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OCD | Developments

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Office of Child Development

After-School

Do After-School Programs Work? Studies Help Define Key Features

New research is providing fresh insights into just how important individual characteristics of after-school programs can be in deciding whether a program is able to offer children more than a safe haven for a few hours a day when school is out.

Concern over providing safe, developmentally-appropriate after-school programs has increased with the number of parents who find themselves at work when school is out. In Allegheny County, a 1999 University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development survey estimated that 14% of nearly 111,000 public and parochial school students were enrolled in structured nonschool-hour programs, but as many as 73,000 school-aged children needed nonschool-hour care.

Several studies have reported a link between children attending after-school programs and improved academic performance, better social skills, higher self-esteem, and other benefits. For example, in a study of 52,000 students in New York City after-school programs and 91,000 others who were not enrolled, students who attended after-school programs did better academically and had higher school attendance and graduation rates.

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IN THIS ISSUE

Applied Pysch

Taking Knowledge of Human Development From Concept To Neighborhood Practice

The University of Pittsburgh is quietly strengthening its capacity to advance knowledge of human development and its practical use in programs for children, youth, and families.

In the Department of Psychology in the School of Education, the Applied Developmental Psychology (ADP) program recently expanded its expertise with the addition of new faculty with wide-ranging research interests.

On a broader scale, efforts are underway to more effectively pool the talents and resources of the ADP program with those of the Department of Psychology's Developmental Program and the University's Office of Child Development (OCD). A key focus of this effort is to more fully develop the teaching and research dimensions of applied developmental issues in the University.

The idea is to build upon the university's strengths in developmental research; the design, implementation, and

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evaluation of effective community-based programs; and the education of the next generation of teachers, researchers, and practitioners in the field.

"Together, we have some of the strongest resources anywhere," said Carl N. Johnson, Ph.D., Chairman of the Department of Psychology in Education and Coordinator of the Applied Developmental Psychology Program. "What makes us unique is this effort to go from high-powered research on applied issues to effective practice."

Applied Developmental Psychology (ADP) is equally strong in education and applied research. New faculty broaden the scope of research with their expertise and interests in issues ranging from risk and resiliency to raising the aspirations and achievement of low-income children and children of color.

> "It is critical that you look at how your best ideas and research get translated in the real world," said Dr. Johnson. "What excites me is that we have the whole range of resources to do that."

In Education, ADP integrates what is known about child development with the skills and expertise necessary to develop, implement and evaluate real world programs for children, youth, and families. Its Masters program, for example, is unique in its emphasis on *theory-in-practice* aimed at applying research and theory to community-based services for children and their families.

The Department of Psychology's Developmental Program emphasizes education and research focused on key areas of development, including social development, cognitive development, language development, and social-cognitive development. In addition, the Department's joint Developmental-Clinical Program is a stellar doctoral program that trains clinicians with a developmental perspective.

The Developmental Program has a long tradition in applied research, including noted studies in child care, autism, and antisocial behavior. The recent addition of new faculty further strengthens the program, which is led by Susan B. Campbell, Ph.D., whose research interests include the effects of child care on children's development, the early emergence of behavior problems in young children, maternal depression, and child adjustment.

OCD, a program of the School of Education, works in partnership with faculty and the community to enhance the welfare of children, youth, and families. Under Co-Directors Christina J. Groark, Ph.D., and Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., the work of OCD has grown to include interdisciplinary education and training; interdisciplinary research and scholarship; human service demonstration programs, networking, and strategic planning; program monitoring and evaluation; and needs assessments and policy studies.

Efforts are underway to give OCD a stronger academic presence, particularly in terms of research and teaching.

Over the past 20 years, OCD has given the University a significant presence in the community, fostering important collaborations and playing a key role in the design and implementation of effective research-based programs and the development of practices and policies that address the well-being of children and families in western Pennsylvania and across the state. OCD, for example, helped to establish a consortium of 33 Allegheny County family support centers that today stands as a national model for family support programming. Other projects include operating one of the Early Head Start (EHS) programs in the national evaluation of EHS and managing the Early Childhood Initiative Demonstration Project, which has shown how high-quality early childhood services can improve the outcomes of low-income children.

