

After-School Programs

Exploring the Strengths & Opportunities for
Growth in the CNG After-School Programs

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Executive Summary

The Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula (BGCP) currently operates six Center for a New Generation (CNG) after-school programs at school sites in the peninsula area. As the CNG programs expand, BGCP is interested in understanding the strengths and areas for growth for their after-school programs, specifically those currently implemented in elementary schools. In the fall of 2008, BGCP continued its partnership with student research teams from Stanford University School of Education to explore this theme. Two groups with three students were assigned to this topic, and each group researched two elementary schools with CNG programs. Our research focused on Taft Elementary School in Redwood City and Belle Haven Community School in the Ravenswood district, and this report presents our team's findings. CNG's after-school programs at Taft and Belle Haven currently implement training and curriculum components from Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL), which is an after-school program developed in Boston and implemented at additional BELL sites on the east coast.

In order to research the after-school programs at these sites, we conducted interviews with the CNG director of programs, two site directors, two lead teachers, and multiple mentors. Additionally, we conducted one mentor focus group at Taft. On-site observations and informal student interviews also informed this research. Protocols for all meetings, interviews, and observations can be found in the appendices of this report.

In order to frame the data and recommendations, the research team conducted a review of literature on after-school programs. To address the questions raised by BGCP, the most relevant readings were those that focused on the benefits of after-school programs, the increased attention on and expectations of after-school programs, and elements of high quality after-school programs. Additionally, background on the BELL program as it is implemented at on-site locations is important to frame the research regarding the BELL elements of the CNG programs.

Through on-site observations and conversations with people involved in the after-school programs at different levels of implementation, several important themes emerged.

- *Positive supports and opportunities:* Mentor teachers at CNG programs have created a safe, comfortable environment, which allows students to engage in social and emotional learning. Staff members have positive attitudes, build relationships with students, and serve as role-models. BGCP should continue to emphasize the importance of staff positivity and relationship building, while also fostering group management and maintaining the role of mentors as authorities in the classroom.
- *Academic Programming:* Taft and Belle Haven after-school programs currently use KidzLit and components of the BELL curriculum, as BELL was identified by BCGP as a leader in effective literacy programs. Beyond the training and materials, BELL encompasses an approach to after-school programming including intentional scheduling, individual student progress portfolios, and the use of multiple certified teachers. These aspects have been more difficult for CNG programs to employ. As CNG develops its relationship with the newly appointed Director of Regional Expansion at BELL, it will be important to explore the non-negotiable elements of the BELL approach to determine if using certain components will still result in the positive outcomes seen at on-site BELL programs.

- *Training:* Training is a clear goal at both sites and mentors described orientation training as extensive and useful. Nonetheless, a number of staff at different levels expressed that additional, on-going, training would be beneficial. In building and structuring an in-service training program, CNG should consider alternatives to group sessions, such as increased cross-site visits, time during staff meetings dedicated to sharing information on lesson implementation, and more consistent mentor observations and feedback.
- *Connection to the School Day:* At both Taft and Belle Haven, positive sentiments exist between the school and after-school programs, which present a foundation for building collaboration and communication with the day program curriculum and teachers. As shared staff, lead teachers offer significant potential for connection between the day and after-school programs. CNG should examine the current implementation of this role and consider ways to increase the time spent in the after-school program by a day teacher. Additionally, mentor observations of classroom lessons and the use of day program materials are methods that CNG could explore in order to increase alignment with their host schools.

These themes correspond with important elements of after-school programs as presented in the literature, therefore demonstrating the positive foundation for after-school programs at Taft and Belle Haven as well as opportunities for CNG to further develop its after-school programs.

Introduction

The Boys and Girls Clubs of the Peninsula (BGCP) currently operates six Center for a New Generation (CNG) after-school programs, four of which are in elementary schools in East Palo Alto and Menlo Park. Three of the elementary school sites are currently implementing curricula from Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL), an after-school literacy program developed in Boston with site-based implementation in additional east coast cities. BELL sites include James Flood Elementary School, Belle Haven Community School and Taft Elementary School. The fourth elementary school site, East Palo Alto Academy, employs a non-BELL curriculum. In fall 2008, BGCP continued a partnership with students from Stanford University to research and recommend opportunities for development in various aspects of their programming. For the after-school program, the original research question posed by BGCP involved examining a CNG after-school program that uses the BELL approach versus one that does not. However, dividing the CNG sites between two research groups resulted in our group examining two schools that both use the BELL curriculum. Therefore, our research team shifted the study focus to understanding the overall strengths and opportunities for improvement of the after-school programs.

