

The Wallace Foundation Commissions Research on the Use of Data in Afterschool Systems

In 2013, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago was selected by The Wallace Foundation to conduct a four-year field-guiding, systematic examination of how cities building afterschool systems are gathering and using data to develop and improve their systems. The goal is to provide actionable insight for those building these coordinated, citywide afterschool systems to expand access and participation in high-quality afterschool programs for disadvantaged children and youth.

Background

In 2003, Wallace began its support of afterschool system building in five cities (New York, Providence, Boston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.). However, significant challenges and questions remain about whether and how the field will progress from this principle to an operational model, particularly given the context of ever-shrinking financial resources. Wallace's second initiative in afterschool system building, launched in 2012 across nine cities (Baltimore, Denver, Fort Worth, Grand Rapids, Jacksonville, Louisville, Nashville, Philadelphia, and Saint Paul), has created the opportunity to examine these issues and inform the field's work. And, evidence of the effective use of data will be greatly valued by a large audience.

Study Objectives

The afterschool systems' data use study will address the field's demand for greater clarity on how the systems can use information to reach their goals and how system champions can discuss the value generated by successful data strategies. It will describe how cities develop the capacity to make sense of the information available to them, the challenges they confront and the benefits they can obtain when they accurately assess the costs and benefits of cities' use of data; factors contributing to or hindering cities from using data; the tradeoffs required; and above all, the value of using data to reach the goals of systems building (such as to provide more high-quality afterschool programs in which children and youth consistently participate). The study will consider all types of data that systems use, including those that are housed within the cities' management information systems (e.g., attendance data) and those that exist elsewhere including market research, geo-mapping, and needs assessments.

The chief objectives of the study are to:

- Ascertain what data cities select for use;
- Describe how cities collect this information;
- Show how cities analyze and use the data;
- Explain the challenges and successes in using data;
- Examine the benefits and costs of building system capacity to use data;
- Explore plans for sustaining the operation of afterschool systems' data use; and,
- Clarify the value of afterschool systems' investments in data use.

Study Methods

Information is collected through phone and in-person interviews; on-site observations of meetings; review of documents, data systems, and other tools and materials related to the systems' use of information; and surveys. The combination of methods varies across cities depending on which investigative methods are most suitable in each context.

Research Team

Since 1985, Chapin Hall has been a research and policy center focused on improving the well-being of children and youth, families, and their communities. Its researchers represent diverse academic backgrounds, including social work, public policy, education, economics, sociology, psychology, and law. Many have significant direct service experience that informs and enriches their research and others have worked in federal and state government, service agencies, or policy research organizations.