

21st Century Community Learning Centers at Children’s Aid Society Community Schools

Target Population	Middle school
Evaluation	3-year longitudinal, comparison evaluation
Findings	Increase in academic achievement and positive youth development outcomes
Elements of Success	Collaboration Community Support Offers a range of activities Personal relationships with staff Structured program

Overview of Program

The Children’s Aid Society (CAS) provides health, mental health, afterschool, parent, Head Start, Early Head Start, weekend and summer programs in 21 New York City community schools. Community schools provide added services to students and families through partnerships between CAS and the school. According to the

CAS “Theory of Change,” a good afterschool program is one important strategy to reach CAS’s long term goals of academic achievement and positive youth development. Each site is a 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) and has a different specific focus, such as “leadership” or “self-expression.” The CAS programs offer academic enrichment and youth development activities.

Key Findings:

Overall, the findings for the 3-year longitudinal study indicated an increase in-academic achievement and positive youth development for CAS participants over nonparticipants. Students enrolled in CAS programs had higher school attendance than non-participants.

The authors do note that outcomes cannot be attributed in a causal way to the program, only association is possible due to the research method used. However, plausible arguments for causality are strengthened because outcomes hypothesized in the Theory of Change are those found. For Year 3, the significance cutoff was .05, indicating 95% confidence that the outcome did not occur by chance.

Summary of Findings:

- Students who participated in the afterschool programs at all from 2004-2007 attained steadily higher scale scores on the math test compared to nonparticipants.
- Students who participated in the afterschool programs at all from 2004-2007 attained steadily higher reading scale scores significantly more often than nonparticipants.

Of the students who were in CAS afterschool programs from 2004-2007, 44.7% demonstrated a statistically significant increase in their performance levels in math compared to 37% of those students who did not attend CAS afterschool programs.

- There were no statistically significant differences in reading performance levels between CAS afterschool participants and nonparticipants for 2004-2007.
- Of CAS afterschool program participants, 20.9% increased their performance level in reading, and 29.4% increased their performance level in math for Year 3 (2006-2007).
- Of CAS participants who spent 60% of their time or more in CAS during 2006-2007, 42.1% performed at Level 3 on the math test for Year 3 (2006-2007).
- Participants had higher levels of school attendance from 2004-2007 than students who never participated in programs during that time, and greater afterschool participation was related to better school attendance.
- Significant increases were observed in self-esteem and career and aspirations, along with decreased reports in problems with communication, from Year 1 to Year 3.
- In Year 3, students who had higher (60% or more) program participation were significantly more engaged in their communities than other students.
- From 2004-2007, school engagement showed a statistically significant decrease, which could be attributed to major structural changes in the schools.

In 2004-2005, CAS afterschool participants were significantly less likely to spend two or more hours per week watching television or playing video games and more likely to spend more than two hours reading. In 2005-2006, participants reported more often that they learned new things or acquired new skills. From 2006-2007 a significantly higher percentage of CAS participants engaged in sports, games and activities where they could get help with school or research projects.

Program Population/Eligibility

- Program enrollment includes students in 5th or 6th through 8th grade, but staff emphasized that program enrollment is actually heavily 5th and 6th graders.
- Each program serves 250-400 youth (roughly one-quarter of the school's population).
- From 2006-2007, 75.9% of participants were Hispanic, 21.3% were African American, 1.4% were Asian, .6% were white, and .5% were Native American.
- From 2006-2007, 51.9% were male and 47.8% were female
- Students described as English as a Second Language (ESL) students comprised 23.7% of the population from 2004-2005, 24.8% in 2005-2006, and 12.8% from 2006-2007.
- Youth attending middle schools with CAS/21stCCLC programs in NYC are eligible for this particular program.
- Youth are recruited through flyers, notices, staff phone calls, mailings, visits to classrooms, tables at parent nights, and word of mouth at the beginning of the year. Programs also approach youth who have attended in previous years.

Program Components

- A typical CAS afterschool program begins with a 20 minute snack or supper, followed by homework help, academic enrichment, and youth development activities.
- Academic enrichment and youth development programs include sewing, cooking, media arts, Recycle a Bicycle, Operation SMART (science projects for girls), Fashion Club, Hip Hop poetry, performance arts, yoga, Youth Council, Peace Games, HOPE Leadership Academy, etc.

- All programs offer study hall or homework help, and sports and recreation activities. Some programs offer “open activities” where students can relax in a less formal environment, such as movies or sports on Friday afternoons.