"It is critical that you look at how your best ideas and research get translated in the real world," said Dr. Johnson. "What excites me is that we have the whole range of resources to do that."

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New Faculty Strengthen Research On Children and Family Issues

Recent faculty additions have broadened the research capacity of the Department of Psychology in Education's Applied Developmental Program and the Department of Psychology's Developmental Program.

Among the recent additions to the Applied Developmental Program is **Heather J. Bachman, Ph.D.**, who joined the program after completing postdoctoral training at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research. Dr. Bachman's research interests include cognitive and social competence in childhood and adolescence; risk and resilience, particularly in low-income and ethnic minority populations; and contexts of development, including families, schools, poverty, and social policy. Her recent work has examined reading and math proficiency among minority, urban, and low-income preschool children.

Eva Marie Shivers, J.D., Ph.D., earned her doctorate in Psychological Studies in Education at the University of California, Los Angeles, shortly before joining the Applied Developmental Program. Her research interests include child care policy, social and emotional development of low-income children of color, effective early education in low-income communities of color, and provider-child relationships in child care settings. Her recent work includes studying the experiences that African-American mothers have with high quality child care as they move from welfare to work; predicting attachment relationships in informal child care settings; and developing research partnerships with early care and learning programs serving low-income families of color.

Jane Pizzolato, Ph.D., joined the Applied Developmental Program last year after earning a doctorate in Educational Psychology, Learning and Development at Michigan State University. Her work is focused on improving the aspirations and achievements of students of color and students from low-income communities. Her research interests include achievement in students of color and students from low-income families, adolescent development, developmental outcome assessment, home-school partnerships, parent involvement, and retention and academic success of high-risk students.

In addition, **Steven Bagnato, Ed.D.**, while not new to Pitt, has now made the Department of Psychology in Education the focus of most of his work at the University. He serves as Faculty Director of Developmental Psychology Interdisciplinary Training at The UCLID Center. In 1996, Dr. Bagnato created Early Childhood Partnerships, an innovative university-hospital community collaborative devoted to community-based interagency consultation, mentoring, technical assistance, service, and applied research for children at developmental risk and to serving as a catalyst to unify the early care and education system. His research interests include developmentally-appropriate, curriculum-based assessment and program evaluation outcome methods in early childhood settings for children at developmental risk or with neurodevelopmental disabilities and neurobehavioral disorders.

The Department of Psychology's Developmental Program recently welcomed **JeeWon Cheong, Ph.D.** who came to the program from the State University of New York, Albany, where she was an assistant professor. She earned her doctorate in Social Psychology at Arizona State University. Dr. Cheong is also involved in the department's Clinical/Developmental Program. Her research interests include adolescent drug use and related problem behaviors, prevention of drug use, and evaluation of the effectiveness of prevention programs.

Another recent addition to the Developmental Program is **Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal, Ph.D.** She earned a doctorate in Human Development and Social Policy at Northwestern University and worked for the Children's Defense Fund before joining the Department of Psychology. Dr. Votruba-Drzal's research focuses on environmental origins of economic disparities in school readiness and early academic achievement, particularly on how social policies affect the lives of young children and families.

For more information on the School of Education's Applied Developmental Program, visit www.education.pitt.edu/pie/, and for the Department of Psychology's Developmental Program, visit www.psychology.pitt.edu/graduate/developmental/index.php.

Coming Events

2006 Family Support Conference Comes To Pittsburgh In May

The 13th Annual Family Support Conference, *Family Development: Forging a Path for Successful Growth*, will be held on May 31 at the Westin Convention Center Pittsburgh Hotel in Downtown Pittsburgh.

