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How to Make After School Programs Work: a Study of Successful After School Programs in Five States

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HOW TO MAKE AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS WORK:
A STUDY OF SUCCESSFUL AFTER SCHOOL
PROGRAMS IN FIVE STATES

By

Caitlin Laboissonniere

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Abstract

This study explores the factors that make a high school after school program successful. Eight programs from five states participated in the study by completing a voluntary survey in 2009. Student input and passionate staff were reported as being important in a majority of the programs. Fifty percent of the programs were categorized as being a success due to their fulfillment of at least two of the four factors used to measure success. The results of the analyses point to the types of activities available to teen participants as being the most important aspect to ensure the success of an after school program.

Introduction

The United States has become a country in which a high school degree is a necessity in order to become a successfully employed worker. The U.S. society has also placed a high importance on having a college degree. Without a high school diploma not only is it impossible to go to college, but it is very difficult to maintain a well paying career. However, not all of the people in the United States have been able to realize the importance of educational attainment for their career futures and so the drop out rates among high school students still remains high. After school programs have become a way to combat this problem. Though much debate has focused on the importance of after school programs, the literature does suggest that they do in some way affect teens and their choices about whether to continue with their education.

Along with drop out rates, a number of additional social problems are responded to by after school programs. They can combat teen delinquency by providing students with alternative ways to spend their time. Teens without direction and support will more often than not become part of delinquent behavior because they have no stake in the society. These programs also can help reduce the number of people who are unemployed or receiving welfare if students decide to continue their education instead of dropping out and having children. If they feel as though they have no reason to go to school and participate in developing a future for themselves, then students will be more likely to participate in delinquent behavior: whether it's joining a gang, drinking alcohol, taking drugs, or participating in sexual activities.

After school programs can help teens realize their potential and the importance of school. With activities such as career development and educational support programs, teens can see what opportunities are available to them. Not all teens need after school programs but “at-risk” teens can be influenced positively by them.

After school time is an easy time for teens to be delinquent; this is when many teens are unsupervised. Unless there is a place with a good environment to go to, they are more likely to find other negative things to do during this time. As Collins et al. (2004: 56) explain, “... in the 1990s, we discovered that young people of middle and high school age get in the most trouble during unsupervised hours from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m., and we generated the modern after-school movement.” It would be great to think that all unsupervised teens simply go home after school and do their homework until mom and dad come home, but this is just not the case in the United States. According to Cole and Rodman (1987: 92), “One study found that 15% of self-care children usually spent time at home alone in the morning, 76% usually spent time alone in the afternoon after school, and 9% usually spent time at home alone in the evening.”

There are many factors surrounding teens that make them more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors according to Moore (2006). These factors include having a single-parent household, large families, or parents with low education levels. These are things that teens cannot prevent nor do anything about. After school programs can be a positive influence in these teens’ lives and thus may reduce the negative effects of these factors. Giving teens goals and aspirations is a great tool in combating their likelihood of participation in delinquent behavior. However, the question remains: what sort of after school program is most likely to have these beneficial effects?

I conducted a study that attempts to find what the key factor to successful after school programs is. Though over fifty programs were contacted, only eight participated in the 12 question survey I distributed. The programs had different activities available as well as goals for why they implemented the program. An analysis was conducted and each program was given a rating of either successful, satisfactory, or needs improvement. These three ratings were based on four factors that were used to measure the success of a program. The factors were grade

improvement, increased attendance rates, retention in the program, and increased graduation rates.

Literature Review

“Despite the increased importance of a high school education, the high school completion rate for the country has been static over the last quarter century. The rate fluctuated around 84 percent between 1973 and 1983, moved up slightly between 1983 and 1992, and has been at about 86 percent since 1992. This net increase of about 2 percent is not very encouraging” (The National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996).

The question of how to combat this problem is important. After school programs are seen by many scholars and practitioners as a way to get teens more involved in the community and thus raise graduation rates. Low graduation rates lead to a smaller job market for those in certain communities. The After School Alliance (2004: 19) describes the job problem as follows: “In 1950, 80 percent of jobs were classified as ‘unskilled’. In the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century, that figure reversed itself. Today, 80 percent of jobs are classified as ‘skilled’, and employment growth is expected to be the fastest for positions that require some type of formal postsecondary education, such as database administrator, physician’s assistant, or computer software engineer.” These quotes show the new importance of education that many teens and their parents don’t realize. This set of changes in the educational attainment needed for career success has come to be known as “credential creep” (Bollag, 2007). It is important to understand the change in our need for education in order to be a successful member of society. Without advancing to secondary education or at least graduating from high school, teens will not be prepared for the new workforce in the United States. After school programs can help teens and their parents to understand the value of skilled work and the need for education.

According to The National Center for Educational Studies (2006), in 1987 13% of public schools offered before and after school programs. That number increased in 1999, with 47% of public schools offering before and after school programs. Though there are many more programs offered today than in recent years, the accessibility of these programs for the teens that need them the most is still low. These teens tend to be in urban, lower-class

neighborhoods. For instance, in her discussion of students in Hartford, CT, Gleick (1995:1) explains,

“While money certainly seems in short supply, what is more troubling here is the isolation in which Hartford's student, 94% of them African American or Hispanic, nearly 3 out of 4 poor, with a high school dropout rate more than three times the state average find themselves: a sort of walled city, separated from less troubled suburbs by an invisible color line drawn not by law but by decades of white flight.”

Gleick's description tells us of teens left behind by the educational system. Studies such as this also tell us that the parents of these children may not be able to successfully guide their children through the educational system. Wilson (1987:57) also explains how the ghetto neighborhoods, as he calls them, have been isolated by society. There is a constant dependence on welfare and many people are unemployed. This cannot change due to the isolation they face from society. The people located in these neighborhoods are so far removed from the rest of society that they must depend on an illegitimate or “underground” economy. As Wilson (1987:58) explains further, “If I had to use one term to capture the differences in the experiences of low-income families who live in inner-city areas from the experiences of those who live in other areas in the central city today, that term would be concentration effects.” He continues by stating that disadvantaged blacks of the urban populations are most highly concentrated in these ghettos. The children in these ghetto communities are not exposed to the positive social aspects of society. The link between education and future employment opportunities is never made to the members of these communities. What are the specific barriers, then, that these children face?