This research study examined the CNG after-school programs at Taft in Redwood City and Belle Haven in the Ravenswood district. CNG began operating its after-school program at Belle Haven in 2006, and is currently in the second year of implementing BELL, while the CNG program at Taft is new as of August, 2008. We sought to answer the following questions:

- From the perspective of key constituencies (site-coordinators, mentors, and lead-teachers), what are the strengths and weaknesses of the after-school programs at their school?
- How could the programs be more beneficial to the students that they serve?
- What improvements could be made?

To address these questions, we conducted qualitative research, including a literature review, on-site observations, and interviews with administrators, staff and students at both school sites, and a mentor focus group.

Literature Review

In order to inform our project, we conducted a literature review of readings that focus on after-school programs. Comprehensive after-school programming is increasingly viewed as an important component in promoting learning and social development for youth, and therefore literature related to after-school programs is extensive. To address the questions raised by BGCP, the readings that we found most relevant were those that addressed the benefits of after-school programs, the increased attention on and expectations of after-school programs, and elements of high quality after-school programs. Additionally, background on the BELL program as it is designed to be implemented is important to frame our research regarding the BELL elements of the CNG programs.

Benefits of After-School Programs

Extensive research and program evaluation reviews demonstrate that participation in after-school programs is associated with greater student engagement in learning and school. This engagement exists in the form of gains in school attendance, greater commitment to homework and improved homework quality (Hammond & Reimer, 2006; Chung, 2000; Kane, 2004). Additionally, in reviews of effective programs from around the country, Hammond and Reimer (2006) and Chung (2000) found that participation in after-school programs can lead to social behavior that increases student engagement, such as improved school behavior and increased positive attitudes about school.

In addition to student engagement in learning, after-school programs can result in improved academic achievement. In a meta-analysis of program evaluations, Lauer et al. (2006) concluded that out-of-school-time programs could have positive effects on the achievement of at-risk students in reading and math. The meta-analysis found that students in early elementary grades particularly can benefit from out-of-school-time programs for improved reading, and that programs do not have to focus solely on academic activities to have positive effects on student achievement. Additionally, a report jointly issued by the Department of Education and Department of Justice gives multiple examples of studies and data on how after-school programs led to better grades, higher academic achievement, and increased interest in and ability to read (Chung, 2000).

Research has also found participation in after-school programs to be associated with improved social development, including better interpersonal skills and peer relationships (Hammond & Reimer, 2006). In an extensive review of after-school programs, Chung (2000) also reported social benefits, such as fewer behavior problems in school, improved conflict-resolution ability, improved cooperation, and higher self-confidence as a result of healthy relationships with adults and peers.

Expectations of After-School Programs

In recent years, after-school programs have gained attention in the national education policy debate and No Child Left Behind has focused new attention on out-of-school time programs (Pittman et al., 2004). Funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is evidence of this increased attention, as it grew from \$40 million in 1998 to \$1 billion in 2002, a level around which it remains currently. Additionally, the increased emphasis of test-based accountability for schools in general has also resulted in higher expectations of after-school programs with respect to academic achievement (Kane, 2004; Lauer, et al., 2006).

In light of the increased attention and expectations, literature has focused on the importance of considering the amount and nature of time spent in after-school programs (versus day programs) and developing realistic expectations, particularly with respect to academic achievement. Accordingly, multiple studies and articles have suggested that it is not realistic or appropriate for after-school programs to target test scores (Kane, 2004; Hammond & Reimer, 2006; Halpern, 2006; Pittman et al., 2004). As academic expectations rise, it is important to distinguish between increasing engagement in learning and directly improving academic achievement. Pittman, Irby, Yohalem, and Wilson-Ahlstrom (2004) note that there is a strong research base to support the idea that engagement in learning leads to long-term academic success, but the link to measurable

academic improvement is not necessarily an immediate one. Therefore, the findings that after-school programs increase engagement in learning imply that they could impact long-term academic success, even if short-term gains are not seen.

Elements of Successful After-School Programs

Although extensive literature exists regarding the benefits of after-school programs, it is difficult to draw causal links between program models and student outcomes. Nonetheless, research and program reviews have shown consistency in program attributes that are associated with positive youth outcomes.

