes of after school programs is increasing, there is still little known about program effects, particularly across the developmental continuum and over time.

> *In order to address the challenges raised, it is imperative that existing momentum around out-of-school time be channeled into the development of the after school field. This will require collective vision, strategizing and meaningful collaborations.*

In this era of accountability, evaluation and research that demonstrate program success will ultimately drum up financial support for programs and build credibility in the field. Although some feel that policy and practice need a greater selection of research to draw upon, the out-of-school time field now has enough credible knowledge to establish promising practices.

Connecting Evaluation and Research to Policy and Practice

If evaluation and research findings on after school programs are to affect practice and policy, it is critical that they become, as one participant noted, a "part of the water supply." This requires work up front to ensure that evaluators and researchers are answering the

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important questions facing individual programs, policy-makers, and the field at large. It also requires post-evaluation work to make sure that findings are accessible to policy and practice audiences. Many with whom we spoke noted that evaluation and research information is making its way into policy and practice discussions more now than in years past.

Research and evaluation have the potential to affect practice and influence legislative initiatives on both regional and national levels. Although policy-making in out-of-school time has historically been at the state and local levels, it is beginning to surface as a national priority and policy-makers are looking for guidance as they invest dollars. Reports documenting effective programs that measure long term outcomes and demonstrate success in reaching goals are especially useful for policy-makers. Models of successful collaborations among programs are of particular interest to practitioners because, more often than not, they are financed by multiple funders and held responsible for a range of outcomes. As is the case in the family and children's services field, a new challenge facing out-of-school time programs and collaborative efforts is the documentation and demonstration of the value added by each collaborating partner program.

The diversity of the after school field makes connecting researchers and evaluators with those working in policy and practice difficult. At the local level, evaluators will need to work closely with program staff to identify the salient questions, issues and outcomes of greatest relevance to those working in after school programs.

Building Infrastructure to Improve and Share Evaluation Practices and Findings

To tackle these challenges, we must develop ways to support evaluation and research and their connections to policy and practice. Beyond that, we need to use those connections to continue to develop and improve programs. Examples include:

- The Center for the Study of Evaluation (CSE) at the University of California, Los Angeles, found, as they evaluated LA's BEST initiative, that local capacity building is both an important focus and challenge. Through development of locally-relevant measures and data collection systems, CSE hopes to internalize evaluation in local sites, and use that information for the national evaluation. From the perspective of local evaluators, this connection and support is essential.

- Texas A&M developed a local university consortium to help programs improve their evaluation. A team of university-affiliated evaluators worked closely with program practitioners to define program goals, elements to achieve them, and indicators of success.

- The U.S. Department of Education developed a continuous improvement manual to assist 21st Century Community Learning Centers program grantees in collecting evaluative data. The Department is also conducting a longitudinal evaluation of the program and will report its performance to Congress.

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Child Care Bureau is building a child care research data archive that will serve as a repository for research and provide technical assistance to policy-makers and practitioners as they locate and use information from the studies.

- The Harvard Family Research Project is developing an evaluation data collection and dissemination strategy to centralize evaluation knowledge at the national and local level by creating an after school program/initiative evaluation database. The database is a compilation of evaluation designs, data collection methods, outcomes, and findings of both large- and small-scale after school initiatives. Information will be shared broadly via the Web, a series of research publications, and policy and practice briefs that will promote understanding and discussion of evaluation in after school programs.

Next Steps

In order to address the challenges raised, it is imperative to channel existing momentum around out-of-school time into the development of the field. This will require collective vision, strategic planning, and meaningful collaboration. The focus groups and meeting we conducted provided an important opportunity for researchers and evaluators to hear the information needs of policy-makers and practitioners and learn about some important evaluation and research related infrastructure work currently being done. We hope that these discussions will mark the beginning of continued conversations to build the field of out-of-school time.

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Karen Horsch, a senior researcher at HFRP for more than three years, studies issues related to the evaluation of out-of-school time programs and specializes in issues related to outcomes-based management in nonprofits.

Kathleen Hart, a research analyst at HFRP for the past year, conducts research on out-of-school time and is a contributor to The Evaluation Exchange.

Afterschool Alliance

On October 12, 2000, the **Afterschool Alliance** sponsored the *LightsOn Afterschool!* project as part of their efforts to build awareness and expand resources for after school programs. The Alliance is an emerging group of public, private, and nonprofit groups that grew out of a partnership between the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education. The Afterschool Alliance hopes to raise national and local awareness about the importance of after school programs so that all children will have access to top quality, affordable after school programs by 2010. Contact the Afterschool Alliance, P.O. Box 65166, Washington, DC, 20035; 202-296-9378

http://www.afterschoolalliance.org

Laurie Olsen uses the example of *California Tomorrow* to highlight the importance of addressing issues of access and equity in the evaluation of after school programs.

Reflections on Access and Equity Implications for After School Program Evaluations

In response to the day-to-day realities of 28 million school-age children and the seven million latchkey kids who care for themselves and each other every afternoon, there has been an explosion of public and private investment in after school programs. The policy intents behind this encompass a variety of concerns, from juvenile crime, child safety, and support for mothers in the workforce to youth development and assuaging poor academic performance. While funding tends to be universal and non-needs based, the concerns addressed by after school programs disproportionately impact poor children, immigrant children and youth of color. In the past, there have been too many examples in which low-income communities were disproportionately excluded from resource allocations, and low-income, immigrant youth, and children of color were not well served by public institutions. This is often because resources and programs do not explicitly target their needs and address their barriers to involvement. Without deliberate efforts to reach out to the less well served, more sophisticated organizations and communities tend to garner most of the resources, funding and services for after school programming.

With major public investment in after school programs and a dramatic expansion of the field, program evaluations play a critical role in raising and framing questions for programs and communities, collecting data to inform policy direction, and monitoring patterns of inclusion and access. For these reasons, it is crucial to consciously focus on equity and access in after school program evaluations.

As *California Tomorrow*, with a focus on both equity-centered school reform and capacity building in diverse communities, explored issues of equity and access in after-school programs, it became clear that few programs, funders, or evaluators addressed these specific dimensions within the program movement. Yet many with whom we spoke voiced an interest in more deeply understanding how an access and equity framework might help shape evaluation research questions, the nature of the measures used to evaluate success and quality, and the methods used to collect data.

As a result, *California Tomorrow* framed a working set of principles defining equity and access in after school programs, presented here with reflections on their implications for evaluators.

• After school programs and policies should result in improved outcomes for youth and should play a role in countering current gaps and inequities in social and educational supports and outcomes.