Ogbu (1990) would describe the population in these ghetto communities as being part of the involuntary minority group. Slavery and colonization are the two main causes of involuntary minorities. Ogbu (1990) argues that African Americans and Native Americans are two examples of involuntary minorities in America. These involuntary minority groups find it difficult to accept the cultural norms of the white population. This makes it more difficult for these minorities to succeed because they are unwilling to follow the necessary steps that are required for success in a society. The main piece of this success in the U.S. begins in the

educational system. These minorities do not buy into the “white” educational system and thus their success is hindered. They believe that those who do adopt the cultural norms such as obtaining an education are “acting white”. Not only do their peers disapprove of this behavior but they are unsure of how whites will feel about their success in the educational system. According to Ogbu (1990), this is why many involuntary minorities, mainly blacks, do not try to succeed in the educational system and do not see the importance of their education.

Barriers to Academic Success

According to Cheng and Starks (2002: 306), “In general scholars have agreed that (1) children’s educational expectations have strong effects on school performance and educational attainments; (2) children’s educational expectations vary by racial groups, with Asian Americans having the highest and Hispanic Americans having the lowest educational expectations.” Oberman et al. (2005:8) similarly argue that “the achievement gap between white or Asian students and their Hispanic/Latino or African-American peers is troubling and persistent. Even when looking at students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, a gap exists based on race.” According to Pluvoise (2006), while 24 percent of white students were expected to drop out of school in 2006, the percentage of Hispanic, black, and American Indian student dropouts is twice as high. These differences in educational attainment and expectations point to the persistent barriers that parents in poor and minority communities experience in motivating their children to achieve academic success.

Parents in poor and minority communities are more likely to work more than one job or to be single parents than others are. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2002 3.3 million children lived with only their fathers while 16.5 million children lived with only their mothers. The U.S. Census Bureau also points out that 53% of black children were living with one parent and 25% of Hispanic children were living with one parent. Children living in such arrangements are less likely to have parents home during the after-school hours, which leaves them unsupervised. Just a few hours of unsupervised time each day provides opportunities for youth to participate in delinquent behavior. A survey conducted by YMCA of the USA (US Newswire 2001), found that 59% of teens are unsupervised after school each day. These unsupervised

teens are four times more likely to be D students than those teens with regular supervision. They engage in delinquent behavior such as drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, skipping class, and participating in sexual activity more often times than supervised teens do. The likelihood of drug use, especially marijuana, increases threefold.

The Debate about After-School Programs

After school programs include many types of activities that take place during the after school hours. Participating in tutoring, sports teams, and volunteer work can all be classified as after school programs. This project focuses on the types of programs that have been created specifically for high school students who do not have constructive activities planned for these hours. The programs considered in this thesis consist of activities that will benefit the participants' future aspirations and plans such as career development, work/volunteer activities, and educational specific activities rather than simply keeping them off the street.

There is an ongoing debate as to whether after school programs are truly helpful to these at-risk students. Darcy Olsen and Kristen Anderson Moore discuss the main beliefs of those who support each side of the debate. On the one hand, some scholars believe that after school programs are not successful because most participants are not the "at-risk students" who need the programs. Most children are not delinquent so these programs are not needed to combat that. On the other hand, the supporters of these programs believe that there is too much delinquency among our teens and that these programs can be used to help eliminate their bad behavior.

Darcy Olsen (2009) further discusses the inconsistencies in the reasoning behind the need for after school programs. She believes that after school programs are not needed to prevent juvenile delinquency because most juveniles are not delinquent. She uses statistics from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997) to support this belief. The survey found that 8% of participants had been arrested, 7% had sold drugs, 6% had become pregnant, and 5% had participated in a gang. These numbers alone should prove that she is incorrect. If each of the participants only answered yes to one of the questions than that would mean that 26% of teens were delinquent, though of course it is likely that many participants answered yes to

more than one question. In addition, the NSLY survey does not capture several other aspects of delinquency, such as school truancy, drug use, theft, and other petty crimes. Olsen appears to be trying to reduce the support for after school programs however possible.

Olsen also discusses President Clinton's support for these programs and believes that he shouldn't have been so supportive. She gives the statistic that only 2% of children ages 5-12 spend significant after school time alone. This, she says, proves that these programs are not needed because clearly parents are finding places for their children to go. However, the focus of these programs is to prevent teens from being delinquent—and Olsen's numbers tell us nothing about the after school plans of teens. Even if they participate in programs as younger students, it is hoped that these programs will leave a lasting effect on students by helping them develop goals and aspirations centered on achieving high school graduation and educational success.

Kristen Anderson Moore believes that children who are at high risk for delinquent behavior need after school programs. She believes that there are five risk factors that lead to delinquency; the more risk factors a child is surrounded by, the more likely they are to have behavioral issues. The risk factors are poverty, single-parent family, parents or parent with a low level of education, large family, and family not owning their own home. There are three categories in which children ages 12-17 can be placed into according to the number of risks they are subject to. She has found that 64% of children grow up in low risk homes that have either one or no risk factors. Twenty-nine percent of children live in medium risk homes where they are affected by two or three risk factors. Finally, 7% of children have 4 or 5 risk factors that surround them. All together, 36% of America's children are in a situation where they experience medium to high risk. She believes the number of risk factors one experiences affects his or her social well-being and one's likelihood of delinquency. According to Moore, low risk children have a 5.5% chance of being suspended or expelled from school while medium risk students have an 11.8% chance and high risk students have a 21.4% chance. This shows that high risk students are 4 times more likely to be expelled or suspended than low risk students. She has also found that 9.4% of low risk students are likely to have emotional or behavioral problems.

Twenty two point two percent of medium risk students are likely to have behavioral problems and 30.3% of high risk students are likely to have behavioral or emotional problems. This shows that medium risk students are twice as likely to have behavioral problems and high risk students are three times more likely to have behavioral problems than low risk students are. She believes this supports the need for after school programs. To Moore, these programs would help alleviate the stress such risks place on students and allow them a safe haven where they can establish their goals and dreams.

