
Independence School District, MO

Evaluation of

The Before- and After-School Program

(21CCLC Grant)

2008-2009 Executive Summary

Conducted by The Zigler Center
in Child Development and Social Policy
Yale University

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Executive Summary

The Independence School District (ISD), MO has been a leader in the provision of after school enrichment and childcare services for over 20 years. Since 2003, ISD's after-school programs have been supported by 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC) grants, awarded by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The 21CCLC grants enabled ISD to expand as well as enhance its after-school programs, shifting from a childcare model to a comprehensive, school-based model with a focus on students and families and the promotion of interest in learning among students and parents.

This shift broadened the scope of before- and after-school programs to include learning and enrichment activities and resulted in the creation of two program components to the after-school initiative: Kids' Safari and Clubs. Kids' Safari combines childcare and after-school activities, whereas the Clubs program does not include childcare, but provides all students with opportunities to participate in various after-school enrichment activities. Together, Kids' Safari and Clubs are referred to as ISD's after-school program.

In addition to supporting the shift in program implementation, the 21CCLC grant enabled ISD to undertake a longitudinal evaluation of the after-school program. The evaluation, conducted by the Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University, has been on-going since 2003 and includes comparisons among three groups: students (and families) in Kids' Safari, students (and families) in Clubs, and a control group of students who do not participate in any of the after-school activities.

In this 2008-2009 Evaluation Report - based on data collected from six schools - we present the latest findings, which indicate that the after-school program continues to be highly effective and is associated with significant positive outcomes.

The evaluation has two major components: implementation and impact studies. The implementation study focuses on what types of services the school-age program offers and the characteristics and educational background program staff, an assessment of the quality of the program and the number of and characteristics of the students enrolled. The impact study section focuses on the program's effect on the students and the schools as a whole.

Implementation: The schools participating in this evaluation include Benton, Randall, Luff, Ott, Spring Branch, and Glendale. Almost half of the student population, or 43 percent, of these schools participating is enrolled in the school-age program. Students in grades kindergarten through five attend what we found to be well-planned, research-based before- and after-school programs. The schools involved serve an at-risk population where more than half, or 53 percent of students qualify for free lunch and another 10 percent qualify for reduced lunch, for a total of 63 percent of the student body.

Program coordinators and program staff are predominantly Caucasian females with an average age of 35 and 26 years old respectively. Both groups are well educated, with more than 83 percent of coordinators having attained a Bachelor's degree and 80 percent of staff reporting at least some college education over the minimum six hour requirement. The school district hires the staff for Kids' Safari to work specifically with that program. The Clubs activities are led by teachers, community vendors and volunteers with specific interest and expertise in the topics.

Impact: Based upon our analysis, we note that the major impact of participation in Kids' Safari is seen in student grades and the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores. Kids' Safari participants, 9.3 percent of whom are special education students and therefore at higher risk for low achievement, actually earned higher grade point averages and higher MAP scores than did students in the Clubs or the control groups. Kids' Safari MAP score averages were also higher than the averages for the district and the state. Because only 38 percent of the Kids' Safari participants received free or reduced lunch (lower than the Clubs and control groups and lower than the ISD average) we conducted additional tests to compare performance across economic subgroups. Kids' Safari students still earned higher grades and MAP scores across all but one subject (physical education, where scores were identical to other groups). The current findings suggest that participation in Kids'

Safari is increasing student grades and MAP scores, and the program may be an effective approach to narrowing the academic achievement gap for low-income and special education students.

In addition to the higher academic achievement among Kids' Safari participants, we found that:

- Kids' Safari participants also attained higher rankings in academic behavior, school attendance rates, and social skills, as well as improvement in school-wide variables indicative of academic success (low special education, lower rates of grade retention, lowered student turnover, and lowered rates of absenteeism and suspension rates);
- The average Kids' Safari program attendance rate is 64 percent, which is exceptional, indicating that students are interested in and enjoy the activities associated with Kids' Safari programs;
- Parent and student survey data further confirm that students find the programs enjoyable and worthwhile, with parent ratings of the Kids' Safari program being higher this year than previous years.

The after-school program's impact extended to the school as a whole:

- Parents, principals, teachers, staff, and students through a variety of data collection instruments give high marks for school climate, which includes leadership, decision-making, friendliness of program staff, and program effectiveness; and
- Special education referrals, which are one indicator of the extent that students are struggling academically, were at an all-time low, at 4.6 percent.

Recommendations: This year and previous years' evaluation findings support the continuation of the Independence School District's school-age program. The findings further suggest that increased enrollment would benefit more students. We believe that ISD's ability to provide effective programs, which yield highly positive results, is due in large part to its focus on professional development and program oversight. We recommend that ISD continue its on-site mentoring and coaching which have become an integral part of its staff professional development efforts and the cornerstone of its ability to provide high quality after-school programs.

It is also our recommendation that ISD continue in this trajectory and that it make every effort to publicize its approach and assist other schools in Missouri and across the country achieve a level of excellence in the provision of before- and after-school care and enrichment.