In order to measure after school programs' abilities to close gaps in social and educational supports and outcomes for youth, it is essential that measures of outcome improvements be accompanied by disaggregated comparative data that provide a base line and over-time measure of the size of gaps between racial/ethnic groups, gender, social and economic status levels, and levels of English fluency. Gaps should be measured both within and across programs. Because most programs are neighborhood and residentially based and regions are often divided down racial and ethnic lines, this comparative data should enable the evaluator to examine, for example, the level of support provided and the impact of programs in poor communities with the level of support and impact of programs in wealthier or suburban communities.

• Resources should be allocated with a focus on the creation of after school support for children living in communities where such programs are scarce.

This principle requires close examination of who receives funding to provide services. Location of funded programs can be overlaid on a map of existing community resources and services, allowing for an analysis of locales where services are scarce. Furthermore, a comparison of the location of funded programs with socioeconomic status, health status, measures of safety, and racial/ethnic data about communities will demonstrate whether the services are getting to children and communities most in need. Where possible, it would be helpful to document "best practices" in initiative and policy design that result in resources being accessible to and used by those communities most in need. Within programs, comparative data on those actually served by a program and the youth population in the school attendance area enable evaluators to explore exactly who receives support and whether those served are the children in greatest need.

• Policies and practices in the field should ensure that no community is excluded from being able to provide or access after school services due to

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21st Century Community Learning Centers

Leveling the Playing Field

When the U.S. Department of Education (ED) unveiled its 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21stCCLC) afterschool initiative in 1998, it announced a series of regional bidders' conferences to assist local education agencies (LEAs) in applying for the 21stCCLC grants. These training workshops were intended to attract those organizations and programs that might not have typically applied for 21stCCLC funding. The bidders conferences are offered annually across the U.S. by ED, in conjunction with the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the National Community Education Association (NCEA), and the National Center for Community Education (NCCE). (The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation funds NCCE and NCEA to train and assist on 21stCCLC projects funded by ED.) Information provided at the workshops includes:

- *Profiles of successful past awards*
- *Typical errors in previous applications*
- *Changes in the current competition*
- *Activities mandated by statute*
- *Absolute and competitive priorities*
- *Selection criteria*
- *Insight into how applications were selected for funding*

By providing technical assistance to novice and experienced grantwriters alike, the workshops help to level the playing field for programs seeking 21stCCLC funds.

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barriers related to language, income, skin color, immigrant status, gender, and physical disability.

All of the above characteristics have a history of sorting young people into those with access and better social and educational outcomes and those without. Because of this, it is imperative that evaluations of program effectiveness include an examination of the barriers present that result in limited access and involvement. Some of these may be obvious (i.e., information about funding and grant application meetings are only advertised and conducted in English, despite the existence of large language minorities in a community; program sites without ramps or elevators and so access is precluded for young people with physical disabilities), but often an evaluation of barriers requires an analysis of whether students are representatively enrolling. Programs should deliberately seek the perspectives of potentially excluded groups to determine those barriers that may hinder their participation in the program.

• Programs should foster a positive sense of identity, build upon the cultures of the families, and offer a curriculum that values and responds to the strengths, challenges, and needs of all of the different kinds of youth in their communities (e.g. youth of different ethnicities, class backgrounds, spiritual beliefs, genders, sexual orientations, and physical or cognitive abilities).

An access and equity lens should not only focus on who enrolls in programs, it should also be concerned with the responsiveness and appropriateness of what occurs in programs. Many times it is the practices, attitudes, and hidden or overt curriculum that give some young people the message that they are worth less than others. Basic quality indicators should include aspects related to responsiveness and inclusiveness of all students. An analysis of this principle requires frameworks for assessing cultural and linguistic responsiveness, observations and data collection aimed at documenting attitudes and expectations, examination of the content of curriculum and programs, and approaches to elicit the perspectives and experiences of young people and parents about these issues.

• After school programs should strengthen the capacity of young people to be active, contributing members of their families, communities, and our increasingly diverse society.

Youth development principles have been at the heart of many after school programs in the past. In light of recent program expansion and focus on academic and social outcomes, some programs may work to develop youth leadership, building their ability to be active, contributing members of their families and communities. Evaluations should include multiple kinds of outcome measures, both academic and social. They should seek evidence of ways in which young people are supported and involved in their communities, providing leadership within their programs, and reaching across divides of language, culture, skin color, and class.

• Policies and practices should support communities, parents and youth in shaping programs and determining which organizations should provide after school services.

To examine this aspect of programs, an evaluator would document governance practices and policies and the degree of representative involvement that parents and youth have in decision making. It is important to look for which parents and youth are involved to ensure that the voices of those who may find it more difficult to be heard are, in fact, present. Evaluations would be concerned with whether or not the policies and procedures in design and funding allow for community involvement in determining which organizations would provide the program.

Conclusion

Key to all of these reflections is the importance of collecting demographic data and disaggregating outcome data, designing evaluations in ways that promote multiple perspectives, conducting evaluations in ways that support the involvement and engagement of people who are often excluded from governance and decision-making (students, parents, language minority communities, etc.), and developing frameworks for observations and data collection to elicit information on barriers to confirm the presence or absence of culturally responsive practices. But, perhaps most importantly, we must use the evaluation process and data to promote dialogue, inspire reflection, and stir engagement within and among communities about their desired outcomes for youth and their visions of equity and inclusion.

It is important that there be a conscious focus on equity and access in evaluations of after school programs. Evaluations play a crucial role in raising and framing questions for programs and communities, collecting the data that will inform policy direction and monitoring patterns of inclusion and access.

We invite and encourage dialogue from readers about our working framework, ideas for equity-centered approaches to after school program evaluation, and about what is needed to support evaluators in deeper investigation of the equity and access dimensions of after school programs.

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California Tomorrow is a nonprofit research, technical assistance, and advocacy organization committed to building a strong, fair, and inclusive multicultural society.

Using a participatory/empowerment evaluation approach with *Save the Children*, Linda C. Morrell and Kenneth L. Terao from the Aguirre Group offer reflections and lessons learned from their experience.

Strengthening Local Evaluation Capacity in Rural Communities

In 1997, Save the Children U.S. Programs (SCF) implemented an innovative initiative, the Web of Support, to promote quality out-of-school time programs for children and youth in some of America's most economically distressed communities. This initiative provided funding and technical assistance to grantees (called community partners) in rural and urban areas, emphasizing elements — constructive activities (including leadership development), caring adults and safe environments — that contribute to children's learning and personal growth. To familiarize and ensure adoption of the Web of Support, Save the Children provided community partners with training and technical assistance in program development (how to improve out-of-school time programs for children) and evaluation (how to measure outcomes of activities and services provided to children).

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST), a nationally recognized organization with expertise in strengthening out-of-school time programs, led training and technical assistance (T/TA) exercises to ensure programs' continuous quality improvement. The Aguirre Group (Aguirre), an organization specializing in evaluation, provided T/TA in internal outcome evaluation and conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the Web of Support.