Curriculum Development and Program Evaluation

While literature has noted that there is not a one-size-fits-all model of after-school programming, there is also agreement that intentional programming, goals, and evaluation are important. In a review of high-quality programs, Pittman et al. (2004) noted that models of successful after-school programs vary from explicit academic models to enrichment-focused models, yet that curriculum development is important for all. Literature has also highlighted the importance of a broad array of enrichment activities or a menu of programs, so that youth have exposure to new learning opportunities. In addition to enrichment activities, Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, and Mielke (2005) found that literacy skill-building, and some degree of homework help were also aspects of programs that correlated with academic achievement. Finally, multiple reviews of effective after-school programs note the need for clear goals and continuous evaluation so that program planners can gauge success based on the goals set for their particular program (Hammond & Reimer, 2006; Poggi, 2003; Chung, 2000).

Staff

The importance of program staff was a consistent finding in studies and reviews of high-quality after-school programs. A comprehensive review of sources that addressed after-school efficacy found consensus regarding the importance of staff training, low staff-student ratios, professional development, and stability in staff (Hammond & Reimer, 2006). Additionally, a review of The After-School Corporation (TASC) programs in New York found that programs associated with academic achievement had a strong leader, on-going training throughout the year, regular staff meetings, and consistent feedback (Birmingham et al., 2005).

Given the variety in program strategies, the type of training necessary for any one after-school program will vary. Specifically, programs should ensure that after-school workers have the skills and particular content knowledge necessary to do their jobs based on goals of the program (Pittman et al., 2004; Poggi, 2003). For example, in the TASC study, Birmingham et al. (2005) found that programs associated with academic achievement employed staff that understood and used instructional strategies such as communication of objectives, scaffolding understanding of concepts, and recognition of youth's efforts and accomplishments.

In addition to content knowledge and instructional strategies, it is important that staff members are trained in group management techniques. In a study examining Philadelphia Beacon Centers, Grossman, Campbell, and Raley (2007) reported that group management is one of the most important factors in promoting youth engagement, learning, enjoyment and regular participation in after-school programs. The report also emphasized the importance of positive attitudes among

staff in enhancing youth learning and engagement, a finding which Pierce et al. (1999) supported in a study examining outcomes for first-graders involved in after-school programs.

Strong Relationships

Literature related to successful after-school programs often refers to the importance of relationship building – between the program and the host school, with families, and between and among peers and staff. In the TASC study, Birmingham et al. (2005) found that programs associated with academic achievement all had strong relationships with their host schools. The programs achieved these connections through the alignment of priorities across day and after-school programs, shared teachers and staff, conversations between after-school staff and teachers about participants, and shared celebrations and appreciation between programs. In an article about academic support in after-school programs, Poggi (2003) also stressed the need of consistent, formal, and specific communication between extended and regular school day staff. In addition to a strong relationship between the day and after-school programs, literature consistently emphasizes the importance of relationship building, between staff and students, and among peers (Hammond & Reimer, 2006; Birmingham et al., 2005). Grossman et al. (2007) reported this as one of their most important findings, noting that “how well programs create high-quality learning environments is linked to staff’s ability to promote supportive interactions among all youth and between staff and youth” (42).

Background on BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life)

In an effort to contribute to the academic goals of the schools they serve, BCGP sought to implement an after-school program with proven academic results. After researching effective literacy programs, BCGP identified BELL as a leader and began implementing BELL curriculum and training in 2006 at some of the CNG sites. An evaluation on the Harvard Family Research Project website outlines the program as one that emphasizes a skill based, multi-cultural curriculum, implemented by certified teachers and highly trained college students. An Educational Advisor at each site develops and tracks goals for each scholar through individual portfolios. BELL also stresses the importance of parent support and participation as well as a strong connection to the school day lessons. Evaluations have shown that BELL scholars in the after-school program achieve gains in reading and math skills and improvement in self-esteem and social skills (HFRP, 2003). Additionally, the BELL summer program has demonstrated effectiveness in reducing summer learning loss among low-income children (Chaplin & Capizzano, 2006). BELL is committed to continuous program improvement, and has been recognized as a model for programs seeking to conduct thorough evaluation (Phalen & Cooper, 2007).

