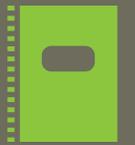




AFTER-SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Evaluation





**THE COLORADO TRUST IS DEDICATED TO ADVANCING THE HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING OF THE PEOPLE OF COLORADO.**

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AFTER-SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Evaluation



Prepared By

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The Colorado Trust appreciates the many contributions to its After-School Initiative, the evaluation and the preparation of this report.

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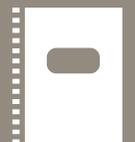
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*This report was edited by Judy Gordon
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TO OUR READERS

We are pleased to present the evaluation findings of The Colorado Trust's five-year, \$11 million After-School Initiative. This effort provided support to over 30 after-school providers across Colorado, and served more than 12,000 diverse young people.

When this initiative first began, in 2000, the focus on student academic achievement had begun to intensify with statewide performance testing, the federal No Child Left Behind Act and other such policies. Recognizing that accessible, after-school programming is one way to support student academic achievement, The Trust's After-School Initiative also provided a strong focus on the overall positive development of youth.

The independent evaluation of the After-School Initiative was conducted by the National Research Center (NRC). The evaluation findings show that youth reported improvements in their positive life choices, sense of self, core values, cultural competency, life skills, community involvement and academic success as a result of participating in the after-school programs. Intensive technical assistance and networking helped grantees to develop strong partnerships and programs, and The After-School Initiative Toolkit for Evaluating Positive Youth Development (available at www.coloradotrust.org) provided grantees and other after-school providers with a tailored instrument for measuring the effectiveness of their programs. This initiative, in part, also led to the development of the Colorado AfterSchool Network, a statewide network that provides ongoing support for after-school programs.

The Colorado Trust has a long-standing commitment to supporting positive youth development efforts. In addition to the After-School Initiative, The Trust has committed more than \$44 million over the last decade to such initiatives as the Safe2Tell Hotline, Safe Communities~Safe Schools, Preventing Youth Handgun Violence, Assets for Colorado Youth and the recently-begun Bullying Prevention Initiative.

We hope this report will help to inform the field of positive youth development and serve to strengthen the lives of Colorado's young people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John R. Moran, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

John R. Moran, Jr.
President & CEO



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CHAPTER

1

Introduction

Background on After-School Care

Although after-school programs for children and youth have been around for many years, and a recent proliferation of after-school programs across the country has provided after-school care to millions of students, many children still return to an empty home after school. An estimated 6.5 million students participate in after-school programs; however, the parents of another 15.3 million children reported an unmet need for after-school programming for their children.¹

These numbers, in fact, represent an increased demand for after-school programs. The increase was spurred by a variety of factors including changes in the family structure, changes in the community and a shift toward positive youth development²:

- » Decades ago, most traditional nuclear families were comprised of one wage earner. Families are now overwhelmingly comprised of two wage earners, leaving no parent to take care of the children after school.
- » The number of single-parent families has increased over the years. Many of these families struggle to provide adequate supervision for their children.

- » Communities once consisted of neighbors who were more willing and able collectively to care for their youth, but now there are few adults available and willing to watch youth during the day. The result often is a decrease in assistance to families from neighbors and friends.
- » The field of youth development recently experienced a shift away from a focus on identifying and reducing risks to a focus on identifying and building upon strengths.

This last point, the increased focus on the strengths of youth, occurred at a time when experts in the field of youth development acknowledged that adolescents face increasing demands as they reach adulthood. It is not enough for youth to be problem-free, it is also important for them to be fully prepared to be contributing members of society.³ That is, youth needed to acquire the competencies necessary to move successfully through the developmental stages of life.⁴

One set of competencies was articulated by Learner, Fisher and Weinberg⁵:

- 1 Competence in academic, social and vocational areas
- 2 Confidence or a positive self-identity

- 3 Connections to community, family and peers
- 4 Character or positive values, integrity and moral commitment
- 5 Caring and compassion.

Social programs can be designed to improve these competencies. Grantees under The Colorado Trust's After-School Initiative focused on many of these same competencies.

The increased demand in after-school programs has led to an increase in the need for accountability⁶ as well as a desire to understand what works to increase academic achievements, decrease delinquency and increase positive youth development.⁷ As a result, more and more programs have conducted evaluations.

The following review of the literature includes promising results for the after-school field, but the results provide only modest answers to the question of what works. More research is needed to yield conclusive answers about the effectiveness of after-school programs.

need to navigate through life^{6, 8-15} as well as to stay out of trouble.^{6, 10, 12, 13} As shown in Table 1, the research indicated modest improvements in youths' academic achievement, life skills, pro-social behavior, and psychological and social development. These results were gleaned from recent meta-analyses of after-school programs, major studies of after-school programming and well-known resources in the field, particularly the Harvard Family Research Project and Afterschool Alliance.

It is important to note that while the results shown in Table 1 were promising, results from other evaluations have shown no improvement in many youth outcomes such as standardized academic scores, self-concept, mathematics, grades,⁶ reading test scores, homework completion, safety and behavior, and negligible impact on developmental outcomes.¹⁵ In one instance, results even showed an increase in negative attitudes toward schools.⁶

Further, many of these evaluations continue to be limited methodologically because of the realities of everyday programming. For example, some of the studies using quasi-experimental designs were limited by voluntary participation (selection bias) making it difficult to attribute changes in youth to the program when the changes could be due to differences between the intervention groups and comparison groups. Additionally, in some evaluations the small sample sizes may not have allowed enough statistical power to detect a difference in outcomes. Still other evaluations were written with findings that were overly enthusiastic because authors were eager to find something that works, so even the most meager study passed as promising.⁷

Consequently, there are no conclusive answers about the effectiveness of after-school programs.^{7, 12, 14} Despite these limitations of research, some rigorous evaluations are currently underway that will expand our knowledge base and add to the current promising results of after-school programs.¹⁶

The evaluation demonstrated clearly that youth participants believed that the time they spent in these after-school programs was not just fun, but transforming.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING AND EVALUATION:

Youth Outcomes

Research and evaluations of after-school programs have increased in both number and rigor in recent years. They have indicated that after-school programs can influence the developmental competencies youth

TABLE 1. FAVORABLE RESULTS FROM AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

Outcomes	Positive Results
Academic Achievement	<p>Better attitudes toward school² Higher educational aspirations^{10, 12} Higher school attendance^{2, 7, 10, 12, 15} Less tardiness¹⁵ Better achievement test scores^{2, 7, 10, 12} Increased homework completion⁷ Better grades^{2, 7, 10} Increased reading/level^{7, 12, 34} Increased math scores/grades^{2, 7, 15, 34} Increased language tests⁷ Increased engagement in learning^{11, 13} Increased educational equality¹¹ Increased engagement in reading² Increased use of verbal skills² Improved academic achievement¹³</p>
Life Skills	<p>Improved social skills^{7, 10} Improved communication skills¹⁰ Improved relationships with peers, parent and/or teachers^{10, 12, 13} Increased skills for coping with peer pressure¹⁰ Increased life skills^{11, 12} Improved race relations⁷ Improved positive youth development⁷ Improved interpersonal skills¹³ Improved problem solving¹³</p>
Prosocial Behavior	<p>Less disciplinary action in school^{10, 13} Decreased behavioral problems^{10, 13} Decreased participation in aggressive activities^{12, 13} Increased community involvement¹⁰ Avoidance of drug and alcohol use^{10, 12, 13} Lower rates of substance abuse⁷ Decreased delinquency and violent behaviors^{10, 12, 13} Improved truancy¹³ Less involvement in serious criminal offenses⁷ More behavioral control^{17, 13} Increased knowledge of safe sex and avoidance of sexual activity and pregnancy¹⁰ Decrease in high-risk sexual behavior¹³ Less smoking¹³</p>
Psychological/Social Development	<p>Broadened world view¹⁰ Increased self-confidence/self-esteem^{7, 10, 12} Self-efficacy^{12, 13} Increased social and emotional development</p>

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING AND EVALUATION:

Program Quality and Standards

A number of research and evaluation studies also have been conducted to identify the program features or practices that enhance youth outcomes. The National School Aged Childcare Alliance¹⁷ provides a comprehensive set of standards for implementing quality programs for elementary school students. Their 40 research-based standards fall into five categories: human relationships; programming; environment; partnerships with young people, families, schools and communities; and staff and administration. Additionally, the set of standards promoted by the Search Institute¹⁸ includes: support; empowerment; boundaries and expectations; and constructive use of time. Through a meta-analysis of the literature on after-school care, RAND¹⁹ associates identified 18 practices that have emerged as characteristics of high-quality after-school programs or with positive outcomes for children. These include:

Staff Management Practices

- » Training staff
- » Hiring and retaining educated staff
- » Providing attractive compensation

Program Management Practices

- » Providing a sufficient variety of activities
- » Ensuring that programming was flexible
- » Establishing and maintaining a favorable emotional climate
- » Maintaining a low child-to-staff ratio
- » Keeping total enrollment low
- » Having a mix of younger and older children
- » Providing age-appropriate activities and materials
- » Providing adequate space

- » Maintaining continuity with regular day school
- » Establishing clear goals and program evaluation
- » Providing enough quality materials
- » Paying adequate attention to safety and health

Community Contacts

- » Involving families
- » Using volunteers
- » Using community-based organizations and facilities

Further, the National Youth Development Information Center²⁰ suggests the following components for creating successful out-of-school-time programs:

- » A comprehensive strategy with clear mission and goals
- » Committed, caring, professional leadership
- » Youth-centered activities in youth-accessible facilities
- » Culturally competent and diverse programs
- » Youth ownership and involvement
- » A positive focus including all youth.

Programmatic elements associated with positive youth outcomes cover a wide range of activities, some of which match those included in this evaluation. These research and evaluation findings on after-school programs suggest that the field continues to expand its knowledge base about factors that appear to be working to increase developmental competencies among youth as well as what practices seem to be correlated with these successful outcomes. The Colorado Trust's After-School Initiative adds to this body of knowledge by exploring the developmental outcomes observed by youth participants and how these outcomes correlate with program elements.

The Colorado Trust's After-School Initiative

Overview

The Colorado Trust is a grantmaking foundation dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of the people of Colorado. Established in 1985 and endowed with the proceeds of the sale of PSL Health-care Corporation, The Colorado Trust manages its grantmaking through initiatives. This grantmaking style blends together several elements — researching and understanding the needs of the people of Colorado, creating a strategy to meet those needs, making grants, evaluating effectiveness or impact and strategically communicating lessons learned — to bring about defined changes or improvements. The Trust develops grantmaking initiatives that advance accessible and affordable health care and provide resources to strengthen families.

The Trust's five-year (2000–2005), \$11 million After-School Initiative (ASI) served children between fourth and ninth grades. Initially, 37 grantees across Colorado were selected to participate in the initiative (30 grantees participated in the complete evaluation). All of the programs promoted positive youth development within the context of their youth programming. The Trust's After-School Initiative was designed to ensure grantees maximum opportunities for programmatic success.²¹ National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) was selected to conduct the evaluation.

An initiative management team provided direction, focus and general oversight of the initiative. This partnership team, made up of three Regional Coordinating Agencies (RCAs), NRC and The Colorado Trust, were in regular communication with each other about the initiative process.

