Viewing After-School Programs Through the Family Impact Lens
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Abstract

Interest in after-school programs has greatly increased during the past decade with federal funding reaching about $1 billion in FY 2008. With funding from the 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC), after-school programs are serving a large population of children and families from minority and low-income families. A family impact analysis reveals that after-school programs can support families in several ways. After-school programs can provide children with care and education while parents are at work, which can support parents' efforts to balance work and family responsibilities. Evidence suggests that after-school programs can benefit academic outcomes, although not every program has proven to be effective. Programs also offer children and parents an opportunity to create beneficial informal social networks through relationships with program staff and other families. However, after-school programs themselves do not always engender such positive effects, and diverse factors such as program qualities and strategies for program-parent partnerships can lead to very different outcomes. A few exemplar programs exist and promising practices could improve parent-program partnerships. Yet we are still not aware of how many programs nationwide are based on family impact principles given insufficient efforts to apply a family impact lens to after-school programs.

Introduction

Since the early 90s, researchers' and policymakers' interest in after-school programs has increased. After-school programs offer academic, artistic, and other enrichment opportunities in local elementary and secondary schools, community-based organizations, and other public or private organizations. Specifically, under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, after-school programs have been regarded as places that can enhance children's academic achievement during their non-school hours, and also enrich children's development in areas such as emotional and social learning. After-school programs are also popular because they are safe places that provide quality care and supervision for children. Currently, there are more than 8.4 million school-age children nationwide (15%) who participate in afterschool programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2012). The amount of federal funding (21st CCLC) for after-school programs has steadily increased and reached $1.081 billion in FY 2008.

Background

Description of 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC)

Since 21st CCLC provides the only current federal funding designated for after-school programs, it is important to understand its characteristics and how it guides each state and

grantee program. This program was initiated in 1998 under the Clinton Administration with $40 million of funding. The funding was restricted to school-based programs for the purpose of providing a safe haven for children by offering diverse activities including art, drug and violence prevention, and tutoring programs. After-school programs also benefit members of communities more broadly through school resources such as school computer labs and gymnasiums. The federal government directly awarded grants to leading agencies across the nation on a competitive basis, reaching 315 schools the first year (www.ed.gov).

After the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2002, 21st CCLC was reauthorized as one part of the law (Title VI, Part B of NCLB). The emphasis of 21st CCLC was accordingly moved to improving school achievement of children who attend poverty-stricken and low-performing schools. Currently 21st CCLC's three main purposes are as follows: 1) offering academic enrichment programs including tutoring, 2) providing other enrichment programs such as drug and violence prevention programs, and 3) offering families educational and literacy services. Under NCLB, the Department of Education transferred administration of 21st CCLC grants to states, and each state's educational agency awards grants to eligible applicants on a competitive basis. The federal budget for 21st CCLC doubled after the passage of NCLB increasing to $846 million in FY 2001 and $1.081 billion in FY 2008.

Research on After-school Programs

With heightened interest in after-school programs, studies and evaluations of after-school programs have also increased. During the past decade, researchers have mainly focused on how the program affects children's academic, emotional, social, and physical development and what features of programs (e.g., quality of staff, students' participation rate) account for children's positive development. The need for effective evaluation has also been emphasized (e.g., Institute of Government and Public Affairs, 2007). Often, study results are mixed, showing that some programs have no impact and or even a negative impact on children, conceivably due to factors such as poor program quality and negative peer influence (e.g., Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). Because after-school programs vary substantially in form, purpose, and quality, scholars have found it difficult to provide a single, clear picture of their effectiveness.

Despite these difficulties, researchers conclude that a well-structured program can have positive effects on children's development in a number of ways. Based on three large-scale, meta-analyses, Granger (2008) found that, on average, after-school programs have a positive effect on academic outcomes. Granger cautioned, however, that some after-school programs work while others don't, and emphasized the importance of including evidence-based practices that can contribute to effective programs.

After-school programs vary across states, which is another reason it is difficult to provide a coherent assessment of their effectiveness. Although 21st CCLC emphasize academic activities, some states have separate state funding for diverse goals. According to the Institute of Government and Public Affairs (2007), 22 states have their own funding for after-school programs. Illinois, for example, supports a program called Teen REACH that aims to prevent adolescents' risky behaviors and promote positive development, whereas states like Tennessee and California run programs designed to promote both positive development and better academic achievement. States like Illinois administer programs through the Department of Human Services, whereas some other states like Kentucky operate programs under the Department of

Education. These differences can lead to different program philosophies and evaluation guidelines, and fuel debates on what the goals of after-school programs should be (Granger, 2008).

Because afterschool programs vary so much across states, researchers and policymakers should be cautious in interpreting the results of their studies because the policies and programs may vary substantially in their own jurisdictions.

