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Joblessness and Urban Poverty Research Program  
John F. Kennedy School of Government  
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**The Urban Seminar Series**  
ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

# Urban Seminar on After-School Time



The Urban Seminar on After-School Time began with presentations by community-based practitioners from Baltimore, Detroit, Oakland, Philadelphia, and Richmond who are expanding after-school opportunities for children residing in low-income, urban communities. Supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Urban Health Initiative, these community-based practitioners are hoping that after-school programs will provide a safety net for children who are at high risk for depression, substance abuse, early sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, and violence. Furthermore, child advocates, policymakers, and practitioners alike are interested in the possibility that after-school programs can promote long-term academic success.

Experts in the field of after-school program development suggest that one of the major challenges facing many low-income children is access to youth-serving organizations, which are not typically located in their neighborhoods. In response to this problem, a recent study proposed that "locating after-school programs in schools may be particularly sensible in low-income communities given that there are few available resources that children and their parents can use for educational and recreational purposes" (1). For the 2001 fiscal year, the federal government has allotted \$850 million dollars to after-school programs in schools. Many state and local governments also have increased their investments in after-school programs. But many unanswered questions remain, including: How should after-school programs be structured? What are the best methods for measuring outcomes and evaluating success? What types of collaborations are needed between after-school service providers, schools, and community programs to provide children with the compendium of services needed for optimal success? The participants at the Urban Seminar pondered these questions and more.

*The "Urban Seminar on After-School Time," part of the Urban Seminar Series on Children's Health and Safety, was held May 10-11, 2001 at Harvard University. The seminar featured the presentation of three commissioned papers on issues related to after-school programs for children and youth. For more information please visit our website at [www.ksg.harvard.edu/urbanpoverty](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/urbanpoverty).*

## Research Findings and Lessons from the Field

Following the opening panel presentation by practitioners, three research papers were presented and discussed. The first paper focused on evaluating community programs for youth, the second on establishing effective partnerships around after-school programs, and the third on a new framework for collaborations. Summaries of the papers and the discussions around them appear below. Also below is a summary of the fourth and final session of the seminar: a panel discussion among program developers on lessons from the field.

### *Evaluating After-school Programs*

*Theory-based evaluation is a promising alternative to random assignment evaluation for determining the effectiveness of after-school programs.* Community-based programs for youth – which include after-school programs – do not lend themselves well to evaluation by experimental design, according to Dr. Jacquelynne Eccles of The University of Michigan (1). For one thing, "the voluntary nature of most community-based programs creates problems with selection bias." For another, specifying treatment in evaluation studies is oftentimes problematic. Many community organizations offer a diverse array of after-school activities. Since youth themselves choose a wide variety of activities to attend and control the frequency of their attendance, it is difficult for evaluators to determine the exact level of each child's exposure to the various aspects of the center's programs. "Such variation," wrote Eccles, "makes it difficult to determine which aspects of the programs are responsible for which developmental outcomes." Another issue is the dynamic nature of community-based programs. Experimental evaluation designs "assume a static linear system," but after-school programs are constantly changing in response to a variety of factors including the transience of students and staff and feedback from students and staff about what works and what does not.

In light of the difficulty with implementing traditional experimental methods, Eccles suggested that theory-based evaluation may present a useful alternative to researchers, and may better capture the impact of complex social interventions. According to Eccles, "theory-based evaluation acknowledges the importance of substantive theory, quantitative assessment, and causal modeling, but it does not require experimental or even quasi-experimental design. Instead it focuses on causal modeling derived from a well-specified theory of change." The theory of change identifies the components that must be present for the expected outcomes to occur as well as the various characteristics of the program, the youth, and the

community that influence program effectiveness. Then "these components must be measured to evaluate whether they are in place in the form and quantity expected."