Evaluation Approach

Save the Children, in collaboration with Aguirre, chose a participatory/empowerment approach to evaluate the Web of Support because it promotes self-sufficiency within the organization and among associated community partners, allows for customized evaluations of a diverse selection of programs/activities, and supports efforts for continuous program improvement.

> "*The participatory/empowerment* approach to evaluation allows community partners to have ownership and involvement at all levels of the evaluation process, developing their own definitions of positive change and improvement based on the populations they serve and the needs within the community."

The participatory/empowerment approach also allows community partners to have ownership and involvement at all levels of the evaluation process. They are able to develop their own definitions of positive change and improvement based on the populations they serve and needs within the community, identifying the stakeholders and their roles in evaluation design and implementation. This approach also allows the contributions and viewpoints of individuals at all levels of the Web of Support to be acknowledged.

Train the Trainer

To support the development and institutionalization of internal evaluation, Aguirre trained Save the Children staff at the national office in Westport, Connecticut, and the three rural regional offices in Berea, Kentucky (Appalachian Region), Asheville, North Carolina (Eastern Region), and Albuquerque, New Mexico (Western Region), to be evaluation trainers for rural community partners. These trainers initially observed on-site assistance, regional trainings, and telephone assistance conducted by Aguirre to community partners. After they understood evaluation in theory and practice, the trainers began to play a larger role in conducting training and providing assistance. Over the three years of the initiative, Save the Children staff developed the skills to provide ongoing support to community partners, with Aguirre providing technical expertise and support when necessary. Training Save the Children staff to be trainers supported evaluation sustainability at both the national and local levels. This fit naturally into existing staff responsibilities given that staff contact community partners frequently and have strong personal relationships with them.

Evaluation Assistance to Community Partners

Save the Children regional staff and Aguirre assisted community partners in developing plans to evaluate their out-of-school time activities in each of the three elements of the Web of Support: constructive activities, caring adults, and safe places. More than 60 community partners at 230 partner sites throughout the rural United States have adopted Save the Children's Web of Support principles and work to improve the services they provide to children.

Based on the empowerment approach, rural community partners determined activities to be evaluated, instruments, and methods of data collection, data analysis strategies, and ways to report findings and use information.

Save the Children held at least two annual evaluation trainings in each region and provided ongoing assistance in person or via phone to partners throughout the evaluation cycle. The initial training was designed to assist community partners as they developed evaluation plans, instruments, and data collection methods for specific activities. Partners used a variety of evaluation methods and instruments, including pre/post children and youth surveys, pre/post adult surveys (staff, teacher, and parent), observation checklists, parent interviews, collection of existing records (e.g. grades and test scores), and focus groups.

The second training was designed as a hands-on workshop in which partners analyzed their data and created local evaluation reports. Partners were also trained to use their results by discussing ways in which programs/activities could be strengthened.

Initiative-Wide Evaluation

The local evaluation reports developed by community partners and the additional surveys conducted by Aguirre were used to evaluate the Web of Support at the national level, providing a snapshot of the effect Save the Children-supported programs had on children across the country. The findings showed that more than 6,000 children participated in constructive activities that were evaluated. The activities examined were designed to enhance children's cognitive ability, intellectual skill, and social maturity, and specifically included:

- *Tutoring programs for all school subjects*
- *Reading and math programs to sharpen academic skills*
- *Computer training to enhance technical understanding*
- *Recreation programs to develop social and team building skills*
- *Library programs to encourage interest in reading*
- *Arts programs to enhance self confidence*
- *Youth councils to develop leadership skills*

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Interview with

Michelle Seligson

For the past 20 years, Michelle Seligson has played a critical role in highlighting the importance of the out-of-school hours and in building the policy, program, and research base that helped bring the field into its current stage of dramatic expansion. She founded the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) and was its director until last year when she began the Building Relational Practices in Out-Of-School Environments Project at the Center for Research on Women at Wellesley College. As director of this group, she conducts research on the quality of relationships in after school care. We asked Micchelle about the history of the out-of-school time field, the challenges currently facing the field, and the role evaluation and research have played and might continue to play in supporting this field.

Q *Please describe the evolution of the out-of-school time field.*

A The field has broad roots across many community institutions and agencies. It really began with the settlement houses in the late 1800s. In addition to playing an important role in helping children and families assimilate into American culture, the settlement houses used after-school to create a space for kids who were often caring for their younger siblings or who were left on their own. So the beginnings of out-of-school time grew out of the social work field, and emphasized social and emotional development.

During World War II, the government stepped in to fund after-school programs, many of which were 24-hour programs in public schools; these programs even made meals available for moms who were factory workers, to take home when they picked up their kids. This government involvement ended after the war, when many women left the out-of-home workforce.

During the Women's Movement and women's return to the labor force, families started to become more comfortable with paid child care. Beginning in the 1960s, the mandate for preschool and early childhood education really took off. Head Start had a huge influence on early childhood programs for middle class kids as well as disadvantaged children because it highlighted the value of early childhood education across the board. By the seventies, after school programs really began emerging. Many of them were started by parent groups, PTAs, or civic organizations, and they were run by everyone — schools, YMCAs, churches, the League of Women Voters. Most of them provided care after school, during the summers and school vacations, and on holidays. Almost all of these programs were financed by parent fees, with some welfare money available for poorer families.

In the seventies and eighties, the development of the model that we now recognize as a school-age child care program started taking a more defined shape, mostly as a hybrid of early childhood education, recreation, and child care. Relatively recently, there has been a shift toward thinking about out-of-school time programs as supports for education and academic achievement. While the question about whether — and how — out-of-school time programs influence students' academic achievement has long been asked, the recent increase in money for these programs has renewed a focus on the question of results. Education departments and school districts have long said that they will not take money out of their education budgets for after school programs. But now the money is there due to initiatives such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which is in line with concern about academic results.

> *Policy-makers most often* want to know whether reading and math scores have improved because of after school programs - they're not asking whether children in these programs are going to be good citizens or are learning to get along with one another. We must work with them to shape appropriate expectations for these programs.

Q *How have research and evaluation supported the development of the out-of-school time field?*

A It has been very slow in coming. NIOST wrote a book called *The School-Age Child Care Policy Report* in 1983 in which we tried to show — using data from a handful of studies — that school-age child care programs make a difference. However, most research at that time was focused on how child care did not hurt children whose mothers were working. Eventually, however, the research community started taking an interest in this topic because it was a growing field. This was coincident with the High Scope/Perry Preschool study that had such an impact on state early childhood policy. People were developing programs and starting to evaluate them, and our research on program practices and on policy was extremely important in helping people get a handle on after-school programs. NIOST acted as the repository and disseminator of that research because we knew that it was a very central part of making the case for supporting these programs.

