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September 2008



Research BRIEF

Youth Community Connections

Minnesota's Statewide Afterschool Alliance

Afterschool Programming Yields Academic Benefits

Children and youth participating in quality afterschool programs reap increased academic outcomes.

Balanced, high-quality afterschool learning opportunities make a difference in the academic lives of participating students. Balanced programs offer enrichment skill-building activities as well as academic support. Children and youth of all ages who participate in afterschool programs reap academic benefits, such as improved attendance, reduced disciplinary action, and increased test scores, compared to children and youth who do not participate.

PARTICIPATION IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS INCREASES ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Regular participation in afterschool programs has shown greater academic gains than reducing class sizes. Academic benefits include behaviors related to school performance as well as achievement measured by tests, grades, or graduation rates. Regular afterschool program participants show:

- ◆ Improved attendance and reduced tardiness
- ◆ Lower dropout rates and higher credit accumulation
- ◆ Better attitudes and increased educational aspirations
- ◆ Increased learning engagement and homework completion
- ◆ Academic confidence and use of skills
- ◆ Less disciplinary action (such as suspensions)
- ◆ Improved scores in math, reading, language arts, writing, citizenship, and science tests
- ◆ Participation in multiple programs yields greater outcomes than participation in a single program
- ◆ Higher on-time promotion rates
- ◆ Reduced failures
- ◆ Overall grade improvements

STUDENTS AT GREATEST RISK SHOW GREATEST GAINS

Youth who have greater challenges tend to experience an opportunity gap. The opportunity gap occurs when low-income and other disadvantaged youth lack access to afterschool and summer programs, a result of which can be learning loss that affects the achievement gap.

- ◆ Participating youth show decreased losses over summer and other school breaks
- ◆ They also show increased proficiency and achievement test scores
- ◆ Children whose families were less engaged in school demonstrated significantly greater gains in multiple areas following afterschool program participation
- ◆ Program participants who had the most risk factors and were furthest behind academically have made the greatest gains on year-end achievement tests

CRITICAL FACTORS TO ACHIEVE SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES

Access to and sustained participation in afterschool or summer programs

- ◆ Quality programs, as evidenced by:
 - ◆ Safe and appropriate environment
 - ◆ High-interest programming
 - ◆ Engagement and choices
 - ◆ Positive relationships between staff and students as well as between students
- ◆ Balanced programming offering academic support as well as extracurricular or co-curricular skill-building activities that promote youth development in real-world contexts
- ◆ Strong partnerships between stakeholders (schools, families, communities, and programs) to provide high-quality opportunities for the largest number of students