Applying the Family Impact Lens to After-School Programs

Because providing educational programs for families is one of 21st CCLC's objectives, families are undeniably an important component of after-school programs' effectiveness. However, most studies have focused on children's developmental outcomes without examining how child outcomes may be affected by family involvement in the program. A few research institutes like the Harvard Family Research Project focus on understanding the connection between after-school programs and families (e.g., Bouffard & Weiss, 2008; Hemphill & Kreider, 2008; Wimer et al., 2006). Overall, hundreds of studies have examined the relation between child outcomes and family members' involvement in traditional school settings, but few have studied this association in after-school programs. This family impact analysis aims to examine how families affect after-school programs and how after-school programs affect families.

Family Impact Analysis

Based on the background of after-school programs described above, this section will apply the Family Impact principles to after-school programs. This analysis is based on principles developed by Ooms and Preister (1988) and revised by the Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminars (Bogenschneider et al., 2012; Bogenschneider, Little, Ooms, Benning, & Cadigan, 2012a, 2012b). For this analysis, four of the five family impact principles are applied to after-school programs. Two or three questions are considered under each principle. Principle #2, Family Stability, is not discussed here because it is not relevant to after-school programs.

Principle #1: Family Responsibility

- How well does the policy, program, or practice affect the ability of families to balance time commitments to work, family, and community?

- How well does the policy, program, or practice help families build the capacity to fulfill their functions and avoid taking over family responsibilities unless absolutely necessary?

Researchers' and policymakers' interest in after-school programs stem from after-school programs' dual goals of supporting parents' work and enhancing children's well-being. As more mothers are employed outside the home and the balance of work and family becomes a crucial national issue, after-school programs have been regarded as places that can provide care and education for children while their parents are at work.

After-school programs can support families by providing needed guidance and supervision during the after-school hours (e.g., Vandell, Pierce, & Dadisman, 2005). Among married parents with children under 18, 43% of mothers and 88% of fathers are employed full-

time. On average, parents spend 1.2 hours and 0.8 hours each day, respectively, caring for their children (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Insufficient time for care and supervision during the after-school hours has been linked to negative effects on child well-being. Specifically, juvenile delinquency occurred most frequently right after school (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999), and adolescents' likelihood of experiencing drugs or alcohol was closely related to boredom and lack of care providers during their after-school hours (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2003). Research suggests that children's development is influenced by the way after-school time is arranged and good after-school programs have the potential to provide quality care and activities (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2004).

After-school programming is also related to parents' ability to support their children financially. According to a recent report (Gareis & Barnett, 2006), parents' concern about their children during after-school hours can influence their performance on the job. Worrying about children resulted in low productivity such as missed work, distractions on the job, poor quality of work, and not meeting expectations. These findings held irrespective of the number of hours that parents worked. Both mothers and fathers were being affected by such work/family stress. Not surprisingly, parental stress was highest when their children spent unsupervised time alone or with siblings after school.

Principle #3: Family Relationships

- How well does the policy, program, or practice involve couples, immediate family members, and extended family when appropriate in working to resolve problems, with a focus on improving family relationships?

- How well does the policy, program, or practice provide the knowledge, communication skills, conflict resolution strategies, and problem-solving abilities needed for healthy couple, marital, parental, and family relationships or link families to information and education sources?

The data reported here derive from 21st CCLC, which is the only federal funding for after-school programs. Because 21st CCLC emphasizes providing educational services to families as well as their children, each state is trying to involve families in their after-school programs. According to the 21st CCLC program's 2004-2005 evaluation report (Naftzger, Kaufman, Margolin, & Ali, 2006), all 17 states that were awarded new grants for after-school programs during this period reported that their activities highlighted educational opportunities for adult family members. These states identified adult family education as mandatory or optional priorities when accepting applications. However, in the actual operation of after-school programs, the average time spent on family programs was less than 3 hours in a week, which was the second least time spent in any program activity. The researchers suggested that the family programs are conducted on a less frequent basis, and more easily cancelled than other programs.

The 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 21st CCLC evaluations also revealed that the kinds of family programs conducted during after-school programs need to be defined more clearly (Naftzger, Kaufman, & Margolin, 2005; Naftzger et al., 2006). The reports integrate family involvement and family literacy into one category, although those two activities may have completely different purposes. According to Bouffard & Weiss (2008), an important meaning of

family involvement is sharing responsibilities with parents for children's progress, which current reports on 21st CCLC do not address. In 21st CCLC, eligible family activities include family programs as diverse as parenting strategies and resume development (Naftzger et al., 2006). Yet there have been no reports on how much time is spent on such programs nor on their impact on children's progress and the parent-program partnership.

Principle #4: Family Diversity

- How well does the policy, program, or practice ensure the accessibility and quality of programs and services for culturally, economically, geographically, racially/ethnically, and religiously diverse families?