Moore, along with many other scholars, believes that a child is affected by his or her surroundings and must have help combating the negative effects that are caused. She believes that children cannot be expected to deal with these negative influences alone. Olsen, on the other hand, believes that there needs to be no intervention and children who are left alone can make good decisions and choose the correct path to take. Research on the outcomes of after school programs can shed light on this debate by demonstrating whether or not such programs are able to make an impact on the choices and behaviors of at-risk youth.

How After School Programs Work

After school programs are implemented to get high-risk and disadvantaged teens interested in their futures. If a child feels as though he or she is working towards a goal then his or her likelihood of staying in school to reach that goal is much higher. Many parents of high-risk and disadvantaged teens are not able to help their children value education nor to encourage them to pursue any career goals and aspirations. This is due, in large part, to the parents' own lack of education, time, and other resources. As Candey (2001:1) explains about the girls she spoke with in her study,

“They cite the migrant worker who depends on the girls in his family to cook and clean while the men and boys tend to the field. Or the newly arrived immigrant mother who holds two jobs but relies on her older daughters to provide child care for younger siblings. For these families, the experts say, pushing education down on the list of priorities is a matter of survival.”

This supports the argument of the cultural stigmas placed on many of these students who are not successful in school. It is not the ignorance of parents or the lack of love for their children but instead, it is the priorities that they place above education in their struggle to survive. Children learn from their parents that education is not a priority, and this does not help a child to succeed. As Suh et al. (2007:196) explain another large factor that does not help to support the importance that should be placed on education is the lack of education of the parents, but more specifically the maternal figure. Due to their lack of education, these parents aren't able to help guide their child/children throughout the educational system because they are unaware of the need for education. The after school programs need to help re-instill the importance of education in the students in an environment that engages these children.

The After School Alliance is a group of non-profit, public, and private organizations looking to raise awareness about the importance of after school programs. The After School Alliance suggests that after school programs need four key characteristics in order to be successful. According to the group, there needs to be a career and/or college exploration opportunity. This will allow the teens to become interested and excited about what to do when they graduate from high school and will also allow them to see whether they would like to participate in the working world or go on to college; a high school degree is the foundation to success in either path they choose. Another important piece of the program, according to the Alliance, must be the leadership and input of the participants. This allows teens to choose what they would like to do and to lead others in performing these tasks. It helps them to feel needed and important. The third key ingredient is knowledgeable staff. The staff needs to understand the importance of the program and needs to know how to help make it a success. The staff also needs to remain a part of the program for as long as possible in order for the teens to trust them and develop a relationship. According to the After School Alliance, "evaluations of after school programs have found that the ability to build relationships, as much as activities offered, is a key element in keeping teens engaged in programs" (After School Alliance, 2005:5). Finally, the program needs to take place away from school in a safe location where teens feel comfortable. Teens are more likely to participate if they believe the focus is not on education but instead just a fun place to hang out with peers.

According to Quinn (1999), there are five challenges that these programs face when being implemented. The first is participation. Quinn argues that many programs do not meet the desires or needs of teens. Since these children are at an age where they have more choices on how to spend their free time, many would rather spend it having fun with friends. Unless they believe these programs would allow for that to take place than their interest declines immensely. The second barrier is access. As Quinn suggests, students, especially those from low-income households, may find difficulty in transportation to these program. The third challenge is funding for these programs. Since they are still fairly new, the money that the government has available to spend on implementing most programs is not sufficient. Without the funding many programs are unable to offer the same activities that are available in wealthier communities. The fourth problem in the implementation is effectiveness. Quinn suggests that there has not been much research done on the effectiveness of these programs and this makes it more difficult for the government to support them. Without knowing if these programs are really helping society why should the government keep funding them? The final barrier is coordination with other services. Whether it is among schools, libraries, local activity centers, or other resources there is a lack of support in these communities. Without the support of surrounding institutions, there is no real push for these students to participate by outside sources. Not only are many parents absent and unable to suggest that students be participating, but other places around the community do not try to influence these students to go to programs either. Also, the programs themselves lack the funding and resources to be able to reach out to the students; without these resources it is difficult for the programs to aid in the students' participation.

Besides the barriers that Quinn identifies, it is also clear that teens may not find family support for their after school activities, despite the fact that family participation in after school programs is important. Horowitz and Bronte-Tinkew (2007) list four reasons why families should be involved. First, it can help a student's academic performance and one's relationship with his or her parents. When parents are involved there is less lying and fighting between parents and children and in turn the parents seem to appreciate their child's accomplishments much more. The second benefit is that teens will refrain from delinquent behavior.

“...Compared with teens in similar programs with parental involvement and with teens that are not enrolled in any program, youth enrolled in some after-school programs with a parental involvement component have been found to be more likely to refuse alcohol and marijuana, to better understand the dangers of marijuana, and to better understand health consequences of drug use” (Horowitz and Bronte-Tinkew, 2007:1-2).

The next important benefit to parental involvement is that the program itself can be positively affected. These parents may offer suggestions that the programs can use to improve; the parents will also know what their child is doing and will approve of the actions. Family involvement in these programs above all else will help them to become better parents. It allows them to have an opportunity to understand more about the development of their children. This would give them an opportunity to relate to their child and help the child to move away from negative behavior. There are many barriers that can keep families from becoming involved but if they can be overcome, the benefits outweigh the trouble a parent may have to go through to help their child's program. Due to economic and physical work hours, it is difficult for a parent to find the means to be a part of the development of their children during the after school hours. Parents of these disadvantaged teens may work more than one job or have a job in the after noon. This leads to them not being available during these very important hours of the day. To combat this lack of supervision and the freedom given to teens, they can engage in after school programs. These programs can be effective, but students must continuously participate in the program in order for them to reap the benefits of participation.

Retention in after-school programs as well as in school is also extremely important. While families can help children to stay in these programs, there need to be services provided that can keep the attention of the students which will make them volunteer to come back. Bronte-Tinkew et. Al believe there are five ways that programs can maximize retention. The first step is to figure out who the program should target. Also, a purpose needs to be established. This will help create a population to focus on and will benefit the program when trying to figure out what services to offer. The second step is to set goals for attendance. Once program coordinators decide how many people they hope will attend the program each day, they can focus on how to retain students and if numbers begin to dwindle, they can refocus their efforts to achieve higher attendance. Next, barriers that need to be overcome should be

defined. One way to do this is to ask the teens and adults in the community why they would not be able to participate in a program and then make sure that issue is addressed so the highest rate of participation can be achieved. After this is complete, coordinators need to figure out how to measure their program's true success. Whether it is retention, increased academic achievements of students, graduation rate increases, or another metric, this will help them to see whether their program is worth the effort. Finally, program coordinators need to take into consideration the opinion of the participants. If nobody is enjoying the activities available, then it will be difficult for these teens to really gain much from the participation in the program.

