

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

The Promise of Afterschool Programs for Promoting School Connectedness

Anderson-Butcher, D. (2010). The promise of afterschool programs for promoting school connectedness. *Prevention Researcher*, 17(3), 14-Nov. doi:10.1037/e597072010-004

SUMMARY: Youth, parents and guardian, and school staff reports were used to explore key design features and qualities of after-school programs that foster school connectedness, (i.e., the degree to which youth feel connected to their school, measured by feelings of connection, attendance, and academic outcomes). The focus of this study was the Central Ohio Afterschool Youth Development Program, which targets programs in at-risk communities based on poverty and school performance. Results show that a variety of program features fostered school connectedness.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The top reason youth attended the programs was because of the relationships they had with caring adults.
- An added value of the afterschool programs was that they were able to engage parents or guardians and the community in the program and the school.
- Multiple design features and qualities that enhance school connectedness were identified: promoting positive relationships; development of a sense of belonging to the program and the school; provision of safety; enhancement of school activities; engagement of parents and the community; fostering the connections to teachers and classrooms; reinforcement of school rules and practices; establishment of high expectations and standards.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with organizations that work with military connected families to emphasize the importance of after-school programs
- Develop modules to help inform staff regarding the important programs features that promote positive youth development in after-school youth programs, especially those important for military youth

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate staff regarding which program features may be important for enhancing positive youth development and school connectedness
- Provide parents with opportunities to engage in community and school-based activities

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support the implementation of evidence-based after-school programming specifically for military youth
- Recommend training for professionals working with military youth regarding military culture as a way to promote understanding and connection among youth and staff

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Satisfaction surveys (from youth, parents or guardians, and teachers or school staff), site observation data, and attendance and academic indicators from 21 afterschool programs across central Ohio were assessed.
- All programs operated at least three hours per day, five days a week, and were managed by: City Parks and Recreation Departments (n = 4); community centers (n = 3); Communities in Schools (n = 5); faith-based organizations (n = 1); youth organizations such as YMCA (n = 8).
- Additionally, 133 youth were compared to a match comparison group (n = 122).

PARTICIPANTS

- Survey data from 503 youth, 233 parents or guardians, and 502 teachers or school staff were utilized.
- Most youth were Black (84%), female (54%), and had an average age of 12 years.
- No demographic data for parents or school personnel were provided.

LIMITATIONS

- Other untested variables may be influencing results; for example, youth participants may be involved in other extra-curricular activities or school-based intervention programs that may account for improved outcomes.
- The author's subjectivity may have influenced the findings, as she only reported those outcomes that map on to Eccles and Gootman's features of high quality afterschool programming.
- Participants were not military connected; therefore, results may not generalize to military children in youth programs.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Continue to explore which positive experiences in after-school programs, individually or in combination, lead to school connectedness
- Examine the potentially deleterious effect of negative experiences in after-school programs on school connectedness
- Consider how duration or program participation impact youths' experiences in after-school programs

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