

Brief Research-to-Results

Child TRENDS®

... information for designers, funders, and practitioners of out-of-school time programs on program practices that should be encouraged.

Publication #2010-02

January 2010

PRACTICES TO *FOSTER* IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS

Kristin Anderson Moore, Ph.D., Jacinta Bronte-Tinkew, Ph.D., and Ashleigh Collins, M.A.

OVERVIEW

Efforts to improve outcomes for children and youth in out-of-school time programs can benefit from implementing proven practices from the field. In this brief, we draw from research, as well as a series of Roundtables¹ with practitioners and youth, to identify 10 practices that can foster positive outcomes for participants in out-of-school time programs. In a related brief, we highlight negative practices to avoid.²

PROGRAM PRACTICES TO FOSTER

1. Foster positive and sustained relationships with caring adults. Research finds that relationships with caring adults play a key role in determining the level of participation and engagement a young person will have in a program, a finding that was also reflected in comments made by youth and practitioners in recent Roundtables organized by Child Trends. Relationships with caring adults will also affect how receptive and responsive young people may be to a program and whether positive changes occur in their lives as a result of their involvement in it.^{3,4,5} While good facilities and activities are desirable, relationships remain the most critical aspects of effective programs.
2. Foster an organizational culture that focuses on the *whole child*. The heightened focus on academic achievement in recent years has resulted in a tendency to downplay the importance of social and emotional development and even the importance of health and exercise. As vital as academic achievement is, positive development means more than just high test scores and grades. Indeed, good physical and mental health, as well as positive social and emotional development, contributes to improved academic achievement. Moreover, research indicates that effective programs can support better social and emotional development, as well as better behavior.^{6,7,8}
3. Foster engaging and varied activities. Research indicates that children and youth learn better with a variety of activity options, learning strategies (including interactive projects and group work), and opportunities to pace their own activities.^{9,10} Young people have reported high levels of interest and enjoyment when participating in diverse out-of-school time activities, such as sports and arts enrichment (such as dance, drama, visual arts, and music).¹¹ Furthermore, research finds that when children and youth are engaged and select their own activities, they have higher self-esteem, fewer behavioral problems, and an increased likelihood of participating in program activities.^{12,13,14,15,16}
4. Foster opportunities for children and youth to have input into programs. One of the top reasons that youth give for not participating in out-of-school time programs is a lack of interest in the program

activities being offered.¹⁷ Obtaining ideas from participants can provide useful input and also involve participants in governance. It is easy for programs to resort to “one-size-fits-all” activities managed by adults. However, such an approach is not as conducive to the positive development of children and youth of varying ages.^{18,19,20,21, 22}

5. Foster age-appropriate volunteer opportunities for children and youth to contribute. An accumulating body of research indicates that volunteering fosters positive development among children and youth.^{23,24,25} In addition, evaluations have found that service-learning approaches can enhance school success and reduce the risk of teen pregnancy.^{26,27} Neighborhoods, organizations, parks, and schools have many needs, and there are many ways that teens and even younger children can help meet those needs.²⁸ Such an approach can be “two for the price of one” because volunteering helps both program participants and their community, and may support a strong connection between youth and their communities.

6. Foster engaged and involved parents and families. Getting parents and other family members involved in out-of-school time programs has proven challenging to programs, but finding ways to keep parents informed and engaged warrants the effort.²⁹ Family involvement in out-of-school time programs is a component of high-performing programs, and is associated with higher levels of youth participation and improved program quality.³⁰ Out-of-school time programs have found the following strategies helpful in involving parents and families in program activities:

- Build rapport with families by offering positive feedback related to their child’s program participation;³¹
- Sponsor family activities where children can share what they have learned;³²
- Offer activities for parents such as volunteer opportunities and computer or parenting classes;³³ and
- Involve parents in program decision making.³⁴

7. Foster a **program environment that has staff “buy in”** for data and evaluation. In an era of accountability and evidence-based programs, it is critical for organizations to become both producers and users of data for their out-of-school time programs. Input from frontline staff can be helpful in designing and implementing a data system or an evaluation,³⁵ and support from staff members can make a data system or an evaluation more efficient and accurate. Moreover, staff members may be more likely to act on the findings from an evaluation if they have been consulted and their voices heard. Similarly, an organization may be more likely to develop and sustain a commitment to ongoing data collection and analysis if staff members at all levels understand, support, and value the role of research and data in helping to meet the organizational mission.³⁶

8. Foster culturally appropriate programs. While translating materials into another language can be helpful, it is not sufficient to make a program culturally sensitive.³⁷ Instead, it is often necessary to adapt the program for the population being served. This effort involves identifying the core components of a program and being sure to retain them, while adapting other program elements in ways that are more acceptable and attractive to the children and families in the target population. To achieve this goal, programs can:³⁸

- Acknowledge differences and affirm a commitment to diversity;
- Encourage intercultural ties by providing opportunities for diverse program participants to collaborate on service projects or activities;
- Include program leaders, volunteers, and staff members from diverse backgrounds; and
- Incorporate traditional elements from multiple cultures by including activities, celebrations, books, games, and posters that reflect diverse experiences.