Lessons from the Literature

Unsupervised teens are much more likely to participate in delinquent behavior than supervised teens are. This means that teens who are not supervised after school need somewhere to go that will keep them from participating in delinquent behavior. Skilled jobs, which are 80% of the jobs in the United States, require some form of college education. This means that education has become increasingly more important and that teens today need to finish high school more than ever before. Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians are 2 times more likely to drop out of high school than white students are no matter what their socioeconomic situation is. This shows that something needs to be done to help them graduate and to give them a fair chance in today's job market. There are five risk factors that would make a teen more likely to engage in delinquent behavior: poverty, being part of a single-parent family, having a parent with low level of education, large family, and being a part of a family that does not own their own home. Four elements are speculated to be important in the success of an after school program; career or job exploration, leadership and input of participants, enthusiastic staff, and retention of the staff involved. Retention and attendance to school as well as to a program appears to be very important in the success of each teen participant.

We do not know what the most important aspect of an after school program is. We do not know if the target population is being reached by these programs or if it is engaged in

participation. Also, we do not know how to give these students incentives to participate in programs or how to be sure that these programs do leave a lasting effect on them. This thesis will seek to answer these questions.

Methods

Before contacting any programs, permission was sought from the Rhode Island College Human Subjects Committee. Program coordinators or other staff who responded to the study signed an informed consent form (See Appendix A).

A sample of potential programs was established through the use of the website www.afterschool.gov. This website lists approximately three after school affiliated agencies for each of the fifty states. Out of all of the agencies and programs listed for each state, only thirteen programs met the conditions for inclusion in this study. These conditions were that the programs serve high-school aged students, were available during the after school hours, and had activities that were focused on the academic and economic future of its participants. Out of that original sample of programs, only two had enough information to be contacted. Many did not have telephone numbers or websites that were still in use. The list does not seem to have been updated in a few years so much of the information was dated. One program out of this list participated in the study.

The second list of programs was obtained from various web sources. These sources included state websites as well as some additional agencies listed on afterschool.gov. Including the first thirteen programs, a total of seventy four emails and phone calls were placed to thirty seven different programs. Though many of the programs had more than one location, none of the participants were from the same program. The response rate to the Emails and phone calls was 37%. Eight of these programs finally participated. This is only 22% of the total number of programs contacted. Summary data on the sample, including the programs which did not respond or which were unwilling to participate, can be found in Appendix B.

Representatives of each program responded to a survey by either telephone or email, whichever they preferred (the survey can be found in Appendix C). The survey consists of

questions that focus on the population in the area that the program is available in, as well as the demographics of the participants and factors that can be used to measure program outcomes. Each program was also asked to provide information about the socioeconomic status, race, family structure, and educational background characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood. The study participants were asked to provide information about the gender, race, and socioeconomic status of the teens in the program as well. In addition, the survey asked questions about the types of activities available and the way in which students joined.

Each program was given a letter A through H to keep their participation anonymous. Next, the success of each program was analyzed. Success of a program was measured using four factors. These factors include the retention rate of the program, grade improvement amongst the teens, attendance improvement in school, and graduation rate increases. Not all programs had available statistics for each of these factors. Because each director did not give a numerical value in every survey, the answers to each question became “yes” or “no” when analyzing each program’s survey. A higher importance was placed on graduation rate increase. As explained in the literature review, high-school dropout rates are still high in the U.S. With new issues such as the credential creep and lack of unskilled-labor jobs, a high school degree has become a staple in the U.S. job market. Each program was placed into one of three categories depending on their answers to these four factors.

The analysis consisted of a similar process created by John Stuart Mill. The first method of analyses used is referred to as the joint method. Mill uses this method to find a common factor that either leads to an outcome or the incompleteness of an outcome. The second method used is Mill’s concomitant variation method. In this process of analyses Mills focuses on how many factors or the amount in which each factor is fulfilled as the cause for an outcome. The amount of fulfillment of each factor leads to the level of the outcome; this study looks at the fulfillment of four “success” factors as a way to categorize after school programs. Each program is placed into one of three levels of success based upon the fulfillment of the four success factors. The three categories are “needs improvement”, “satisfactory”, and “success”. A program may not be categorized as successful if graduation rates do not increase. This means

that a successful program must have increased graduation rates as well as the fulfillment of at least one of the other “success” factor in order to be categorized as a success. To be satisfactory, a program must have two or more factors fulfilled, not including graduation rate because that would make it a successful program. The program is categorized as needing improvement when less than two requirements are fulfilled.

The demographic overview of the participants as well as the surrounding neighborhood was also requested in the survey. Again, not all of the participants had this information or the information that was given was vague. Thus, U.S. Census Statistics were used to provide any missing or insufficient answers about the demographics of the surrounding area. I could not however use this website to aid in the description of the students in the program.

Limitations

There were many limitations to my research. The amount of time allotted for the completion of the project did not enable me to give programs enough time to respond to the surveys. Many program coordinators explained that they simply did not have the time to participate in the study throughout the course of their busy day. Other programs weren't reachable at all. I left messages and emails for all program coordinators. Many never returned my calls even after a second call was placed to the programs by me and fellow classmates that helped with the contacting. Another limitation was that much time and effort was placed on contacting programs that did not exist anymore or were not the type of program that I needed to participate in my survey. Some programs were only run during the summer and others were focused on elementary and/or middle school students. Due to the small sample size of after school programs in the U.S. it is difficult to generalize this study to the larger population of programs. This study was conducted on an exploratory basis and provides direction for future research to pick-up where I have left off.

Hypotheses

- 1) The success of an after school program is largely dependent on the teen participant's input and enthusiasm towards the program.
- 2) The success of the program depends on the activities provided. These activities should be things that focus on the participant's future academic and employment success.

