



Center for Children and Families

2017 Spring Lecture Series

Expanding Opportunities for Children and Youth

"Promises and Paradoxes in Understanding Impacts of Out of School Programs for Youth"

Annie Wright, Ph.D.

Director of Evaluation for the Center on Research and Evaluation (CORE)
Southern Methodist University

February 10, 2017

Themes:

Approach to evaluation

- Evaluation should improve programs as well as prove program impacts
- Evaluation partnerships should build the capacity of organizations to plan, implement and monitor/evaluate their programming
- When possible, evaluations should ask how and why a program is achieving impact, not just whether it did. This allows for continuous improvement of program delivery and sustainability of effective practices.

What's special about OST?

- Out of school time (OST) programs uniquely address persistent gaps in academic achievement by filling after and summer school hours with enriching activities.
- Network of local support & delivery organizations working on similar goals.

Theme 1: Focus more on changing adults and organizations than on changing youth.

- Address the underlying conditions within OST sites that contribute to implementation of highly effective programs.
- Shift our focus from only looking at features of the activities being provided to implementation of the overall program.
- *local example:* Dallas Afterschool's Program Quality Initiative (training, coaching & tools) positively increased sites' Programming and Activities

Theme 2: Use excellent data and rigorous methods to get a clearer picture of what really works (or doesn't).

- Relying on aggregate data and simple comparisons over time and/or comparisons from one group of students to another can result in erroneous interpretations of impact.
- We can get false positives, believing that programs have impact when they do not, or that they have more impact than they really do.

- We can get false negatives, believing that programs do not have impact when they really do, or underestimating their impact.
- High-stakes standardized test scores can, at times, be a very good metric for research purposes, but overall for understanding OST impacts, valuing change for adults & organizations instead of over-emphasizing change for youth is warranted.
- *local example*: across Dallas Afterschool's network, sites with higher quality OST helped improve K-2 literacy gains

Theme 3: Utilize the whole network.

- Share one another's successes as well as failures.
- Linking students' experiences during the school day to after school seems to be the most effective strategy for impacting academic gains; this implies strategic partnerships with ISDs and other agencies.
- We have "program deserts": not all of our youth can access OST programs at all and there are variations in quality of programs.
- Support large-scale, city-wide partnerships and authentic collaboration across agencies.

References:

Davidson, E.J., McEachen, J. (2015). *Making the important measurable, not the measurable important. How authentic mixed methods assessment helps unlock student potential – and tracks what really matters.* The Learner First™, Seattle, WA.

Durlak, J.A. What everyone should know about implementation. In, *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning*, CASEL, Chicago, IL.

Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R., & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of afterschool programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45, 294-309.

Lamont, A., **Wright**, A., Wandersman, A., Hamm, D. (2014). An empowerment evaluation approach to implementing with quality at scale: The Quality implementation process and tools. In, *Empowerment Evaluation*, 2nd Edition, D. Fetterman, S. Kaftarian & A. Wandersman, Eds.

Meyers, D. C., Katz, J., Chien, V., Wandersman, A., Scaccia, J. P., & **Wright**, A. (2012). A synthesis and translation of implementation frameworks: Development and piloting of the quality implementation tool. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 50, 3, 481-496.

Smith, C., Akiva, T., Sugar, S., Lo, Y. J., Frank, K. A., Peck, S. C., Cortina, K. S., & Devaney, T. (2012). *Continuous quality improvement in afterschool settings: Impact findings from the Youth Program Quality Intervention study.* Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment.

Wright, A., Farmer, D., & Lan, P. (2017; in preparation). Promoting Student Outcomes by Increasing Afterschool Site Quality; Results of a multi-year evaluation of Dallas Afterschool's support to OST sites.

Wright, A., Lamont, A., Wandersman, A., & Osher, D. (2014) Getting to outcomes and social and emotional learning programs. In, *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning*, CASEL, Chicago, IL.