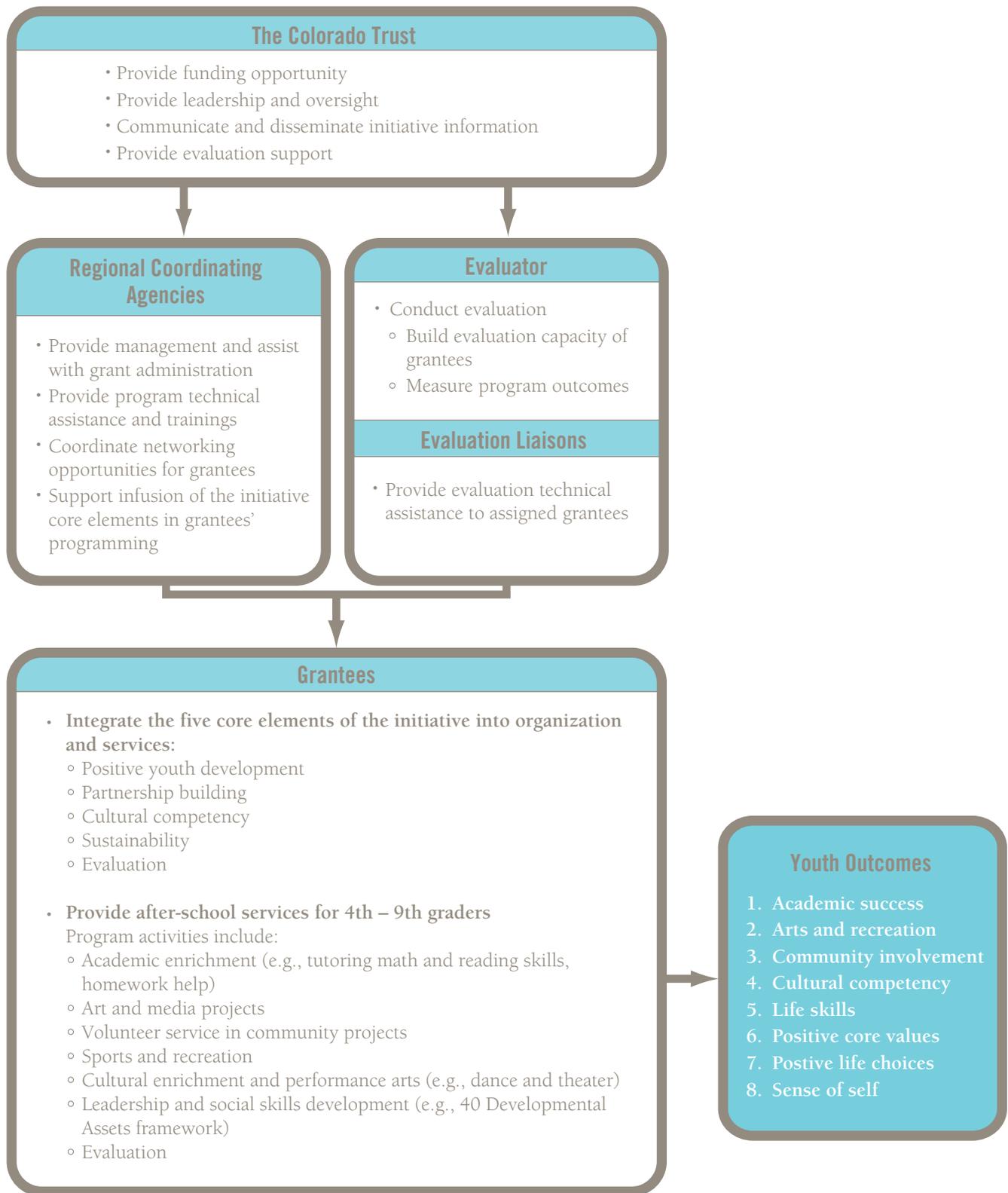
Geographically, the state was divided into three regions encompassing 20 of the 64 counties. Each RCA was responsible for providing comprehensive

programmatic training and technical assistance to the grantees within its region.

- » The RCAs, in partnership with after-school program staff, conducted organizational and program assessments with each grantee to determine the level, extent and depth of their programmatic technical assistance needs.
- » The RCAs were charged with building the capacity of programs to deliver high-quality services and promote the practical application of strength-based activities (i.e., after-school activities that focused on what is “right” about youth rather than negative factors).
- » The RCAs assisted program staff to integrate initiative activities (called core elements) into program curriculum and to ensure that each of the initiative core elements was effectively integrated into the philosophy and practice of each program.
- » Each RCA provided written and verbal reports to The Trust at monthly partnership update meetings. These meetings provided opportunities for initiative staff — from the RCAs and The Trust — to share aspects of their work that created challenges and fostered successes.²¹

NRC participated in partnership meetings to provide updates and to discuss evaluation technical assistance with grantees as well as data collection, evaluation analysis, site visits and interpretation of results. Figure 1 depicts the structure of the After-School Initiative and summarizes the roles of the stakeholders: the grantees, RCAs, NRC and The Colorado Trust. The diagram also shows the hypothesized relationships between core elements and youth outcomes. The Trust believed that the integration of the core elements by grantees into their after-school programs would lead to better youth outcomes. The youth outcomes (listed on the right side of the diagram) and their correlation with three of the core elements — positive youth development, partnerships and cultural competency — were measured in the evaluation.²¹

FIGURE 1. STRUCTURE OF THE AFTER-SCHOOL INITIATIVE



Range of Programs

The 30 after-school grantees offered 50 programs located in schools, churches, city recreation departments, nonprofit organizations and youth-serving agencies throughout the state (see Figure 2). Geographically, these programs spanned nearly all areas of Colorado and included rural, urban and suburban communities. Although the primary focus of program curriculum was to encourage positive youth development, the scope of program services ranged from social and recreational skill building, such as leadership development, to mentoring and outdoor sports activities. Other activities included academic support to improve reading, math, science, writing and computer technology skills. Many of the programs integrated various cultural activities including arts and crafts, storytelling, folkloric dancing and traditional celebrations. Program staff members, RCAs and The Trust developed strategies to help the after-school

grantees regularly share information with each other regarding the types of activities and approaches that were most effective in their programs.²¹

Core Elements

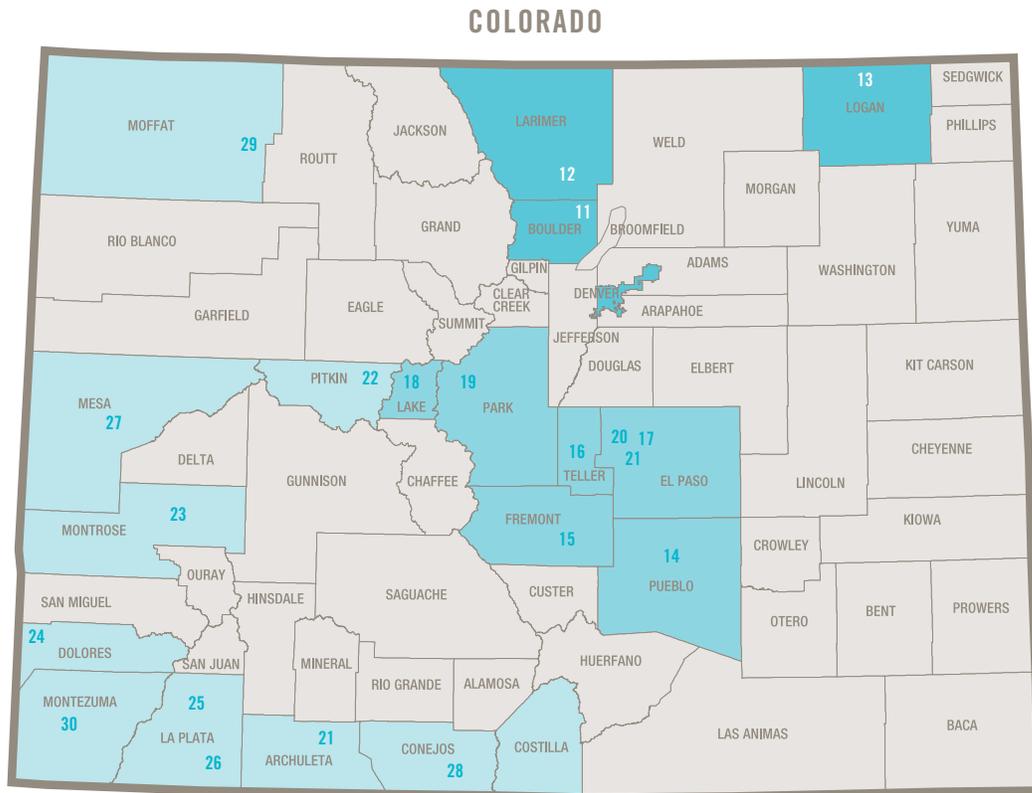
Central to the After-School Initiative were “core elements” considered to be essential characteristics of successful after-school programs. These five core elements were: positive youth development, partnerships, cultural competency, sustainability and evaluation.²¹

As the overarching strategy, each grantee program was committed to focusing time and attention on promoting positive youth development. After-school programs that used a positive youth development approach capitalized on the strengths and insights that emerged from young people when they were actively engaged as part of the decisionmaking process. Incorporating input from youth into the

The core elements for this initiative were defined as follows¹:

- 1 Positive Youth Development: A philosophy, framework and practice that focuses on the developmental needs of all youth by identifying and nurturing their strengths.
- 2 Partnerships: A focus on improving the everyday context of individual youth's lives through active and authentic relationships among youth, parents, ASI sites' staff, schools and, as appropriate, other individuals and organizations.
- 3 Cultural Competency: An ongoing process and practice that builds the capacity of organizations and individuals to understand, accept, value and honor the unique contributions of all people, including but not limited to people's: ability, age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, geographic region, health, language, mental health, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and spirituality.
- 4 Sustainability: Ensures that locally defined after-school needs of a community are addressed over time through steady or increased funding revenues, training and retention of staff and ensuring quality.
- 5 Evaluation: A form of systematic measurement of the initiative to promote understanding and the improvement of after-school services.

FIGURE 2. AFTER-SCHOOL INITIATIVE GRANTEES THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE EVALUATION



REGIONAL COORDINATING AGENCIES

Region 1

Colorado Foundation for Families and Children

Region 1 Grantees:

- 1 Adams 12 - Five Star Schools*
- 2 Asian Pacific Development Center*
- 3 Community Health Education Services-J'NED*
- 4 Cross Community Coalition*
- 5 Escuela Tlatelolco*
- 6 Jewish Community Center*
- 7 Metropolitan Black Church Initiative*
- 8 Mile High United Way – Horace Mann Neighborhood Center*
- 9 Mercy Housing South West*
- 10 University of Denver Bridge Project*
- 11 City of Longmont Division of Youth Services
- 12 Estes Valley Recreation and Park District
- 13 Plateau (Peetz) RE-5 School District

* Grantees 1 through 10 are located in the Denver metropolitan area.

Region 2

Colorado Springs Assets for Youth

Region 2 Grantees:

- 14 Boys & Girls Club-Pueblo Co. and Lower Arkansas Valley
- 15 Canon City Metro Parks and Recreation
- 16 City of Cripple Creek Park and Recreation
- 17 Colorado State University El Paso County Co-op Extension
- 18 Lake County School District
- 19 Park County RE-2 School District
- 20 Pikes Peak Southeast – Y.M.C.A.