Literature regarding benefits of after-school programs, the increased attention on and expectations of after-school programs, and elements of high quality after-school programs provide the framework for our understanding of the CNG after-school programs. Furthermore, knowledge regarding the BELL program as it exists in on-site programs on the east coast is important background as we consider data regarding BELL implementation at CNG sites.

Methodology

To understand the strengths and areas of improvement for the BGCP after-school programs, our research group spoke with a number of people involved in the after-school program at different levels of implementation. By asking these constituencies similar sets of questions, we were able to synthesize our findings into themes and compare their consistency across distinct constituencies. The data we collected for this study included formal interviews with the director of school site programs, site directors and lead teachers. We also observed the after-school programs, conducted informal interviews with students and mentors, and held a focus group with mentors at Taft. Finally, we reviewed CNG documents, such as quarterly reports, evaluation forms and a newsletter, and examined numerous studies regarding after-school programs.

Research Sites

Our interviews, observations and focus group were conducted at two schools - Taft Community School in Redwood City and Belle Haven Community School in Menlo Park.

Subjects

We chose our subjects based on the structure of the CNG program. The CNG program was structured with a director of school site after-school programs at BGCP, a site director who was a BGCP staff and was responsible for the operations of the specific after-school program, a lead teacher who was a day school staff and responsible for the liaison between the after-school and day school, and mentors who were the after-school program teachers. We formally interviewed the director of school site programs using the interview protocol in Appendix A, and then the site director and lead teacher from each school using the interview protocol found in Appendix B and C. The site directors chose the classrooms for us to observe and we randomly chose students to talk to and tried to talk to the mentors when they had time. All mentors at Taft were notified about the focus group and participated on a voluntary basis.

We decided on the same interview protocol with the other after-school program group. Our protocols were based on gaining a better understanding of the goals, structure, strengths and areas of improvement of the CNG program. Our literature review also helped guide us on what important components (staff training, program evaluation) were fundamentals in understanding an after-school program. The interview protocols, which were similar for each constituency, allowed us to compare their opinions and find patterns of preference.

Procedures

We first corresponded with James Harris, the Operations Director and interviewed Alara MacGillivray, the director of school site programs to get a fact base to ground our understanding of the BGCP after-school programs. The correspondence with James Harris was conducted through email and an informal meeting, while the interview with Alara MacGillivray was conducted at her office at the Moldaw Zaffaroni Clubhouse in East Palo Alto. The goals for the meeting with Alara are outlined in Appendix A.

All our group members participated in the first formal interview conducted with the site director at Belle Haven. After we gained a better overall understanding of the after-school programs, we

divided responsibilities to increase efficiency. We visited each school on average twice a week. At that time, two of the group members conducted site observations while the other interviewed the site director or lead teacher. These interviews followed the protocol found in Appendix B and C. Each interview and site observation was approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The goals of the site observations are illustrated in Appendix D.

To gain a better understanding of the program from the mentors' perspectives, the site director at Taft organized a focus group. Eight mentors attended the focus group that lasted approximately 45 minutes. The focus group followed the protocol found in Appendix E.

We conducted all the interviews, site observations and focus group within a time span of about four weeks. Some challenges in our data collection included not being able to conduct a focus group for mentors at Belle Haven, and the difficulty of coordinating time to visit the school sites. Given more time, we would have conducted further site observations and informal interviews with students and expanded our perspective on the after-school programs through interviewing other constituencies, including parents, principals and day teachers. Despite these challenges, we were able to gather a significant amount of data to inform our findings and recommendations.

Findings

We grouped our findings into the following five categories: non-academic benefits, academic benefits, staff training, connection to the day program and program evaluation.

Non-Academic Benefits

Mentor teachers within classrooms have created an engaging, comfortable space

Students have a close relationship with their mentors and in some cases; students view their mentors more as peers than teachers. Literature has highlighted that close relationships between staff and students as well as small group settings can benefit students' social development (Hammond & Reimer, 2006; Birmingham et al, 2005). This dynamic was evident at Taft, as one mentor mentioned a few of her students were very introverted, however they became more sociable in the after-school program and this translated to the day program. Mentors from both schools mentioned the need to include an element of something more fun in the CNG program to further increase the students' level of engagement. Suggestions they gave included the addition of a more formal sports or recreational element within the program and more appropriate reading material to engage the younger students.