Keynote presenters this year include Michael Kerr, Director of the Bowen Center for the Study of Family at Georgetown University; Walter Howard Smith Jr., Executive Director of Family Resources, which serves more than 20,000 children, teens, and adults in Allegheny County with concerns related to preventing and treating child abuse and neglect; and Ayesha Grice, a writer, astrologer, and facilitator of workshops with relationships, healing, and empowerment themes. The conference also offers more than two dozen workshops on children and family issues.

The objectives of the conference are to:

- Understand and set personal and family goals.
- Understand and implement strength-based family growth.
- Understand and remove with families challenges to healthy growth and development.
- Support and strengthen the healthy growth of families through empowerment with families, caregivers and service providers.
- Develop successful mobilization of families and communities to enrich the lives of children, youth, and families through healthy growth of families.
- Identify and use both traditional and non-traditional successful models in working with families that leads to family healthy growth and development.

The conference is designed for parents, neighborhood leaders, family support participants, faith-based groups, community and economic development organizations, human service agencies, foundations, advocacy groups, child care practitioners, educators, counselors, mental health providers, social services workers, public agency staff, policymakers, and elected officials.

This year's conference is supported by Family Support America, PA Center for Schools and Communities, Allegheny County, City of Pittsburgh, and the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, visit: www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/training/FamilySupportConference2006.pdf.

OCD Evaluation Symposium Offered At Two Sites In 2006

The Office of Child Development's Division of Planning and Evaluation is offering its Evaluation Symposium for social, human service and community agencies. This year marks the third consecutive year the Division of Planning and Evaluation has organized the one-day event.

The upcoming symposium will be offered at sites in western and central Pennsylvania to better accommodate agencies and staff throughout the state.

The symposium offers participants an opportunity to learn about a wide range of evaluation topics and methodologies. In 2006, the Evaluation Symposium will include small group exercises that enable participants to apply new knowledge and skills and benefit from individual assistance from the presenters.

Symposium presenters have extensive expertise in program evaluation and have provided training and technical assistance to numerous agencies during the 13-year history of OCD's Division of Planning and Evaluation.

The 2006 Evaluation Symposium is being offered in May in the following areas:

- Western Pennsylvania - Cranberry, PA on May 3, 2006.
- Central Pennsylvania - Mechanicsburg, PA on May 17, 2006.

Additional information will be announced in the coming months.

To be added to the Symposium's distribution list, please contact Charlene Nelson at (412) 244-7553 or e-mail her at: ocdpep@pitt.edu.

University of Pittsburgh

OCD | Special Report

Pre-Kindergarten: Characteristics of Public Programs and Factors That Affect Classroom Quality

Interest in public kindergarten programs has surged in the past 10 years. Nearly all states now invest in public pre-kindergarten programs and that investment has reached historic levels. Until recently, however, little evidence was available to define program, teacher, and other key characteristics of public pre-kindergarten around the country and how certain program features relate to the quality of a child's classroom experience.

Recent research, using data gathered in the 2005 National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) Multi-State Pre-Kindergarten Study, shows how pre-kindergarten programs in six states address issues such as program intensity, location, staffing, and population served. Each of these features can affect costs and benefits. Research based on the NCEDL data also suggests how certain program, classroom, teacher, and child characteristics relate to quality.

The NCEDL study, the first major comprehensive study of pre-kindergarten across several states, collected data from 240 programs in Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, California, and New York. Each state has well-established, large-scale, public pre-kindergarten initiatives.

Pennsylvania only recently joined the list of states that offer funding for public pre-kindergarten. The Education Accountability Block Grant, begun in fiscal 2004-2005, offers grants to the 501 public school districts in the state to support research-based programs designed to boost student achievement, including pre-kindergarten. Last year, schools invested most of the $200 million allocation on early childhood education, spending more than $2 of every $3 to support kindergarten, pre-kindergarten, and smaller class sizes in grades K-third. Most invested in full-day kindergarten. Only 40 districts invested in quality pre-kindergarten programs.[1] Gov. Edward G. Rendell, in his 2006-2007 budget, proposes a 5% increase in the block grants, which would raise the total available to public schools to $250 million.