Region 3

TPPI/Montrose Memorial Hospital

Region 3 Grantees:

- 21 Archuleta Education Center
- 22 Aspen Santa Fe Ballet Company
- 23 Black Canyon Boys & Girls Club
- 24 Dolores County (4-H) Broadcast
- 25 Durango Latino Education Coalition
- 26 La Plata Family Centers Coalition
- 27 Mesa County DHHS – Club Mid
- 28 Mi Amigo-Valle de Sol Community Center
- 29 Moffat County Recreational After-school Doorway Program
- 30 Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

program design and activities while promoting decisionmaking skills of youth were integral to programmatic success.²¹

The core elements for this initiative were defined as follows²¹:

- 1 **Positive Youth Development:** A philosophy, framework and practice that focuses on the developmental needs of all youth by identifying and nurturing their strengths.
- 2 **Partnerships:** A focus on improving the everyday context of individual youth's lives through active and authentic relationships among youth, parents, ASI sites staff, schools and, as appropriate, other individuals and organizations.
- 3 **Cultural Competency:** An ongoing process and practice that builds the capacity of organizations and individuals to understand, accept, value and honor the unique contributions of all people, including but not limited to people's: ability, age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, geographic region, health, language, mental health, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and spirituality.
- 4 **Sustainability:** Ensures that locally defined after-school needs of a community are addressed over time through steady or increased funding

revenues, training and retention of staff and ensuring quality.

- 5 **Evaluation:** A form of systematic measurement of the initiative to promote understanding and the improvement of after-school services.

Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide The Colorado Trust with information about the overall impact of its initiative and to help grantees increase their ability to evaluate their own programs. The evaluation contract for the After-School Initiative was awarded via a competitive process to NRC.²¹

NRC worked closely with The Trust, the RCAs and the grantees to conduct this evaluation. There were two evaluation components: initiative-wide and grantee-specific.²¹

The Initiative-Wide Evaluation Component

To help The Colorado Trust understand the overall impact of its initiative, as well as to inform the field of after-school programming, the initiative-wide evaluation component aimed to answer the following four evaluation questions²¹:

- 1 What were the demographics of the program participants in the initiative?

The initiative-wide evaluation component aimed to answer these questions²¹ :

- 1 What were the demographics of the program participants in the initiative?
- 2 What youth outcomes were observed by the initiative's programs?
- 3 What relationships were observed between the level of integration of core elements into an after-school program and the youth outcomes grantees intended to impact?
- 4 Did participation in the evaluation build the capacity of grantee organizations to understand and assist in program evaluation efforts?

- 2 What youth outcomes were observed by the initiative's programs?
- 3 What relationships were observed between the level of integration of core elements into an after-school program and the youth outcomes grantees intended to impact?
- 4 Did participation in the evaluation build the capacity of grantee organizations to understand and assist in program evaluation efforts?

Researchers from NRC were charged with answering the first three evaluation questions, while researchers from the University of Colorado's Center for Public-Private Sector Cooperation were charged with answering the fourth. The remainder of this report focuses on the results from the first three questions. The Special Supplement located at the end of this report contains the results from the fourth question.

The Grantee-Specific Evaluation Component

The grantee-specific component was designed to assist in the data collection for the initiative-wide component and to increase grantees' ability to understand and use evaluation results. Recognizing the time needed to successfully incorporate evaluation into program work, The Trust provided each grantee with funding equivalent to 25% of a staff person's time to work on the evaluation.²¹

Customized evaluation technical assistance was provided to each grantee through a NRC evaluation liaison. The evaluation liaisons consisted of research staff that worked with grantees to build their evaluation capacity. Included in this package were²¹:

- » On-site technical support visits by evaluation liaisons which occurred biannually for five years, for a majority of sites, although several sites received up to six visits in a year.

- » Tailored technical support and training was provided to grantees on the implementation and use of KidTrax, a database used to manage programmatic information. Grantees used electronic devices such as palm-pilots and scanners to track youths' attendance. Staff entered youths' demographic characteristics into the database separately. Program staff could use KidTrax to generate reports periodically about the number of youth served, and the characteristics of the youth in the program.
- » Grantees and their respective liaison collaboratively developed individual program evaluation logic models that reflected the outcomes grantees strived to achieve.
- » A comprehensive evaluation handbook created exclusively for the initiative included: an introduction to evaluation; an illustration of the process of logic modeling and definition of outcome measures; a demonstration of evaluation strategies and study designs; and a "how to" guide for designing and customizing evaluation tools, conducting data collection, data analysis, making sense of results, using results for program improvement and communicating results.
- » Four evaluation workshops, each held in three separate locations across the state, provided primary content pertaining to the evaluation handbook chapters and KidTrax assistance.
- » A toolkit for evaluating positive youth development created for the initiative that included sets of post-only and pre-post survey questions pertaining to eight outcome domains (academic success, arts and recreation, community involvement, cultural competency, life skills, positive core values, positive life choices and sense of self) and program quality. The toolkit also included instructions on obtaining parental consent, data collection protocol and logistics for submitting surveys to NRC for analysis.

- » Customized toolkit surveys for each grantee based on grantee logic model outcomes.
- » Grantee-specific assistance on how to administer the customized surveys as well as how to understand, interpret and use program-specific evaluation results.
- » Customized survey analysis and interpretation guides containing tables of grantee-specific data compared to initiative-wide results for each biannual administration.

Over the five-year period, grantees were asked to complete a variety of evaluation tasks. Although the initiative began with 37 grantees, in the first few months, two grantees did not continue funding

and were not part of ongoing evaluation activities. Of the remaining 35 grantees, all programs completed the evaluation tasks required and participated in the evaluation trainings offered to them; not all grantees attended all four trainings (see Table 2). As years passed, the number of grantees was diminished by a few, but still all continuing grantees accomplished all evaluation tasks required of them such as participating in joint site visits with liaisons and RCAs, completing a logic model and obtaining consent from parents and youth. The 30 grantees that continued to participate in the evaluation in the final year completed the agency survey, submitted demographic data, customized a toolkit survey with NRC liaisons and administered surveys to youth.

TABLE 2. EVALUATION TASKS ACCOMPLISHED BY GRANTEES

Evaluation Tasks	Number of Grantees Accomplishing Evaluation Tasks	
	Potential N	Observed N
Participated in Evaluation Trainings*	35	35
Participated in Evaluation Site Visits	35	35
Completed Logic Model	35	35
Installed KidTrax	32	32
Submitted Youth Demographic Data to NRC (KidTrax=15, Excel=15), Spring 2005†	30	30
Obtained Consent Forms from Parents and Youth	32	32
Customized Toolkit Survey with NRC	32	32
Completed Protocol Worksheet, Spring 2005	30	30
Administered Toolkit Survey to Youth, Spring 2005	30	30
Discussed Reports of Survey Results with NRC, Spring 2005	30	30
Completed Agency Survey, Spring 2005	30	30

* Not all grantees attended all four evaluation trainings offered by NRC.

† Although all grantees installed KidTrax, not all programs were able to implement KidTrax with ease and switched to an Excel version of data collection.



Methodology

Data Collection

The Colorado Trust initially selected 37 grantees to participate in the initiative. Over the years, six grantees withdrew from ASI and one active grantee did not participate in the evaluation process. The results reported in this document were based on data from the 30 active ASI grantees that participated in the evaluation during spring 2005. A variety of methods to collect data were used to answer the evaluation questions. These included:

- » Electronic tracking of participant data
- » The Toolkit for Evaluating Positive Youth Development
- » Grantee survey.

Electronic Tracking of Participant Data

Grantees were provided the hardware and software necessary to operate KidTrax, electronic software that maintained demographic information and attendance records of youth participating in the after-school programs. Grantees that elected not to use KidTrax tracked attendance and demographic information electronically via Microsoft® Office Excel. Grantees submitted demographic data to NRC biannually during the months of November and May from

fall 2003 to 2005. The characteristics of program participants reported here were based on demographic results from May 2005, the last semester of the initiative (N=30 grantees).

The Toolkit

NRC developed *The After-School Initiative's Toolkit for Evaluating Positive Youth Development* (Toolkit) for this initiative by conducting an extensive literature review of after-school programs' outcomes and a review of grantee-specific logic models. The literature review included a national search of instruments used to measure assets and positive youth development outcomes. NRC also conducted focus groups with youth-serving programs to incorporate their feedback into the Toolkit.

The Toolkit was developed to provide survey questions that suited unique program goals while permitting integration of results across all of the programs aiming to accomplish the same outcomes. In this way, staff of each program received feedback about their individual program accomplishments, and The Colorado Trust and RCAs received overall initiative findings.

The youth outcomes section of the Toolkit was comprised of multiple survey question sets, which were grouped into seven "domains" that reflected

TABLE 3. OUTCOME INDICATORS BY OUTCOME DOMAIN

Outcome Domain	Outcome Indicators
Youth Outcomes	
Academic Success	Grades, school attachment, school engagement, interest in learning (i.e., reading for pleasure)
Community Involvement	Time spent in community service, sense of importance to community, self concept due to community involvement
Cultural Competency	<p><i>Other Cultures</i> Knowledge of other cultures, races or ethnic groups; care for other cultures, races or ethnic groups; respect for other cultures, races or ethnic groups; comfort with other cultures, races or ethnic groups; understanding of prejudice, stereotyping</p> <p><i>Own Culture</i> Knowledge of own culture, interest in own culture, sense of belonging to cultural group, pride in one's culture, respect for other in community</p>
Life Skills	Friendship skills, communication skills, decisionmaking skills, planning for the future, leadership skills, goal setting skills, problem solving skills, conflict resolution skills, teamwork
Positive Life Choices	Skills to resist high-risk behaviors like substance use and violence
Positive Core Values	Caring, empathy, integrity, honesty, responsibility, interest in community and world problems, equality and fairness
Sense of Self	Self-concept (self-confidence, self-esteem, self-worth), empowerment, positive outlook, sense of purpose
Program Quality	
Attractive and Meaningful Activities	Fun and interesting activities, youth learn new skills, youth enjoy coming to program and tell others to attend
Safety and Trusting Environment	Young person feels safe, program has clear rules and consequences Staff set rules and establish clear norms of behavior, staff treat all kids fairly, Staff can be trusted, young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from staff
Supportive, Caring Climate (Positive Adult Relationships)	Young person receives support from non-parent adults, staff care about youth and respect youth, staff are well liked by youth, youth feel welcome at program, adults recognize when young person does good things, staff encourage young person to do well
Youth as Partners and Resources	Youth are given useful roles in program, youth voices are listened to when planning content and processes, young people have significant roles in making decisions for program

the areas in which grantees believed they were having an impact. These were: academic success, community involvement, cultural competency (of other cultures and own culture), life skills, positive core values, positive life choices and sense of self (see Table 3 for the specific items comprising the outcome domains). An additional domain, arts and recreation, was included for grantees to measure but was not included in the evaluation analysis.

Composite scores for each of these seven domains were created by using the responses to Toolkit question items included in the score. Only items mandated to be included within domains were included in the calculation of composites. For all items, the response scale was “yes,” “kind of” and “not really.” For each domain, a composite score was calculated as the average percent of items within the domain answered “yes,” multiplied by 100, to create a score on a 100-point scale. Given the tendency to report socially desirable responses it seemed reasonable to expect youth to select the most positive option (“yes”) in the programs that were operating optimally.

In addition to the youth outcomes, the Toolkit also included four dimensions aimed at measuring youth ratings of program quality: attractive and meaningful activities; safe and trusting environment; supportive and caring environment; and youth as partners and resources. All grantees were required to include all question sets from the program quality domains. Composite scores were calculated for each program on these four program quality dimensions in two steps. First, a score was created for each participant as the average percent of items answered “yes” within the dimensions. Next, each program was assigned the average score across the participants of that program.

NRC conducted reliability analysis of the items that comprised the composite scores in each outcome domain and found that each reached acceptable levels of internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha > .70). Of the

program quality domains, all dimensions but youth as partners and resources were found to have acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha > .70).