Overview of Evaluation

The report summarized the full results of a 3-year longitudinal, comparison evaluation of afterschool programs conducted by the Children’s Aid Society (CAS) Community Schools and prepared by ActKnowledge. The evaluation examined long-term outcomes of academic achievement, attendance and youth development. The basic goal of the evaluation was to determine if youth who attended CAS afterschool programs did better academically, behaviorally, and/or attitudinally than youth who did not attend. Therefore, the evaluation measured academic and development outcomes for a cohort of youth participants and a comparison group of nonparticipants, as well as preconditions tied to academic and development outcomes (such as active engagement in learning activities and strong psycho-social development) and program implementation. The students who were enrolled as 6th graders in 2004 were the cohort followed throughout the study. For the youth development measures, the evaluators selected 4 of the 6 schools to participate. The 4 schools were chosen to represent CAS middle schools geographically and by numbers of years as Community Schools. For both the academic and youth development outcomes, students in CAS afterschool programs were compared to similar students who did not participate in the programs. A variety of data collection methods were used. The results from this 3 year evaluation are summarized below.

Evaluation Population

- All 6 afterschool programs studied were 21st CCLC operating within 6 CAS community middle schools.
- Students were in grades 5-8.
- The population studied for the academic achievement and attendance outcomes included all youth in all 6 schools. A sample of youth were selected for youth and teacher surveys to measure youth development outcomes between participants and nonparticipants and over time.
- Students who participated in CAS afterschool programs were compared to students who did not participate.
- The 6th grade classes at all 6 CAS schools in 2004 were the cohort that was studied throughout the longitudinal study.
- For the youth development component, a smaller sample of youth was drawn from 4 of the 6 middle schools to complete a pre-test and post-test youth development survey. The youth were representative of program participants and nonparticipants at each school. Participants were enrolled in programs on a first-come-first-served basis, so the youth development survey was quasi-experimental.
- The entire sample for academic achievement/attendance measurements was 5,163, or all youth who attended the 6 middle schools. Of these, 1,766 were 8th graders (the cohort being studied) by Year 3 of the evaluation. During spring 2007, a total of 246 students completed the youth development survey.
- The 246 youth who completed the survey in spring 2007 were the final longitudinal cohort for the youth development survey. Because students moved in and out of programs, all of these

students had participated in CAS after-school programs for at least one year between Years 1 and 3. Therefore, the evaluation could not make comparisons on youth development between students who had ever participated and had never participated. Instead, comparisons were made by participation dosage, specifically 60% or more participation versus less than 60%.

- All students in grades 5-8 in the 6 Community Schools could exercise choice as to which program they attended and many of the nonparticipants (comparison group) students did attend another afterschool program. The other programs were primarily Supplemental Education Services (SES).
- All of the schools met 21st CCLC eligibility requirements and Title 1 eligibility. The percentage of students receiving free lunch at all the schools was 82% to 98%. Additionally, some of the schools were in areas with high rates of linguistic isolation, and all were in neighborhoods with high rates of other risk indicators.

Study Methodology

- The evaluation was a quasi-experimental, longitudinal comparison study.
- Outcomes were measured in two ways: by comparing participants' change over time and by comparing participants to nonparticipants. In addition, comparisons were made based on degree of program attendance. For youth development outcomes, a sample was used whereas for academic and attendance outcomes the entire population was analyzed.
- Data collection methods used for academic achievement and attendance included standardized test score data, school attendance records, and teacher responses to the 21st Century Annual Performance Review (APR) teacher survey.
- Data collection methods for the youth development component included a youth survey and teacher surveys. In addition, focus group, interviews with youth, staff, parents, family and community members, observations and the New York State After-School Program Quality Self-Assessment tool were used to explore preconditions to academic achievement and program implementation.
- To identify youth in afterschool programs, The Community Schools Information System (CSIS) data was used.
- For the academic achievement/attendance-component measures, baseline data collected in Year 1 included student demographics and standardized test scores.
- For the youth development measures, one baseline student survey was administered during the fall of 2004 and a post-test at the spring of each year, along with teacher and staff student ratings.
- For both the academic and youth development components of the evaluation, comparisons were made based on level of participation; "never participated" refers to students who did not participate, "ever participated" refers to students that participated for any amount of time, "participated in CAS 60% or more" or "high-level" attendees refers to participants that spent 60% of the time or more in the program. These categories were used to compare student outcomes on academic achievement and youth development.

Elements of Success

- Collaboration
- Community Support
- Offers a range of activities

- Personal relationships with staff
- Structured program

Funding

Funding from the 21st CCLC primarily supported the programs. In Years 2 and 3, CAS afterschool programs received funding from New York City's Department of Youth and Community Development's Out of School Time (OST) Program. School funding also supported the programs.

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Other Resources

<http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/>