9. Foster varied and engaging approaches to staff training. Effectively trained staff members can positively influence the attainment of program goals, staff-participant interactions, and the work environment.³⁹ As with children and youth, adults may acquire knowledge from lectures, but knowledge alone often does not necessarily change their behavior.^{40,41,42} Studies find that staff training that combines instruction with opportunities to practice new strategies is more effective in producing lasting behavioral changes.^{43,44,45} Other studies find that, in addition to presenting background information on program components, effective staff training includes a blend of components:

- Introducing and demonstrating to staff the important aspects of new skills. Such an introduction may occur live or via video.⁴⁶
- Providing staff opportunities to practice new skills or role play, receive feedback, and reflect.⁴⁷
- Offering ongoing support and follow-up training. Staff members are most likely to integrate their training into their everyday practice when they are given regular opportunities to implement newly learned skills and to receive feedback through staff coaching, mentoring, or supervision.⁴⁸

10. Foster the treatment of children and youth as individuals. The needs of children differ substantially, and this is true even for children in the same community or from the same family.⁴⁹ One of the strengths of out-of-school time programs is that they can personalize relationships and activities to meet the developmental stage, personality, strengths, needs, and stress experienced by each participant. Research suggests that children and youth benefit from participating in activities that are tailored to their age, interests, and stage of development.^{50,51, 52}

TEN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAM PRACTICES TO FOSTER

- 1: Positive and sustained relationships with caring adults.
- 2: An organizational culture that focuses on the *whole child*.
- 3: Engaging and varied activities.
- 4: Volunteer opportunities for children and youth to have input into programs.
- 5: Age-appropriate volunteer opportunities in which children and youth can participate.
- 6: Engaged and involved parents and families.
- 7: **A program environment that has staff “buy in” for data and evaluation.**
- 8: Culturally appropriate programs.
- 9: Varied and engaging approaches to staff training.
- 10: Treatment of children and youth as individuals.

CONCLUSION

A lot has been learned about effective approaches to realizing intended out-of-school time program outcomes. As program practitioners consider fostering evidence-based practices, program administrators, staff, and stakeholders must keep in mind that it is difficult to change behavior overnight, even among children.^{53,54} Thus, programs should be prepared to place an ongoing focus on eliminating negative practices and fostering positive practices.^{55, 56,57}

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank Thandor Miller for his thoughtful review of this brief.