The theory of change must be "the driving force in program development and should guide the decision of what to measure and how." However, Eccles voiced a concern that "[r]arely do we find a well-specified [theoretical] model underlying either program design or evaluation." The author called for a genuine collaboration between basic researchers, applied researchers, program developers, providers, and program evaluators in order fully develop such models. A current theoretical model developed by Cook and colleagues in their 1999 evaluation of the Comer School Intervention provides an "excellent example of the kinds of theoretical program models that would be useful for evaluation of community programs for youth."

*Programs in the early stages of delivery should focus on implementation analysis.* In her paper, Eccles suggested that after-school programs still in the early stages of delivery should focus on implementation analysis rather than outcomes-based evaluation (1). Implementation analysis consists of examining both qualitative and quantitative data to determine how well a program is being or has been implemented. More specifically, an implementation analysis seeks to answer the question: are participants receiving the intended treatment? According to Eccles, "too many outcomes evaluations conclude that a program is not effective without having completed an appropriate implementation analysis." She further states that "it is impossible to know if this lack of effectiveness is due to the failure of the program theory, to a poor implementation of what might otherwise have been an effective treatment, or to poor evaluation that failed to detect the true effects." Conducting an implementation analysis in the early stages of development, before a program has matured, allows evaluators to capture important information about the growth and evolution of programs. It also helps develop the theory of change and identify the appropriate indicators for evaluating the treatment and its outcomes.

As the discussant for this session, Dr. Robert Halpern of the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago and The Erickson Institute praised after-school programs for their unique potential to be "settings that are respectful of children's own agendas, interests, and preferences...where learning and self-expression are pursued for intrinsic reasons." The ensuing discussion focused on the importance of structuring after-school activities in alignment with "the spontaneity and flow of informal play." Several participants agreed that "children need time, space, and resources... to make the program their own, to create a community within a program,... to themselves invent the rules, lores, and traditions..."

Throughout the discussion, it was noted that after-school programs are currently “under growing pressure” from some funders and policymakers to “prevent or ameliorate” social problems or “compensate for the failure” of schools and other institutions. Seminar participants suggested that this leads to a tension for many program providers between gearing after-school activities toward social development or toward academic goals. The point was made that many providers feel a growing pressure to be responsive to some funders, who prefer the more tangible goal of affecting scholarly performance.

Developmental psychologists on the panel challenged the prevailing distinction between “social” and “academic” development in children. It was suggested that this distinction, although commonly made, is misleading and inaccurate. Several studies now indicate, for instance, that healthy social and emotional development is inextricably linked to academic success in youth. The panel suggested that instead of debating the merits of after-school programs that emphasize “academic” or “social” goals, we must consider that both strategies need to be pursued simultaneously with the overarching goal of supporting healthy youth development.

### *Establishing Effective Partnerships*

*Communities face several challenges in creating school-community partnerships for after-school programs.* In a paper describing her preliminary evaluation of the Extended Service Schools Adaptation Initiative (ESS), Dr. Jean Grossman of Public/Private Venture and Princeton University identified several challenges that the ESS grantee communities faced in trying to establish school-community collaborations. ESS is supporting after-school programs in 60 schools in 17 communities for four to six years.

The most basic challenge faced by the ESS initiative was finding available and appropriate space for after-school activities. In fact, the results of Dr. Grossman’s study challenged the notion that school buildings are “underused resources.” Instead, Grossman’s research team found that “some parts of the schools are often heavily used after hours” by teachers, students, sports teams, and outside organizations. Thus, ESS programs “often have to compete for prime spaces such as the gym or computer labs.” Moreover, at the start of the initiative, “some programs found they were the first to be denied a scheduled space if the school had a last-minute request from a teacher.” In most cases, good relationships between school coordinators and key school personnel (principals, teachers, and custodians) were at the heart of gaining access to school space.