Finally, a set of questions included in the Toolkit gathered respondent demographic characteristics and program participation data. The surveys created from the Toolkit were intended to be administered at the end of each semester (post-only) with self-reported measures of changes over time. A copy of the Toolkit can be downloaded from www.coloradotrust.org.

As part of the grantee-specific component of the evaluation, NRC evaluation liaisons worked with grantees to identify and clarify outcomes that grantees intended to impact. Toolkit surveys were then customized for each program to measure outcomes related to program logic models. Not every domain was included in every grantee’s youth participant survey though all grantees collected program satisfaction data and youth demographic and participation data as part of their Toolkit surveys.

Data were collected throughout the initiative with six biannual survey administrations from fall 2002 through spring 2005. Not all grantees participated in the first few administrations. Surveys were administered to assenting youth of consenting parents during the last couple of weeks of each semester. NRC provided each grantee with customized reports in which program outcome data for each domain were compared to the overall initiative results. NRC liaisons and RCAs assisted grantees with interpretation and consequent action.

This report analyzes findings from the final survey administration in May 2005. Toolkit post-only surveys were administered by grantees on multiple days to increase response rates. Two grantees encountered difficulties administering the survey and were unable to complete the spring 2005 survey administration. This report was based on 28 grantees’ (50 programs)

post-only Toolkit participant survey data representing the opinions of 1,071 youth. Among these 28 grantees, 2,332 youth were initially enrolled in their ASI programs; 2,019 youth were active participants who completed the programs resulting in an overall response rate of 53%. The response rates among programs varied from a low of 17% to a high of 100%. The average response rate for programs was 66%.

Grantee Survey

In addition to surveying youth, data also were collected from grantee staff. NRC created a web-based, self-report survey that each grantee completed on an annual basis during each spring semester to measure the extent to which programs had integrated three of the five core elements into their work: positive youth development, partnerships and cultural competency. The survey was conducted four times over the course of the initiative and was modified until its final administration in May 2005 and is reported here. NRC e-mailed grantees the Grantee Survey in April 2005 with a May 2 deadline for grantees to complete the survey online. Grantees who were unable to complete the web-based survey online were provided a hard copy of the survey. All 30 grantees completed the Grantee Survey (100% response rate).

Individual survey items from the Grantee Survey that related to the three relevant core elements were combined into composite scores by averaging the responses given to the items measuring each core element. These composite scores were found to have acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > .70, for a full description of the reliability analysis see the document *Reliability and Validity Testing of the Annual Grantee Survey*²²).

The core elements of sustainability and evaluation were important for programming but were not intended to be linked to youth outcomes and were not measured in this survey.

Statistical Analysis

NRC used Excel, SPSS, a commonly used software program for statistical analysis, and Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) software to analyze the data to answer the evaluation questions. The analyses performed for each question are described below.

1 What were the demographics of the program participants in the initiative?

NRC used the KidTrax or Excel data submitted by grantees for the spring 2005 semester to describe the demographic characteristics of the youth participants in the initiative, including their gender, age, grade and ethnicity. NRC staff calculated the percentage of each characteristic using Excel.

It can be said with greater confidence than before ASI that programs with a focus on positive youth development, cultural competency or partnerships result in better youth outcomes.

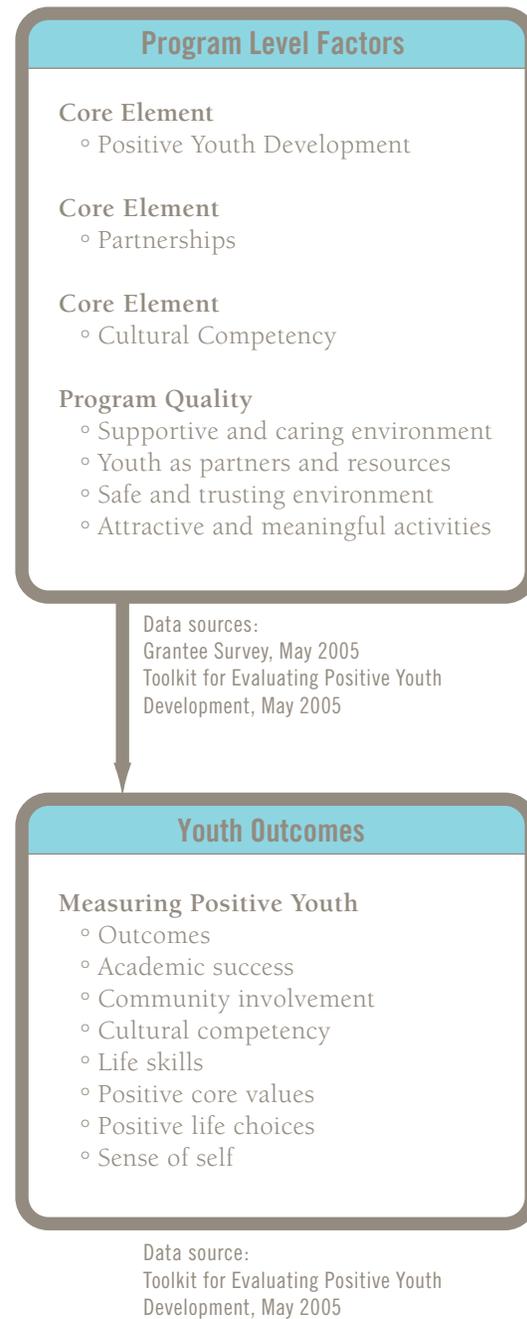
2 What youth outcomes were observed by the initiative's programs?

Toolkit survey questions related to outcomes and program quality asked youth to agree or disagree with positive statements that indicated they improved because of their participation in the program. For each domain a mean composite score was calculated.

3 *What relationships were observed between the level of integration of core elements into an after-school program and the youth outcomes grantees intended to impact?*

Figure 3 illustrates the expected connection of the measured program factors to the youth participant outcomes. First, using HLM, NRC researchers examined the association between the level of integration into programs of each core element and the program quality dimensions and the levels attained by youth for each of the seven outcome domains. Second, to determine which core elements were of greatest importance in explaining youth outcomes, NRC explored further the relationship between the core elements and the youth outcomes by creating HLM models that controlled for youth characteristics (gender, age, rural versus urban location, elementary versus middle school and frequency of program participation) and the level of integration of the other core elements. Associations between a core element and the youth outcome that were statistically significant are reported. Third, to determine which program quality dimensions were of greatest importance, HLM models were created to control for youth characteristics and each of the other program quality dimensions. Associations between a program quality dimension and the youth outcome that were statistically significant are reported.

FIGURE 3. RELATIONSHIP OF PROGRAM LEVEL FACTORS TO YOUTH OUTCOMES





CHAPTER

3

Results

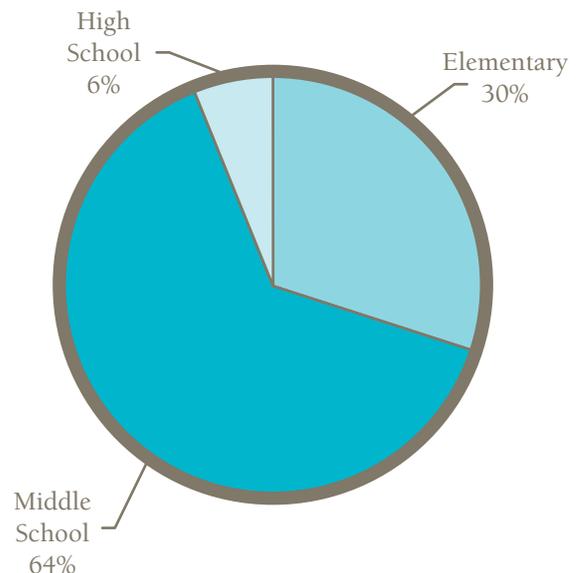
EVALUATION QUESTION #1:

What were the demographics of the program participants in the initiative?

ASI served a diverse group of youth, an estimated 12,500 participant slots over the grant period. This estimate is not an unduplicated count, because many youth participated for multiple years. The following analyses were based on May 2005 data from the electronic tracking of youth, providing a snapshot-in-time description of the initiative. During spring 2005, the initiative provided after-school services to 2,866 youth (Table 4). Males and females were in equal proportion. Ages ranged from 8 to 16 years. Over two-thirds (67%) of the youth served were adolescents (12 years of age or older). Youth were most likely to be in sixth grade (26%).

Nearly two-thirds of participants were in middle school (64%); slightly less than one-third (30%) were in elementary school (Figure 4). Youth participants were from diverse backgrounds. Less than half (45%) were white or Caucasian and more than a third (39%) were Latino or Hispanic (Figure 5). The remaining group consisted of 7% African American, 4% Bi-racial, 2% Native American and 2% Asian or Pacific Islander youth. Youth participants were largely from urban neighborhoods in Colorado. However, 15% of the youth participants were from rural areas in the north, central and southwest parts of the state (Figure 6).

FIGURE 4. SCHOOL TYPE



The After-School Initiative served a diverse group of youth – an estimated 12,500 participants over the grant period.

TABLE 4. CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Spring 2005 (N=2,866)	
Sex/gender	
Female	50%
Male	50%
Age	
8 years or younger	<1%
9 years	4%
10 years	11%
11 years	18%
12 years	22%
13 years	22%
14-16 years	23%
Grade in School	
4th grade	12%
5th grade	18%
6th grade	26%
7th grade	21%
8th grade	17%
9th grade	6%