NIOST's research had two effects on legislation that I think are particularly significant. The first was the Dependent Care Block Grant, which was the first legislation that provided money earmarked for school-age child care beginning in 1984. At the same time, after school programs could not obtain tax exempt status because the IRS held they were not "educational" or "charitable" — categories that allowed other organizations to be tax exempt. Our research helped document what these programs really were doing and in the early 1980s the IRS changed their statutes to grant them tax exempt status.

Things like that would never have emerged without the kind of research that we did early on describing what programs are doing,

what they look like, what their issues are, and the policy context. We learn a lot about the viability of expecting programs to produce certain outcomes for children from what the programs look like and what they are struggling with. We need to consider what programs themselves consider desirable child outcomes when we build our expectations of what after school programs are to achieve.

Q *What role do you think developmental research and program evaluation can play in the next ten years?*

A The studies that should be conducted are ones that look at the whole ecology of the program — the quality, the activities, etc. — not just at educational outcomes. The definition of desired outcomes should be broad so that one does not look only at test scores, but also the social and emotional development of the child, which is tantamount to doing well in school and in life. Different models and approaches should also be evaluated, because there isn't only one approach in terms of content.

There are only a few studies on outcomes because out-of-school time programs that have been around for ten, 15, or 20 years have not been studied. We have no idea if kids are doing well in school or in life because they attended those earlier programs. In the current policy climate, we are assuming these programs can make a huge positive impact on children's achievement, and therefore narrowing the agenda to academic learning rather than care. I think that out-of-school time programs are about both care and learning, as are early childhood programs.

A lot of research is now showing that social/emotional development and caring adults are the most important variables in a child's learning, whatever the content or context of the program. Examining this is the focus of my current work. I began to realize from the beginning of my involvement in this field that I viewed programs as places where children could relate to adults and to each other in ways they were not able to do in school, and as places where they could feel safe emotionally as well as physically. We know from the literature on social/emotional learning and emotional intelligence that the quality of these relationships is essential. The research on "bringing oneself to work" — knowing yourself, your communication style, your ability to work with issues of diversity and authority — parallels the research that children learn only in socially, emotionally, and relationally healthy environments. Therefore, I decided to do my next round of research on this topic in order to support and contribute to the development of programs that effectively promote an array of developmental and educational outcomes that build on the caregivers' connection and relatedness to the children.

We are working on some experiential learning workshops with five programs this year and another five next year. We are listening to and learning from these programs. Rather than trying to impose a model, we are trying to evolve a model with them. We are also tracking the parallel work that is going on in the corporate world as companies realize that the people they hire have to learn how to be more empathic, more flexible, and better able to understand differences. And this all comes from a better sense of oneself.

Q *What do you think are the primary challenges facing the field in the next five years?*

A I think the biggest challenge is the one that faces all caregiving and teaching institutions, and that is, who is going to do the work, and what are the incentives for them to do it? We have an increasingly distressed population of children. If we ask people to work in these caregiving roles and don't pay them sufficiently and place little significance on the value of their job for our society, then we are going to have trouble attracting people who are of high quality. Are teachers, who have already worked a full day and are more expensive, going to do it? If you have child care workers doing it, then you have to compensate them and you have to train them. One interesting staffing model recruits and hires staff who can bridge the in-school program in the morning and the after-school program in the afternoon. As public school employees, these staff earn higher salaries, receive benefits and potentially more professional status. That model is beginning to emerge, and I think it holds considerable promise.

Another challenge facing the field is the current overt emphasis on academic skills, which can easily slip into worksheets and drill if one does not understand that recreation can be educational. For example, a child can learn a lot about science through a cooking project. I am concerned that the quality of programs will be compromised by having too heavy an academic agenda, because it's the method of teaching and discovery that really benefit the children. We need to be careful about the trend toward seeing after school programs as "homework only" centers, especially given the current emphasis on high stakes testing.

Q *What is necessary to make better links between policy, research/evaluation and practice, particularly if these links are to benefit local programs?*

A There are many overlapping networks and organizations and there needs to be some sort of congress of all of them, with a shared information base. There is a good deal of data on how to achieve good developmental results for children. But the people who are making policy — both youth development and after school program policy — need to be reached by the research as well. The information is not presently getting out there. There needs to be a formal approach to doing this, ideally government in partnership with existing advocacy groups. It is important not to reinvent the wheel but rather to bring the work that has been done into the sphere of influence and decision making.

Finally, we need to work with policy-makers to shape appropriate expectations for these programs. The question that the policy-makers often want to have answered is whether reading and math scores have improved. They are not asking whether the children in these programs are going to be good citizens or whether they are learning about how to get along with each other in a democracy. Those, I think, are also very critical questions of substantial national concern. ■

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Lessons Learned and Best Practices
Since the implementation of the Web of Support, Save the Children and affiliated organizations dealt effectively with a variety of challenges as they determined how to best approach and conduct empowerment evaluation in rural communities. Following are some best practices and lessons learned:

Time and experience are necessary to develop skills

Using the empowerment approach to evaluation provides partners with the autonomy to choose the activities they are interested in evaluating and the methods to conduct their evaluation. However, this approach can place a burden on program staff (e.g. maintaining an evaluation schedule, collecting data, analyzing data, etc.). Partners must appreciate that the burden experienced in learning how to develop and implement outcome evaluation is outweighed by the benefits of improving program quality and contributing to their organization's infrastructure and sustainability.

Partners need to learn and experience evaluation skills over time. In the Web of Support model, the first year in which partners are introduced to evaluation they are urged to start with basic evaluation to learn procedures (i.e. designing an evaluation plan, creating/identifying instruments, collecting data, analyzing data, and writing an evaluation report) associated with developing and implementing outcome evaluation. After partners become familiar with internal evaluation principles and procedures, they can focus on the evaluation and improvement of services.

Aggregating and interpreting data are skills that take effort to develop. The more partners are involved in the analysis and interpretation of their data, the better equipped they will be to understand the implications and use the results to make meaningful changes to their program(s). During workshops provided by SCF, partners analyzed and interpreted their own data with the assistance of trained evaluators and SCF staff.

Programs need continued guidance as they come to understand the connection between evaluation and improvement in program quality

Continued training, resources, and guidance help develop higher-level evaluation skills. Given this, partners and staff can develop evaluation materials (including instruments) for their programs. For example, the staff at Iyanbito Learning Center near Gallup, New Mexico, wanted to evaluate the Center's Summer Cultural Enrichment Program. After participating in the Web of Support evaluation trainings and engaging in a year of outcome evaluation, they developed an instrument that measured how much participants learned about their Navajo culture. Staff, along with Alvin Smith (and SCF field manager in the Western Region), led the development of the instrument and Aguirre coaches helped refine it. Partners find data analysis trainings most helpful and productive when they use their own data or relevant program information, which is both meaningful and familiar.

