After School Activities

A summary of the scientific literature on extra-curricular activities in school settings.



How This Impacts Children's Development

After-school programs offer significant advantages for children's development. It would enhance academic achievements, help children improve social and emotional skills, build positive relationships with peers and

adults, increase engagement and school attendance, and reduce risky behaviors.

READ THE BRIEF: Improving After-School Programs in a Climate of Accountability, 2008

READ THE BRIEF: Over-Scheduled is Over-Stated: After-School Activities Are Good for Kids, 2006

Talking Points from the SRCD Briefs

- Research suggests that children and adolescents spend an average of about five hours a week on organized activities, and after-school programs have been shown to improve key academic, social, and emotional outcomes.
- A growing emphasis on accountability standards, coupled with the "No Child Left Behind" legislation, is putting pressure on after school programs to help educators boost academic outcomes for students.
    - Research shows that while after-school programs can positively impact academic performance, many do not. Some argue that these programs should focus on academics, while others caution that doing so could turn them into poorly implemented extensions of the school day. Improving effectiveness is challenging, as most staff are part-time, earn modest wages, and only receive legally required benefits, leading to high staff turnover in after-school programs
- Much of the funding for after-school programs comes from education budgets and is administered by state and local education agencies.
- Research indicates that many conventional after-school programs have little impact on outcomes compared to other community services. However, effective programs are student-driven, focus on improving staff-youth interactions, include continuous staff development, and have clear, explicit goals.

Policy Considerations in the Briefs

1. New data suggest that 40% of young people don't take part in extracurricular activities. They do not do as well academically as their peers who do participate, raising questions about equity and access to programming.
2. After-school programs should clearly define their goals and ensure activities align with them. They should also encourage student-centered, active, and developmentally appropriate learning, making

the most of the flexibility in scheduling and location that these programs offer.

3. Regular on-site staff development and improved curriculum materials are key to enhancing the effectiveness of after-school programs
4. Recognize that improving curriculum materials alone is unlikely to produce desired results.
    - This is especially important if the curriculum is arranged according to a fixed, sequential schedule, because attendance in afterschool programs can be sporadic.

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