As pre-kindergarten programs grow in Pennsylvania and across the nation, important policy decisions are being made that influence their implementation and outcomes. The recent studies offer a deeper understanding of the implications of program location, length, teacher education, and other key characteristics of these programs.

Characteristics of Pre-Kindergarten Programs

Investment in public pre-kindergarten has increased dramatically in the United States. State funding to support pre-kindergarten programs rose from $200 million in 1988[2] to $2.54 billion by 2003.[3]

Several factors have contributed to the heightened interest in pre-kindergarten, including a greater awareness of the importance of children entering school ready to learn, a rise in the number of mothers in the workforce, research that underscores the role an enriching environment plays in early brain development, and landmark studies, such as the Carolina Abecedarian Study and the Perry Preschool/High Scope Study, which provide convincing evidence that quality early childhood programs benefit the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children.

Despite the unprecedented surge in interest, few states serve more than 20% of their four-year-olds. Although most states provide funding for pre-kindergarten, many of their initiatives are still in the early stages of development.

As might be expected, state-funded pre-kindergarten programs across the nation vary in design, organization, and

staffing. These programs typically serve one of two populations: a specific targeted population, usually children at risk of school problems, or a universal population. Most state-fund pre-kindergarten programs target children at risk for academic problems.

Recent studies drawn from the NCEDL data examined center-based pre-kindergarten programs for 3- and 4-year-olds that were fully or partially funded by state education agencies and were operated in schools or in the community under the direction of state and local education agencies. These included Head Start programs only if the public school district was the grantee or delegate. Programs in four of the six states were targeted toward children considered at risk for academic problems. These children typically entered the program having scored below age norms on the Peabody Picture Test, Oral & Written Language Scale, and Woodcock-Johnson III tests. Overall, the teacher:child ratio was reportedly good. The average enrollment was less than 18 children in a class with about eight children enrolled per adult in the classroom.

The studies identify three structural features that may be critical to the implementation and outcomes: location of the program, length of the school day, and the education of teachers.

Location

Whether to house pre-kindergarten programs in public schools, community centers, or a combination of both is a basic decision when implementing state-funded programs. A major policy question is whether pre-kindergarten programs operated in the public school differ from programs in other settings.

In studies based on the NCEDL data, 47% of the programs in the six states were located in public schools buildings.

Program location was related to key differences in the characteristics of teachers. About 81% of the pre-kindergarten teachers in public schools held a bachelor's degree or higher and only 8% had not earned a college degree. Among pre-kindergarten teachers in non-public school settings, 57% had a bachelor's degree or higher and 24% had no college degree. Teachers in public school settings were paid significantly more than those who taught pre-kindergarten in non-public school programs.

Nevertheless, the location of the program was not found to be related to the characteristics of the children served or classrooms. In addition, no differences in child assessment scores or teacher-reported curriculum were associated with where programs were located.

Program Length

Little research is available to allow comparisons between full-day and part-day preschool. However, studies of the length of kindergarten programs suggest that the length of day matters. For example, children in full-day kindergarten, when compared to peers in part-day programs, are more likely to be offered a richer menu of activities, including dramatic play, science, art, music, and social studies.[4]

In studies based on the NCEDL data, more than half of the public pre-kindergarten programs in the six states were open for fewer than 15 hours a week. A full-day program was defined as one that served children 20 or more hours a week. About 61% of the programs operated five days a week with the others open four or fewer days a week.

Differences were noted in curriculum and the populations of children served. Full-day teachers were more likely to report using High/Scope curricula than part-day teachers, who were more likely to use state- or locally-developed curricula or, in a case of 7% of part-day programs, no curriculum at all. Full-day programs also served a higher proportion of children from low-income backgrounds and African-American children.

