

## **Building a Partnership in Education: Studying the Impact of Out-of-School Programs on School-Related Indicators in Urban School Settings**

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Jefferson County, located in Louisville, Kentucky, is experiencing a unique effort to collect and share data about after-school programs that will help educators and youth-service providers understand the relationship between out-of-school activities and non-academic and academic indicators. The partners in the project include the Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS), Jefferson County Government, City of Louisville, Metro United Way, Metro Parks Department, Urban League, Workforce Investment Board, Salvation Army Boys and Girls Clubs, and many other youth-related organizations. Besides the financial commitment of the participating partners, the efforts have been partially funded with grant support from the Mott Foundation, administered by the Academy for Educational Development and the US Department of Education. Currently, the project is being implemented in eight community schools and six Boys and Girls Clubs sites that have the common characteristic of being located in high-need areas. Overall, the school district and the community-based organizations (CBO) have reached consensus on critical youth non-academic (attendance, suspensions) and academic (GPA, standardized testing) indicators. Other indicators are connectedness, locus of control and successful transition to adult life.

State-of-the-art technology has been used to collect and share information among the partners. First, a membership management information system was put in place. KidTrax is a barcode card-swipe system that allows organizations to track and report key critical variables about individual members. The JCPS “populates” the demographic data for the CBO in a quick and accurate manner; at the same time, the CBO collects data on number of visits, duration of the visits, and other out-of-school related indicators. Second, an user-friendly “middleware” software has been developed in a collaboration between the local university and the school district. The Connectedness Analysis Reporting System (CARS), the web-based software, connects the membership data of the youth organization to the school district and, at the same time, connects the data warehouse of the district to a community-based youth organization. This process makes the data accessible in a user-friendly format. Third, with the valuable combination of KidTrax, CARS, and the JCPS-based warehouse, there is a wealth of information that can be used for evaluation research. A preliminary report of the findings related to this unique partnership between CBO and the school district follows in the next couple of paragraphs.

An outcome-based evaluation was conducted in our school district. To initially analyze the information, a correlation was conducted to assess the relationship between average visit length and (a) attendance percent, (b) total number of suspensions, and (c) GPA. In terms of attendance, a significant positive correlation was found between average visit length and attendance percent for those participants with 8.16 or above number of visits ( $r = .28$ ,  $p = .04$ ). In terms of suspensions, a non-significant negative correlation was found between advanced regular attendees (those with more than 8.16 CBO visits) and suspensions ( $r = -.02$ ,  $p = .86$ ). Finally, in terms of GPA, a non-significant positive correlation was found between advanced regular attendees and GPA ( $r = .19$ ,  $p = .15$ ). Taken as a whole, the trends found in these correlation analyses were positive.

To further analyze the data, a quasi-experimental approach was utilized (pre-post test control group research design). The evaluation research design involved creating a matched comparison group using previous attendance percent (91.7% for the control group and 91.9% for the treatment group) and free/reduced lunch participation (93.9% for the control group and 93.9% for the treatment group) as matching variables. The two groups were (a) attendees with 8.16 or more visits and (b) attendees with less than 8.16 visits to the centers. The assumptions were checked (i.e., normality, independence of observations, and equality of variance). Given the small sample size, the data were analyzed using an independent-samples t-test. The table displays the information related to the results. The more regular attendees have a higher attendance and it is approaching statistical significance. The effect size shows that it is a practically significant impact. The standard in educational research is an effect size of approximately .25. For this part, the mean difference between more regular attendees (i.e., treatment) and less regular attendees (i.e., control) students was divided or standardized by the pooled post-test standard deviation for the outcome. The resulting standardized difference, or effect size, provides a summary of the magnitude of the effect and is interpretable as the number of standard deviation units separating more regular attendees from control students on the outcomes.

Comparison of Regular and Non-Regular Attendees on Attendance in School (N = 66)

Group	M	SD	t	Effect Size
Non-Regular (n = 33)	90.27	8.07	1.83*	.468
Regular Attendees (n = 33)	93.24	4.61		

\* p = .07

Needless to say, the Louisville partnership is addressing multiple challenges in this unique experience. For instance, inter-organizational agreements are being developed to address the protection of human research participants and other security related mechanisms. Also, technology is a major challenge for organizations that do not have technology skills needed to implement the KidTrax system or to properly use the CARS system. Overall, though, our experience is that it is possible to share data and develop strong partnerships in education. Other districts should consider a similar program in their communities to assess and improve the outcomes of out-of-school programs. Inter-organizational barriers will challenge the partnerships in education. We have to overcome those hurdles. School districts and CBO have a common endeavor: It is all about having a positive impact in the life of our needy kids!