Thoughtful consideration of data findings demonstrates the link between program evaluation and program improvement. It is beneficial for program staff to reflect on findings immediately following data analysis in a forum facilitated by someone knowledgeable in program quality improvement and evaluation. In many cases, SCF staff moderated discussions with individual partners on site. The discussions were designed to lead partners to conclusions about program changes based on evaluation results. Often this was done just before partners completed their annual program plan (a yearly SCF requirement).

Involvement at all levels is necessary for institutionalization of evaluation

Institutionalizing the empowerment approach to outcome evaluation is realistic. The level of interest, resources allocated, and degree of importance that senior staff place on the empowerment approach concept determines the level of commitment participants at all levels have in the adoption of evaluation.

It is important that, at all levels, evaluation is seen as a companion to program quality and improvement. To facilitate this at the national level, SCF conducted monthly conference calls on program improvement and evaluation among SCF home and regional office staff and consultants. At the local level, partners were provided with integrated program development/improvement and evaluation technical assistance by SCF staff.

To understand and integrate results to strengthen programs, discussion of evaluation findings among stakeholders is essential. With more people involved, it is easier to contemplate findings with individual partners and to disseminate new and innovative ideas. Partners are encouraged to take work completed during trainings back to their community for discussion before materials are finalized (including evaluation plans, instruments, and, later, reports). After stakeholders at the local level are satisfied with their information (i.e. evaluation findings), they can provide the information to SCF for national distribution via newsletter, telephone conference call, regional gathering, retreat, and the Inter/intranet.

Community partners with the ability to demonstrate accountability when applying for funding have an improved chance of gaining financial support. This ability promotes program sustainability along with an appreciation of evaluation and its benefits. For example, a community partner in Letcher County, Kentucky, was able to enhance the evaluation section of a 21st Century Community Learning Center's proposal to the U.S. Department of Education and ultimately receive funding partially because they demonstrated knowledge of and experience in evaluation.

The limitations of the evaluation approach must be recognized
Using the empowerment approach to evaluation, partners are free to define improvement based on their individual program standards. Because definitions often vary among programs, generalizing results is not recommended.

The type and rigor of data collection, analysis, and reporting varied between community partners. Therefore, in most cases, program-to program comparisons are not appropriate.

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Linda Lausell Bryant describes the *Partnership for After School Education*, a New York City-based coalition committed to quality after school programs.

Investing in Those Who Invest in Our Youth

It's 3:00 p.m. Do you know where our children are?

History of PASE

In New York City in 1993, the Partnership for After School Education (PASE) began with a small group of leaders from youth development and literacy who sought to answer this question. They knew that for too many of the city's children, 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. was a time of detrimental extracurricular activity where children were learning "skills" such as violence, premature sexual activity, and drug dealing. This small group of youth leaders believed in the value and need for high quality after school programs and sensed that after school education was an idea whose time had come. Determined to offer the city's children a better set of skills, they recognized the need for coalition building and resource sharing in what was then an isolated, fragmented arena of after school programs. With initial support from New York City youth funders, PASE began to hold forums and conferences where practitioners, often for the first time, received professional development from their more experienced peers.

Since its modest beginning, PASE quickly grew into a network of more than 850 organizations committed to quality after school education. The majority of PASE's membership consists of neighborhood programs that support families and youth. PASE works to enhance program capacity to serve the diverse needs of children, youth and families by providing training, technical assistance, networking opportunities, agency to agency program mentoring, and program models by tapping the rich talent and expertise that exists within the field.

The Need for Capacity Building in the After School Arena

In New York City and throughout the country, many new initiatives have been launched in the after school arena, resulting in scores of new programs. While many children and families now benefit from these programs, a large gap still exists between the need for programs and their availability. The increase in new programs poses challenges for the field, including:

Quality and Sustainability: The after school field must meet the challenge of providing high quality, sustainable programs to its consumers. In other industries, increased demand often affects quality of service. Poor quality in after school programs is unacceptable, regardless of the field's growth — a child rarely has the option of choosing another after school program because there aren't enough from which to choose.

Isolation: In New York City, youth serving agencies have often worked in isolation while competing for the same dollars. Failure to share ideas and best practices seriously limits agencies and results in redundancy and gaps in services, ultimately limiting the capacity of the field.

Diversity: The after school field attracts people from a wide variety of professional backgrounds including education, social work, youth development, and childcare, among others. While this diversity is a strength, it also poses challenges as after school education emerges as a field and codes for professional preparation, training and evaluation are examined.

Meeting the Need

These challenges are the impetus for PASE's creation and the blueprint for the services we offer. The PASE network allows practitioners to come together to share and learn from one another to build quality programs. This is accomplished through a variety of approaches:

The PASE Training Institute strengthens the capacity of youth agencies by providing ongoing professional development in a range of content areas relevant to managers and line staff.

Peer Technical Assistance Teams, composed of practitioners with skills in a particular area — including literacy, the arts, youth leadership and management — are dispatched to agency sites to provide specific assistance to agencies.

The After School Literature Project is a collaborative effort between the California-based Developmental Studies Center (DSC), PASE, and other agencies across the country. PASE and DSC trainers assist the staff of 30 after school programs to implement DSC's in-school literacy curriculum, adapted by PASE and DSC for use in after school settings.

PASE General Forums are regular half-day forums that deal with important issues in the field. Topics have included "New Government Funding for After School Programs," "Practical Strategies for Violence Prevention," "Integrating the Arts in After School Education," and "Developing an After School Workforce." These forums create a wonderful networking opportunity and often serve as an entry point for new staff or new agencies to become involved in PASE.

The PASE Annual Conference explores current issues and enables participants to hear from speakers and choose from a variety of innovative workshops on topics relevant to the creation of quality after school programs.

Agency to Agency Mentoring pairs established youth "mentor" agencies and with "mentee" agencies launching new programs or expanding current ones. Staff at all levels meet on a regular basis to share skills, experiences, and expertise.

In addition to training and technical assistance, PASE strives to create opportunities for modeling best practices. The *PASE Learning Lab* is designed to showcase the best after school practices. Launched in a Brooklyn middle school, the Lab allows exemplary practitioners to showcase their most innovative and effective programs by working directly with the school's children for a ten-week cycle. Youth serving professionals from schools, community-based organizations, and foundations, as well as policy-makers and parents, observe children engaged in creative and innovative programs and discuss their observations with the practitioners and each other. PASE hopes to establish Learning Labs in each of New York City's five boroughs.

