

# Study of Promising Afterschool Programs

## Key Findings from New Research on the Benefits of High-Quality Afterschool Programs October 2007

### Overview

A new study conducted by researchers at the University of California, Irvine, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Policy Studies Associates, Inc. and supported by the C.S. Mott Foundation finds that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores and work habits as well as reductions in behavioral problems and substance use. These benefits can help offset the negative impact of unsupervised conditions in the afterschool hours.

The two-year study followed almost 3,000 low-income, ethnically-diverse elementary and middle school students from eight states in six major metropolitan centers and six smaller urban and rural locations.<sup>1</sup> About half of the young people attended high-quality afterschool programs at their schools or in their communities. Programs offered an age-appropriate mix of academic enrichment, tutoring, recreational, arts, community-based service, and other activities.

### Key Findings

#### *Improved Academic Outcomes*

- ⇒ Elementary school and middle school students who regularly attended the high-quality afterschool programs (alone or in combination with other activities) across two years demonstrated significant gains in standardized math test scores, compared to their peers who were routinely unsupervised during afterschool hours. Regular participation in the programs was associated with gains of 12 to 20 percentiles in math achievement test scores over the two-year period, relative to students who were routinely unsupervised after school. These gains reflect effect sizes of .52 to .73.<sup>2</sup>
- ⇒ Elementary and middle school students who regularly participated in high-quality afterschool programs had significant gains in self-reported work habits, relative to unsupervised students (effect sizes of .20 to .41). Classroom teachers of the elementary students also reported gains in work habits (effect sizes of .31 to .35) and task persistence (effect sizes of .23 to .30).

#### *Improved Social and Behavioral Outcomes*

- ⇒ Elementary program participants were reported by their teachers to exhibit gains in social skills with peers (effect sizes of .21 to .30) and pro-social behavior (effect sizes of .21 to .23), and reductions in aggression (effect sizes of .29 to .34), relative to unsupervised students.
- ⇒ Reductions in misconduct (e.g., skipping school, getting into fights) over the two-year period were reported by both elementary and middle school program participants, relative to unsupervised students (effect sizes of .51 to .66).
- ⇒ Middle school students who regularly participated in afterschool programs reported reduced use of drugs and alcohol, compared to those who were unsupervised. Effect sizes (.47 to .67) are four to six times larger than those reported in a recent meta-analysis of school-based substance-abuse prevention programs aimed at middle school students.

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To view the full report, please visit [www.gse.uci.edu/research\\_SPASP.php](http://www.gse.uci.edu/research_SPASP.php).

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<sup>1</sup> Aurora, CO; Baldwin, MI; Bridgeport, CT, Central Falls, RI; Denver, CO; Los Angeles, CA; Missoula, MT; New York, NY; Oakland, CA; Pawtucket, RI; Salem, OR; San Diego, CA; San Ysidro, CA; Seaside, CA

<sup>2</sup>An effect size is a statistical tool that is useful in interpreting the magnitude of the difference between two measures. Unlike a test of statistical significance, the effect size is not affected by the size of the samples assembled for the study. Comparisons with effects found in other studies of educational programs suggest that the effect size of the gains associated with high-quality afterschool programs reported above are substantial:

A study of the impact of instruction by Teach for America teachers on math achievement found an effect size of .15 on math scores after a year of participation in a classroom led by a Teach for America teacher (Decker, Mayer, & Glazerman, 2004).

A study of the impact of the reduction in class size in elementary classrooms by eight students per class found an effect size of .23 on math scores after one year (Finn & Achilles, 1999).

In a review of four studies of afterschool programs, Kane (2004) concluded that the expected impact of an extra hour of instruction delivered in an afterschool setting over a school year equals an effect size of .05 in reading and math.

An evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program in Louisiana found that the impact of this afterschool program was an effect size of .13 on a combined measure of reading, math, and language test scores (Jenner & Jenner, 2007).