- How well does the policy, program, or practice identify and respect the different attitudes, behaviors, and values of families from various cultural, economic, geographic, racial/ethnic, and religious backgrounds, structures, and stages of life?

Since 21st CCLC makes it a priority to provide services for students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools, the program is obviously identifying and supporting families who are economically vulnerable. Improving academic competence of low-income children has been a primary goal of the No Child Left Behind Act, given that better school achievement is undeniably a crucial factor that can lead to postsecondary education, labor market success, and reduced income inequality. According to the 21st CCLC 2004-2005 evaluation (Naftzger et al., 2006), about 62% of children attending after-school programs in the United States during 2004-2005 were from low-income families eligible for the children's free or reduced lunch program.

Beyond 21st CCLC, a few scholars identified the potential of after-school programs for families living in poverty, and reported how programs can affect children's outcomes. For example, low-income children who participate in after-school programs turned out to spend more time in academic and other enrichment activities (Posner & Vandell, 1999). Some studies also showed that programs resulted in higher academic achievement and lower rates of school drop-out and crime (Mahoney, 2000; Posner & Vandell, 1994).

According to a recent study conducted by the Black Alliance for Educational Options (Robinson & Fenwick, 2008), low-income parents had high expectations for after-school programs. According to this report, Black, low-income working parents believed after-school programs were a means to help their children escape poverty. They also hoped after-school programs would provide their children with homework assistance, tutoring, a safe environment away from deviant peers, and opportunities to acquire leadership skills.

Despite the potential benefits, reports identify several obstacles for participation by low-income families. Although 21st CCLC's main goal is supporting children from disadvantaged families, lack of transportation, unavailability of programs, cost of after-school programs, and high-crime neighborhood are barriers (Institute of Government and Public Affairs, 2007; Mahoney, Larson, Eccles, & Lord, 2005). Also, parents in the Black Alliance for Educational Options study expressed frustration when insufficient opportunities provided by the programs did not meet their high expectations for the after-school programs. In addition, programs can actually have the opposite effect of what is intended. For example, adolescents who attend

unorganized and recreation-based programs tend to associate with more risky peers and engage in more antisocial behaviors (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000).

Family diversity also can be an especially important issue for after-school programs given the rapidly increasing population of minority students, expected to be 50% of K-12 students in 2010 (Kennedy, Bronte-Tinkew, & Matthews, 2007). Since 21st CCLC focuses on children from economically disadvantaged families, a few minority populations are overrepresented among 21st CCLC after-school program attendees compared to the general population. According to the 2004-2005 21st CCLC evaluation report, the highest population groups were Hispanic (33%) and Black (28%) children followed by White (25%), Native American (3%), and Asian children (2%). However, the population distribution can be quite different if we look beyond programs funded by 21st CCLC. According to a report of the Harvard Family Research Project (Wimer et al., 2006), which was published in the same year as the 21st CCLC 2004-2005 report, Latino adolescents were still underrepresented across all types of after-school programs.

Family culture and language barriers are significant challenges for afterschool programs, as reported by 26% of 21st CCLC program directors (Weiss & Brigham, 2003). More than half of 21st CCLC programs provide activities for an average of 3 hours each week on family involvement and literacy. Currently, students' and families' language improvement is emphasized more than their unique cultures. Evaluation reports revealed that the proportion of students with limited English proficiency was about 17% during both the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 periods; of the programs, 30% provided an average of 8 hours per week on language improvement in 2004-2005.

Interestingly, there is no 21st CCLC guideline regarding the importance of respecting different values and attitudes of minority children and parents. Even beyond 21st CCLC, there is no current large-scale data showing how after-school programs are identifying and respecting children's and families' cultural values and how those can be related to overall program effectiveness. Only a small number of studies target after-school programs for minority students; most examine the programs' effects on children's academic, social, and emotional development (e.g., Riggs, 2006), not how these impacts might be affected by a program's sensitivity to cultural considerations. However, a few program evaluations show that some interventions designed for improving children's cultural awareness can lead to better social and emotional development and less delinquency (e.g., Prevention Works!, 1999).

Principle #5: Family Engagement

- How well does the policy, program, or practice train and encourage professionals to work in collaboration with families, to allow families to make their own decisions (within the confines of the law), and to respect their choices?

- How well does the policy, program, or practice involve family members, particularly from marginalized families, in policy and program development, implementation, and evaluation?

- How well does the policy, program, or practice build on social supports that are essential to families' lives (e.g., friends; family-to-family support; community, neighborhood, volunteer, and faith-based organizations)?