National Initiatives

All of these approaches help build the capacity of staff from local agencies and, ultimately, in the field as a whole. Interest on the local level initiatives led to a national effort to build capacity in the after school field. PASE's "peer-driven network" will be replicated in ten

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> evaluations to watch

Program / Initiative	*Evaluation*	*Evaluator*	*Timeline*
The 21st Century Community Learning Centers, a U.S. Department of Education program, provides expanded learning, recreational, and enrichment opportunities after school in a supervised, safe, and drug free environment. **http://www.ed.gov/21stcclc/**	Four-year longitudinal evaluation using an experimental design with random assignment, examining impact and implementation.	Mathematica **http://www.mathinc.com**	Evaluation design report expected 11/2000. First and second report expected 12/2001 and 12/2002 respectively.
The Afterschool Corporation (TASC) works in partnership with education, city and state officials, and community based organizations to create a network of quality after school programs. TASC funds nonprofit groups to operate after school programs in public schools and provides ongoing training and technical assistance for program staff. **http://www.tascorp.org/homepage.html**	Five-year comprehensive evaluation examining rates of student participation, program implementation, effects on participating agencies and institutions, student achievement, parental attachment to work and best practices. Data from site observations, interviews, focus groups, surveys, document reviews and student enrollment and attendance records used.	Policy Study Associates	Year one report, *Increasing and Improving After School Opportunities*, issued 2/2000. Year two report expected 3/2002. Final report expected spring, 2004.
The Baltimore Safe & Sound campaign is an effort led by citizens, service providers, funders and policy-makers to create, implement and support a framework that ensures all of Baltimore's children receive support to be safe and healthy. The initiative strives to provide meaningful recreational, cultural, and intellectual after and out-of-school experiences for all school age children. **http://www.safeandsound.org**	Evaluation to measure community performance in supporting child safety and welfare using school performance, dropout rates, incidence of teen childbearing, juvenile crime, and availability of supportive activity for children as indicators.	The Data Collaborative, made up of the Family League of Baltimore and the Maternal, Child and Community Health Science Consortium of Johns Hopkins' School of Hygiene and Public Health **http://www.med/jhu.edu/mchsc**	For information, contact **info@safeandsound.org**
Open year-round, after school, during the evening and on weekends, **Beacon Centers** provide an array of opportunities and support to promote the healthy development of young people, their families, and communities. New York City piloted the Beacons Initiative and the cities of Oakland, Savannah, Denver, Minneapolis, and San Francisco are replicating it.	**NYC**: Phase I, conducted in fall, 1997, to spring, 1998, studied development and implementation of the Beacons Initiative at several sites. Phase II is a six site outcome study that will evaluate how the initiative affected youth, parents, host schools, and surrounding communities. **SF:** Four year evaluation of early, intermediate, and long-term outcomes for young people.	**NYC:** Academy for Educational Development, Chapin Hall Center for Children (U Chicago), Hunter College Center on AIDS, Drugs & Community Health; **SF**: Public/Private Ventures	**NYC:** Phase I completed 1999. Phase II forthcoming **SF:** Interim report expected fall, 2000.
The Chicago Full Service Schools Initiative is designed to improve physical and psychological well-being and school achievement for children in high risk communities. The three participating schools, open after school and in the evening, offer recreation, school remediation and tutoring programs.	Three-year evaluation using qualitative and quantitative methods to study changes in the lives of four primary constituent groups: students, parents, teachers and service providers.	Chapin Hall Center for Children (U of Chicago) **http://www.chapin.uchicago.edu/ProjectsGuide/ProgramDoc.html**	Report expected 10/2000.
DeWitt Wallace Extended Services Schools initiative aims to transform public school facilities into full service youth and community centers offering an array of after school activities for young people. Four ESS models include Beacons Centers, Bridges to Success, Community Schools, and West Philadelphia Improvement Corps, all of which are committed to enhancing youths' well-being and development. **http://www.wallacefunds.org/publications/pub_ess/focus_ess.htm**	Phase I focuses on community-level planning and leadership and early implementation activities. Phase II examines factors associated with quality implementation, youth participation and experience, and cost analyses. Six sites will participate in a more intensive data collection effort requiring submission of information on youth participation and experiences.	Public/Private Ventures, **http://www.ppv.org**; Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation **http://www.mdrc.org/Education/EES.htm**	Interim report forthcoming.

> evaluations to watch

Program / Initiative	*Evaluation*	*Evaluator*	*Timeline*
Extension 'CARES' ... for America's Children and Youth, a national initiative of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension System, aims to improve the quality, affordability, accessibility, and sustainability of child care and youth programming in out-of-school time through federal, state, and local partnerships that tap the expertise and assets of local community programs. **http://www.reeusda.gov/childcare/**	National evaluation plan currently being developed. Local Extension offices to receive evaluation tools to collect data and report results via Web and paper data entry system. Initial evaluation results focus on obtaining process data. As the initiative unfolds, emphasis will shift to collection of impact data.	Evaluation committee coordinated by researchers from University of Georgia and the Mississippi State University Cooperative Extension Service.	First report expected 1/2002.
The Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP), funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, provides funds for collaborative efforts between local educational agencies, public/private nonprofit organizations, and tribal nations to develop effective mentoring programs for youth at risk of educational failure, dropping out, and involvement in delinquent activities. **http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/jump/index.html**	The evaluation, begun in 1997, examines characteristics of successful youth, mentors, matches, and program dynamics. Quarterly narrative reports, selected site visits, and data on projects, youth, mentors, and matches being collected. A limited number of site visits to selected JUMP programs enable evaluators to understand the organizational, community, recruiting, training, retention, and sustainability issues associated with mentoring.	Information Technology International **http://www.itiincorporated.com/JUMP/jump.htm**	Next interim report submitted fall, 2000.
Los Angeles' Better Educated Students for Tomorrow (LA's BEST) operates after school programs in disinvested regions that are vulnerable to crime, gang activity, and have students with low test scores. Programs offer academic support, recreation, and enrichment activities in a safe environment. **http://www.lasbest.org**	Five-year (1993-1998) longitudinal evaluation using quasi-experimental design examines formative issues and outcomes influencing educational achievement.	UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation **http://www.cse.ucla.edu**	Report completed 6/2000.
Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (MOST) initiative, a three-city initiative (Boston, Chicago, and Seattle), is designed to develop a community-based collaborative and comprehensive set of programs and activities for children ages five to 14. **http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC/most.html**	Evaluation to describe and categorize strategies and dimensions at each site (supply, quantity, and financing), to examine effectiveness in strategies to strengthen programs and generate descriptive information to aid future investment in the field. Data collection methods include interviews, observations, administrative data collection, and document analysis.	Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago **http://www.chapin/uchicago.edu/ProjectsGuide/ProgramEvaluation.html**	Report completed 2/2000.
Safe Schools/Healthy Students, a joint initiative of the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice, provides students, schools, and communities with comprehensive educational, mental health, social service, law enforcement, and juvenile justice system services.	Five-year national cross-site evaluation of core process and outcome data elements. Evaluation design includes comparison data from representative national samples of school districts.	Research Triangle Institute **http://www.rti.org/**	Interim reports every one to two years. Final report expected in 2006.
Save the Children Web of Support provides assistance to organizations and collaboratives throughout the country striving to provide children and youth with constructive activities, access to caring adults, and safe places during their out-of-school hours. **http://www.savethechildren.org**	Rural Community Partners and Urban Collaboratives (individual program sites) used an empowerment approach to determine data collection methods. Findings also used for the initiative wide evaluation, along with pre/post surveys of Partners, telephone interviews with Urban Collaborative members and regional staff, and site visit observations.	Aguirre Group **http://www.aguirreinternational.com** *(see "Promising Practices," page 7)*	1998-99 evaluation report completed 6/2000.