Summary of Programs

Table 1. Success Matrix for Programs in Study	Retention Rate	Grade Improvement	Graduation Rates	School Attendance	Overall Rating
Program A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Success
Program B	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Success
Program C	Yes	No	No	No	N/A
Program D	No	No	No	No	Needs Improvement
Program E	Yes	No	Yes	No	Success
Program F	Yes	No	Yes	No	Success
Program G	Yes	No	No	Yes	Satisfactory
Program H	No	No	No	No	N/A

Program A

The focus of this nonprofit program is to provide at-risk, economically disadvantaged students from urban high schools with a place that can help them prepare for college. The program is year round and includes six activities. The activities provided are one-on-one advising, internships, community service, adventure-based learning, group meetings, and academic enrichment. These programs are chosen through staff and student input.

Though the community in which the program is located is 71% white, the participants are 90% minorities. Students nominated to participate in the program are in eighth grade, qualify for free lunch, and must have at least a C in their core subjects. They must then go through a selection process consisting of interviews, home visits, and written applications.

There is a 75% retention rate. Most participants' grades remain above a C. Attendance at school has increased and 84% of the participants have been accepted to college. Overall according to our four factors, this program is a success.

According to the program's director, the reason the program is a success is due to their approach in the types of activities provided. Because there is an array of support in all aspects of these teens' lives, it allows for the program to leave its mark on every part of their lives.

Program B

This multi-generational program focuses on the needs of both youth and the elderly. The programs' activities focus on building safer communities, and the issues and isolation surrounding both age groups. The programs are simple things like watching movies and playing cards. They are chosen by staff, elders, and youth.

The racial demographics of the community and the participants in the program are consistent; the majority, over 75%, is black. The students that participate are at-risk and usually come from either single-family households or homes where the grandparent is the head of the household. Eighty five percent of the time the teens are placed in the program by parents.

The program has witnessed 100% retention rates. There has been 75% grade improvement among the students. 100% of the students have increased attendance to school. According to our four factors, this program is a success.

The program staff member who completed the survey believes that the reason the program has been a success is because they use an idea that other cultures have incorporated in their societies for years. By giving the two most vulnerable populations a chance to be a part of something allows for growth amongst them and gives a solution to the vulnerability of these populations.

Program C

This recreational-focused program was created to combat a growing drug problem amongst teens in this community 38 years ago. Teens were given the power to choose the staff, location of the building, decorations, and the activities of the program. The activities include sports, nature and cultural adventures, music and poetry open microphones, community service, and art and photo exhibitions.

The median household income of the community is \$58,000 but the program incorporates more students from a lower-economic status. There are a high percentage of students in the program from a single-parent or grandparent run household which is similar to the neighborhood in which the program is located. The program participants were largely white: 95%. The neighborhood in which the program is located is also predominately white. The program director pointed out that there are many people of European and middle-eastern descent living in this community. All of the eighth graders in the community are given a pamphlet explaining the program but the students enroll by themselves.

The retention rate is high among the students. The survey participant could not provide exact numbers for grades, graduation rates, or attendance. They did explain that there have been many testimonials over the past 38 years describing the benefit that the program has had on students' characters. The character benefits include things such as altruism, kindness, communication skills, and confidence. The reason for the lack of evidence seemed to be that this program was not focused on achieving any specific goals for the teens participating. The director described the program as more of a hang out spot than a place where teens come to engage in activities that will benefit their futures significantly. This program could not be rated because of a lack of responses to the four measures of success. This program may be in a neighborhood that does not have a need for a program that will benefit disadvantaged teens.

The director does explain why he/she believes their program is a success. Due to the voluntary nature of their program as well as the diverse activities provided, the survey participant believes that it is a large success. He/she does go on to say that he/she would love

to have one or two staff members from the teen population. He/she believed this would allow for even more success.

Program D

This hang-out spot was created 10 years ago after a group of teens asked local officials to help them find safe places to go after school. The impetus for creating the program began after quite a few attempted and successful suicides as well as delinquency among the juvenile population. The center in which the program is based out of has many fun things for teens to do including foosball tables, televisions, ping pong, and even a kitchen full of snacks. They also have social service programs including probation, as well as runaway and homeless youth services. The teens are allowed to determine all of the activities in which they wish to participate.

The survey participant believed that the teens in the program come from a wide array of socioeconomic backgrounds as well as races. However, the statistics he/she gave did not support this idea. Eighty nine percent or 403 out of the 452 teens in the program were white, with only 5 Hispanics, 13 Native Americans, and 14 blacks. The program is located in a densely populated suburban neighborhood with a wide range of economic statuses. The majority of citizens could be viewed as middle-class.

There were no available data on the retention rates, grade improvements, graduation rates, or attendance rates. The program director believed that the most important aspect of success was the communication and leadership skills developed by the program. This is absolutely an important piece in the success of the programs but this program was given a rating of “needing improvement”. The reason that this program has been placed in this category is because the director specifically discusses that she believes that the participants of the program are disadvantaged. This would mean that the correct demographic is being reached but the outcomes needed in this population do not appear to be reached. The program director did not have the statistics about grade improvements, etc. because their program was not developed to improve these academic areas.

Program E

This work related program is based out of the libraries in a large Midwest city. The impetus for creating this program was actually that students hanging out at the library after school needed something to do. There are many activities provided for the teens but all focus on employability skills. There are mock interviews, résumé writing, guest speakers, field trips, and participation in the youth career Olympics provided in these programs.

The program participants mirror the community in which the programs are located. The participants, as well as the surrounding community, are about 75% African American and 25% other. Most of the students are minorities from low-income neighborhoods with either single-parent households or homes that have grandparents as the primary caregiver. Teens voluntarily participate in the programs.

There were no available statistics on attendance rates or grade improvements. There is an 80% retention rate and 85% graduation increase amongst participants however. According to our four factors, and the importance placed on graduation rates, this program may be placed in the category of successful.

The director of the program believes that the staff is the most important aspect of the program. The staff members are very passionate about the students and the success rate. If there were more money, the director believes more opportunities could be made available to the teens which would be extremely beneficial to the program.

