Out-of-School Time Evaluation Snapshot
Number 3, March 2003

Performance Measures in Out-of-School Time Evaluation

Harvard Family Research Project’s series of Out-of-School Time Evaluation Snapshots distills the wealth of information compiled in our Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database\(^1\) into a single report. Each Snapshot examines a specific aspect of out-of-school time (OST) evaluation. This Snapshot provides the academic, youth development, and prevention performance measures currently being used by out-of-school time programs to assess their progress. It also includes the corresponding data sources for these measures.\(^2\) A future Snapshot will focus on the specific standardized assessment tools and tests that programs use to demonstrate impact.\(^3\)

Increasingly, out-of-school time programs are being asked to provide data that documents their progress and demonstrates their results. But for many OST programs and their over-worked staff this added responsibility is the “straw that broke the camel’s back.” Across the country there is a cry from programs for help in deciding what to measure and how to measure it. Although there is no formal consensus regarding realistic outcomes for all OST programs, one of the unintended benefits of the release of the first national 21st Century Community Learning Centers impact evaluation\(^4\) has been increased attention to the question “What is realistic for OST programs to be held accountable for?” Proceedings from a June 2003 After School Summit hosted by the U.S. Department of Education and Arnold Schwarzenegger indicate that researchers and policymakers alike are interested and invested in helping programs measure and improve their performance.\(^5\)

This Snapshot contributes to that conversation by providing a comprehensive listing of the performance measures that OST programs nationwide are currently using as well as the sources that they use to collect data on each measure. This Snapshot is based on a review of the outcomes reported in the evaluations posted in the Harvard Family Research Project Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database.\(^6\) While not an exhaustive listing of the universe of performance measures currently being used, this Snapshot provides information for programs making evaluation decisions as well as for researchers, evaluators, and others helping programs build evaluation capacity and improve performance.

\(^{1}\) Our database contains profiles of out-of-school time (OST) program evaluations, which are searchable on a wide range of criteria. It is available in the OST section of the HFRP website at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html.

\(^{2}\) Performance measure information for this Snapshot was adapted from Documenting Progress and Demonstrating Results: Evaluating Local Out-of-School Time Programs, a joint publication of the Harvard Family Research Project and the Finance Project, available at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/index.html#local.

\(^{3}\) This and future Snapshots in the series will be available in the OST section of the HFRP website at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/index.html. (To be notified when Snapshots become available sign up for our OST website change notification email at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/subscribe.html.)


\(^{5}\) A summary report of the After School Summit is available at www.publicengagement.com/afterschoolsummit.

\(^{6}\) Our scan for this Snapshot was conducted in October 2003, at which time there were 54 profile posted in our database.
What Is a Performance Measure?

Performance measures assess your program’s progress on the implementation of your *strategies and activities*. They assess the results of your out-of-school time (OST) program’s service delivery. Ask yourself: In the work that my program does, what do we hope to directly affect? What results are we willing to be directly accountable for producing? What can we realistically accomplish?

There are two types of performance measures:

*Measures of effort* – Also commonly known as outputs, these are measures of the products and services generated by program strategies and activities. Ask yourself: What does my program generate (e.g., publications, training materials), What levels of activity do we produce (e.g., the number of children served or products developed), and What will measure the quality of our services (e.g., parent and child satisfaction rates)? Measures of effort assess how much you did, but do little in terms of explaining how well you did it or how well your program ultimately worked for the target population with whom you are working. These are the easiest of all the evaluation measures to identify and track (e.g., number of children served in the OST program and participant demographics, number of classes/sessions/trainings held, etc.).

*Measures of effect* – These are changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviors in your target population. Ask yourself: How will I know that the children or families I work with in my OST program are better off? What changes do I expect to result from the strategies and activities my program provides? Remember that measures of effect reflect changes that your program acting alone expects to produce (e.g., increased social competence, higher self-esteem and confidence, improved study habits).