FIGURE 5. RACE/ETHNICITY OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

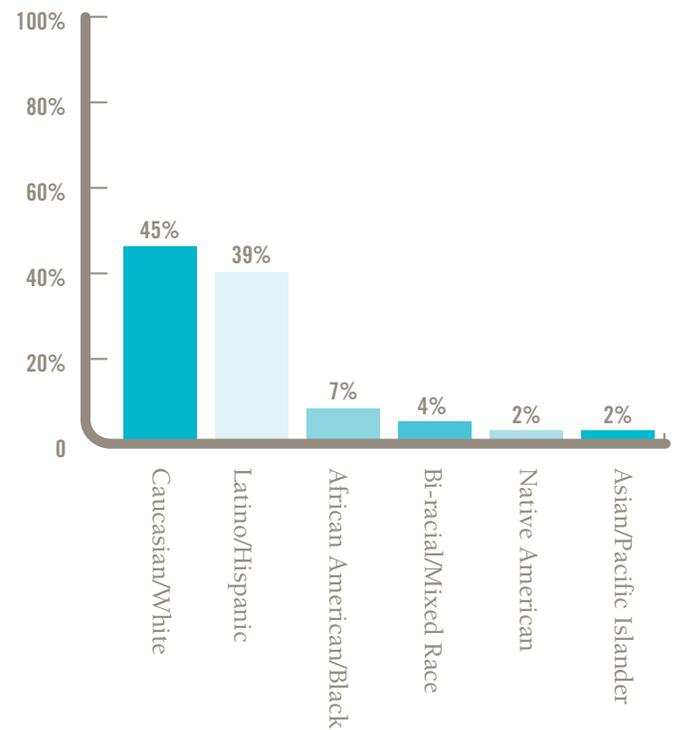


FIGURE 6. GEOGRAPHIC AREA

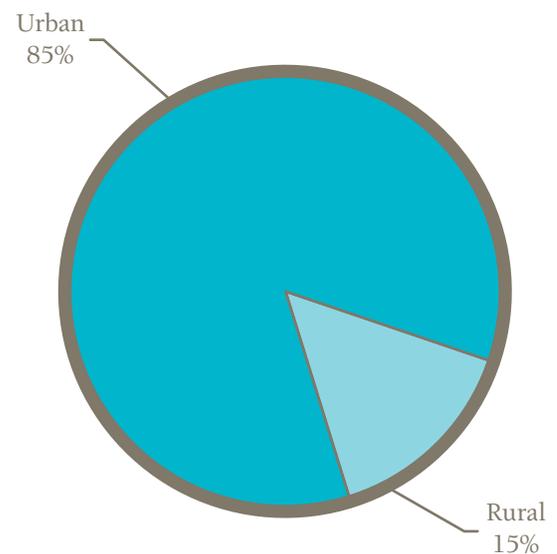
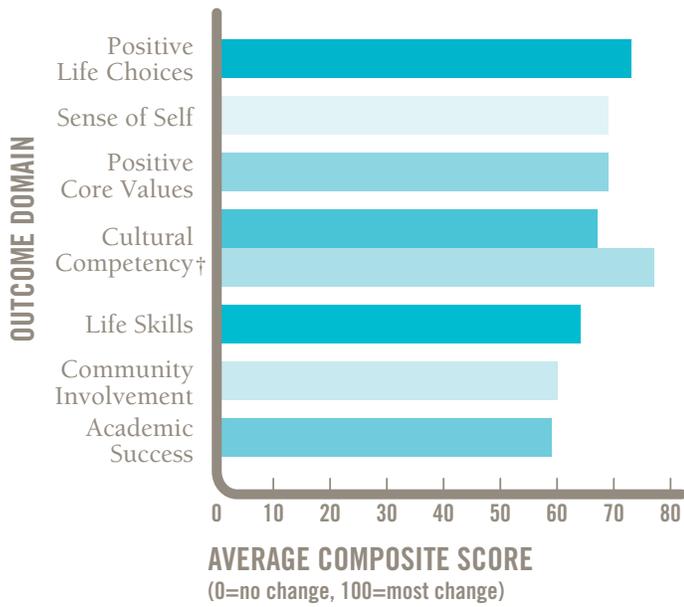


FIGURE 7. YOUTH SELF-REPORTING OF POSITIVE CHANGE BY OUTCOME DOMAIN*



* Not all programs focused on all outcomes.
 † Cultural Competency included in two measures: cultural competency in other cultures (average score 67) and cultural competency of own culture (average score 77).

EVALUATION QUESTION #2:

What youth outcomes were observed by the initiative’s programs?

Youth participants reported the largest average improvements in the areas of positive life choices (average score 73 on a 100-point scale), followed by sense of self (average score of 69), positive core values (average score of 69) and cultural competency (average score of 67 for other cultures, average score of 77 for own culture) (Figure 7) (Table 5). On average, participating youth answered “yes” to almost two-thirds of the items in the remaining three outcome domains: life skills (average score 64), community involvement (average score of 60) and academic success (average score of 59).

TABLE 5. AVERAGE COMPOSITE SCORE FOR OUTCOME DOMAINS

Outcome Domain	Average Composite Score (0=no change, 100=most change)	Number of Participants (N=1,071)	Number of Programs Asking Questions
Academic Success	59	N=1,049	49
Community Involvement	60	N=364	21
Cultural Competency <i>Other Cultures</i>	67	N=533	29
Cultural Competency <i>Own Culture</i>	77	N=206	12
Life Skills	64	N=865	40
Positive Life Choices	73	N=648	33
Positive Core Values	69	N=657	32
Sense of Self	69	N=970	45

Youth reports of outcomes differed by their demographic characteristics, school level and frequency of participation in the program (Table 6). Females were more likely than males to report having improved their positive core values. Youth of color, on average, reported greater improvements in academic success, cultural competency and sense of self than their white counterparts. Youth in elementary school were more likely to report improvements in academic success, sense of self or positive life choices than youth in middle and high school. Youth from rural areas reported higher scores for academic success, life skills, positive core values and making positive life choices than youth from urban areas. However youth from urban areas were more likely to report improvements in community involvement than youth

from rural areas. Finally, frequent attendance in after-school programs was associated with greater reported improvements in academic success.

EVALUATION QUESTION #3:

What relationships were observed between the level of integration of the core elements into after-school programs and the youth outcomes that grantees intended to impact?

First, the levels of integration of core elements into the after-school programs and the program quality were examined. As shown in Table 7, the core element of positive youth development was relatively highly

TABLE 6. DIFFERENCES IN OUTCOMES BY DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION

Youth Characteristics	Academic Success	Community Involvement	Cultural Competency	Life Skills	Positive Core Values	Positive Life Choices	Sense of Self
Gender males, females					Females reported more improvement*		
Race/Ethnicity youth of color, white youth	Youth of color reported more improvement†		Youth of color reported more improvement*				Youth of color reported more improvement‡
School Level high, middle, elementary	Youth in elementary school reported more improvement‡					Youth in elementary school reported more improvement†	Youth in elementary school reported more improvement*
Rural/Urban rural, urban	Rural youth reported more improvement*	Urban youth reported more improvement†		Rural youth reported more improvement‡	Rural youth reported more improvement‡	Rural youth reported more improvement‡	
Frequency of Participation everyday, to less than once a month	Youth participating more often reported more improvement†						

Average differences in outcomes by demographic characteristics were tested using analysis of variance. Significant differences are reported in the table above.
 * Significant: p<.10. † Significant: p<.05. ‡ Significant: p<.01.

integrated into the after-school programs, with an average score of 71 on a 100-point scale. The core elements of partnerships and cultural competency had somewhat lower scores, but still above the scale midpoint at 61 and 62, respectively, on a 100-point scale. Youth ratings of program quality were positive, with the highest average ratings being given to the dimensions of “safe and trusting environment” (average score of 82 on a 100-point scale) and “supportive and caring environment” (average score of 81). The dimensions of “attractive and meaningful activities” and “program treats youth as resources” were given somewhat lower ratings, but still above the scale midpoint (average scores of 70 and 66, respectively).

Several relationships were found when exploring whether the programs’ integration of the core elements was related to the youth outcomes. The analysis controlled for demographic characteristics, frequency of participation and other core elements.

The core element of positive youth development was significantly associated with six of the seven youth outcome domains measured; it was positively related to academic success, youth cultural competency (of other cultures and own culture), life skills, positive core values, positive life choices and sense of self (Table 8). On average, programs with greater integration of partnerships were associated with higher levels of youths’ positive core values. Finally, integrating cultural competency practices was positively related to youths’ own cultural competency and sense of self.

Almost all the program quality dimensions were positively associated with youth outcomes when the relationships were examined bivariately. When multivariate models were tested, which controlled for youth characteristics and for the effects of the other program quality dimensions, the dimensions of “attractive and meaningful activities,” “safe and

TABLE 7. LEVEL OF INTEGRATION OF CORE ELEMENTS INTO PROGRAMS AND PROGRAM QUALITY

	Average Score (0=most negative 100=most positive)	Standard Deviation	Number of Grantees/Programs*
Core Element: Positive Youth Development	71	11	N=28
Core Element: Partnerships	61	16	N=28
Core Element: Cultural Competency	62	19	N=28
Program Quality (Average Youth Rating)			
Attractive and Meaningful Activities	70	14	N=50
Safe and Trusting Environment	82	11	N=50
Program Treats Youth as Resources	66	16	N=50
Supportive and Caring Environment	81	12	N=50

* Core elements were measured at the grantee level, while program quality was measured at the program level.

trusting environment” and “supportive and caring environment” remained significantly associated (Table 9). “Attractive and meaningful activities” was positively related to youths’ academic success and youths’ cultural competency of their own culture. “Safe and trusting environment” was positively

associated with academic success, youths’ cultural competency of other cultures, positive core values, positive life choices and sense of self. “Supportive and caring environment” was positively associated with community involvement and youths’ cultural competency of their own culture.

TABLE 8. CORRELATIONS OF OUTCOMES WITH CORE ELEMENTS, CONTROLLING FOR YOUTH CHARACTERISTICS AND OTHER CORE ELEMENTS

Core Elements	Academic Success	Community Involvement	Cultural Competency Other	Cultural Competency Own	Life Skills	Positive Core Values	Positive Life Choices	Sense of Self
Positive Youth Development	Positive†		Positive†	Positive†	Positive†	Positive†	Positive†	Positive†
Partnerships						Positive†		
Cultural Competency Positive‡				Positive*				Positive*

A two-level HLM model was built that adjusted for youth characteristics (age, gender, level in school, frequency of program participation, urban versus rural location) and integration of other core elements. Associations between youth outcomes and core elements that are statistically significant are indicated.

* Significant: $p < .10$. † Significant: $p < .05$. ‡ Significant: $p < .01$.

TABLE 9. CORRELATIONS OF OUTCOMES WITH PROGRAM QUALITY, CONTROLLING FOR YOUTH CHARACTERISTICS AND DIMENSIONS OF PROGRAM QUALITY

Program Quality Dimensions	Academic Success	Community Involvement	Cultural Competency Other	Cultural Competency Own	Life Skills	Positive Core Values	Positive Life Choices	Sense of Self
Attractive and Meaningful Activities	Positive†			Positive†				
Safe and Trusting Environment	Positive†		Positive†			Positive†	Positive†	Positive†
Program Treats Youth as Resources								
Supportive and Caring Environment		Positive†		Positive†				

A two-level HLM model was built that adjusted for youth characteristics (age, gender, level in school, frequency of program participation, urban versus rural location) and other dimensions of program quality. Associations between youth outcomes and program quality dimensions that are statistically significant are indicated.

* Significant: $p < .10$. † Significant: $p < .05$. ‡ Significant: $p < .01$.



CHAPTER

4

Discussion of the Results

The After-School Initiative (ASI) evaluation results suggest that the initiative had a positive influence on the lives of a diverse group of youth. From the perspective of the youth participating in the initiative, the programs were beneficial because they provided a safe and attractive place to develop skills and provided opportunities that could serve them well in adulthood. Generally, the positive influence was greatest for youth of color, youth in elementary school, youth living in rural areas and those that participated most often.

Demographic Reach

The demographic results suggest that the initiative reached its target population by serving a wide demographic mix of youth. ASI provided more than 12,500 slots for youth over the five-year grant period. In its final semester, ASI served almost 3,000 youth, more than half of whom were youth of color. The initiative served a larger percentage of youth of color (55%) than existed in the general population of 8- to 16-year-olds in Colorado (31%) and about the same ratio of males to females and youth living in rural to urban locations (2000 Census).

Youth Outcomes

The programs in the initiative embraced the notion that for youth “problem-free was not fully prepared” to be productive members of society²³ and they aimed to develop youth competencies and promote pro-social behavior. The results suggest that the initiative helped youth build many developmental competencies which should help them to succeed in life.²⁴ Average composite scores demonstrate that youth in the programs reported improvements in the intended youth outcomes: positive life choices, sense of self, positive core values, cultural competency, life skills, community involvement and academic success. These competencies have been shown to be important for positive, healthy development that can serve youth, their families and the community well.

ASI targeted an important, vulnerable and impressionable age group, youth in fourth through ninth grade. Developing assets, “concrete, common sense, positive experiences and qualities essential to raising successful young people” during early childhood and adolescence has long-term benefits.²⁴ Research has shown that youth with more internal assets — such as commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity — are less likely to use alcohol, engage in violence or

to be depressed.²⁵ Once youth begin to participate in delinquent behavior, they are likely to continue.²⁶ Many youth participating in ASI reported making positive life choices as a result of their participation in the program. Engaging youth in productive activities would be an important finding for any youth program. First, by participating in the program, youth were less likely to participate in delinquent behavior because of a reduction in their time available for such behavior. Second, encouraging youth to make positive life choices as they age helps them to continue with these choices later in life.²⁴

Overall, the improvements reported by these young people suggest the possibility of a brighter future for them. Youth reported feeling better about themselves

and their future as a result of their participation in ASI. Youth also reported gaining a better sense of self-efficacy; as a result of their participation in the ASI program they learned that they could do things that they did not think they could do before. These feelings were measured as part of the “sense of self” domain. Improved positive core values help to guide youth in their everyday choices. Youth reported being better at standing up for what they believe, caring more about the feelings of other people and taking responsibility for their actions as a result of their participation in the ASI program.

