

**Reference Desk Response No. 293:  
Measuring Effectiveness of Afterschool Programs**

Question:

1. How can one measure the effectiveness and outcomes of after-school programs, and what are some examples of quality evaluations on after-school programs?
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**Report:**

Following an established REL-NEI Reference Desk research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive and policy-oriented briefs and articles in this area. The sources included federally funded organizations, additional research institutions, several educational research databases, and a general Internet search using Google and other search engines. We also searched for appropriate organizations that may act as resources on this issue. We have not done an evaluation of these organizations or the resources themselves, but offer this list to you for your information only.

Our Researchers have found numerous studies which provide data collection and analysis methods that were used to analyze the effectiveness of several after-school programs. There is no consensus on which methodology is best for evaluating after school programs in particular. However, a number of studies cite meta-analysis as a rigorous and comprehensive research method that meets a high standard of research methodologies. According to one resource, "Meta-analysis is a collection of systematic techniques for resolving apparent contradictions in research findings. Meta-analysts translate results from different studies to a common metric and statistically explore the relations between study characteristics and findings" (See, After School Alliance, 2008, below).

Question:

1. **How can one measure the effectiveness and outcomes of after-school programs, and what are some examples of quality evaluations on after-school programs?**

**1.1. The Evaluation of Enhanced Academic Instruction in After-School Programs.** *Rebeck Black, A., Doolittle, F., Somers, M.A., Unterman, R., and Baldwin Grossman, J.; 2009; pp. 25-27.*

Source: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance 20084021  
(<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20094077/pdf/20094077.pdf>)

This study evaluates the effectiveness of enhanced academic instruction in after-school programs. The research questions and study design are provided, as well as the findings. "The research design uses a lottery-like process (random assignment) to offer students one of two alternative types of academic support. The evaluation draws on multiple data sources...After-school program attendance, Data on the number of skills assigned during the school year, After-school staff surveys, Structured interviews with after-school instructors, regular after-school program group staff, after-school district coordinators, Structured protocol observations of the implementation, Student surveys, Regular-school-day teacher survey, Student achievement tests, Data include characteristics of the school, such as the school setting, student body demographics, and student-to-teacher ratio."

**1.2. Evaluations Backgrounder: A Summary of Formal Evaluations of the Academic Impact of Afterschool Programs.** *Afterschool Alliance; 2008.*

Source: ERIC (#ED502307)

([http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/3e/a6/55.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/3e/a6/55.pdf))

This article includes and cites numerous studies on large-scale, state-level, and local-level afterschool programs and their impacts on students' academic performance. The studies provide research methods and findings which may serve as starting points for further reading. "Large-Scale Studies...The 2006 McREL Meta-Analysis of Effects of Out-of-School Time Programs for At-Risk Students...A meta-analysis is a statistical re-analysis of the results of several studies on a related topic, conducted for the purpose of integrating the studies' findings, notwithstanding differences in their respective research methodologies. The studies selected for inclusion in the McREL meta-analysis all met rigorous methodological standards." (P.10) "Evaluations of State-Level Initiative...New Hampshire Study of Academically Focused Afterschool Programs...Research methods included gathering attendance records from programs, surveying teachers and students about behavior and academic achievement, and surveying afterschool program directors about their staffing and program characteristics." (P.11) "Local or Program Level Evaluations...Mahoney and Lord Ecological Analysis of After-School Program Participation...This first installment of a longitudinal study focused on academic achievement of 599 'students enrolled in the first, second, and third grades of three public schools in the Northeastern United States'... When completed, the study will track afterschool students for four years, comparing students with four different types of afterschool arrangements: those in afterschool programs, those cared for by parents, those cared for by a combination of siblings or in self care, and those cared for by a combination of other adults and in sibling or self care." (P. 23)

**1.3. When Schools Stay Open Late: The National Evaluation of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers Program New Findings.** *Dynarski, M., James-Burdumy, S., Moore, M. Rosenberg, L., Deke, J., Mansfield, W., Warner, E.; 2004.*

Source: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance CLC2004.