Teacher Characteristics

The education level required to teach pre-kindergarten varies widely from state to state with minimum requirements ranging from a child development associate certificate to an associate's degree or bachelor's degree. Some states demand that the 2- or 4-year degree be in early childhood education or child development.

In studies based on the NCEDL data, 70% of the lead teachers of the programs in the six states had at least a bachelor's degree and nearly 30% had earned a master's degree. On the other hand, 16% had no formal degree past high school. The studies noted that, overall, pre-kindergarten teachers with bachelor's degree or higher is becoming the norm.

Significant differences were found between public pre-kindergarten classrooms taught by teachers with and without bachelor's degrees. Teachers who did not have a bachelor's degree were teaching significantly more children – and a higher proportion of children – from low-income backgrounds than teachers who held bachelor's degrees. Those with bachelor's degrees were more likely to teach children who entered the pre-kindergarten program with higher skills, such as children with higher tests scores for receptive vocabulary and expressive vocabulary. In other words, children most in need of high-quality early learning experiences were more likely to be taught by the teachers with lower qualifications.

Program Characteristics And Classroom Quality

Nearly all of the state legislation supporting public pre-kindergarten programs emphasizes the implementation of pro-

grams of high quality to ensure that children are well prepared to enter school. What predicts quality child care and quality learning in early elementary school grades is well documented.[5, 6, 7] Unfortunately, few large scale studies specific to public pre-kindergarten have examined which characteristics predict the classroom quality of these programs.

Recent research drawn from the NCEDL study data examines the extent to which program, teacher, child, and classroom characteristics of pre-kindergarten programs in six states predict the observed quality and teacher-child interactions. Certain features of the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and the Emerging Academics Snapshot were used to measure the warmth and appropriateness of teacher-child interactions, quality of language interactions, emotional and instructional climate of the classroom, quality of instruction, and other factors.

Researchers reported that differences in state policies and regulations appeared to account for many of the differences in the quality of the pre-kindergarten experience offered by the programs studied. Other studies that have examined the impact of state-level factors on programs for young children suggest that what affects quality the most is the extent to which regulations, such as those that set teacher-child ratios or minimum teacher credentials, are enforced by the state and the extent to which professional development support is provided to help programs meet those regulations.[8]

Certain characteristics of public pre-kindergarten programs were found to significantly relate to quality, while others were reported to have little impact.

Location of the program, child-staff ratios, and the length of day were found to have little or no affect on the quality indictors used by researchers. Child-staff ratios, however, were fairly consistent across the programs studied and were low, on average.

The quality of the pre-kindergarten experiences was found to be more influenced by the characteristics of the teachers and children in the program.

Poverty and Program Quality

Studies in elementary schools have reported that the characteristics of children, particularly poverty, can affect program quality and teacher behavior. More specifically, teachers tend to be less sensitive and instructional quality lower in classrooms with a high concentration of children who live in poverty.[9, 10]

Similarly, in the study of pre-kindergarten quality that was drawn from the NCEDL data, the quality of public pre-kindergarten programs – as measured by ECERS-R and CLASS – was typically found to be lower when a majority of the children were from families whose incomes fell below the poverty line. Researchers, in noting that further study is necessary to more fully understand the relationship between quality and poverty, suggest that the teachers and staff, training and other resources available to offset the effects of poverty may be insufficient.

Teacher Attributes Matter

Classroom quality was also found to be related to the characteristics of pre-kindergarten teachers, particularly to their level of education.

A fairly substantial number of pre-kindergarten teachers in programs funded by the six states studied had bachelor's degrees, but no early childhood training. The study found several quality indicators were higher when teachers had some level of specialized training in early childhood.

Researchers, for example, reported that teachers with a four-year degree and a teaching certificate in early childhood were rated on the ECERS-R as creating a more positive emotional climate and providing more activities than were teachers who had no formal training in early childhood. Although the effects were small, the observations suggest that specialized training may be needed in addition to a bachelor's degree for a teacher to be more effective.