Program F

This program is based on the exploration of health careers. The organization behind programs in the state that this program is located has made it a goal to focus on the future of health career opportunities in the future. The organization believes that there will be an increased number of health career jobs needed in the future for many reasons including, for example, the aging baby-boomer population. This program places the same importance on the activities selected. These activities include taking blood pressure, counting respirations, CPR, and filling out health intake forms. Though these activities have somewhat of a practical

implication for everyday life, the main focus is to get the teens participating interested in health services.

The participants of the program and the surrounding neighborhood in which the center is located have very similar socioeconomic and race demographics. Both have a large Latin and black community with a small percent of whites present. The students are mostly economically disadvantaged and from ethnic minorities. Many of the participants will be the first in their families to attend college. Student participation is voluntary and includes the completion of an online application as well as attendance to an informational meeting.

Data on attendance rates and grade improvements were not available. Retention rates and graduation rates do increase among participants in the program. According to our four factors this program may be placed in the category of successful, especially when we place a higher significance on graduation rates. As explained in the methods section, when a program fulfills two requirements and one of them is an increase in graduation rates, it is categorized as being successful.

The director of the program believes that the success is based upon the appeal of the program. She believes that the program is appealing to students who are interested in a stable career for their future. The survey participant believes that the best way to improve their program would be to reach a large audience of students and to help them network in the career world upon completion of high school and college.

Program G

This life-skills training program is focused on teens placed in foster care. The program provides the students with activities to help them learn basic skills that will help them once they are on their own. Skills such as balancing a checkbook, cooking, and prioritizing are focused on. The students do have some input in selected the activities in which they would like participate.

The program provides services for all teens in foster care ages 16 and up throughout all of the state. The largest race represented in the program is Caucasian. Blacks and Hispanics are

also a large portion of the teens, considering the number of blacks and Hispanics in the state. Along with the small population of Asians and Native Americans in the state, the representation of these two races is small among participants in the program.

The only factor that the director could speak about among our success factors was that attendance rates improved at school. They also said that many of the teens stayed with the program because they realized that it was beneficial to their everyday lives. This program, according to our four factors, cannot be seen as a satisfactory after school program.

The director believed that this program was successful and that the success was due to the staff. Many of the staff came from broken families and parents of drug addicts so the teens find it very easy to relate to the staff. The survey participant believes that the program would improve if they had more things for the teens to do.

Program H

This enrichment program is focused on athletic and artistic activities. The members are expected to pay tuition in order to be able to participate. Staff, participants, as well as the surrounding community help to choose the activities for the teens.

A majority of the surrounding community is made up of white middle-class people. Fifty percent of the participants are Jewish. The socioeconomic make-up is diverse but mostly consists of middle-class teens.

No information could be provided about the four success factors. The director however believed that the program is successful and that it was due to the fact that the participants had a strong bond and unity based in the Jewish religion and value system. They believed that more members and other funding sources would help make the program more successful. This may be a program that has participants who already attend school regularly and have high graduation rates so this program does not need to focus on those factors. As the director answered the survey it seemed like the program was created specifically as a place in which Jewish beliefs could be upheld and valued among the participants in the program.

Findings

Table 2. Comparison of Factors Influencing Program Outcomes

	Teen Input on Activities	Activity Types	Neighborhood Characteristics	Who are Participants	Overall Rating
Program A	Yes. Some teen input	Community Service, Internships, one-on-one advisory	Range of economic and race demographic . Majority middle class. 29% minority population	100% qualify for free federal lunch. 90% minorities	Success
Program B	Yes. Some teen input	Games, interactions with elderly participants including story telling and movie watching.	Lower to moderate income levels. 75% black and 15% Latino.	Parents have low to moderate incomes. 85% black and 15% other races.	Success
Program C	Yes. Some input	Open microphone sessions, sports, art and photo activities	Large European and middle eastern population. Income levels vary but remain around middle-class levels.	95% white and 5% other. Lower end of middle-class families.	N/A
Program D	Yes. Choose ALL activities.	“Delinquency deterrent”. Air hockey, pin-pong, TV watching,	Large economic range. Income levels range	Same economic status and racial demographi	Needs improvement

		arts and crafts.	from the high and low end of middle-class. 89% white	c as the surrounding neighborhood	
Program E	No. Suggestions accepted.	Employability skills workshop, mock interviews, guest speakers, field trips.	75% black. Low-income neighborhood.	Mirrors surrounding community	Success
Program F	No. Suggestions accepted.	Health specific activities such as CPR training, and intake form completion.	90% minority and middle-lower classes	75% minority and middle-lower class	Success
Program G	Yes. Some input	Cooking skills, balancing a checkbook, grocery shopping	75% white. 11% Latino, 9% black, 5% other. Range of all economic statuses. Very poor-very rich.	Teens in DCYF care. 50% white, 26% black, 18% Latino, 6% other.	Satisfactory
Program H	Yes. Some input	Sports and art classes.	99% White middle class. Large Jewish population	99% white middle class. 50% are Jewish	N/A

Though each of the eight programs had much diversity among the activities available, the location of the center, and the races and socioeconomic statuses of the participants, there

was one variable that 63% of programs exhibited: a social disadvantage of the teens. With causes ranging from local suicides to loitering, each program began because there was some problem attributed to the teens in the neighborhood. Some of the programs were begun due to requests from teens themselves, while others were founded after adults saw a problem and felt that an after school program would be the solution. Six of the directors discussed the disadvantages to the population. The theme seems to be that after school programs can help develop the disadvantaged teens into adults who will have the basic skills needed to succeed in the current U.S. society. This may mean attending college, finishing high school, or even just learning how to take care of themselves on a basic level such as shopping for food.

Two of the eight programs do not involve students in the creation of the activities available. However, all eight programs do state that input from the teen participants is welcome and needed in order for the program to run smoothly. One director explains, "The activities are decided by the youth. We have a teen council that meets weekly to plan and implement all of the events and activities. They also interview potential staff and volunteers." This program uses the teens within all of the developmental phases. This director goes on to say specifically that they "believe the program has been so successful due to the connection the participants have to the program. They have total ownership and voice in the daily implantation on the activities and events and the daily operation of the facility." This program was rated as needing improvement.