For the most economically disadvantaged youth, transportation to and from programs was a serious barrier to participation in after-school activities. Parents were often unable to provide transportation since many worked second-shift jobs. In addition, arranging other transportation options proved costly for programs, which resulted in some of the “most needy” students being unable to participate in ESS activities. In some cases, school districts found financial means to support late busing of students. In other cases, programs were able to turn to community partners for transportation support. Dr. Grossman noted that “as programs continue to work toward creative solutions to these transportation difficulties, the evidence suggests that long-term solutions rest in the capacity of cities and school districts to shoulder financial responsibilities for extended service programs.”

Dr. Grossman also drew attention to the general tension between the in-school and after-school program staff around issues such as student behavior, deterioration of equipment, or custodial concerns. “School/program tensions are often perceived by program staff as created by school distrust of the program,” she notes. However, given that principals work under tight budgets, these tensions are “not surprising.” In fact, Dr. Grossman’s investigation “reveals that the fundamental issue is not one of turf or control but of resources.” Long-term solutions must come from increasing public funds to maintain school facilities if they are to be kept open for longer hours to accommodate both school and after-school programs. Dr. Grossman concludes that although “turf and control issues do arise, [they] can be resolved over time as trust builds....[however] the resource issue will not go away without the public’s greater awareness and support.”

*Several factors help facilitate collaboration between schools and providers of after-school programs.* In the course of ESS evaluation, Dr. Grossman identified several factors that facilitated collaborations between communities and schools, including previous collaborative experience among and between the key partners, the adoption of decision-making processes that included all key partners, and the assistance of intermediaries in resolving early disputes. She found that the support of school principals almost always was a primary factor in easing implementation, but also discovered that the high rate of turnover among principals meant that such support, once gained, could not be taken for granted.

Maintaining the goodwill of school principals was one of several unanticipated job requirements that took up the program coordinators’ time. Each of the ESS communities hired a coordinator to manage the daily programs in their respective schools. At first, many of these coordinators worked part-time because the amount of after-school activities was limited, but it soon became clear that having full-time coordinators was vital to the success of the programs.

In ESS, school coordinators reported to one of three governance structures chosen by the communities. While shared decision-making between a school council and a lead agency proved a popular option at first, by year's end most of the communities that had chosen this option had shifted toward having the lead agency be responsible for making decisions. In contrast, the other two governance options – making a small team of key stakeholders or one lead agency responsible for decisions – seemed to be more stable and effective school-level governance structures. In addition, cities that have multiple schools involved in the ESS initiative tend to have city-level oversight committees to coordinate programs across schools. Such oversight committees provide important human resources by helping to troubleshoot problems and identify new funding options.

*More effort is needed to draw disadvantaged students into after-school programs.* According to Dr. Grossman, ESS programs are reaching thousands of disadvantaged children by virtue of the fact that two-thirds of enrollees in ESS programs qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. But ESS school coordinators reported that while their programs succeed in reaching low-income children, they feel they are less successful in recruiting the most seriously disadvantaged children, including those who have consistently low grades; have poor school attendance records; are prone to detention; are lacking support at home; or who come from poor, non-English-speaking families. Grossman suggested that programs wishing to attract more disadvantaged students should address barriers such as transportation, the difficulty of contacting and communicating with parents, and the students' own dislike of school.

In discussing Dr. Grossman's paper, Lucy Friedman, president of The After-School Corporation, praised the idea of community-based agencies operating after-school programs in schools, but she pointed out that in many communities, money for after-school programs is being directed through the schools, many of which are, in essence, using the money to extend "skill and drill" education. "If we wanted more of what happens during the school day, we'd call it 'more school' not 'after-school,'" Dr. Friedman said. Elaborating on the subject of how to determine what services to offer children during after-school programs, participants began discussing – in broad terms – issues around quality. How is quality in after-school programs ensured, maintained, improved, and measured? Many evaluators of after-school program are currently trying to "tease out" the attributes of after-school programs that provide the most benefit to children, but one area of agreement is that the best after-school programs are age and developmentally appropriate for children. Another discussion thread related to the factors that increase the quality of after-school programs for the long term. Participants largely agreed that some of the most important factors that contribute to improved programs include linking programs to other community resources and improving access to facilities and materials.