Editor: Harriet J. Scarupa

REFERENCES

- ¹ With funding from The Atlantic Philanthropies, Child Trends has held a series of Roundtables with practitioners to identify their issues, concerns, research needs, and perspectives, as well as to get feedback about Child Trends' publications and outreach efforts.
- ² Moore, K., Collins, A., & Bronte-Tinkew, J. (2010, January). Practices to avoid in out-of-school time programs. (*Research-to-Results* brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ³ Metz, A., Bowie, L., & Bandy, T. (2007). *The role of frontline staff in the implementation of evidence-based programs: An exploratory study*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ⁴ Vandell, D., Henderson, V., & Wilson, K. (1988). A longitudinal of children with day-care experiences of varying quality. *Child Development, 59*, 1286-1292.
- ⁵ Howes, C., Phillips, D., & Whitebook, M. (1992). Thresholds of quality: Implications for the social development of children in center-based child care. *Child Development, 63*(2), 449-460.
- ⁶ Payton, J., Weissberg, R., Durlak, J., Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R., Schellinger, K., & Pachan, M. (2008). *The positive impact of social and emotional learning for kindergarten to eighth-grade students: Findings from three scientific reviews*. Technical report. Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Available at: <http://www.casel.org/downloads/PackardTR.pdf>.
- ⁷ Bowie, L., Garrett, S., Kinukawa, A., McKinney, K., Moore, K., Redd, Z., Theokas, C., & Wilson, B. (2006). *Program implementation: What do we know?* Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2007_06_01_FR_PrgmImplementation.pdf.
- ⁸ Metz, A., Burkhauser, M., Collins, A., & Bandy, T. (2008). *The role of organizational context and external influences in the implementation of evidence based practice: Report III*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ⁹ Thornton, R. (1999). Using the results of research in science education to improve science learning. Nicosia, Cyprus: Keynote address to the International Conference on Science Education.
- ¹⁰ Rosenthal, R., & Vandell, D. (1996). Quality of care at school-aged child-care programs: Regulatable features, observed experiences, child perspectives, and parent perspectives. *Child Development, 67*(05), 2434-2445.
- ¹¹ Shernoff, D., & Vandell, D. (2007). Engagement in after-school program activities: Quality of experience from the perspective of participants. *Journal of Youth Adolescence, 36*(7), 891-903.
- ¹² Connor, C., Piasta, S., Fishman, B., Glasney, S., Crowe, E., Underwood, P., & Morrison, F. (2009). Individualizing student instruction precisely: Effects of child x instruction interactions on first graders' literacy development. *Child Development, 80*(1), 77-100.
- ¹³ The After-School Corporation. (2007). *Meeting the high school challenge: Making after-school work for older students*. New York: The After-School Corporation.
- ¹⁴ Kennedy, E., Wilson, B., Valladares, S., & Bronte-Tinkew, J. (2007, June). Improving attendance and retention in out-of-school time programs (*Research-to-Results* practitioner insights brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2007_06_19_RB_AttendandReten.pdf.
- ¹⁵ Roffman, J., Pagano, M., & Hirsch, B. (2001). Youth functioning and experiences in inner-city after-school programs among age, gender, and race groups. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 10*(1), 85-100.
- ¹⁶ Collins, A., Moore, K., & Paisano-Trujillo, R. (2009, January). Implementing school-based services: Strategies from New Mexico's school-based health and extended learning services (*Research-to-Results* practitioner insights brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ¹⁷ Kennedy, E., Wilson, B., Valladares, S., & Bronte-Tinkew, J. (2007, June).
- ¹⁸ Junge, S., Manglallan, S., & Raskasuskas, J. (2003). Building life skills through afterschool participation in experimental and cooperative learning. *Child Study Journal, 33*(3), 165-174.
- ¹⁹ Lewis, W. (1986). Strategic interventions with children of single-parent families. *School Counselor, 33*(5), 375-378.
- ²⁰ Connor, C., Piasta, S., Fishman, B., Glasney, S., Crowe, E., Underwood, P., & Morrison, F. (2009).
- ²¹ The After-School Corporation. (2007).
- ²² Kennedy, E., Wilson, B., Valladares, S., & Bronte-Tinkew, J. (2007, June).
- ²³ Zaff, J., & Michelson, E. (2001). *Background for community-level work on positive citizenship in adolescence: Reviewing the literature on contributing factors*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ²⁴ Zaff, J., Moore, K., Papillo, A., & Williams, S. (2003). Implications of extracurricular activity participation during adolescence on positive outcomes. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 18*(6), 599-630.
- ²⁵ Zarnett, N., & Lerner, R. (2008). *Ways to promote the positive development of children and youth*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2008_02_27_PositiveYouthDev.pdf.
- ²⁶ Allen, J., Philliber, S., Herrling, S., & Kupermic, G. (1997). Preventing teen pregnancy and academic failure: Experimental evaluation of a developmentally based approach. *Child Development, 68*(4), 729-742.
- ²⁷ Allen, J., & Philliber, S. (2001). Who benefits most from a broadly targeted prevention program? Differential efficacy across populations in the Teen Outreach Program. *Journal of Community Psychology, 29*(6), 637-655.

