

Boys and Girls Clubs of America

A Summary of:

ENHANCING THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF AT-RISK YOUTH, 2000, *Prevention Science*, 1:51-60, by Steven P. Schinke, Kristin C. Cole and Stephen R. Poulin, Columbia University School of Social Work

Overview

Boys & Girls Clubs of America (B&GCA) was founded in 1906 and has more than 2,000 facilities in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands and U.S. military installations abroad. Nearly 400 of these programs are in public housing areas. The B&GCA's mission is to form healthy partnerships between school-aged children of all backgrounds and concerned adults. The public housing initiative was launched in 1987 under the auspices of the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In 1996, B&GCA piloted an after-school educational enhancement program for youth in public housing in five cities. This evaluation looks at the results of the pilot study.

POPULATION

B&GCA serves approximately three million children, mostly in economically disadvantaged areas. The evaluation studies 992 youth, with an average age of 12.3 years. Forty percent were female. Of the participants, 63.5 percent were African American, 27.5 percent were Latino, 12 percent were white and 7.8 percent other. The sample reflected the national population of youth who live in publicly subsidized housing.

Evidence of Effectiveness

In each of the five cities, researchers targeted three subgroups of youth to participate in the study: (1) youth attending the B&GCA enhancement program ("program"); (2) youth from public housing projects whose B&GCA did not offer the program ("comparison"); and (3) youth from public housing projects that did not have B&GCA (called "control" by researchers). Between the pre-test and the 18-month follow-up, program youth had improved (differences in means were statistically significant at the five percent level):

- ♦ average grade (average grade for program youth rose from 78.39 to 83.48, for comparison youth fell from 78.47 to 76.42, and for control youth fell from 75.43 to 71.79)

- ♦ attendance rates (the mean number of missed days in a school year by program youth fell from 6.4 to 3.7, for comparison youth rose from 4.85 to 5.85, and for control youth rose from 7.47 to 7.75)

Grades in most subject areas (Grades were rounded to the closest unit to facilitate reading):

- ♦ Mathematics - average grade for program youth rose 4 points (from 77 to 82), while falling 3 points for comparison youth (from 78 to 75) and control youth (from 75 to 72 respectively)
- ♦ English - average grade for program youth rose 6 points (from 78 to 84), while falling 1 point for comparison youth (from 79 to 78) and 3 points for control youth (76 to 73)

- ◆ Writing - average grade for program youth rose 5 points (from 80 to 85), while falling 1 point for comparison youth (from 79 to 78) and control youth (from 73 to 72)
- ◆ Science - average grade for program youth rose 6 points (from 78 to 84), while falling 2 points for comparison youth (from 79 to 77) and 4 points for control youth (from 75 to 71)
- ◆ Social studies - average grade for program youth rose 5 points (from 79 to 84), while falling 2 points for comparison youth (from 78 to 76) and 4 points for control youth (from 77 to 73)

Key Components

Each week, within the B&GCA facility or in outside sessions, the trainers engaged youth in structured activities, such as:

- ◆ four to five hours a week of discussions with knowledgeable adults
- ◆ one to two hours a week of writing
- ◆ four to five hours a week of leisure reading
- ◆ five to six hours a week of required homework
- ◆ two to three hours a week of community service (tutoring other children, for instance)

- ◆ four to five hours a week of educational games, such as word and math games

Participation was voluntary and, to entice the youth to participate, program sites used many incentives, such as field trips, school supplies, computer time, special privileges, certificates, gold stars and praise.

Parents were also encouraged to participate with their children in the educational activities. Parents and youth attended an orientation meeting, after which parents were invited to serve as volunteers and to attend the cultural events presented by the youth.

Staff, volunteers and parents attended ongoing training.

Contributing Factors

Structured Program

Some comparison and control sites also offered tutoring and homework help, but did not have the structure offered by the B&GCA program, did not require homework and tutoring, and did not engage routinely in educational games to enhance the lessons being taught.

Trained staff

Another difference between B&GCA program and the comparison and control sites was the presence of a trained staff solely focused on educational enhancements.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study used both a comparison and a “control” group. Participation in the groups was voluntary (not randomized). Comparison and control groups mirrored the age, gender and ethnic/racial background of program youth. Some of the youth in the comparison and control groups received tutoring, but did not attend a structured after-school program. The attrition rate at the end of the study was 13.91 percent, with no significant differences between subgroups. Researchers used students’ surveys, teacher ratings and school records to collect data at the beginning of the program (pre-test), six months later (post-test) and 18 months later (follow-up). Findings were consistent across all measures. This summary presents only school data.

EVALUATION FUNDING

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GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

Public housing projects in Cleveland, OH; Edinburg, TX; New York City, NY; Oakland, CA; Tampa, FL.

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