

# Sacramento START

## A Summary of:

**“Sacramento START: An Evaluation Report, September 1996 — May 1997”** (January 1998)  
Sacramento Neighborhood Planning and Development Services Department. By Judith Lamare.

### Focus

- Early Childhood
- ✓ Primary School
- Middle School
- Secondary School
- Postsecondary
- ✓ Extended Learning

## Overview

Sacramento’s Students Today Achieving Results for Tomorrow (START) program is an after-school academic enrichment program that provides a safe, positive learning environment for elementary school students from low-income families. START was founded in 1995 by the City of Sacramento to help these students “succeed academically and socially” and to “connect neighborhoods with schools” by employing adults from the community and students’ parents as part-time, after-school instructors. At the time of this evaluation, START operated for two-and-a-half hours a day four days a week, and students received homework assistance and help with reading while also participating in recreational activities.

## POPULATION

Currently, START spans 5 school districts in the Sacramento metro area, and it enrolls over 7,000 students. At the time of the evaluation (1996-97), there were 2,000 students in the program: 87% of START students qualified for free lunch, 83% belonged to racial or ethnic minority groups and 58% came from homes where English is not the primary language spoken. The Natomas School District’s sample was composed of 46 students from second through fifth grades, the North Sacramento School District includes 105 third through sixth grade students and Sacramento City Unified School District had 653 third through sixth grade students. Approximately three-quarters of the students began the program scoring below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading and math proficiency. Parents or community members made up 73% of START staff.

## Key Findings

The evaluator used various standardized test scores from the different START schools and districts, reporting the data in Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) scores, based on national test performance.

In the three districts evaluated, more than half of START students showed improvement in NCE scores:

- ◆ START students in the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) improved an average 5.4 NCE points.

- ◆ START students in the North Sacramento School District (NSSD) improved an average of 4.6 NCE points.
- ◆ START students in the Natomas School District (NSD) improved an average of 4 NCE points.

START had the greatest impact on students who began the program in the lowest quartile of standardized reading test scores. In SCUSD, 83% of START students who began the program in the lowest quartile improved on average 22 NCE points in third and fourth grades and 15 NCE points in fifth and sixth grades.

Compared to students scoring in the lowest quartile on standardized test scores who did not participate in START, evaluators found that START students with similar academic achievement in SCUSD improved an average of 3.5 NCE points more than their non-START peers.

Students who stuck with START for a semester or more benefited the most from the program.

Those who spent a full year in the program improved an average of 6 NCE points. However, the evaluator noted that many students did not stay in the program for that long. The average program dropout rate in the first six months was 32%. Though the population served by START is highly mobile, this was not the only reason for the dropout rate, considering that only 14% of the students who left START had moved.

### Program Components

For nine hours a week, START staff and volunteers provide homework assistance, literacy training and other academic enrichment activities to more than 100 students at each school site. Key components of the program include:

- ◆ The majority of volunteers and paid staff are parents of students or adults who live in the same communities as the students they teach.
- ◆ The majority of START sites have a student-to-staff ratio no greater than 20:1. The program

directors are striving to recruit more volunteers to achieve a ratio of 10:1.

- ◆ Program directors receive regular reports on evaluation data and analysis so that they can revise intervention strategies.

During 1996-97, START's first full year of operation, the program had a budget of \$934,000, which amounted to a cost of \$3.50 per child, per day. Parents and community members, who worked as staff, earned over half a million dollars for their time.

### Contributing Factors

#### *School/Program Collaboration*

Communication and collaboration between START directors and school administrators was crucial to the success of the program. START had to work with schools especially in aligning the academic training of staff and the learning goals of students in the program.

#### *Extended Learning*

By providing a safe and fun learning environment after school, the START program offered an alternative avenue of academic enrichment for minority and low-income students.

#### *Community Involvement*

START consciously worked to involve members of the community in its after-school program, hiring nearly three-quarters of its staff from neighborhoods surrounding the elementary schools where the program was held.

#### *Student Commitment and Attendance*

The evaluator noted that the longer students participated in the program, the greater an impact START had on their academic achievement. Since this was the first full year of program implementation, the evaluator also recommended that further evaluation was needed once START stabilized.

#### *Professional Development*

The evaluator felt that START needed to improve staff training procedures by providing volunteer participation goals and monitoring volunteer progress as well as placing increased emphasis on the academic support component of staff work.

**STUDY METHODOLOGY**

Evaluators analyzed school data for students in grades 3 through 6 who attended the program. Only students with test scores in the Fall 1996 and Spring 1997 were incorporated in the research. The school districts recorded student achievement on a range of standardized tests including the California Achievement Test (CAT) and the Sacramento Achievement Levels Test (SALT). Scores were translated in Normal Curve Equivalency (NCE), an equal interval scale that indicates variations in academic growth (NCE is zero for a normal growth). Three out of the five school districts that have implemented START provided test score data; four of twenty START schools did not provide data. Since the City initiated the project and the evaluation, school districts covered in the study were those within the jurisdiction of the City of Sacramento.

**EVALUATION & PROGRAM FUNDING**

The City of Sacramento funded the evaluation. The START program is funded by a public/private partnership that included the City of Sacramento,

five school districts and numerous corporations, foundations and individuals.

**GEOGRAPHIC AREAS**

Sacramento, California: Sacramento City Unified School District, North Sacramento School District, Natomas School District, Del Paso School District and Elk Grove School District.

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