Other teacher characteristics found to relate to pre-kindergarten classroom quality included the teacher's attitudes and beliefs about interactions with children. These were measured with a questionnaire that discriminates between traditional or relatively adult-centered perspectives on interactions with children and more modern or progressive child-centered perspectives. Teachers with traditional or adult-centered perspectives were rated significantly lower on CLASS instructional and ECERS-R interaction scores.

Research specific to public pre-kindergarten is still developing. However, studies based on the NCEDL data offer states fresh insight into the key characteristics found among some of the longest-running programs in the country and how teacher, classroom, and child attributes affect the quality of these programs that seek to prepare young children for school.

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This Special Report is based on the above-referenced publications. It is not intended to be an original work but a summary for the convenience of our readers. References noted in the text follow:

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Announcements. . .

Free Background Reports Cover Children's Issues

The University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development offers a recently-updated series of free background reports providing concise overviews of current topics important to children and families.

New topics in the series, *Children, Youth & Family Background*, include childhood obesity, foster care, early literacy, parent-teen relationships, and the trend among nonprofit agencies to help support their missions by starting money-generating social enterprises.

The reports, originally produced to keep journalists and policymakers up to date on children's issues, are available free of charge to anyone interested in learning about the latest developments in areas ranging from education and child development to child welfare and juvenile crime. These reports are written, edited, and reviewed by the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

All *Children, Youth & Family Background* reports are posted on the OCD website as portable document files (.pdf) for viewing and downloading at the following address: http://www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family/backgrounders.asp.

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But last year, a study of federally-funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers warned that the benefits of after-school programs might be less than what parents assume, particularly when it comes to academic performance.

The study, conducted by New Jersey-based Mathematica Policy Research, found little difference in the academic performance of elementary and middle school students who were enrolled in the after-school programs and the performance of students who were not enrolled. The study also noted that students in the after-school program were more likely to behave badly in school.

The contrasting findings of these studies suggest not all after-school programs are similarly effective, and parents and other stakeholders should be skeptical of claims that portray after-school programs as a panacea for the problems besetting today's children.

At the same time, these and other studies point out program characteristics that they might look for when trying to decide whether a program is able to realize its potential and help children improve their academic and social skills while feeling safe and secure during after-school hours.

New Studies, Lingering Debate

After- and before-school programs have gained considerable attention because parents, educators, and policy makers have searched for ways to improve children's academic and social outcomes and children need a safe haven during off-school hours, when an increasing number of parents are at work.

Significant public dollars, in turn, have been spent toward providing academic, enrichment, and recreational activities in public schools during after-school hours. For example, after the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program was refocused on providing such after-school activities in 1998, funding increased from $40 million to $1 billion a year.

Despite more than a decade of growing interest, few after-school programs have been rigorously evaluated. The conflicting research results will likely prolong debate over whether available research evidence supports increased investment in after-school programs.

The Mathematica study involved about 3,000 elementary and middle school students in 87 after-school programs nationwide and more than 3,500 students not enrolled in the programs. Generally, the programs had no impact on reading test scores or grades. Elementary school students in the programs who had low grades at the beginning of the two-year study showed a small improvement in English grades, about two percentage points on a 100-point scale. Middle school students in the programs had lower rates of absenteeism than those in the comparison group.

The study also found the programs had no impact on students receiving homework help or on the number of students who completed their homework. Help with homework was the most common academic activity offered by the after-school programs. Similarly, most outcomes related to personal and social development showed no difference. Middle school students were more likely than the comparison group to say they expected to graduate from college. However, the difference was small, only about two percentage points.

Poor behavior was more likely among students in the after-school programs. The study reported that the school district contacted parents of 28% of the program students over behavior issues, compared to 23% of those not in the program. About 12% of program students were suspended compared to 8% of students in the control group. The program also had no impact on parent involvement, including attendance at after-school events and parent-teacher organization meetings and in the number of parents who volunteered at school.