Mentor teachers become valuable adult resources and role models

There is general consensus among constituencies that one of the most positive program elements is the relationships that are developed and the impact on youth of having supportive adult mentors. Belle Haven's site director continuously emphasized that the relationships instill positive attitudes in students and are a main driving force for students to return to the program. This corresponds to the finding that a positive attitude among staff is important for enhancing youth learning and engagement (Grossman et al., 2007; Pierce et al., 1999). Additionally, multiple members of the Taft staff focused on program goals of social skill building, helping

students believe in themselves, providing them with tools for conflict-resolution, offering enrichment activities, and creating youth-adult relationships.

Academic Benefits

Academic programs across the school sites varied widely

The curriculum at both schools is expected to be a combination of BELL and KidzLit. Additional program elements include homework help, electives, life skills, visual and performing arts, recess, and community time. There have been varying degrees of transference of the BELL curriculum to Taft and Belle Haven, and overall it appears that Belle Haven follows the BELL curriculum more closely than Taft does.

Some mentors also addressed that they felt materials were not age-appropriate. Specifically at Taft, kindergarten mentors believed the books were too long and too advanced. Other mentors from other grade levels thought the materials were easy for some but difficult for others hence the material could not cater to a wide range of students' abilities.

Assessment tools cited by leadership as an area for growth and improvement

The need for assessment tools was stated by multiple members of the BGCP staff. In some schools observation of progress in workbooks and evaluation sheets yields academic improvement information, while in other schools evaluation and assessment were noted more informally through observation and communication with parents. Mentors at Belle Haven expressed that they have methods for tracking student progress, while mentors at Taft were less clear about these tools.

The emphasis on homework completion was clear across all sites

Completion of homework was seen by the students as a priority across all sites, and in some sites the mentor teachers focused on this as an explicit classroom goal. The emphasis on homework completion was particularly strong at Taft where the school explicitly requested that the after-school program prioritize finishing homework. As a result, homework assistance was often before the literacy block and parents were notified if homework was not completed. The homework component in the CNG programs differed from BELL. The BELL focus for this scheduled portion of the day is on math while the CNG program assisted in whatever homework the students had. However, our research only identifies homework completion and is insufficient to determine whether CNG after-school programs led to the benefits noted in literature such as greater student commitment to homework (Kane, 2004) and improved homework quality (Hammond & Reimer, 2006; Chung, 2000).

Training

Consistent training remains a goal across sites

In general, there was consensus on the emphasis on staff training, but ongoing training varied across the two sites. All constituencies described extensive orientation sessions that include training on behavior management, child development, overview of BGCP, and lesson plan development. However, despite the quantity of training, numerous people in different roles expressed that further training would be beneficial. Some staff mentioned the need for further

training on instructional strategies, which is consistent with research suggesting that programs should ensure that after-school workers have the skills and particular content knowledge necessary to do their jobs based on goals of the program (Pittman et al.; Poggi). Mentors found the cross-site visits helpful and also learned from observing the modeled lessons by the lead-teacher.

Capacity for in-service training through lead teachers

Multiple people mentioned the lead teacher as an important asset for staff training, yet it became clear through site visits and conversations that the teachers at both schools have very limited availability for this function.

Lead teachers spoke at length about the fact that the mentors need more training on behavior management and instructional strategies. This corresponds to the mentors request for on-going training with particular emphasis on behavior management, and is consistent with the finding that group management is one of the most important factors in promoting youth engagement, learning, enjoyment and regular participation in after-school programs (Grossman et al., 2007).

BELL specific training

There has been some progress in consolidating the transfer of BELL curriculum. For example, this past summer, BELL hired a Director of Regional Expansion, Courtney Schroeder. BGCP has recently established a relationship with Courtney and she made site visits to CNG programs in early October. Courtney explained that BELL is aiming to expand their on-site programs nationally as well as develop a formal affiliate plan for other programs that use the BELL model/curriculum. However, the director of the CNG acknowledges there is still substantial challenge of translating BELL curriculum to on-site programs.

All constituencies acknowledged the lack of direct BELL training. The CNG director acknowledged that ideally site directors would go to BELL training in Boston; however, neither site director at Taft or Belle Haven has been. Both site directors expressed the feeling that they did not understand the “gist” or “big picture” of BELL and that it would be helpful to attend training in Boston to gain a better understanding of the program. Additionally, lead teachers have not received any BELL training.