Performance Measures and Data Sources for Academic Outcomes

Evaluators use a broad range of performance measures to assess participants’ academic outcomes in OST programs. They range from grades to standardized testing to participants’ homework completion. The list below shows the broad range of possibilities for OST academic performance measures. Obviously a single program would not use all these measures and may develop some not on this list. Data sources for these performance measures include: parent, teacher, principal, OST staff, and participant interviews and surveys; school records; and standardized testing results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>Data Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to get along with others in school</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic knowledge in specific content areas</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance in general</td>
<td>Participant, parent, principal, program staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harvard Family Research Project · Harvard Graduate School of Education · 3 Garden Street · Cambridge, MA · 02138
Website: www.hfrp.org · Email: hfrp@gse.harvard.edu · Tel: 617-495-9108 · Fax: 617-495-8594
Attendance/absenteeism

Attitude toward school
Behavior in school

Communication skills in school
Cognitive improvement
College attendance
College preparation/plans/information
College retention/continuation
Comfort with taking tests
Disciplinary action/suspension/expulsion
Dropout
Effectiveness of school overall
Effort (including grades for effort)
English language development
Expectations of achievement and success
Family involvement in school events
General academic knowledge
Grade point average
Grade retention
Grades – overall
Grades in content areas (math, reading, etc.)
Grades in OST program academic courses
Help seeking
Homework performance
Intention to graduate
Intention to remain in school
Interest in recreational reading
Learning skills development
Liking school
Motivation to learn
Overall happiness in school
Perceived competence
Quality of schoolwork
Recreational reading
Safety – viewing school as a safe place
Scholastic achievement assessed by knowledge about specific subjects
Scholastic competence
School vandalism
Special education placement

Participant, school records, teacher, parent, principal
Participant
Principal, teacher, standardized behavior scales
Parent
Teacher
Participant youth survey, school records
Participant
Participant
Participant
School records
Participant
Principal
Participant
Participant, school records
Participant
Participant, teacher
Principal
Participant
School records
Participant, principal, school records
Participant, teacher
School records, parent
Participant
Participant
Participant, teacher, parent, principal
Participant
Participant
Program staff
Teacher
Participant, parent
Participant, principal
Parent
Participant
Parent
Participant
Parent, teacher
Standardized behavior scales
Participant
Principal
Principal

---

School behaviors included in the scales are: frustration, tolerance, distraction, ignoring teasing, nervousness, sadness, aggression, acting out, shyness, and anxiety.
Standardized test scores

SAT-9, PSAT, Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT-IV), Terra Nova Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics Computation Test, CTB/McGraw-Hill CAT-5 Math and Reading Comprehension Tests, Informal Reading Inventory, state assessments, school-wide assessments, program-specific tests

Study skills

Participant

Performance Measures and Data Sources for Positive Youth Development Outcomes

Many OST evaluations assess youth development outcomes, which are broadly defined as those outcomes that assess the social and emotional development of program participants. Outcomes that fall into this category range from standardized measures of self-esteem, participant behavior, and interpersonal skills to decision making and goal setting, leadership, and career development. The list below shows the broad range of possibilities for OST youth development performance measures. Obviously a single program would not use all these measures and may develop some not on this list. Like the data sources for academic performance measures, sources for youth development performance measures include: parent, teacher, principal, OST staff, and participant interviews and surveys; school records; and standardized assessments.

Data Sources for Youth Development Performance Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>Data Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult relationships</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of community resources</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking skills/financial skills</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior change toward new program component</td>
<td>Parent, participant, program staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td>Program staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural awareness</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression prevention</td>
<td>Parent, teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Assets(^8)</td>
<td>Participant youth survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to new activities</td>
<td>Program staff, principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facing issues outside of OST program</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with adults</td>
<td>Teacher, principal, program staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with other students in OST</td>
<td>Participant, parent, program staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with peers</td>
<td>Participant, program staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in nonacademic subjects (art, music, etc.)</td>
<td>Participant, program staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership development/opportunities</td>
<td>Participant youth survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life skills</td>
<td>Participant, standardized assessment, program staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to volunteer</td>
<td>Participant, program staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer relationships</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving skills</td>
<td>Standardized assessment, program staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive use of leisure time</td>
<td>Participant, program staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^8\) Search Institute 40 Developmental Assets. For more information on this assessment framework, see [www.search-institute.org/assets](http://www.search-institute.org/assets).
Professional/workforce skills and development  Participant
Respect for others  Participant
Self-confidence  Parent, provider, standardized tests, employer
Self-esteem  Participant youth survey, standardized assessment, teacher
Sense of belonging  Participant
Sense of community  Participant
Sense of safety  Participant
Social skills  Parent
Sources of support for youth  Participant

**Performance Measures and Data Sources for Prevention Outcomes**

Performance measures that fall into the prevention category include participants’ changes in sexual behavior, feelings of personal safety, changes in drug and alcohol use and abuse, and overall improvements in physical health. The list below shows the broad range of possibilities for OST prevention performance measures. Obviously a single program would not use all these measures and may develop some not on this list. Data sources for this information include: parent, participant, mentor, and teacher interviews and surveys and police reporting and records.