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers did clearly meet an important fundamental need – elementary students were more likely to feel safe. Most said they felt "very safe," the highest of three categories. Only 2.5% reported feeling "not safe at all," compared to 7% of the children in the control group.

Of course, children were not randomly assigned to programs or controls, so it is possible that parents of lower performing and more troublesome behaving children chose to put them in the programs.

In contrast to the Mathematica study, a report by The After-School Corporation (TASC) paints a rosier picture of the benefits for some 52,000 pre-kindergarten-to-high school students, who attended 96 after-school programs in New York City. The 2004 evaluation compared students enrolled in after-school programs with 91,000 students who were not enrolled.

Elementary and middle school students in after-school programs made more progress in math than students who were not enrolled, with those who stayed in after-school programs for the full two years of the study realizing the greatest

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gains. No differences were reported in English and reading measures.

Academic outcomes reported in the TASC study suggest the after-school programs were particularly beneficial to low-income students, African-American and Hispanic students, and students with special needs. African-American and Hispanic students, for example, showed the greatest academic gains over nonparticipants.

Students in pre-kindergarten through the eighth grade who were enrolled in after-school programs attended school more frequently than nonparticipants. High school students in the programs generally performed better in Regents tests than nonparticipants, and they earned more credits toward graduation. School officials said they felt the after-school programs also improved student attitudes toward school.

Program Traits Important

Despite the contrasting outcomes, the recent studies contribute to a growing body of evidence that is helping to identify important traits among after-school programs.

One of the important differences among the students in the TASC and Mathematica studies was program attendance. In the TASC study, 71% of pre-kindergarten and elementary school students attended after-school programs at least 60 days per school year and an average of three days per week. In the Mathematica study, elementary school students attended after-school programs an average 49 days per school year in the first year of the study and 32 in the second. More consistent exposure to the program than 32-49 days per year may be necessary to produce benefits.

Several studies have identified program characteristics associated with improved outcomes, according to a Rand Corporation report. These include a clear mission, high expectations, a supportive emotional climate, appropriate content relative to the children's needs, integrated family and community partners, and a trained staff that remains with the program.

"This is my bias, but I think it is very important to have people who are developmentally-oriented, who really understand how to have good, exciting, developmentally-appropriate programs for kids," said Carl Johnson, Ph.D., Chairman of the University of Pittsburgh Department of Psychology in Education.

Staffing was identified as an important factor in both the Mathematica and TASC studies.

In the Mathematica study, researchers noted that homework help was passive, more like a study hall than a tutoring session, and academic activities were poorly linked to school curriculum. Coordination with school-day curriculum was better when regular schoolteachers were on staff, but that was rare. Outside staff, which was the norm, tended to focus more on noncognitive activities. In addition, turnover was high – nearly two thirds of program staff left after the first year.

In the TASC study, 86% of the after-school program managers held a bachelor's degree and 40% had earned a master's degree. Almost half of front-line staff had at least a two-year college degree. Among staff, 95% reported they were "highly satisfied" with the job. In addition, 86% of school principals said after-school programs were well coordinated with school curriculum and that programs sought input from the schools on gaps in students' skill that might be addressed in after-school activities.

The type and quality of the activities are also important. Although programs vary in content, the good ones tend to offer age- and developmentally-appropriate activities in an environment that is more relaxed than the classroom setting students spend their school days in. At the same time, they should offer more than entertainment.

In the Mathematica study, program directors felt they needed to provide fun activities to attract students and struggled to balance those with academic activities, which they viewed as less attractive to children. In the better-attended after-school programs examined in the TASC study, more than three-quarters of the projects engaged students in group activities that involved discussion and group problem-solving and research. Nearly all resulted in a final performance, such as a speech, a play, or some other kind of artistic event. Students were also involved in writing stories and producing newspapers.