Connection to Day Program

Positive relationships present a foundation for connection

All constituencies acknowledged the importance of a supportive administration in the implementation of an after-school program. Literature also stresses this importance, in which the programs associated with academic achievement had strong relationships with their host schools (Birmingham et al., 2005). The director of the CNG program specifically pointed out that was the main reason why she thought James Flood was the “flagship,” and also highlighted the very supportive principal at Belle Haven. Both site directors had a close relationship with the administrators in the day program. For example, the site director at Belle Haven attends teacher meetings weekly and tries to know everyone on campus because he feels the connection to the school day programs is crucial. He thinks the administration at Belle Haven sees the after-school

program as an asset and feels “they listen to me” and “we got each other’s backs.” However, he also said he wishes there was greater rapport between teachers and mentors.

Overall, the after-school program at Taft also has a positive relationship with the day program. However, mentors at Taft mentioned that they feel restricted and restrained by using the same spaces that the day teachers’ use. They do not feel they could share materials or use blackboards or bulletin boards. Nonetheless, mentors made positive comments about their relationships with teachers at the school.

Communication plan is in place, but execution varies

Both site directors recognize the importance of consistent, formal, and specific communication between extended and regular school day staff, a finding supported by literature (Poggi, 2003). CNG has developed teacher communication forms to facilitate feedback between teachers and mentors and CNG information sheets to provide day teachers with information regarding the after-school program. However, the use of these communication tools varied across the school sites. Furthermore, a more formalized structure to introduce the after-school programs to day teachers and to connect mentors with day teachers would be beneficial. This was suggested because day teachers ask lead teachers a lot of questions about the after-school program. Furthermore, the mentors’ main form of contact with day teachers is during student pick-up time at the end of the school day. Those are usually very brief and tend to focus on logistics rather than student specifics.

Academically, the BELL program stresses the importance of a strong connection to the school day lessons (Harvard Family Research Project). This has been implemented relatively well in both sites. Both sites established close relationships to plan for its after-school academic program. For example, at Belle Haven, CNG receives monthly standards/planning guides from the vice principal. The site director at Taft hopes to establish a monthly correspondence with teachers at Taft to understand the curriculum of the day program. Other suggestions for forging a stronger connection to host school includes alignment of priorities across day and after-school programs, shared teachers and staff, conversations between after-school staff and teachers about participants, and shared celebrations and appreciations between programs (Birmingham et al., 2005).

Liaison role of lead teachers is limited by time spent in the program

Lead teachers are an integral part of connecting the after-school program with the day program. Report from ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education suggests that effective academic after-school programs align their curriculum with the day school by using day teachers as program staff (1998). However, our site visits and further interviews revealed that the lead teachers at both schools spend very limited time in the program. For example, lead teachers spend an average of 2-4 hours per week in the after-school programs. Lead teachers also reflected the weak connection and communication and felt there was no direct line of coordination regarding the curriculum to the after-school program.

Evaluation

Academic goals

The site director at Bell Haven was aware of the heavy emphasis on academic achievement from the district; however, there was less emphasis of this at Taft. At both sites, there did not seem to be a direct translation and constant reminder of the CNG goals with the mentors. Many mentors did not remember the exact goals, or many perceived what they viewed as most valuable from the after-school program (e.g. homework completion, building self-confidence) as the goals. Multiple reviews of effective after-school programs note the need for clear goals and continuous evaluation so that program planners can gauge success based on the goals set for their particular program (Hammond & Reimer, 2006; Poggi, 2003; Chung, 2000).

Academic evaluation

The CNG program has many measures to track students' academic progress, reflecting an understanding among the leadership of the importance of continuous evaluation (Hammond & Reimer, 2006; Poggi, 2003; Chung, 2000). To evaluate the CNG program in general, BGCP completes extensive self-evaluations at the end of each year, which reviews target outcomes, accomplishments, and lessons learned for going forward.

With regards to site program evaluation, the director of the CNG explained that in the past two years they did pre- and post-testing of SDRT scores; however, these did not translate as meaningful to the district, so they decided not to do that this year and instead are focused on CST scores. Currently, Belle Haven CNG program uses a range of test scores, evaluation forms and informal feedback to evaluate its program. These includes BELL quarterly quizzes, student report cards, pre and post test with the students and teachers attitude on the after-school program and teacher communication form to assess the students' progress.