(<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pdf/20043001.pdf>)

"In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education contracted with Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., and Decision Information Resources, Inc., to evaluate the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. The evaluation team collected student outcome data in five areas: after-school supervision, location, and activities; academic performance and achievement; behavior; personal and social development; and safety. It did collect parent outcome data on involvement in school activities and employment status. The elementary study was based on random assignment, in which outcomes of students assigned to the program were compared with outcomes of students not assigned to the program. The middle school evaluation was based on a matched-comparison design, in which outcomes of students who participated in programs were compared with outcomes of similar students who did not. Findings from these data were presented in the study's first report. For the second year of data collection, researchers gathered additional data in two ways. First, they added more elementary school programs and students. Second, they followed middle school students for a second year, which enabled the evaluation to explore whether there were outcome differences after two years. The results are summarized in this new report, which contains findings from this second year of data collection. A third report will analyze impacts for elementary students after two years." (P.xv)

**1.4. Impacts of After-School Programs on Student Outcomes.** *Goerlich Zief, S., Lauver, S., and Maynard, R.A.; 2006; pp. 2-3.*

Source: The Campbell Collaboration.

([http://db.c2admin.org/doc-pdf/zief\\_afterschool\\_review.pdf](http://db.c2admin.org/doc-pdf/zief_afterschool_review.pdf))

"There have been six major reviews of research on the impact of out-of-school programs that have included programs with an academic focus...However, all differ in important ways from this new review. For example, prior reviewers cast a broad net when defining an after-school program and included programs with a primary focus on tutoring, mentoring, youth development, or comprehensive services. Notably, most did not attempt a thorough or systematic search for all evidence. Many reviews did not describe their methods for assessing the quality of the studies on which they were reporting and did not address the fact that the evidence from which review conclusions were drawn varied considerably in terms of the internal validity of the estimates. Program design and delivery of the included studies was fairly heterogeneous, limiting the ability to draw conclusions across studies. Furthermore, the analyses were fairly descriptive, and no review attempted to combine the impact estimates from multiple studies using meta-analytic

techniques. This review differs from prior reviews in four main ways. First, this review makes use of recently released experimental studies in the field that were not captured by all prior reviews. Second, this review focuses on a particular type of after-school program—those that operate on a regular basis after school during the school year and include some academic support services. Third, the review is based on a well-defined, systematic strategy for identifying all possible studies and determining those that are appropriate for inclusion in the review. All identified studies that have a relevant focus and that were judged to present credible evidence of program impacts were included, regardless of their findings. Fourth, this review pools the evidence of program impacts on particular outcomes across studies using meta-analytic methods.” (PP.2-3)

### Additional Organizations to Consult

- **Afterschool.gov**  
(<http://www.afterschool.gov/xhtml/subject/53.html>)  
Afterschool.gov connects the public to federal resources that support after-school programs. Afterschool.gov provides a single location for the public to access afterschool resources that are located across the Federal government, including information about starting and operating an afterschool program, federal funding sources, and research and reports on after-school and youth issues.
- **After School Matters**  
(<http://www.afterschoolmatters.org/>)  
After School Matters is a non-profit organization in Chicago that partners with local government and community-based organizations to expand out-of-school opportunities for Chicago teens. Its 2007-2008 annual report mentions research and findings from the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. (<http://www.afterschoolmatters.org/about/report/>)
- **Afterschool Alliance**  
(<http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/researchReports.cfm>)  
The Afterschool Alliance works with the Administration, the U.S. Congress, governors, mayors and advocates, and has more than 25,000 afterschool program partners. Its website contains a series of briefing papers, reports and fact sheets used widely by media, policy makers, concerned organizations and individuals.

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### Key words and search strings used in the search:

Afterschool programs OR after-school programs OR after school programs OR effectiveness, evaluation OR evaluation models AND impact AND measure AND results.

### Search databases and websites:

Institute for Education Science Sites: Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL); What Works Clearinghouse (WWC); Doing What Works (DWW); National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); Institute for Education Sciences (IES)

Other Federally Funded Sites: The Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center; The National High School Center; The Center on Innovation and Improvement; Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education (CDDRE); National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing; National Center for Performance Incentives; Access Center for Improving Outcomes for All Students K-8; National Dropout Prevention Center/Network; National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning

Additional Data Resources: The Campbell Collaboration; Education Development Center; WestEd; ERIC

### Criteria for inclusion:

When Reference Desk Researchers review resources, they consider, among other things, four factors:

1. **Date of the publication:** The most current information is included unless in the case of nationally known seminal resources
2. **Source and funder of the report/study/brief/article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols;

3. **Methodology:** i.e. Random control trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc. Priority for inclusion is given generally to random control trial study findings; however, the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: Numbers of participants (just a few? Thousands?); Selection (did the participants volunteer in the study, or were they chosen?); Representation (were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?)
4. **Existing knowledge base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is slim or non-existent. In these cases we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, etc.

### **REL Northeast and Islands**

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