As the United States becomes more diverse, youth should benefit from increased cultural competency such as that gained by participants in this initiative.

The Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets

EXTERNAL ASSETS

The first 20 Developmental Assets focus on positive experiences that young people receive from the people and institutions in their lives. Four categories of external assets are included in the framework:

- 1 Support: Young people must experience support, care and love from their families, neighbors and others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments.
- 2 Empowerment: Young people must be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute. For this to occur, they must be safe and feel secure.
- 3 Boundaries and expectations: Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are “in bounds” or “out-of-bounds.”
- 4 Constructive use of time: Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities and youth programs.

INTERNAL ASSETS

A community’s responsibility for its young people does not end with the provision of external assets. Caring adults must make a similar commitment to nurturing the internal qualities that guide positive choices and foster a sense of confidence, passion and purpose. Young people need this wisdom to make responsible decisions about the present and future.

The framework includes four categories of internal assets:

- 1 Commitment to learning: Young people must develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.
- 2 Positive values: Young people must develop strong values that guide their choices.
- 3 Social competencies: Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, build relationships and succeed in life.
- 4 Positive identity: Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth and promise.

Source: Search Institute

Youth reported that they were more likely to know more about their own culture, people of other cultures and have more respect for people of other cultures because of their participation in the ASI program. As a result of these skills, youth may be more likely to get along with other people, less likely to fear differences, and most importantly, less likely to engage in prejudice and racist acts.²⁴

Youth use life skills to get along with others, develop relationships and work with others on a team. Life skills help youth solve problems better and resolve them without violence or fighting.²⁴ Thus, youth may be prepared with the skills, self-efficacy and values needed to fully participate in school and a career later in life. Educators and employers also benefit from having well-developed youth who have the skills and knowledge to contribute productively to society.²⁷

Although youths' perceived improvements in school and their involvement in the community were lower than was reported for other outcomes, many youth did report improvements here. This is particularly noteworthy given that improvement in academics is an outcome that has been difficult for many after-school programs to demonstrate.²⁸

Some of the outcomes differed by gender, ethnicity, school level, geography (rural or urban) and frequency of participation. Females were more likely to report improvements in positive core values than males. Specifically, females were more likely to report that they cared about other people's feelings and more likely to stand up for what they believed.

Youth of color reported greater improvements in academic success than their white counterparts. This finding was consistent with after-school literature which has shown that youth of color benefit more from programs aimed at improving academic skills.^{12, 29} Extra hours of tutoring or homework help may be especially beneficial to youth of color who struggle in school and cannot afford tutoring or whose parents

do not speak English and cannot assist them with their homework. Consistent with cultural identity development literature, youth of color were more attuned to their culture and had an awareness and sensitivity for other cultures.^{30, 31} Specifically, youth of color reported greater improvements in cultural competency and their sense of self than their white counterparts.

Also consistent with after-school literature, efforts to improve youths' academic success were more fruitful for younger kids.⁶ The results indicated that, on average, youth in elementary school reported more improvement in academic success compared to youth in advanced grades. Self-reported improvements in youths' sense of self and positive life choices were also greater during elementary school.

Interestingly, youth living in rural areas were more likely to report increases in academic success, life skills, positive core values and positive life choices than youth in urban areas. The larger improvements in certain outcomes may be due to the smaller student-to-adult ratio (5:1) that they were able to achieve in their programs; a ratio that was larger in urban programs. However, youth in urban areas did report more change in the area of community involvement than rural youth. This may be due to the fact that fewer formal opportunities may be available for youth volunteerism in rural settings or it may be that rural youth may not have understood the concept of community involvement to include both formal and informal volunteerism and therefore under-reported their level of community involvement.

Finally, self-reported improvements in academics were greater for youth who attended after-school programming at least two to three times a week, or everyday or almost everyday compared to youth who attended less often. These results were consistent with a recent finding from an evaluation of the Extended-Day Tutoring Program in Memphis

City Schools which showed that youth outcomes improved with attendance or the completion of most of the programming.¹²

Relationships Between the Core Elements and Youth Outcomes

The following discussion focuses on the relationships between youth outcomes and three of the five core elements: positive youth development, partnerships and cultural competency. The other two core elements, sustainability and evaluation, were not expected to be correlated with youth outcomes.

Positive Youth Development

Research shows that focusing on youths' strengths through positive youth development can yield positive outcomes for youth.³² Youth respond when others believe in them. Positive youth development is predicated on the notion that all youth have the potential for successful, healthy development.³³ Moreover, the acquisition of developmentally appropriate skills and guidance are needed to achieve physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional and social development.³² The results of the evaluation confirmed the premise that integrating positive youth development practices in programs was related to six of the seven youth outcomes measured: academic success, cultural competency of other cultures and their own culture, life skills, positive core values, positive life choices and sense of self.

Partnerships

There is support from the literature relating to the importance of partnerships for youth-serving programs^{17, 19} and this evaluation confirmed that "partnerships" was positively associated with the self-report of positive core values (e.g., empathy, integrity, responsibility) made by youth. However, "partnerships" was not positively associated with any of the other expected youth outcomes.

Cultural Competency

Cultural competency has been identified as important for creating successful out-of-school-time programs.²⁰ This evaluation confirmed the expectation that integrating cultural competency practices resulted in self-reported improvements in youths' cultural competency in their own culture and their sense of self. These findings were not surprising given that a variety of programs included a strong focus on improving youths' awareness of their own culture and were particularly culturally responsive to youth needs. However, it was surprising to find that the integration of cultural competency was not associated with increased self-report of cultural competency in other cultures or any of the other outcome domains.

The After-School Initiative reached its target population by providing after-school services to a diverse group of youth in Colorado, youth who may otherwise have gone without appropriate supervision after school.

Possible Reasons for Lack of Relationship between Core Elements and Youth Outcomes

Several reasons may explain the lack of significant associations between core elements and youth outcomes including conceptualizing the core elements, measurement error, obstacles to integration of the core elements and inadequate dosage.

- » *Theoretical Conceptualization of the Core Elements*
There are a variety of ways to conceptualize the core elements of partnerships and cultural competency. The Grantee Survey was based on definitions and constructs defined as part of ASI.

However, it is possible that the definitions upon which the measurement of core elements was based did not capture all of the dimensions of cultural competency and partnerships that are at the heart of implementing successful programs.

» *Measurement Error*

Another possible reason for the lack of relationship between core elements and youth outcomes may be measurement error. For example, the evaluation's measures did not include measures of whether parents or other organizations actually participated in the programs' efforts to develop partnerships. Rather the instrument measured whether programs made the effort to develop partnerships with families and other organizations. On a similar note, the measures in the instruments may not have been sensitive enough to detect such relationships, particularly since the instruments were developed with the intention of having the lowest burden possible on the participants and program staff.

» *Lack of Statistical Power*

Although there were responses for 1,071 youth in these analyses, there were only 30 grantees and therefore 30 core element scores. Given this small number of grantee ratings and the analysis that explored the relationship between the core elements and outcome domains while controlling for demographic variables, there may not have been enough power or substantial differences in ratings to detect statistical associations in the data, even if they had existed.

» *Obstacles to Integration of the Core Elements*

Obstacles to integration of the core elements offered a possible explanation for the lack of relationship between the core elements and youth outcomes examined in this evaluation. For example, developing partnerships with parents, although important, may have been difficult to accomplish. Programs may have planned activities that

involved parents but it may have been difficult to get parents to participate due to work schedules, transportation, etc. In fact, it was noted that parental participation was challenging because parents were not available for their children let alone for the program.

Additionally, some grantees may not have had a good understanding of the core element of partnerships and its definition as it evolved within the first couple of years of the initiative. Additionally, on a five-point scale from "never" to "quite often," programs on average only implemented partnership practices "sometimes" (the scale mid-point). This level of integration may not have been sufficient to enhance youth outcomes.

Further, integration of the core elements may have required more hands-on activities than were possible given time and staffing limitations. It is possible that program staff taught cultural competency to youth but could not offer enough experiences needed to consolidate fully the skills learned. This might explain the lack of association between the core element of cultural competency and many of the youth outcome domains. According to the research conducted by National Research Council,³² teaching skills as well as "exposure to intentional learning experiences" were important features of skill-building that may yield strong results only if they were both emphasized in programming.

» *Inadequate Dosage*

Finally, when intended relationships do not surface, evaluators often point to dosage or the amount of programming implemented as being insufficient to affect the intended outcomes. That is, it was possible that providing after-school services to youth on a drop-in basis or only a couple of days a week was not enough to inculcate some of the core elements that could

build youth outcomes. In fact, when examining the relationship between the core elements and youth outcomes, increased level of participation (dosage) was related to improved academic success. This finding was consistent with out-of-school-time evaluations that have shown that for both reading and mathematics outcomes, effects were larger for programs that consisted of more than 45 hours in duration.³⁴ Additionally, changes in these outcomes may require a longer intervention period before becoming apparent. According to the Harvard Family Research Project, participation in out-of-school-time programs of at least two years was positively related to youth outcomes.⁸

Relationships Between Program Quality and Youth Outcomes

Elements comprising the program quality domains have been associated with best practices in positive youth development and successful youth programs. The domains also include many of the external assets from Search Institute’s assets framework: support, empowerment, boundaries, expectations and constructive use of time.³⁵ This analysis confirmed that many of these programmatic elements were positively associated with youth outcomes.

Academic success, while important, is not the only meaningful or malleable outcome of after-school programming.

The quality domain of “safe and trusting environment” was rated highest by youth in ASI. The domain contains youths’ self-report of items such as feeling of safety while at the program, clear program rules

and consequences, and trust in relationships with staff. Programs where youth reported higher levels of trust demonstrated better outcomes in the areas of academic success, cultural competency of other cultures, positive core values, positive life choices and sense of self.

Providing activities that are “attractive and meaningful” for youth is a premise of positive youth development programming. This analysis found that when programs received higher ratings of satisfaction with the activities offered, youth reported better results in the areas of academic success and youths’ cultural competency of their own culture.

Youth were more likely to report improvements in community involvement in programs that created a “supportive and caring environment.”

The other program quality domain “program treats youth as partners and resources,” although significant in bivariate analyses, did not contribute uniquely to the statistical model that controlled for youth characteristics and the interrelation of all four quality domains.

Cautions When Interpreting Results

Several methodological limitations of the research should be considered when interpreting these results. First, the accuracy of the data used in this study was dependent on the accuracy of the data submitted by program staff using new knowledge and technology. Although program staff improved in their level of accuracy over time, there continued to be some missing data and errors that researchers were unable to clean or reconcile.

Second, selection bias may have influenced the results due to the fact that youth were not placed in programs at random but chose to enter. The type of child who had the interest and resources to attend may have different outcomes than those who never walked in the door. Also, attrition and non-response bias may

have influenced the findings. These are limitations that most program evaluations contend with, this one included. The overall response rate for active youth in all programs was 53%, less than ideal. Programs administered the surveys on multiple days to avoid the problem of attrition; however, the response rates indicated that they were unable to gain the perspectives of some of the youth in the programs. Response rates of this type result in responses of youth who were more likely to attend the programs and, therefore, would not have captured the perspectives, possibly different, of those who were less likely to attend.