Although there are similar evaluation sheets and structure at Taft, it has not yet been implemented. The lack of a structural evaluation is reflected in the mentors' responses. The mentors at Taft said they use brief informal interactions with teachers and parents as their way of measuring progress. Furthermore, lead teachers in both sites were unsure of how the program tracks progress and were not aware of the formal program evaluation structure, suggesting the need for more communication between the day school and after-school programs with regards to the after-school program academic evaluation.

Opportunities for Growth

The research, interviews, and observations conducted through the course of this project indicate that the Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula provides a very rich after-school program, which helps to serve the academic, social, and emotional needs of youth at the Belle Haven and Taft sites. While a strong foundation exists, a few key areas emerged as potential opportunities for growth.

Staff training

Staff training should remain a high priority for the CNG after-school programs, with ongoing enhancement of skills emphasized. Although program budgets and dedication of uninterrupted training time present challenges to training programs, staff practices are a critical element in the delivery of high quality after-school programs.

Classroom management should continue to be a staple of the training program for mentors and other after-school program staff. Grossman, Campbell, and Raley (2007) specifically note the need for ongoing training opportunities. BGCP could consider increased cross-site visits and observations, which were mentioned by mentors as effective and helpful. Additionally, each site could dedicate time at staff meetings to exchange advice and effective strategies with peers. High quality online training sessions, which can be as brief as fifteen minutes, is suggested to have lasting impact on after-school programs (Moses, 2008).

Given that academic improvement is a goal of the CNG after-school programs, providing mentors with training on instructional strategies should also be a priority. Literature has noted that programs should ensure that after-school workers have the skills and particular content knowledge necessary to do their jobs based on goals of the program (Pittman et al., 2004; Poggi, 2003). In addition to group training sessions, BGCP could consider increased mentor observations and feedback, conducted by either the lead teacher or site director.

Finally, with respect to BELL training, it would be helpful for all site directors to attend on-site training in Boston. On-site training would give them a more comprehensive understanding of the BELL approach and allow for more effective transfer of BELL training to mentors. Additionally, CNG should consider providing lead teachers with general BELL training, so that the day teachers gain a better understanding of the program.

BELL Program Implementation

It is important for BGCP to investigate whether BELL elements can be used effectively in a piece-meal way. Communication with BELL's Director of Regional Expansion will be beneficial in terms of understanding which BELL elements are non-negotiable. Therefore, maintaining a close relationship with the Director of Regional Expansion should be a priority. Additionally, CNG could explore whether there are additional elements of the BELL curriculum that could be incorporated in order to increase fidelity with the BELL approach as it is implemented at on-site locations.

Connection to the school day

Research has demonstrated that programs associated with academic achievement have strong relationships with their host schools (Birmingham et al., 2005). BCCP can capitalize on the positive sentiments that exist between the day and after-school programs to increase the connection with school day programs and teachers. BGCP should examine the current implementation of the lead teacher role and explore ways to increase the time spent in the after-school program by a day teacher. One suggestion is to explore the use of more than one lead teacher. Additionally, mentor observations of classroom lessons would provide a means of building rapport with teachers who instruct their students during the day. Finally, in order to align academic priorities, BGCP could explore particularly strong curriculum components from the day program and consider the use of these day program materials.

Conclusions

The Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula after-school program has positive benefits to the youth and the greater community it serves. The enhanced social behavior and greater student engagement are two of the many direct benefits seen from participation in the existing program. Children are active, engaged, and generally happy when taking part in the Boys and Girls Club after-school program as it is delivered currently.

It is important to realize what realistic expectations are for an organization in this shared ground between school and community. The increased emphasis of test-based accountability for schools in general has resulted in high expectations of after-school programs with respect to academic achievement. Yet short-term academic gains are difficult to achieve. CNG should continue to highlight their students' progress in homework completion, attendance, and behavior, understanding that increased engagement in learning leads to long-term academic success.

