



What does the research say about afterschool?

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Afterschool and summer learning programs are locally-designed school and community solutions that help kids learn and grow, keep children and teenagers safe, and support families to balance work with home. Students in programs participate in hands-on learning, discover new interests, receive nutritious snacks and meals, and have the chance to be physically active. Programs offer a broad array of enriching activities—from learning about electricity and how to build circuits to growing vegetables and preparing healthy meals—that help students build their communications skills, learn how to work collaboratively, and foster confidence in themselves. These are foundational skills and competencies that students need as they move through school and toward adulthood.

But what does the research tell us about the effectiveness of afterschool programs? The following is a small sampling of findings—from meta-analyses to program-level evaluations—that show that there is demonstrable evidence of the positive impact programs have on students' academics, school-day attendance, engagement in learning, and behavior.

Afterschool helps students to learn

- ▶ **Closing the achievement gap:** Research examining the effect of participation in afterschool programs found that the more consistent students' participation in afterschool is, the greater the gains in their math achievement. Among low-income students, the higher the levels of participation in afterschool, the smaller the math achievement gap is between them and their high-income peers.¹
- ▶ **Improved academic performance:** A 2006 meta-analysis synthesizing 35 out-of-school time (OST) afterschool program studies, conducted by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) with funding from the Department of Education, found that afterschool programs had positive and significant effects among students at risk of failure in reading or math. Researchers found positive results on reading achievement, particularly in lower elementary grade levels and in high school and positive and significant effects on math achievement, particularly for middle and high school students.²
- ▶ **Making gains in math:** An evaluation of high-quality afterschool programs serving 3,000 low-income elementary and middle school students found that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs by low-income youth resulted in significant gains in math test scores and work habits and reductions in behavioral problems. The Promising Afterschool Programs Study, a study of about 3,000 low-income, ethnically-diverse elementary and middle school students, found that those who regularly attended high-quality programs over two years demonstrated gains of up to 20 percentiles and 12 percentiles in standardized math test scores respectively, compared to their peers who were routinely unsupervised during the afterschool hours.³

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Image provided by The 50 State Afterschool Network

Afterschool helps boost school attendance

- ▶ **Improved school-day attendance:** A meta-analysis of 68 studies of afterschool programs reported that students who participated in afterschool programs that used evidence-based practices saw significant improvement in their school-day attendance.⁴
- ▶ **Greater improvement in school-day attendance among regularly attending students:** Statewide evaluations of 21st Century Community Learning Centers have found the programs to have a positive impact on their students' school-day attendance. An evaluation of New Jersey's Community Learning Centers found statistically significant negative effects on school-day truancy rates for students who regularly participated in the program compared to their non-participating peers. Students with very high levels of attendance (attending the program 70 days or more) demonstrated an even greater reduction in truancy. Evaluations of the Texas' Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) consistently found that students with high levels of attendance in the program saw particularly strong results, where students participating for 60 days or more had a lower school-day absence rate than students who did not participate in the program (2016 evaluation— 19 percent lower, 2013 evaluation— 15 percent lower).⁵
- ▶ **Decreased likelihood of dropping out of school:** A study of LA's BEST, an afterschool and summer learning program that served more than 25,000 students at close to 200 sites in the Los Angeles Unified School District, found that dropout rates among LA's BEST students were significantly lower than the overall district dropout rate. The study on the program's long-term effects also found that program participation had a significant effect on reducing the dropout rate for low-income students.⁶

Afterschool helps keep kids engaged

- ▶ **Improved classroom engagement:** A study following close to 3,000 low-income elementary and middle school students across eight states, representing both urban centers and rural communities, found that students who regularly participated in high-quality afterschool programs improved their classroom work habits and task persistence.⁷
- ▶ **The greater the participation, the greater the gains:** Research examining the effect of participation in afterschool programs on students' academic functioning found that students who consistently participated in programs experienced greater gains in classroom teachers' reports of their work habits than students who did not participate regularly.⁸
- ▶ **Parents, teachers, and principals agree that programs increase student engagement:** An evaluation of North Dakota's Community Learning Centers found that 3 in 4 parents agreed that their child's attitude toward school improved as a result of participating in the program. Teachers reported that among students who needed to improve in the respective areas, 60 percent improved their class participation and more than half (51 percent) showed improvement in coming to school motivated to learn. In a statewide evaluation of New Hampshire's Community Learning Centers, teachers reported that 64 percent of students who regularly participated in the program were more successful finishing their homework and 60 percent increased their level of class participation. Close to all principals surveyed reported that the programs improved students' attitudes toward school (98 percent) and 93 percent believed the programs boosted students' motivation to learn.⁹



A meta-analysis of 68 studies of afterschool programs by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning found that students participating in an afterschool program improved their school-day attendance and saw reductions in drug use and problem behavior.

Afterschool helps to improve students' foundational skills

- ▶ **Decreased disciplinary incidents:** Evaluations of the Texas' Afterschool Centers on Education found a statistically significant relationship between students regularly attending the program and fewer school-day disciplinary incidents. For instance, a 2016 evaluation found that the school-day disciplinary incidence rate for high school students attending the program for 60 days or more was 23 percent lower than students who did not participate in the program.¹⁰
- ▶ **Improved decision-making skills:** An evaluation of Chicago's After School Matters program, using a randomized controlled trial, found that students participating in the program reported significantly higher self-regulation and significantly fewer problem behaviors than their peers who did not participate in the program. This included that youth in After School Matters were more likely to report that they could manage their attention and their emotions and were less likely to report selling drugs or participating in gang activity.¹¹
- ▶ **Decreased risky behaviors:** A meta-analysis by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), reviewing close to six dozen studies of afterschool programs, found that students who participated in an afterschool program exhibited significant improvement in their feelings and attitudes and indicators of behavioral adjustment. Students in programs also saw reductions in drug use and problem behavior, such as aggression, noncompliance, and conduct problems.¹²



For more research on the impact of afterschool and summer learning programs, visit afterschoolalliance.org.

Endnotes

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