**Data Sources for Prevention Performance Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>Data Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>Participant, mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth control use</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime rate – youth perpetrators</td>
<td>Police records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime rate – youth victims</td>
<td>Police records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquency</td>
<td>Participant, mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquency – attitudes about it</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquent peer group membership</td>
<td>Participant, mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang membership</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Kept out of trouble”</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical fitness</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy and birth rates</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race relations</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Risk taking”</td>
<td>Parent, teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex – attitudes about it</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual behavior/initiation of intercourse</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual decision making</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual knowledge</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance use – attitudes about it</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance use decision-making skills</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance use/drug use/alcohol use</td>
<td>Participant, mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons possession/use</td>
<td>Participant, mentor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Which Performance Measures Are Best?**

There may never be a single set of performance measures that all OST programs can be held accountable for, but there are at least four important points that all OST programs must take into consideration when selecting performance measures for evaluation:
1. The range of performance measures currently used to assess program OST outcomes reflects the diversity of OST programming. The selection of which performance measures are best suited to any single program or initiative should be inextricably tied to the program’s goals, strategies, and activities. Being intentional about a theory of change—a way of articulating the program’s primary goals, strategies, and activities—can help to determine what measures to use to assess progress toward achieving program goals.

2. Performance measures are not the same as performance indicators. Indicators, such as “increasing the percentage of students graduating from high school,” are measures for which data exist that quantify and track community-wide progress toward results. They require community-wide effort to move and reflect substantial changes across a community. The selection of performance measures should reflect the context in which the OST program operates, recognizing the strengths and limitations of the program to affect overall change given that context. And they should contribute to understanding progress on the program’s performance indicators.

3. Availability of data sources is a consideration when selecting and developing performance measures. Many programs rely on parent, participant, and staff reporting as data sources, using program-generated surveys and questionnaires to collect data. This is a less costly option than using standardized academic and behavioral assessments that may require training to administer, but has less validity than standardized testing and assessment tools.

4. Performance measures should, in part, be selected because they will yield useful information for program improvement as well as to fulfill accountability requirements. A litmus test for a good evaluation, and consequently the list of performance measures selected, is to ask the question, “Will the information collected be useful to the program and its stakeholders?” The answer should be a resounding “yes.”

Priscilla Little, Project Manager; Erin Harris, Research Assistant; Suzanne Bouffard, HFRP Consultant

Acknowledgements
This Snapshot is based on a review of the Harvard Family Research Project Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database, which is supported by grants from the C. S. Mott Foundation and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. The principal investigator for this study is Dr. Heather B. Weiss. The authors wish to thank Julia Coffman and Sherri Lauver, HFRP Consultants, for their review.

Related Resources


Harvard Family Research Project Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database

The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database contains profiles of out-of-school time (OST) program evaluations. Its purpose is to provide accessible information about previous and current evaluations to support the development of high quality evaluations and programs in the OST field.

Types of Programs Included in the Database
Evaluations in the database meet the following three criteria:

1. The evaluated program or initiative operates during out-of-school time.
2. The evaluations aim to answer a specific evaluation question or set of questions about a specific program or initiative.
3. The evaluated program or initiative serves children between the ages of 5 and 19.

Types of Information Included in the Database
Each profile contains detailed information about the evaluations, as well as an overview of the OST program or initiative itself. Electronic links to actual evaluation reports, where available, are also provided, as are program and evaluation contacts.

How to Use the Database
The database is located in the OST section of the HFRP website at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html. The search mechanism allows users to refine their scan of the profiles to specific program and evaluation characteristics and findings information.

© 2004 President & Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced in any way without written permission from Harvard Family Research Project.

About Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP)
Founded in 1983 by Dr. Heather Weiss, HFRP conducts research about programs and policies that serve children and families throughout the United States. By publishing and disseminating its research widely, HFRP plays a vital role in examining and encouraging programs and policies that enable families and communities to help children reach their potential.