

Measures for Assessing After-School Services, Programs, and Systems

Measure	Measurement Method	Inference Level of Measure ¹	Measurement Burden on Programs	Applicability Across Age Groups	Interpretation and Prior Use
Youth Level					
High Program Engagement					
High, sustained daily program attendance	Daily recording of participants' program attendance in logs or electronic files that permit aggregation and analysis across individuals and groups and across time	Low	Medium, because measurement requires an attendance system and daily recordkeeping	All age groups, although standards for judging high program attendance vary across age groups, with higher attendance expectations for younger youth	This measure is often used as an indicator of youth and parent satisfaction with the after-school program It is also used as the basis for other measurement, including surveys and data imported from schools and other agencies (evaluations of After School Matters, LA's BEST) ²
High year-to-year retention in the program	Maintenance of annual youth enrollment records that can be linked across years	Low	Medium, because measurement requires matching youth databases across two or more years	All age groups	Recent research (NYC OST evaluation) shows positive correlation between high retention and self-reported youth benefit
High Educational Effort, Commitment, and Skills					
High daily school attendance	Annual importing of youth-level school attendance records for each after-school participant, permitting aggregation and varied analyses	Low	High, because measurement may require coordination with the school district's data system	All age groups, although average daily school attendance typically varies across grade levels, with lower rates in grades 7-12	Increased school attendance is valued as an after-school outcome because it increases opportunities for youth to benefit from instruction (TASC evaluation) It is also considered an indicator of student commitment to schooling
On-time grade promotion, leading to high school graduation	Annual importing of youth-level grade promotion records for each after-school participant At high school level, annual importing of data on credits earned toward graduation	Low	High, because measurement may require coordination with the school district's data system	All age groups Some school districts no longer designate the grade level of high school students, recognizing only the number of credits a student earns each year toward graduation	On-time grade promotion is valued as an outcome because it implies mastery of grade-level content and is associated with on-time graduation (research of Roderick, Allensworth, and Easton in Chicago) Graduation is valued as an outcome because it is associated with many personal benefits, including access to higher education and jobs with career potential

¹ High-inference measures require judgment on the part of those conducting the measurement (e.g., sustainable financial support). Low-inference measures do not require judgment and usually require only counts, calculations, or yes/no response (e.g., high average daily program attendance). High-inference measures require training to make certain that raters are applying the measures consistently across settings and conditions.

² References to specific research and to particular researchers are examples only and are not complete.

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Mastery of academic (especially literacy) and/or non-academic skills	<p>Skills assessment in the program, based on direct measurement of youth skills (through a test or skill demonstration) or survey of program staff or school-day teachers to obtain their judgment of change in skill level for each youth</p> <p>Importing of data on skill levels from school records</p>	Low to medium, depending on validity and reliability of assessment measures	<p>Skills assessment – low to medium, with greater burden generally imposed by measures with higher validity and reliability</p> <p>Staff or teacher survey – medium, because of distribution and collection of surveys and the scoring and recording of survey responses; survey needs to include tested items or scales capable of measuring this feature; teacher surveys may require the payment of stipends to obtain high response rates</p> <p>Importing of data – high, because measurement requires coordination with the school or school district</p>	All age groups	<p>Some programs seek to develop youth skills in one or more domains, as either a primary or secondary objective</p> <p>Skill development as a program objective may be desirable if the targeted skills improve youth capacity to succeed in school, function effectively in other areas of life, or derive personal satisfaction and sense of accomplishment</p> <p>Many experts (Halpern) believe that a focus on academic skills should not result in after-school programming that only replicates or extends school-day instruction</p>
Program Level					
<i>Structural Features That Promote Youth Success</i>					
Low youth to staff ratio	Comparison of average daily attendance to full-time equivalent staff total, to produce a ratio	Low	Low, because it requires only one annual computation using readily available numbers	Lower ratios expected in the elementary grades	Youth value the adult contact and feedback available in after-school programs; more opportunities for adult contact help youth derive the greatest benefits from participation (NICHHD); lower staff-youth ratios associated with lower incidence of negative staff-youth interactions (Vandell)
High educational level of program director and staff	Survey of program directors and staff	Low	Low, because the measurement of educational level requires only 1-2 survey items	Some evidence that high adult educational levels are especially important in programs serving high school youth (TASC evaluation)	High educational levels of directors and staff associated with high levels of youth participation and retention and also with high levels of program coordination with the regular school day (NYC OST evaluation); high staff education levels are also associated with few negative staff-youth interactions (Vandell)