- ²⁸ Bowie, L., & Bronte-Tinkew, J. (2008, June). *Youth governance: How and why it can help out-of-school time programs involve at-risk youth*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2008_06_18_YouthGovernance.pdf.
- ²⁹ Horowitz, A., & Bronte-Tinkew, J. (2007, June). Building, engaging, and supporting family and parental involvement in out-of-school time programs (*Research to Results* practitioner insights brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2007_06_19_RB_ParentEngage.pdf.
- ³⁰ Metz, A., Burkhauser, M., Collins, A., & Bandy, T. (2008).
- ³¹ Kakli, Z., Kreider, H., Little, P., Buck, T., & Coffrey, M. (2006). *Focus on Families! How to build and support family-centered practices in after school*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project and Build the Out-of-School Time Network.
- ³² Collins, A., Moore, K., & Paisano-Trujillo, R. (2009).
- ³³ Horowitz, A., & Bronte-Tinkew, J. (2007, June).
- ³⁴ Chung A. (2000, September). *After-school programs: Keeping children safe and smart*. Jessup, MD: US Department of Education.
- ³⁵ Bandy, T., Burkhauser, M., & Metz, A. (2009, June). Data-driven decision making in out-of-school time programs. (*Research to Results* brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2009_06_23_RB_Decision-Support.pdf
- ³⁶ Bandy, T., Bowie, L., Burkhauser, M., & Metz, A. (2007). *The role of frontline staff in the implementation of evidence-based practices: Report I*. Child Trends Special Report. Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ³⁷ Kennedy, E., Bronte-Tinkew, J., & Matthews, G. (2007, January). Enhancing cultural competence in out-of-school time programs: What is it, and why is it important? (*Research to Results* practitioner insights brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2007_01_31_RB_CultureCompt.pdf.
- ³⁸ O'Connor, C., Small, S. A., & Cooney, S. M. (2007, January). *Culturally appropriate programming: What do we know about evidence-based programs for culturally and ethnically diverse youth and their families?* What Works, Wisconsin—Research to Practice Series. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- ³⁹ Metz, A., Burkhauser, M., & Bowie, L., (2009, June). Training out-of-school time staff. (*Research-to-Results* brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2009_02_11_RB_StaffTraining.pdf.
- ⁴⁰ Metz, A., Bowie, L., Burkhauser, M., & Bandy, T. (2007). The role of frontline staff in the implementation of evidence-based programs. Child Trends Special Report. Washington, D.C.: Child Trends.
- ⁴¹ Metz, A., Bowie, L., & Bandy, T. (2007). *The role of frontline staff in the implementation of evidence-based programs: An exploratory study*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ⁴² Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development* (3rd. ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- ⁴³ McBride, B. & Schwartz, I. (2003). Effects of teaching early interventionists to use discrete trials during ongoing classroom activities. *Topics in Early Childhood Education*, 23(1), 5-17.
- ⁴⁴ Sarokoff, R. & Sturney, P. (2004). The effects of behavioral skill training on staff implementation of discrete trial teaching. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 37(4), 535-538.
- ⁴⁵ Bolton, J. & Mayer, M. (2008). Promoting the generalization of paraprofessional discrete trial teaching skills. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 23(2), 103-111.
- ⁴⁶ Metz, A., Bowie, L., Burkhauser, M., & Bandy, T. (2007).
- ⁴⁷ Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (2002).
- ⁴⁸ Burkhauser, M. & Metz, A. (2009, February). Using coaching to provide ongoing support and supervision to out-of-school time staff (Research-to-Results brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2009_02_11_RB_StaffCoaching.pdf.
- ⁴⁹ Murray, V., Brody, G., & Stephens, D. (2003). Psychometric analysis of the racelessness scales in studies of rural African American youth. Washington DC: Indicators of Positive Development Conference. Abstract available at: http://www.childtrends.org/docdisp_page.cfm?LID=A44808-A5F0-4159-B38A5529D864A075.
- ⁵⁰ Connor, C., Piasta, S., Fishman, B., Glasney, S., Crowe, E., Underwood, P., & Morrison, F. (2009).
- ⁵¹ The After-School Corporation. (2007).
- ⁵² Kennedy, E., Wilson, B., Valladares, S., & Bronte-Tinkew, J. (2007, June).
- ⁵³ McLaren, E. (2007). Partnering to encourage transfer of learning: Providing professional development follow up supports to head start teachers. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 68(4-4), 1319.
- ⁵⁴ Frey, A., Ruchkin, V., Martin, A., & Schwab, M. (2009). Adolescents in transition: School and family characteristics in the development of violent behaviors entering high school. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 40(1), 1-13.
- ⁵⁵ Metz, A., Burkhauser, M., & Bowie, L. (2009, February).
- ⁵⁶ Bandy, T., Bowie, L., Burkhauser, M., & Metz, A. (2007).
- ⁵⁷ Metz, A., Burkhauser, M., Collins, A., & Bandy, T. (2008).

SUPPORTED BY: The Atlantic Philanthropies
© 2010 Child Trends. *May be reprinted with citation.*
4301 Connecticut Ave, NW, Suite 350, Washington, DC 20008, www.childtrends.org

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that studies children at all stages of development. Our mission is to improve outcomes for children by providing research, data, and analysis to the people and institutions whose decisions and actions affect children. For additional information, including publications available to download, visit our Web site at www.childtrends.org. For the latest information on more than 100 key indicators of child and youth well-being, visit the Child Trends DataBank at www.childtrendsdatabank.org. For summaries of over 400 evaluations of out-of-school time programs that work (or don't) to enhance children's development, visit www.childtrends.org/WhatWorks.