Consistent with current 21st CCLC intent to involve parents, exemplary models of engagement and empowering families exist. For example, since its inception in 2005, the Boys and Girls Clubs America (BGCA) Family PLUS (Parents Leading, Uniting, Serving) recruited experts on adolescent development as advisory committee members, and provided diverse programs such as parenting courses as well as teen and parent counseling. Evaluations showed several positive outcomes for families such as more time at programs, improved parenting skills, and improved understanding of their adolescent development (Hemphill & Kreider, 2008).

After-school programs can serve as a potential opportunity, especially for low-income parents and their children, to form social networks. First of all, evaluations of 21st CCLC indicate that interpersonal relationships with after-school staff are an important informal support for children that determine the success of an after-school program. Because many contemporary children cannot easily find supportive non-parent adults, having mentoring relationships with staff greatly benefits a number of children's developmental outcomes. Children can establish their personal identities and develop their own talents with the support and encouragement of after-school staff that they know and trust (Matloff-Nieves, 2007). Also, guidance and support from adults are known to reduce the likelihood that adolescents can be exposed to deviant adults and deviant peer activities in their neighborhood (Casey, Ripke, & Huston, 2005). Due to the important role of after-school staff, researchers are constantly emphasizing the quality of staff and also appropriate training and assistance for them (e.g., Durlak, 2008).

Second, although there is no large-scale data, some evidence indicates that after-school programs and staff are becoming an important support for parents as well. According to a report (Bouffard & Weiss, 2008), social networks built into after-school programs can provide parents with information about children's school policies and other parenting practices. A few reports show benefits of supportive relationships for low-income or minority parents. For example, in an after-school program called *Generacion Diez*, designed for a Latino immigrant community in Pennsylvania, staff helped parents to communicate well with children's school teachers, talked about children's educational needs, and gave assistance for childrearing (www.hfrp.org). In another after-school program located in the Boston area, with a predominantly Black and Latino population, parents came to after-school program staff to discuss various personal problems such as immigration, personal relationship problems, finance, and their children's problems; in response, the after-school staff offered practical and emotional support (Kakli, Kreider, Little, Buck, & Coffey, 2006).

Parents also seem to formulate social networks with other parents they meet through after-school programs. According to one report (The After-School Corporation, 2006), low-income parents in a program enjoyed diverse activities such as dance, cooking, or exercise, and such activities provided chances to socialize with other parents.

Some organizations are dedicated to providing specific ways to collaborate with families. The Harvard Family Research Project, for example, introduced several pragmatic strategies such as providing a welcoming atmosphere at parents' visits, offering orientation sessions for new families, being responsive to parents' needs, and hiring a staff person to engage families (Kakli et al., 2006). Although such efforts to involve parents in after-school programs are still in the beginning stages, efforts to enhance family involvement may constantly improve given that it can build on the long-standing experience forming school-parent partnerships.

Conclusion

Assessing after-school programs and 21st CCLC through a family impact lens revealed both strengths and limitations of current after-school programs. Regarding strengths, research has demonstrated after-school programs' potential to support a number of family functions, particularly the ability of families to economically support their members. After-school programs can help both children and parents by providing children with quality care and supervision and some are successful in promoting academic achievement. Children's and parents' relationships with after-school program staff and other families can also serve as beneficial informal social support networks. Since 21st CCLC is targeting children from poverty-stricken families, programs funded by 21st CCLC are also serving minority and economically disadvantaged families, mostly through educational programs.

Regarding limitations, this family impact analysis also revealed that the potential of after-school programs to support families may not always be realized. For example, an unstructured, poor quality program can even be harmful for children's development, and a program without good strategies for parent-program partnership can end up with a poor-quality parent program in spite of best intentions to involve parents. For instance, although one of the goals of 21st CCLC is reaching parents through educational programs, the evaluation shows, on average, family involvement programs are conducted with very limited amounts of time and on an irregular basis. In addition, in terms of supporting diverse and vulnerable families, after-school programs are still not available to many of these targeted parents and children.

Finally, this family impact analysis shows a few exemplar programs that are already being implemented using successful family involvement strategies. However, we still do not know how many programs are being conducted based on such family-friendly principles nationwide. Lack of data and program inconsistency may be due to insufficient recognition of the potential of after-school programs to support family functioning and the potential of family impact analysis to improve program design, implementation, and evaluation.

Based on this analysis, policymakers should take the following considerations into account:

- Policymakers should require that programs be evaluated for quality using existing instruments. For example, the Youth Program Quality Assessment is currently used by a few local and state governments, including the Michigan Department of Education (Institute of Government and Public Affairs, 2007).

- Policymakers should ensure that family involvement is required and that programs allocate sufficient time for it.

- Policymakers should require that evaluations of after-school programs include examples of their family impact.

- As data become available, policymakers should require that evidence-based program models be used.

- Policymakers should take steps to ensure that program resources reach vulnerable families and racially-ethnically diverse families who are likely to benefit.

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