> ask the expert

Given the strong pressure for out-of-school time programs to show academic results, what evaluation approaches can be used to understand the connection between academic outcomes and program activities?

Karen Walker, director of community studies at Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), focuses on work in youth development and community initiatives. Currently, Dr. Walker is principal investigator on the San Francisco Beacons Initiative evaluation and co-principal investigator on the Extended Service School Initiative, funded by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. P/PV's evaluation of Beacons was designed around the site's theory of change and includes both implementation and outcomes components. In addition to the initiative's theory of change, evaluators identified intervening outcomes that may be precursors to changes in academic performance.

Karen Walker responds

"It is important to ask whether the program, by its intent and structure, lends itself to an evaluation that examines academic outcomes. Many out-of-school time programs do not. Some — such as those run by the Boys & Girls Clubs — provide safe havens where youth have opportunities to develop positive relationships with adults. Such opportunities are crucial to youth development as those who have positive relationships with adults, both family and non-family members, are more likely to succeed academically than those who don't. But the link between positive adult-youth relationships and academic success is a complex one. To burden a program that solely intends to provide youth with adult role models and a safe place to be with the expectation of participants' academic improvement puts it at unnecessary risk of being considered a failure.

"Program schedule and structure can also influence whether a program is appropriate for an evaluation of academic outcomes. For example, Beacon Centers — such as those in New York, Denver, and San Francisco — provide an array of activities during the week and on the weekend. One youth may participate in a dance group two afternoons and a science club one afternoon a week while another may participate in a youth social advocacy group and still another may play basketball. It is important to take into account the complexity, number of activities provided and differences in youth participation when determining how and what you will be evaluating.

"Evaluating youth's outcomes across an *entire program* is a complex, labor intensive task and probably beyond the capacity of program staff already stretched for time. Practitioners wishing to do such a broad evaluation should consider contracting the work out to researchers.

"However, program staff can begin by evaluating a limited number (between one and three) of activities offered. For example, assume that you wish to evaluate an academic activity that meets several times per week and has a reasonable chance to positively affect a young person's scholastic achievement. The assessment should take several issues into consideration:

*"**Participation:*** It is important to document how often youth attend the activity. In an activity with mandatory attendance, we might assume that most youth attend regularly and may experience beneficial effects on their academic achievement. In many activities, however, participation is voluntary and may be inconsistent, a fact that lessens the chance of the programs having a significant impact in the classroom. Documenting attendance and developing a good information system can be a challenging and labor intensive task. Paper systems that use standard enrollment forms and attendance sheets are the least expensive method. While program staff can collect the data from the activity providers, some programs have successfully used youth employees to do this task. Higher cost options include the use of computer databases and other technology. Some programs, including the San Francisco Beacons and the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund's Extended Service Schools (ESS) Initiative, have developed systems to track individual student participation by activity. The ESS Initiative is pilot testing the use of Palm Pilots to collect attendance data with the hope that minimizing arduous data entry will facilitate the process. Other organizations use swipe card systems that also cut down on data entry. Consider contacting other programs to see what they use and what the challenges and advantages of their systems are.

*"**Quality:*** It is important to know the quality of the activity. Examine how well the activity is structured and managed by staff: Do staff show up on time? How do they handle disputes among youth? Do the activity's day-to-day tasks address the activity's stated goals? Examine relationships between youth and staff: How responsive are the youth to the staff's direction? How effective are staff in providing support to youth in accomplishing their tasks? What is the emotional tenor of the relationship? Examine the activity's level of challenge: Do youth report that they are challenged? Do staff monitor youth's levels of frustration and provide clear direction when frustration mounts? Make assessments by observing the activity and asking youth about their perceptions of the activity through short surveys or focus groups. Without these assessments, it is difficult to interpret the results of any activity evaluation. Knowing the activity's quality provides program operators with information useful for two purposes: as a tool to improve program quality and a device to interpret findings on youth outcomes.

*"**Fit:*** The outcomes and indicators selected should relate closely to the activity's goals and specific tasks. For example, a model building activity might aim to improve youth's skills in calculating the area of surfaces and determining proportions. Assessments should focus on those specific skills — not math skills in general. Be prepared to be flexible in your assessment methods. Portfolios of a youth's work can be used to track their progress in a skill-based activity and can include written work as well as visual arts. Pre- and post-tests — assessments of individual performance taken before and after the program — can look specifically at the knowledge or a skill set that the program aims to develop. An effective homework help program, for example, should show that students who participate are more likely to complete their homework and do it well. Note, however, that you should assess the program's quality to ensure that those helping students do not simply give them the answers but provide them with tools for solving problems.

"The pressure to show that out-of-school time programs can improve youth academic performance is fierce and future funding will likely depend on it. However, the most obviously available outcomes — standardized test scores and course grades — are unlikely to improve unless you specifically target the knowledge areas covered in tests or in classes. Therefore, we should resist the pressure to measure these if the program itself does not aim explicitly to improve youth's academic outcomes." ■

Afterschool.gov
Sponsored by the Federal Support to Communities Initiative with support from the National Partnership for Reinventing Government and the General Services Administration, this site has information on resources for out-of-school time initiatives, including an extensive database of federal government grant and loan programs.
http://www.afterschool.gov

Behrman, Richard E., M.D. (Ed.). (1999). When school is out. *The Future of Children*, 9 (2). Los Altos, CA: The David and Lucile Packard Foundation. This issue focuses on efforts to increase funding and build public will for after school programs and new initiatives that enable the field to grow. More than ten articles by experts in the field — policy-makers, researchers, evaluators, and practitioners — discuss topics ranging from the policy climate for after school programs to the role of the school in children's out-of-school time. This journal is published three times annually.
http://www.futureofchildren.org/wso/index.htm