Does this mean that teen input is not needed? No. However, without structure and some formal activities with a base in education, the teens do not get enough of a positive influence. Programs like this simply give teens a place to hang out and don't do much for the development of the participants. It can be said that this type of program is more of a delinquency deterrent than a successful after school program. Delinquency is not specifically a problem for only those low-economic urban populations. In any demographic there is a possibility that the teens may be delinquent during the after school hours. While some communities could benefit highly from an after school program that gives the teens enlightenment into the different careers available to them as well as the importance of their

education, others already are aware of this. The teens in neighborhoods that already value education can still benefit from an after school program. The program needs to be a delinquency deterrent and this can be achieved by giving the teens a safe, fun environment to go to until parents have returned home from work. One of the issues of these types of programs however is the areas in which they are placed. These types of programs should not be placed in a neighborhood with disadvantaged children in need of direction from adults. This program would not be beneficial to at-risk teens. These kinds of programs would only keep them from participating in delinquent behavior but would still leave them unable to realize their educational and career potentials.

One of the more successful programs explains that teens “work collaboratively with staff in planning and implementing activities.” However, this director goes on to say that there are internships, academic enrichment programs, and one-on-one advisory that students may choose to be a part of, but the actual activities themselves are developed by the staff with minor adjustments after teens give their input. This would suggest that teens should have a say, but the overall development of the programs should be left up to the staff and directors running the programs who have the resources and know how to give these teens the types of programs that would be conducive to the development of their characters. If teens are left to choose the activities, they are not as likely to choose programs that will engage them in the development of career and educational goals. The input that they do give about the programs helps them to buy into what they are doing and to believe that they have some choice in what they are participating in.

These eight programs support the hypothesis that teen input is important to a successful after school program, but they demonstrate that it is the *type* of input that is most important. The two programs that do not involve teens in the initial creation of the programs were also very successful. They did say that teen input was very important to the upkeep and future development of the programs however. This suggests that teens need to feel that their voices are heard in order to benefit fully from after school programs, but that giving teens

complete control over the direction of after school activities may not result in programs that achieve success in changing teens' lives.

The activities provided do in fact have an impact on the success of these programs. With the four factors we use to measure success, the most successful programs all seem to have the same type of activities available. The main initiative in each of the successful programs is to instill the idea that education and career goals are important. The activities included to instill these values are career and college exploration, as well as any structured activities that involve tutoring, internships, community service, and counseling. Though some of the programs that we could not call successful do provide a great environment for teens to be a part of after school, there does not seem to be such an impact on the future of the teens involved. The future impact is what our four factors are trying to measure. The programs that have activities such as ping pong, open microphone sessions, and television watching as their activities provided do not seem to prove that there are any lasting effects on their teen participants. These programs do not have activities that involve career or educational exploration. They were all placed in the category of needing improvement.

As one of the program directors explains, "Outcomes that we are reaching for include better communication and leadership skills and a better connection to the community that surrounds them." These are great outcomes that each program should aspire to, but unless the proper activities are supplied to the students these goals are not always attained. In the other programs which place an emphasis on education and jobs, it seems that the traits are formed simply by the teens' participation. These goals are not listed as their main focus because the directors believe that with their participation in the activities provided, the teens will improve their character. One of the directors of a program which has activities such as internships, life-skills meetings, and adventure-based learning activities discusses how these traits develop out of their approach, "A longitudinal, holistic approach and our mission to provide academic, social, motivational support and cultural enrichment that empowers economically disadvantaged high school students to recognize and fulfill their unrealized potential and become matriculated college students, makes our program a success." This program was in fact

placed at the success level. Many of the directors did mention the development of positive characteristic traits in the teens participating in the programs. Many did not, however, believe that this was the goal of the after school program that they directed.

The program that has been labeled unsuccessful as well as the two programs with not enough information to be labeled successful can be labeled this way because they are not a sufficient deterrent to what theorists refer to as general strains. When a program is more of a hang out than a structured environment that help teens develop goals, the strains faced by these teens may still be present. General Strain Theory refers to the negative affects surrounding a person. According to Siegel (2005:143-145), this theory focuses on the idea that people commit crimes when they can't find a means to get what they want. For example, some teens may want to go to college but they realize that they will never be able to afford it so to alleviate the pain that they may be feeling, they may partake in delinquent behavior because they feel as though the society is unfair to them. After school programs can help take some of these strains off of potential delinquent teens and show them that there are ways to be successful even when they do not believe they have a way to achieve some of the goals they have. An unsuccessful program does not help these teens realize their goals and thus the strains placed on them are still prevalent and their preference towards delinquent behaviors may be fulfilled.

Conclusion

Some researchers, such as Darcy Olsen (2000), do not believe that after school programs really are beneficial to the high school population in the United States. I would disagree, especially after talking to the directors of these eight programs. Though not all of the programs were perfect and they were not all classified as being successful, each did leave some sort of impact on the participants' lives even if it was simply a place to go instead of participating in delinquent behavior. In areas where delinquency among teens is higher than others, a place to get teens to go after school is beneficial to their behaviors during these hours. The problem

with simply giving them a safe environment to spend a few hours each afternoon is that this is not helping those teens to realize their potential and possible futures.

Each of the four measures of success included in this study must be as important as the others in order for these programs to be the most effective. After school programs are an effective way to help disadvantaged teens realize the future that is available to them if they should they succeed in graduating high school and pursuing a college education. To be a success, an after school program must be focused on the future career and educational goals of its teens. Teen delinquency tends to allow these children to get in a pattern of unlawful activity as described by Wilson (1987). When living in a disadvantaged neighborhood where they are not shown the positive aspects of education and career goals, they do not feel a need to continue their education. This will allow them to follow in the footsteps of the un-employed disadvantaged community around them. If the programs that are available to these teens do not help them to develop aspirations and dreams of bettering their lives than they are not successful after school programs. There is a big difference between giving teens an after school program where they can “hang-out” and giving teens a successful after school program that will help to better their futures.

Policy Implications

This study suggests that after school programs should have two objectives when planning the success of their programs. These objectives include teen input and education/career oriented activities. The more important of these two seems to be the activity selections. In all of the programs there was an abundance of teen input in the program. The activity selection is more difficult and requires larger resources because the activities involve outside sources such as employers in the community or colleges. The programs should include educational and employment focused activities. Things such as internships, job placement, and career exploration can give teens new goals and aspirations which will translate to continued education and eventually a career that they may have never realized they could achieve.

Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis was an exploratory study. As an exploratory study, it was difficult to generalize the results of this project to other programs due to the small non-random sample used. This thesis can suggest several directions for further research on questions related to the outcomes of after school programs. The results can be used to help support any future hypotheses of what makes after school programs work.

First, I would say a larger sample size should be acquired. I have come to realize this is quite difficult but with a larger amount of time it may be possible. Another option is to use snow-ball sampling. This would require the responses of a few programs and then for those directors to give the future researcher the names of other programs that may like to participate. Another way to get more programs to participate would be to focus on a convenience sample in the state in which the researcher lives in. Then, the researcher could personally visit the programs that they would like to have participate. This may aid in the completion of surveys. In addition, after school programs are heavily dependent on external resources, including funding sources and partners for educational and career-based activities. A study of the availability of these resources would be a valuable tool to those who direct or seek to found after school programs.

Finally, as researchers like Olsen suggest, it is possible that after school programs reach populations that do not need them so much, while missing out on populations for which they would be most beneficial. An expanded study would be able to consider the differences between programs that serve different ethnic or racial groups, those with different socioeconomic statuses, or different genders. Such research could both determine which populations benefit most from after school programs and which populations currently have access to the more successful types of programs.

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Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Rhode Island College

How to Make After-School Programs Work

You are being asked to participate in a research study about the after-school program that you are a director of. You were selected as a possible participant because I have been studying after-school programs such as yours and have randomly selected yours as a model program. Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the research.

Researchers at Rhode Island College are conducting this study.

Background Information

The purpose of this research is to figure out what makes a successful after school program in the high school setting. The focus is on what causes delinquency in teens, how to get them interested in these programs and how to make sure these programs benefit the participants. There are many questions about how to make these programs work and this paper will answer these questions with the help of 15-20 after school programs currently in effect.

Procedures

If you agree to be a participant in this research, we would ask you to do the following things: Answer questions from a survey which we have put together. The survey incorporates questions about the participants in the program. They are general questions about the over-all success and failure. There are no questions about particular students.

Risks and Benefits to Being in the Study

The level of risk associated with this study is no different than that experienced in your everyday life. We will not ask for specific information about the participants so there will be no problems of confidentiality.

The benefits of participation are that current and new after school programs can use my study to help them produce and maintain a successful program. This seems to be a difficult task in these programs. Hopefully with my carefully researched thesis, these programs will have a quick and easy guide to the things to avoid and to include in their programs

Confidentiality

The records of this research will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records

will be kept in a locked file, and access will be limited to the researchers, the college review board responsible for protecting human participants, and regulatory agencies. The original data will be destroyed within 3 years of the studies completion.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with the College. There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not participating or for discontinuing your participation.

Contacts and Questions

The researchers conducting this study are *Professor Mikaila Lemonik Arthur* and *Caitlin Laboissonniere*, a current Rhode Island College student. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have any questions later, you may contact them at marthur@ric.edu or Claboissonnie_1610@ric.edu.

If you would like any additional information of the findings or results of this project please feel free to contact them as well.

If the researchers cannot be reached, or if you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) about (1) concerns regarding this study, (2) research participant rights, (3) research-related injuries, or (4) other human subjects issues, please contact Kevin Middleton, Rhode Island College Committee on Human Participants in Research at (401) 456-8228, or write Kevin Middleton, c/o Rhode Island College Committee on Human Participants in Research at Office of Research and Grants Administration, Roberts Hall, 600 Mount Pleasant Avenue, Providence, RI 02908.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have received answers to the questions I have asked. I consent to participate in this research. I am at least 18 years of age.

This consent is null and void after December 31, 2009.

If you wish to use a pseudonym in this research, please write it in here:

Print Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Response Rates of all Programs Contacted

	<i>Email</i>	<i>Call</i>
<i>State</i>		
California		
Program 1	Yes	No
Program 2	No	No
Connecticut		
Program 1	No	No
Program 2	Yes	No
Program 3	No	No
Program 4	Yes	No
Program 5	No	No
Program 6	No	No
Delaware		
Program 1	Yes	Yes
Georgia		
Program 1	No	No
Program 2	No	No
Program 3	Yes	Yes
Illinois		
Program 1	No	Yes
Kansas		
Program 1	No	No
Program 2	No	No
Massachusetts		
Program 1	No	No
Program 2	No	No
Program 3	No	No
New Jersey		

Program 1	Yes	No
New Mexico		
Program 1	No	No
Program 2	No	No
New York		
Program 1	Yes	Yes
Program 2	No	No
Program 3	No	No
Program 4	Yes	No
Program 5	Yes	Yes
North Carolina		
Program 1	No	No
Ohio		
Program 1	Yes	Yes
Pennsylvania		
Program 1	No	No
Program 2	No	No
Rhode Island		
Program 1	Yes	Yes
Program 2	Yes	Yes
Program 3	Yes	Yes
Texas		
Program 1	No	No
Washington D.C.		
Program 1	No	No
Program 2	No	No
Wyoming		
Program 1	No	No

Total No	24	28
Total Yes	13	9
Total Attempts	37	37

Appendix C

This appendix contains the survey instrument that was used to obtain the information about each program included in the study.

- 1) What type of program is it?
- 2) How is it funded?
- 3) What are the types of activities included in the program?
- 4) How are the activities selected?
- 5) What was the impetus for creating the program?
- 6) Could you provide a general demographic overview of the region in which the program is located? Suburban community, approx. 450 students in each graduating class.
 - a. What is the socio-economic demographic?
 - b. What is the racial demographic?
 - c. What is the communities' educational background?
 - d. What are the current family structures?
- 7) Could you provide a general demographic overview of participants?
 - a. What is the socio-economic demographic?
 - b. What is the racial demographic?
 - c. What is the gender ratio?
- 8) What are the qualifications for hiring staff, are they professionals or volunteers?
- 9) How do the students become involved with the program? Did they volunteer, did parents place them in the program, or was it mandated by someone else?
- 10) What data can you provide about the outcome of your program?
 - a. Retention rates?
 - b. Grade improvements?
 - c. Increased graduation rates?
 - d. Improvement in attendance at school?
- 11) What do you think makes your program a successful program?
- 12) If there is room for improvement, what can you do to make the program more successful?