Third, the self-report nature of the Toolkit and the Grantee Survey meant that both had the potential to be limited by social desirability bias; the tendency to respond to questions in a manner that is socially acceptable or preferred. For example, people tend to under-report behaviors of which others might disapprove such as delinquent or culturally insensitive behavior. In the case of the youth Toolkit data, this might result in participants attributing more positive outcomes to the program than may be deserved. Although efforts were made to reduce participant bias by ensuring anonymity for youth and program staff, desirable responses may have been over-estimated and undesirable responses under-estimated. However, such biases would be unlikely to affect relationships among core elements and youth outcomes unless staff (who reported on core elements) and youth (who reported on outcomes) were affected differently by social desirability bias.

Fourth, the youth Toolkit survey was designed to capture whether youths' perceived outcomes in academic success, sense of self, etc., could be attributed to their participation in the program. Establishing causation requires a methodology utilizing a control or comparison group. Because there was no control or comparison group in this evaluation, attribution of change to program services cannot be determined.

Fifth, the post-test only design of the evaluation posed some limitations for the interpretation of the results. The post-test only design consisted of administering a survey at the end of each semester to determine youth perspectives on the intended outcomes for the initiative (e.g., improved academics, sense of self, life skills). Recall bias may play a role if youth cannot remember accurately their past attitudes, experiences and behaviors. Also, a "masked ceiling effect" may exist for some of the youth outcomes using a post-only methodology. For example, if no improvement is detected, a post-test only design cannot distinguish whether the reason was due to excellent competencies at the start or if, at program end, there was little improvement of standard competencies. A more typical ceiling effect could also mitigate results from pre-post designs but in a pre-post design we can identify maximum scores at program onset.

Sixth, a number of youth outcomes examined in the study are not easily or quickly altered, even in youth. The evaluation timeframe of a semester or year may not have been sufficient to detect expected relationships.

Finally, characteristics of the initiative, such as the heterogeneity of interventions, geographic locations and target population did not permit a strong framework to make conclusions about the causal connections between the core elements and the outcomes that programs intended to achieve. Nevertheless, this design explored the relationships that existed between features of the programs and their intended outcomes.



Conclusions

The Colorado Trust's After-School Initiative achieved its goal of promoting the healthy development of youth during the critical after-school hours. While visiting programs, initiative partners witnessed youths' joy and engagement with the opportunities made available to them by grantees in this initiative. Data in this report confirmed these experiences.

Youth participating in the initiative attributed improvements in important areas of their development to their after-school programs.

The After-School Initiative reached its target population by providing after-school services to a diverse group of youth in the state of Colorado, youth who may otherwise have gone without appropriate supervision after school. The initiative served youth in fourth through ninth grades, two-thirds of whom were adolescents. ASI reached a diverse group of youth, serving a larger proportion of youth of color than

existed in the general population in Colorado. Youth largely resided in urban neighborhoods but rural programs also were included.

Youth participating in the initiative attributed improvements in important areas of their development to their after-school programs. The youth reported improvements in areas such as positive life choices, cultural competency, positive core values, life skills, academic success and community involvement that may serve them well as they develop into adulthood.

This ASI evaluation adds to the literature on after-school programming by exploring whether the programs' integration of the core elements and other characteristics of program quality were related to youth outcomes. Programs that more assiduously implemented positive youth development reported more improvement in academic success, cultural competency, life skills, positive core values, positive life choices and sense of self. Programs whose staff reported a better job of creating partnerships served youth who reported more positive core values. Successful program integration of cultural competence was linked to youths' reports of improved cultural competency in their own culture and a stronger sense of self. Because these relationships remained after controlling for youth and program characteristics,

it can be said with greater confidence than before ASI that programs with a focus on positive youth development, cultural competency or partnerships result in better youth outcomes.

Research has its limitations and, because of the limitations, most research findings are equivocal or attenuated. While many of the evaluation findings in this report suffer the same limitations, results nevertheless demonstrate without ambiguity that a heterogeneous group of youth from many parts of Colorado found that their after-school programs were safe and offered attractive and meaningful activities; that these programs provided youth with a trusting environment and that in these environments youth felt supported and cared for.

The evaluation demonstrated clearly that youth participants believed that the time they spent in these after-school programs was not just fun, but transforming. Youth reported that the staff and activities that engaged them were responsible for their improved core values, including honesty, empathy, and concern for equality and justice. Youth in this initiative stated clearly that the programs they went to after school helped their self-confidence and sense of purpose.

Perhaps of greatest importance to school districts, government entities and law enforcement, these youth, in anonymous surveys, reported being better able to avoid trouble that might lead to violence or other forms of delinquency. All of these positive findings, even the reported reduction in delinquent behaviors, occurred in the highest proportions among programs that provided the strongest emphasis on positive youth development.

Overall, the improvements reported by these young people suggest the possibility of a brighter future for them. Youth reported feeling better about themselves and their future as a result of their participation in the After-School Initiative.



Recommendations

Recommendations

Recommendations for Funders

- » Continue to support after-school programs as youth participants report attaining important skills and competencies due to participation in such programs. This support of community and programmatic efforts to promote positive youth development may assist youth in their successful transition from childhood to adolescence and into adulthood.
- » Continue to be culturally responsive in the way that grantees are funded to continue to reach a diverse population. This includes targeting and recruiting grantees with significant experience in reaching out to diverse communities.
- » Target after-school programs that implement developmentally appropriate services to youth.
- » Continue to focus on embracing the whole student including their developmental skills, values and pro-social behavior to improve outcomes for youth. Academic success, while important, is not the only meaningful or malleable outcome of after-school programming.

- » Early identification of a common set of intended youth outcomes, along with training for programs on how they can improve these outcomes, may help to maximize the impact of after-school programs for youth.

Recommendations for After-School Programs

- » Implement developmentally appropriate, holistic and long-term programs designed to meet the needs of various age groups. Since youth in elementary school appear to be more amenable to improvement than youth at older ages, programs should continue to target the younger ages. Programs targeting older youth should be appropriately tailored to meet the developmental needs of older youth.
- » Continue to be culturally responsive in recruiting practices and program offerings to attract a diverse population. The program offerings should also meet the needs of diverse youth, particularly for disadvantaged and underserved youth, those who would otherwise go without services.
- » Continue to focus on helping the whole student including his or her developmental skills, values and pro-social behavior to improve outcomes for youth. Academic success is important but not the only outcome that can be achieved through these programs.

- » Implement strategies to increase attendance or time with youth to determine whether the enhanced program dosage improves academic success as well as other youth outcomes. Programs may try to avoid drop-in types of attendance if seeking to make more significant changes in the lives of youth.
- » Continue to implement and evaluate the core elements of positive youth development, partnerships and cultural competency practices to improve outcomes for youth. Work to improve the integration of partnerships (such as youth, families, staff and organizations) to explore more accurately whether these practices are related to improved outcomes for youth.

Recommendations for Evaluators

- » Minimize the grantee burden of learning how to conduct evaluation and instead emphasize the meaning and use of evaluation results. Developing evaluation capacity of grantees may be most effective when limited to a basic understanding of the importance of evaluation, development of logic models, minor editing of data collection instruments and collection of data.
- » Because grantees are not in the evaluation business and are busy providing services to youth, evaluators should have a reasonable expectation of grantee evaluation capacity. Evaluators should implement an evaluability assessment and tailor the evaluation to the needs of the initiative and the grantees by meeting grantees where they are with regard to their level of evaluation capacity. This includes an accurate assessment of grantees' evaluation resources, skills and interest in evaluation as well as their ability to understand and operate available technology. With a large number of grantees of varied evaluation sophistication, evaluators should target different levels of evaluation to grantee abilities and interests. Grantees with less evaluation capacity should use process evaluation data to monitor activities and grantees with more evaluation capacity should progress to more rigorous outcome evaluation designs.
- » Evaluators intending to build evaluation capacity in grantees should plan for staff turnover at all levels – from staff designated as the on-site evaluation assistant to the executive director who must champion the utility of evaluation.
- » Extending study timeframes from those typically used for evaluations set in schools (e.g., semester end, year end) might demonstrate more improvement in participating youth, especially when behaviors expected to change take time to evolve.
- » To capture a more complete picture of the initiative, evaluations of after-school initiatives and programs should implement a mixed methodology design that includes both a quantitative component as well as a qualitative component.



EVALUATION QUESTION #4:

Did participation in the evaluation build the capacity of grantee organizations to understand and assist in program evaluation efforts?

Evaluation of Question #4 was conducted by the University of Colorado's Center for Public-Private Sector Cooperation (the Center). This special supplement was written by the Center.

Background

The initiative-wide evaluation component of The Colorado Trust's After-School Initiative was designed to answer four questions:

- 1 What were the demographics of the program participants in the initiative?
- 2 What youth outcomes were observed by the initiative's programs?
- 3 What relationships were observed between the level of integration of core elements into an after-school program and the youth outcomes grantees intended to impact?
- 4 Did participation in the evaluation build the capacity of grantee organizations to understand and assist in program evaluation efforts?

Researchers from National Research Center (NRC) were charged with answering the first three questions; researchers from the Center were charged with answering the fourth. The Center assessed the extent to which the services provided by NRC enhanced grantee organizations' capacity for understanding, implementing and especially for sustaining program evaluation efforts.

The After-School Initiative funded 37 programs delivered by a diverse group of public and nonprofit organizations throughout the state for a five-year period ending May 2005. Overall management responsibilities for the initiative were shared by The Colorado Trust with a partnership team that included staff from the three Regional Coordinating Agencies (RCAs) and NRC. At the outset of the After-School Initiative, there were 35 grantees participating in the evaluation. NRC provided evaluation technical assistance to a total of 30 grantees throughout the life of the initiative.

NRC's major responsibilities included:

- 1 Identifying the demographics of participants in the initiative programs
- 2 Determining the youth outcomes achieved by the initiative programs
- 3 Identifying the relationships observed between core elements and youth outcomes
- 4 Building evaluation capacity for the grantee organizations.