Other important traits may be more subtle. How the

(**After-School** *continued on Page 11)*

Notice to *Developments* Subscribers

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(*After-School* continued from page 10)

program is perceived by staff and students is important. So is allowing students a degree of autonomy, particularly older ones. Do they have a voice in making some decisions? Are they actively engaged in the program? Do they enjoy being there?

"I would look for a program that really gets kids engaged and provides opportunities for individual differences," Dr. Johnson said. "It's very important not to present the program as something for losers or something where kids go because they are not doing well in school. In the programs I've seen that work, the students really want to be there because it is an exciting place to be and an exciting thing to do."

***For more information**, visit:* www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/pdfs/21stfinal.pdf; and www.tascorp.org/publications/catalog/qseas/Binder1.pdf.

Announcements . . .

Parenting Guide Series Available From OCD

The University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development is offering a series of easy-to-use parenting guides offering information and advice on 50 parenting topics. These guides are available free of charge to parents and organizations, agencies and professionals who work with children and families.

The You & Your Child parenting guide series, written and edited by the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, covers topics ranging from how to deal with children's fears, finicky eating habits, and aggressive behavior to getting a child ready to read, setting rules, and coping with grief.

Each guide is based on current parenting literature and has been reviewed by a panel of child development experts and practitioners. The series is made possible by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

To receive a printed set of all 50 guides by mail, send a request along with your name, organization, mailing address and telephone number to:

Parenting Guides
University of Pittsburgh
Office of Child Development
400 North Lexington Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15208.

The You & Your Child parenting guides are also available on the OCD website as portable document files at: www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family/parentingguides.asp.

Free OCD Parenting Columns Well Suited For Newsletters

Dispensing parenting advice, long the domain of grandmothers and other family relations, is drawing more attention from policymakers and others looking for ways to strengthen families and communities – and for good reason. Studies show effective parenting improves a child's chances of healthy development.

Sound parenting advice on more than 50 topics is now available free of charge in a series columns written by Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and former columnist for *Parents* magazine.

The columns, well-suited for newsletters and community newspapers, provide clear, concise and accurate information on topics such as dealing with a child's lying, how to toilet train, what to do about nightmares, discipline and finicky eaters, and how to recognize and address grief in children.

OCD offers the columns free of charge as Microsoft Word documents. All columns are available on OCD website at: www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/family/parentingcolumns.asp

The public service initiative is made possible by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education, whose contributions support production of the columns and other Office of Child Development projects.

Announcements. . .

Free Training Helps Men Become Better Fathers

It has long recognized that men need to be more than a footnote in the lives of their children. Now, the tools they need to fulfill that role and do it well are provided through a nine-session fathers training curriculum that is available free to nonprofit organizations.

The comprehensive fathers training curriculum was developed and successfully field tested by the Fathers Collaborative, a nonprofit partnership of Goodwill Industries, the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, and the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development. The project was made possible by support from the Children's Trust Fund of Pennsylvania and the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

The curriculum gives men the essentials they need to become responsible, effective, caring fathers, including an understanding of key child development stages and issues, how to build relationships with their children, how to work with the child's mother for the benefit of the child, and advice on a range of parenting topics such as age-appropriate play, discipline, and safety.

Included is a 135-page guidebook written specifically for fathers as an easy-to-read reference to all of the information covered in the curriculum. Fathers who complete the training receive the guidebook, a letter of attendance, and a certificate.

The curriculum was developed with the help of an advisory committee that included fathers, professionals who work with non-custodial fathers, mothers, and academics. Over the past year, the training has proved successful when tested on a range of fathers and in a number of settings, including the Allegheny County jail, local churches, and family support centers.

The training and accompanying materials are available free-of-charge to nonprofit organizations interested in working with fathers to improve their parenting skills, understanding of childhood issues, and their relationships with their children.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact Kathryn Rudy, Director of the Division of Community and Internal Services, University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, at (412) 244-5358.

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