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Outreach to parents	Survey of program directors about approaches to attracting parents into regular contact with the program Log of parent visits to and involvement in the program	Low	Program director survey – low, because they are employed by the program and survey items will be keyed to program features Logs – medium	All age groups	Active parent outreach associated with high program attendance and retention (NYC OST evaluation) Research (Epstein) has identified many youth benefits from parent involvement in education
Youth input into program design and operation	Annual survey of program directors about approaches to incorporating youth input into program design and operation Annual survey of youth participants on opportunities to shape program design and operation	Medium	Program director survey – low Youth survey – high, because of required parental research consent, distribution and collection of surveys, and scoring and recording of survey responses; survey needs to include tested items or scales capable of measuring this program feature	Older youth, especially grades 7-12	Opportunities for youth input (“youth voice”) have been found to be particularly important for attracting and retaining older youth because they promote youth commitment to the program and activity
Activity Characteristics That Promote Youth Success					
Positive youth relationships with adults and peers	Annual (or more frequent) survey of youth participants; annual (or more frequent) structured observations of after-school program sessions; annual surveys of program staff or in-school teachers	Medium	Youth survey – high Structured observation – high, due to the need for observer training, measurement of reliability across observers, and multiple observations in each program Staff or teacher survey – medium	All age groups; youth ratings of adult and peer relationships typically dip in the middle grades Teacher survey generally effective only for youth in self-contained classrooms (e.g., grades K-6)	Youth development research emphasizes positive personal relationships because of strong associations of such relationships with skill in soliciting and using assistance, resolving problems, and making healthy choices (Vandell)
Youth opportunities for activity choice and leadership	Annual (or more frequent) structured observations of program sessions; survey of program directors, activity leaders, and/or youth	Medium	Structured observation – high Survey of program directors and/or activity leaders – low Youth survey – high	More important for older participants, especially grades 7-12	Opportunities for choice and leadership have been found to be particularly important in attracting and retaining older youth in structured after-school programs because these features promote youth commitment to the activity; they also allow youth to develop skills needed for successful transition to adulthood (Vandell)

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Explicit activity sequencing	Annual (or more frequent) structured observations of program sessions; surveys of program directors and/or activity leaders	High	Structured observation – high Survey of program directors and/or activity leaders – low	All age groups	Recent research (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007) emphasizes the value of clearly sequenced activities in promoting learning in after-school settings
Active, hands-on learning opportunities	Annual (or more frequent) structured observations of program sessions; surveys of program directors, activity leaders, and/or youth	Medium	Structured observation – high Survey of program directors and/or activity leaders – low Youth survey – high	All age groups	Research emphasizes the value of opportunities to apply knowledge and skills in after-school settings, in order to promote deeper learning (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Vandell)
Breadth of age-appropriate content and activities	Survey of program directors and/or activity leaders about program offerings Activity schedules, with activities categorized by key content foci (e.g., homework, academic enrichment, sports/recreation, arts, life skills)	Medium	Survey of program directors and/or activity leaders – low Inspection of activity schedules – low	Older youth, especially those in grades 7-12	The greater the breadth of available activities, the greater the likelihood that older youth, in particular, will find activities that appeal to them; breadth of activities has been found to be associated with high levels of after-school program retention (NYC OST evaluation; McLaughlin, 2000); diverse content can extend the appeal of programming to unserved youth and can also provide much-needed academic enrichment
System Level					
<i>Availability and Use of Tools for System Cohesion</i>					
Use of a participant tracking system, with data aggregation, reports, and capacity for data-sharing across agencies	Evidence of adoption and regular use of a uniform participant tracking system that meets criteria for functionality	Low	Medium, because this measure requires inspection of the system and sample output	All age groups	A participant tracking system is an essential tool to track youth attendance and outcomes; it is especially important given the field's knowledge of the extent to which participation levels are associated with youth outcomes (evaluations of TASC and Citizen Schools)