To accomplish these tasks, NRC provided each grantee with an evaluation toolkit and an evaluation handbook, as well as customized technical assistance

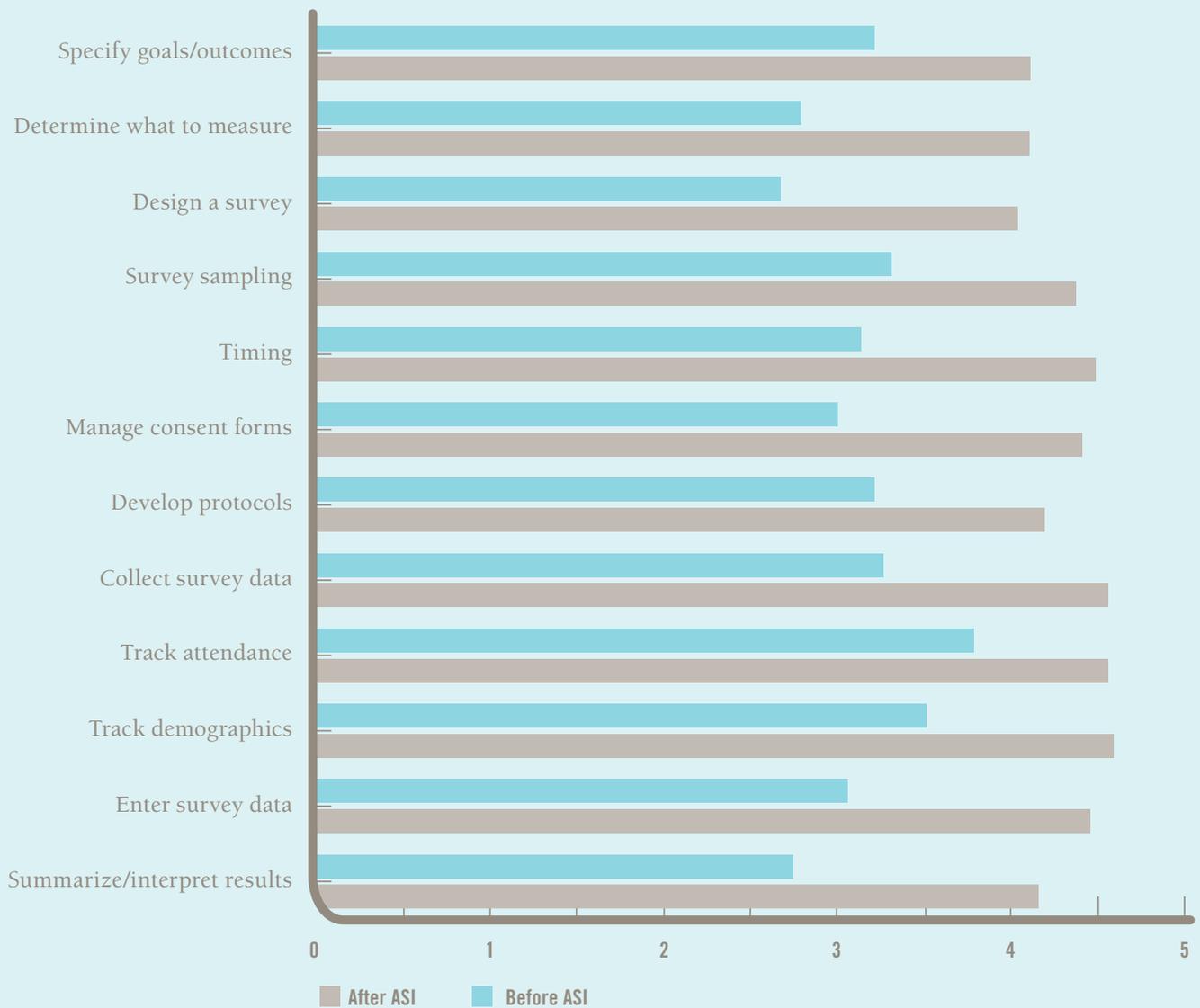
in survey design and implementation from assigned NRC staff members called evaluation liaisons. For the 15 grantees that opted out of the KidTrax tracking system, NRC provided an Excel template for tracking participant demographics. After survey data were collected, NRC analyzed the data and gave grantees a report on program outcomes. In conjunction with the RCAs, NRC scheduled site visits with each grantee to explain survey results and help grantees understand program outcomes.

Results

Survey Response

The Center mailed surveys to the grantees. The surveys were designed to assess the effects of ASI on organizational evaluation capacity. Thirty-one surveys were mailed and 27 completed surveys were received, for an 87% response rate.

FIGURE 8. COMPETENCY IN EVALUATION SKILLS



Increases in Evaluation-Related Skills

The survey listed the discrete evaluation-related skills that NRC laid out in the evaluation handbook and that they intended to impart, as well as skills and knowledge conveyed by the materials in the evaluation toolkit. Grantees were asked to rate their level of competence in each of the listed skills both before and after they received assistance from NRC.

Grantees consistently reported that they were more competent in using each evaluation skill after participation in ASI than before ASI (Figure 8). Looking at all skills together, the mean overall competence score before ASI was 3.13, compared to an overall mean of 4.31 after ASI.

The greatest gains in competency were in managing consent forms, entering data, interpreting survey results and designing a survey. Grantees made the smallest gains in developing protocols, specifying goals and outcomes, and tracking attendance.

Using Evaluation Skills for Grantees' After-School Programs

Grantees were asked if and how they had used what they learned in tracking program attendance and demographics. At least 80% of the respondents were using information from tracking data to understand who they were serving (89%) and to determine appropriate program activities (82%). Seventy-eight percent of grantees said they used tracking information to schedule program activities. Nineteen percent (five grantees) said they used this information to develop grant proposals (Figure 9).

Grantees also were asked if and how they had used survey results. A majority of grantees used survey results to inform staff (89%), board members (70%) and stakeholders including parents, youth and funders (59%). Fully 96% of grantees said that they had used survey results to plan for future programming. Eleven grantees reported using survey results in other ways, including applying for grants (Figure 10).

FIGURE 9. TRACKING PROGRAM ATTENDANCE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

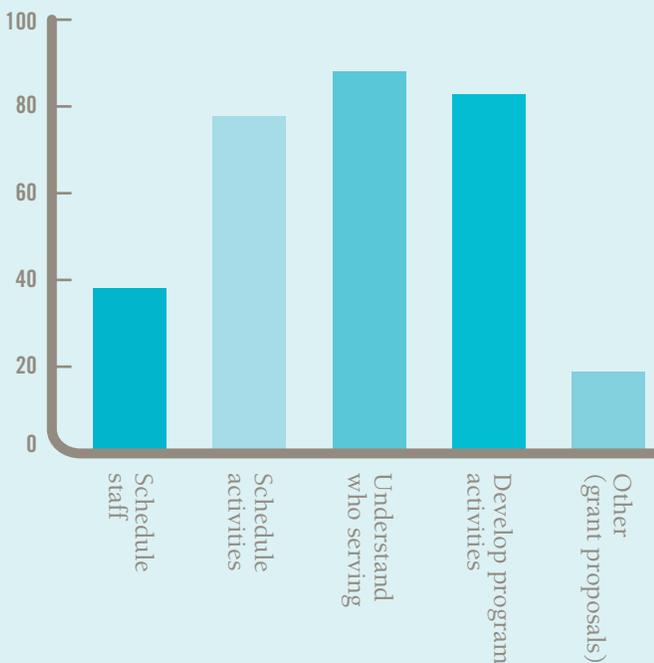
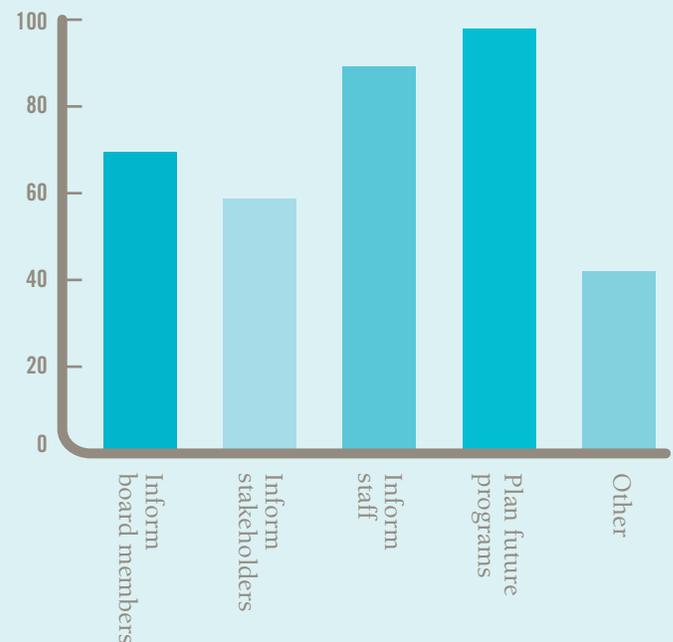


FIGURE 10. USE OF SURVEY RESULTS



Eighty-five percent (23 grantees) used the survey results to modify their after-school programs. Four grantees did not use the survey results in this manner because:

- » The results so far were inconclusive due to the limited size of the survey sample
- » The grantee was waiting for the appropriate time
- » The grantee was in the midst of organizational changes
- » The results from the survey were very good and no major changes had to be made.

These reasons imply that the grantees valued the survey results and may use them in the future.

Of the eight grantees not currently using all evaluation components to assess other programs, six said that they plan to use more components in the future.

Nineteen grantees said their organizations may offer future programs that would benefit from evaluation. All would track attendance and demographics. Seventeen grantees would design a survey to evaluate program outcomes. Of the remaining two grantees, prior interviews indicated that one grantee organization delivers programs that do not benefit from surveys. The other organization had an executive director who had a lot of experience in evaluation and already was fielding surveys before ASI.

Grantee Profiles

Given the level of turnover in grantee organizations, it is important that knowledge and processes be institutionalized throughout the organization. In order to determine the extent to which evaluation skills and abilities had been internalized by organizational staff and not just by the one or several persons actually involved in the after-school program, grantees were asked the roles/titles of the people in their organization who completed the survey and how many people in their local organization had been actively involved in evaluation efforts.

Surveys were completed by a variety of staff at each location, including directors, program coordinators, program assistants and evaluation staff. On average, grantees had at least four staff members who were actively involved in evaluation efforts.

Did Grantees Build Organizational Capacity?

The most important question in the survey was whether or not the ASI evaluation helped the organization build evaluation capacity. Most of the grantees (78%) felt the ASI evaluation helped their organization build evaluation capacity.

Only five grantees felt that ASI did not help them build organizational capacity. Previous interviews with these five grantees indicated that three of the

“[The ASI evaluation] provided organized and structured information that we can use for funding, reporting and planning.”

Using Evaluation Skills for Grantees’ Other Programs

Based on survey data, improving and applying evaluation skills is the norm, not the exception. Most organizations that offer other programs that would benefit from evaluation were using the skills they learned in ASI to evaluate those programs.

Fourteen of the 27 grantees that completed the survey stated that their organizations offered other programs that would benefit from evaluation. Six of these 14 organizations reported that they were using all the evaluation components listed in Table 10 to assess other programs. Five of the 14 grantees were using four or more evaluation components; three grantees were using fewer evaluation components.

five organizations already had evaluation capacity prior to participating in ASI. They were affiliated with an umbrella organization that either provided or required sophisticated evaluation techniques. The other two grantees expressed frustration with the ASI evaluation process, including the lack of continuity in their evaluation technical assistance as a result of staff changes at NRC and having several evaluation liaisons assigned to them during the course of the initiative. They expressed confusion with the various components of the evaluation and frustration and/or disappointment in contacts with their liaison (i.e., liaisons were unavailable or unclear in their explanations). Programmatically, both grantees were doing very well; the reason they didn't build evaluation capacity was because they reported they did not have efficacious relationships with NRC.

All grantees were asked to elaborate on how ASI helped them build organizational capacity in evaluation. The following is a sample of their comments:

“[The ASI evaluation] added to the tools we already had. It made it easier to evaluate programs and collect demographic data.”

“Before, we had no idea how to conduct a valid evaluation. The training and the [evaluation] toolkit, along with hands-on experience, have given me those tools and skills.”

“Since this was the first time we had to do anything like this, from designing the surveys to implementing and administering surveys, NRC was a huge help.”

“[The ASI evaluation] provided organized and structured information that we can use for funding, reporting and planning.”

“Training raised awareness and standards for evaluation and assessment with our organization.”

Conclusions

The Colorado Trust employs various models for increasing the capacity of grantees to conduct evaluations specific to their program. In the After-School Initiative, each grantee received evaluation technical assistance through an evaluation liaison. This approach assisted grantees to contribute data to the initiative-level evaluation, while at the same time receiving program-level feedback from the same data. Through this special supplemental study, The Colorado Trust learned that most grantees increased competency in their evaluation skills and used those skills in their ASI programs as a result of the technical assistance provided through this initiative. Furthermore, most grantees have transferred these skills to other programs beyond ASI and felt that capacity for the organization, beyond any individual, for evaluation had been built as a result of the initiative.



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