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 21st Century Community Learning Centers. A focus of the Mott Foundation's grant-making is *Pathways Out of Poverty*, an effort to improve community education through learning beyond the classroom. In pursuit of that mission, the Mott Foundation entered a partnership with the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to provide training, technical assistance, research, and evaluation supports for ED's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. To that end, the Mott Foundation sponsors polls, authors' reports, and produces resources including *After School Programs: Give Us Wings, Let Us Fly!* and *Making After School Count: Communities and Schools Working Together.*
http://www.mott.org/21stcentury

Coalition for Community Schools. In partnership with community school networks, foundations, education associations, youth and community development organizations, and governments, the Coalition for Community Schools supports families before, during, and after school, each day of the week, developing and implementing policy that supports the community school movement. In April, 2000, the Coalition released *A Policy Approach To Create And Sustain Community Schools: Promoting Policies That Strengthen Schools, Families, and Communities.*
http://www.communityschools.org

Council of Chief State School Officers. (2000). *Extended learning initiatives: Opportunities and implementation challenges*. Washington, DC: Author. This report describes state sponsored extra learning initiatives from five states. Limited copies are available free of charge: Council of Chief State School Officers, One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001-1431. The report is also available on-line:
http://www.ccsso.org/pdfs/ELIreport.pdf

James, Donna Walker. (Ed.), with Sonia Jurich. (1999). *MORE things that DO make a difference for youth: A compendium of evaluations of youth programs and practices, Volume II.* Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum. A follow-up to Volume. 1, *Some Things DO Make a Difference for Youth*, this report summarizes 50 evaluations of youth programs. Program profiles cover evidence of effectiveness, key components, and contributing factors, providing an updated list of the basic principles behind effective youth programs. Copies of Volume 1 or 2 may be ordered for $10 each, or $17.50 for both, prepaid. American Youth Policy Forum, 1836 Jefferson Place, NW, Washington, DC 20036-2505. The report is also available On-line:
http://www.aypf.org/compendium/

McLaughlin, Milbrey W. et al. (2000). *Community counts: How youth organizations matter for youth development.* Washington, DC: Public Education Network. The authors of this report studied 120 youth-based organizations in 34 different U.S. cities that constructively engage youth during the out-of-school time hours. They examined youth achievements in community organizations, necessary community supports, and the effect youth organizations have in the classroom. The report also includes appendices on funding and policy strategies, community supports, and meaningful measures of youth outcomes.
http://www.publiceducation.org/pubs/cc.htm

National Institute on Out-of-School Time. (2000). *Fact sheet on school-age children's out-of-school time.* Wellesley, MA: Author. The 2000 fact sheet provides useful statistics on ways children spend time after school, the variety of programs that respond to their needs, how they benefit from high quality program participation, and the growth of public and private support for out-of-school time programs. **http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC/factsht.html**

National Institute on Out-of-School Time. (2000). *Making an impact on out-of-school time: A guide for Corporation for National Service programs engaged in after school, summer, and weekend activities for young people.* Wellesley, MA: Author. Designed for Corporation for National Service staff, this manual offers resource lists, tip sheets, examples of successful programs, ideas and suggestions, and other training material for enhancing the quality of out-of-school time programs for children ages five to 14. **http://www.etr.org/nsrc/pdfs/niost/impact/impact.html**

National School Age Care Alliance. *School-Age Review.* Produced by the National School Age Care Alliance (NSACA), an organization that strives to develop a high-quality school-age care profession, this semiannual journal focuses on promising practices and lessons learned in areas of research, evaluation, programming and practice. Subscription to School-Age Review is a NSACA membership benefit, which costs $30 annually. NSACA, 1137 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02124. **http://www.nsaca.org/**

School-Age Notes
This national resource organization on school-age care publishes a monthly newsletter on activity and developments in the field, and a catalog of resources for starting, administering and enhancing after school programs. Visit their Web site to sample newsletter articles, purchase a subscription or order resources from the after school catalog. **http://www.schoolagenotes.com**

Social Policy Action Network
The Social Policy Action Network works with communities and practitioners to build support for change by disseminating research and information to policy-makers, engaging the interest of the media, and developing effective solutions to social problems. They have prepared several companion guides to the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's publication, *The Future of Children: When School Is Out.* These publications include a policy brief for public officials and a guide for journalists.
http://www.span-online.org

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), Cooperative Extension System *Extension 'CARES' ... for America's Children and Youth.*
The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension System's national initiative seeks to improve child care and youth programs during the out-of-school time hours. *Extension 'CARES' ... for America's Children and Youth* links local communities across America to teaching, research, education, technology, and 4-H youth development expertise as well as to 105 land grant universities and 3150 county Cooperative Extension Service offices. The Web site provides reports on child care, evaluation information, summaries of recent conferences, and a link to the National Network for Child Care **(http://www.nncc.org)** which has over 2,000 free resources on child care, school-age care, and teen programs.
http://www.reeusda.gov/childcare/

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cities with an ultimate goal of strengthening the national field of after school education by creating a dynamic, yet consistent, web of organizations that support each other as they support children and youth.

PASE is currently engaged in the process of visiting and networking with several U.S. cities, bringing together after school and education leaders to identify training needs, brainstorm and plan the development of training and peer assistance opportunities within their regions. This process will result in an inventory of training opportunities for in school and out-of-school educators and a proposal of national strategies for addressing gaps in training. As PASE enters the national arena, it will continue to tap into the talent and expertise that already exists in the field.

PASE's approach to building the after school field is dynamic and flexible and responds to the variety of levels and types of assistance organizations need. The expansion of local initiatives to cities across the nation will broaden the reach of resources, enhance the quality of youth services and increase the visibility of this very important field throughout the country.

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> new & noteworthy

U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Justice. (2000). *Working for children and families: Safe and smart after-school programs.* Washington, DC: Author. Originally released in 1998, this updated version identifies components of exemplary after school programs, illustrates their potential, and highlights communities that are meeting the need for after school activities. An extensive list of resources, including organizations, Web sites, listserves, videos, and publications, is also provided.
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/SafeSmart/

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2000). *Understanding youth development: Promoting positive pathways of growth.* Washington, DC: Author. This publication examines the factors that influence adolescent development and provides a brief overview of strategies to help communities support young people moving from adolescence to adulthood. A companion piece to *Reconnecting Youth & Community: A Youth Development Approach*, this report provides the theory behind the youth development approach.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2000). *Reconnecting youth and community: A youth development approach.* Washington, DC: Author. This publication provides guidance to youth services providers, community leaders, and policy-makers as they help communities shift from a problem focused approach to serving youth to a community youth involvement model. It also provides steps for implementing a campaign to promote positive images of young people and ideas for involving youth and the community. Available on audio cassette and in Spanish.

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