

# Evaluation of the Waterbury After-School Project

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The goal of this project was to assist the Waterbury Foundation in developing and implementing a citywide evaluation system for Waterbury's after-school programs. The primary question addressed was whether or not after-school programs in the Waterbury community were helping youth to achieve academic success and promoting positive youth development.

Youth development outcomes were included in the evaluation because research has consistently shown that after-school programs can help youth achieve social skills and competencies that enhance motivation, and promote academic progress, emotional development, and pro-social behavior both within, and beyond, the school environment. Indicators of academic success included in the evaluation were grades in math and language arts. Indicators of youth development included achievement motivation, attitudes toward school, youth social skills, positive connections with staff, and positive connections with peers.

The evaluators, worked in collaboration with the Waterbury Youth Development Advisory Council (YDAC), a coalition of after-school programs, to design and implement the evaluation system. The planning involved the following steps.

- Meetings with representatives of after-school programs to identify common program outcome categories.
- A review of literature on evaluations of after-school programs and a written summary of (1) the successful ingredients of after-school programs, and (2) youth outcomes found in successful after-school programs.
- Identification of the specific outcomes to be examined in this evaluation.
- Selection of evaluation tools and development of the evaluation survey.
- Design of the evaluation system for collecting and analyzing the outcome data.
- Technical assistance to local programs and Waterbury Foundation staff in using the evaluation system.

The evaluation of the after-school programs consisted of a pre-test survey administered in the Fall of 2002 and a post-test survey administered in the Spring of 2003. Of the 234 pre-test participants, 90 (38%) also filled out post-test surveys.

The results of the project indicated that the youth involved with after-school programming developed more favorable attitudes towards school over time regardless of how frequently they participated in an after-school program. However, in this sample of youth, language arts grades of the youth who participated in the after-school programming over the course of the year tended to increase AND that the rate of increase in grades over time was higher for those youth who attended the programs more regularly.

Other findings, implications and recommendations for youth programs and future evaluation efforts were discussed in the evaluation report prepared for the YDAC.