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Partner agreements and policies in place	<p>Survey of program directors about partnerships with schools and other public and private agencies, outreach to parents, and professional development opportunities available to staff</p> <p>Review of documents showing approved agreements and policies regarding links to schools and other public and private agencies, safety standards, use of facilities and equipment, and other matters</p>	Medium	<p>Program director survey – low</p> <p>Document review – medium, because this measure requires inspection of agreements and policies, in light of knowledge about the initiative’s priorities, needs, opportunities, and constraints</p>	All age groups	<p>Partner agreements and policies are important for specifying expectations regarding quality assurance, accountability, and liability; agreements are likely to enrich and extend the programming available to participants; they are also likely to increase the likelihood of full integration into the community and hence fiscal and political sustainability</p> <p>Written policies facilitate program replication in new sites and settings</p>
Adoption and use of quality standards	<p>Review of standards</p> <p>Survey of program directors regarding the application and use of quality standards</p>	Low	<p>Standards review – low</p> <p>Program director survey – low</p>	All age groups	Intermediary organizations (Baltimore Safe and Sound) and states (New York) have found quality standards to be an effective tool for promoting agreement with and adherence to their own interpretations of after-school quality
Provision of technical assistance and staff training	<p>Review of records of the delivery of technical assistance and staff training</p> <p>Survey of program directors and activity leaders regarding availability of and satisfaction with quality standards</p>	Low	<p>Records review – medium, because records may need to be assembled</p> <p>Program director and activity leaders survey – low</p>	All age groups	Evaluations of after-school programs have found associations between participation in technical assistance/staff training and self-reported youth benefit from services and also with staff retention in programs (evaluations of NYC OST and TASC)
Sustainable financial support	<p>Survey of program directors regarding the sources and amounts of program fiscal support</p> <p>Review of budgets and documentation of fund-raising approaches</p> <p>Review of city and state budgets to identify line items for support of after-school services</p>	Medium	<p>Program director survey – low</p> <p>Review of budgets – medium, because this measure requires inspection of program, city, and state budgets, fund-raising results, and fund-raising approach, in light of knowledge about the initiative</p>	All age groups	Sustainable financial support is essential for program continuation; it can be achieved through both public and private support, although support from both sectors is most desirable

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Unified governance structure	Review of governance structure Interviews with system leaders and others	Medium	Governance review – medium, because records documenting the structure may need to be assembled; also, actual structure may differ from intended structure Interviews – medium, different questions will be required for each system and each respondent	All age groups	Researchers (Halpern) have found that governance structures that incorporate all elements of the after-school community and give voice to all of them are likely to encourage coherence, visibility, and acceptance of the after-school system by the larger community
<i>Achievement of Scale in Youth Participation</i>					
Growth in number of program slots	Aggregated count of program slots, as reported by program directors	Low	Low, because this measure requires only 1 to 2 numbers annually from each program director	All age groups	Growth in slots is important to increase the numbers of youth who participate in organized after-school programs, especially in light of research on the negative consequences of a lack of adult supervision after school (Mahoney, Vandell)
Engagement of leaders across youth-serving sectors	Evidence of involvement of local youth-service leaders in contributing roles in system governance and operations	Medium	Medium, because this measure requires awareness of key youth-serving sectors and each sector's leaders	More important with older youth because of greater need for diverse programming with this population	Broad leadership engagement is likely to enrich and extend the programming available to participants; it is also likely to increase the likelihood of full integration of after-school services into the community and hence sustainability