



# Making a Difference for Rural Youth: Evaluation Findings from a CYFAR After-School Program

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## DESCRIPTION of EVALUATION

Extant research has focused on out-of-school time among urban and suburban youth, yet there remains scant information on rural low-income youth and their families. This study examined the salience of after-school programs for rural youth. Based on reports from youth, their primary caregiver, and their after-school teacher, we assessed changes in behavior and skill acquisition among 47 youth attending after-school programs in two rural communities. Results indicate enhanced prosocial behaviors and competencies among the after-school participants, as well as fewer family conflicts and less caregiver stress about homework completion. Findings hold implications for future programming and policymaking.

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### EVALUATION

#### Research Questions (RQ)

##### RQ1: Caregiver Report

What were the caregivers' perceptions of the influence of the after-school program on their child's **behavior, peer relations, school performance and caregiver-child relations?**

##### RQ2: Teacher Report

How did youths' **behaviors and competencies** change over the school year?

##### RQ3: Youth Report

How were youth behaviors and competencies related to their perceptions of their **life skills and school connectedness?**

### PROCEDURE & MEASURES

#### Primary Caregivers:

- 17 caregivers completed telephone interviews
- **Measures:** Adapted Teacher-Child Rating Scale; Adapted Children's Report of Parent Behavior Inventory of Parent Influence (Campbell, 1996); Quality of School-Age Child Care Checklist (Oregon State University's Family Policy Program, 1997)

#### After-school Teachers:

- Completed pre- and post-test surveys about each child's progress
- **Measure:** Teacher-Child Rating Scale (Hightower et al., 1986)

#### After-School Youth:

- 47 youth completed pre- and post-test in-person semi-structured interviews; Interviews lasted 20 minutes; All youth received a small gift
- **Measures:** Life Skills Development Evaluation (Bailey & Deen, 2002); School Environment Scale (NLSY, 1988); Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (Schwartz & Mearns, 1989)

### Purpose

To examine how after-school programs can facilitate positive changes in at-risk youth and their families

#### CHARACTERISTICS of Youth & Primary Caregiver

##### Youth Characteristics (N=47 youth)

- Gender: Males 21 (45%)  
Females 26 (55%)
- Race: White 41 (87%)  
Nonwhite 6 (13%)
- Age:  $M=8.8$ ;  $SD=2.1$  (Range: 6-16 yrs)
- Grade: Range: 1-10 grade level

##### Caregiver Characteristics

- Rel to Child: Mother 41 (87%)  
Father 6 (13%)
- Marital Status: Married 33 (70%)  
Single 14 (30%)
- Education: HS/GED 14 (30%)  
Assoc/Tech 19 (40%)  
Bachelor's 8 (17%)  
Other 6 (13%)
- Employed (%yes): 44 (94%)
- Hrs worked/wk:  $M=39.4$ ;  $SD=11.0$  (Range: 0-70 hrs)

### RQ1 RESULTS: Caregiver Reports

#### How has the After-School Program (ASP) influenced your child's:

##### • ...Behavior?

Helped be more confident/outgoing; helped with homework/study skills; improved communication skills

"She is able to be more outgoing and sociable with kids her own age, and with older and younger kids"

##### • ...Peer relationships?

Facilitated more diversity in friends; encouraged respect and civility among peers (and adults)

"Being with more age groups has helped her learn to get along with others"

##### • ...School performance?

Improved grades and helped with homework completion

"He knows when to do his homework...doesn't hurry through it and knows he has to do it himself"

##### • ...Relationship with you (as primary caregiver)?

Homework help reduced caregiver stress

"ASP lessens the stress of having to get homework done...I don't have to worry...leaves more time for fun"

### RQ3 RESULTS: Youth Reports

Correlations between Teacher's Perception of Youth Problems/Competencies and Youth Reports of their Life Skills and School Connectedness

	1	2	3	4
1. Beh. Problems	--	-.93**	-.01	-.40*
2. Competencies		--	.02	.36*
3. Life Skills			--	.12
4. School Connectedness				--

\*\*p<.01. \*p<.05.

### FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS

**FINDING #1:** Parents shared positive views of the after-school program (ASP):

- ASP improved child behaviors/competencies
- ASP enhanced school performance and peer-child and caregiver-child relationships

**IMPLICATION #1:** ASP may play an important role in supporting caregiver function and promoting positive peer, school, and family relationships

**FINDING #2:** Youth exhibited significant gains in competencies and decreases in behavior problems during the school year (as reported by teachers)

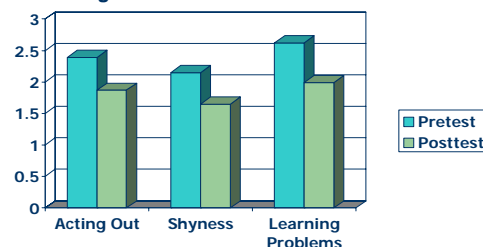
**IMPLICATION #2:** After-school programs likely facilitate positive youth development

**FINDING #3:** Youth who exhibited fewer behavior problems/greater competencies felt more connected to their school.

**IMPLICATION #3:** ASP may facilitate positive youth-school connections

### RQ2 RESULTS: Teacher Reports

#### Changes in Youth Behavior Problems



#### Changes in Youth Competencies