The hallmark of the after-school program is the open access to many positive opportunities. Apart from the safe and stimulating environment, the relationships between staff and students are those of genuine caring and interest. The Boys and Girls Club provides a program which aids in improving self-perception through supportive social interactions and has shown gains in students' engagement in learning. Hopefully, the current findings and recommendations will only enhance the effectiveness of the CNG after-school programs.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Goals for meeting with Alara MacGillivray, Director of School Site Programs

- Background of where we are in terms of our research goals / Confirming details:
 - How many students attend each program
 - Staff breakdown for each school (number of teachers from school versus BGCP mentors)
 - How long has each school been utilizing their particular program?
- Training implemented across the schools (both BELL and Non-BELL) for site directors? Mentor teachers?
- What are the goals of each after-school program? Are they the same for BELL vs. NON-BELL schools?
- Are there program evaluations in place at any of the sites?
- Which of these programs stands out in your mind as accomplishing the goals of BGCP has established for its after-school programs?
 - Follow-up: What components stand out to you most?

Appendix B: Site Directors Interview Protocol

- 1) Tell me about a typical day in the ASP.
 - 2) Tell me about the goals of the after-school program. Is there a mission statement?
 - 3) From your perspective, which program elements have the greatest affect on these goals?
 - 4) Are there components that are not influencing these goals?
 - 5) We understand the students come from teacher referrals and parent enrollment. How does this split break down at Belle Haven?
 - 6) Tell me a little about the training you and your staff receive.
 - 7) Tell me about how you track student progress.
 - 8) What do you see as the programs strengths?
 - 9) What do you see as the programs weaknesses?
 - 10) Are there any changes you would like to see implemented in the program? (probe with challenges to putting these in place)
- IF TIME) Help me understand how the curriculum for the after-school program (ASP) was selected.

Appendix C: Lead Teachers Protocol

- 1) Tell me about a typical day for you in the ASP.
- 2) Tell us about the curriculum for the after-school program?
- 3) How does the after-school curriculum connect to the day school curriculum?
- 4) What are other ways the after-school program coordinates with the school?
- 5) Tell me about the goals of the after-school program. Is there a mission statement?
- 6) From your perspective, which program elements have the greatest affect on these goals? [Follow up: Can you give me an example of how those elements are impactful?]
- 7) Are there components that are not influencing these goals?
- 8) What, if any training did you receive specifically for your role in the after-school program?
- 9) How responsive are the students to the ASP? [Follow up: can you give me an example of what that looks/sounds like in the classroom]
- 8) Can you describe the type of student that benefits most from the program? [Follow up: What specific characteristics come to mind when describing that student?]
- 9) Tell me about how you track student progress.
- 10) What do you see as the programs strengths?
- 11) What do you see as the programs weaknesses?
- 12) Are there any changes you would like to see implemented in the program? (probe with challenges to putting these in place)

Appendix D: Site observation focus

- Interactions (between teacher and students, between students): For example: Do the teachers interact with students regularly? Do the students interact with each other? How do they interact?
- Engagement/Body Language/ Participation: For example: Do the students enjoy being in the ASP?
- Instruction & Learning Experience

Possible questions to be addressed with BGCP Mentors through informal interviews:

Can you explain to me the training process you received?

Tell me about a typical day in the ASP.

Tell me about how you evaluate student growth. [Follow up if they do not address academic growth]

What are the program strengths? [Follow up: From your perspective which program elements have the greatest influence?]

What are the program weaknesses? (Are there elements of the program that need improvement?)

If you were in charge of this program, what would you do? OR Is there anything I should have asked that I didn't?

Informal Questions for students:

How do you feel about coming to the ASP?

What's your favorite part of the program?

Has coming to this program helped you in school?

Appendix E: Focus group questions for BGCP Mentors

“Thank you so much for coming today to talk to us about the after-school program at Taft. We are students at Stanford and are working on a research project for the Boys and Girls Club. We will be asking several questions today that we’re curious to know your thoughts on. Please know that your names and comments are confidential, so we want to encourage you to be as honest as possible. We will be meeting for about 30-45 minutes today.”

Start with introductions and brief mention of previous after-school/BGCP/teaching experience.

- 1) Can you explain the training process you received for the CNG program?
 - a) How did this prepare you for the work you are doing at Taft?
 - b) Are there ongoing training opportunities? Required? Optional?
 - c) Is there any additional training that would have been helpful?
- 2) Tell me about how you evaluate student growth.
 - a) Academic growth?
 - b) Social/emotional growth?
- 3) What are the program strengths?
 - a) What program elements do students enjoy the most?
- 4) What are the program weaknesses?
 - a) Are there elements of the program that need improvement?
 - b) If you were in charge of this program, what would you do?
- 5) Is there anything else you’d like to tell us about the CNG program?