### *A Framework for Effective Collaborations*

In a paper written for the seminar, Dr. Gil Noam of Harvard University argued that society increasingly is moving toward collaborative partnerships to address disparate societal problems and create complex, integrated solutions (3). This is certainly true in the areas of youth development and after-school programs, where private funders, local governments, schools, and community organizations are joining forces to create youth programs. Unfortunately, Dr. Noam lamented, "the belief in partnerships is far stronger than the theoretical and empirical understanding about how to accomplish them" (3). Thus, Dr. Noam suggested in his paper a new framework for understanding collaborations around after-school programs.

*New framework identifies four types of collaboration around after-school programs.* In his paper, Dr. Noam describes four types of collaborations. These types represent a developmental sequence and collaborations may grow from one type to another over time through increasing healthy communication between the partners, establishing mutual trust, and building strong relationships and a common purpose. However, not all collaborations move along the sequence, and some collaborations may have periods of time where they remain stable in a particular type. It is important to note that these four types represent ideals, and many programs have elements of each. In this regard, the sequence is not a strict stepwise progression but a dynamic one where partnerships adjust to new challenges and realities.

Noam described the RALLY prevention in-school and after-school program in Boston, a collaboration between the Boston Public Schools, Harvard Graduate School of Education, McLean Hospital, the YMCA and Boys and Girls Club, and other community organizations. This program provides important insights into partnerships and the important links between schools and community-based after-school programs.

The first type of collaboration, functional intersection, usually occurs when different organizations collaborate based on their overlapping interests. The purpose of this type of collaboration is functional – to gain access to funding, to children and families, or to certain settings such as schools or communities. In this model, the individual partners function autonomously according to their own mission and strategic plan. Although some functional intersections can lead to effective collaborations, most often in functional intersections, partners may lack a joint mission, or true integration of programs, sometimes to the detriment of children in the

program. For instance, as part of an evaluation of a national after-school consortium, Noam conducted several site visits. During one such visit, he initiated a focus group with adolescents, and discovered that these youths were being reluctantly transported to community work settings by a painted bus normally used by preschoolers. This simple detail led to undue feelings of humiliation among the older children, and could have been easily avoided with increased communication and connection between the program, school, and youth.

Collaborative intersection – the second type described by Noam – is probably the most common type of collaboration currently seen in after-school settings. In collaborative intersection, partners are accountable to each other, jointly set goals, create an organizational structure together, and put a conflict management structure in place. Under the collaborative model, what is typically emphasized is the importance of responsibility and cooperation. A productive discipline code is usually established. Such environments, however, are sometimes not warm and inviting to children because program management is focused on making things run smoothly, and virtues of order, structure, and punctuality are stressed.

Noam's third type of collaboration is inclusive intersection. In this type, the partners have developed an inclusive system that has truly become a new entity – one in which the partners feel solidarity with each other and move beyond the singular concerns about governance and hierarchy. But there also are vulnerabilities: program staff and leaders can become adverse to conflict, fearing that addressing differences will interfere with the strong sense of inclusion and connection. "As a consequence," according to Noam, "programs can unknowingly encourage the formation of cliques, intimate groups that collectively act out differences instead of processing them" (3). This collaboration is especially important at a time when we redefine our notions of adolescent development from a focus on separation and autonomy to the essential importance of belonging.

Transformational intersection is the fourth and final type described by Noam. It is the most complex, and possibly most desirable of the four types. Unfortunately, it is probably the least common in current practice. In it, "partners are doing more than creating a strong community and a joint mission. They go one step further and develop together...[toward] the creation of a new frame, a new way of understanding children, families, and communities...Partnering ends up being less of a strategic tool and instead becomes a way of life" (3). While currently few collaborations reach the point of becoming transformational, Noam predicted that, as the field of after-school education matures, "we will witness more" of these partnerships.

Mr. Chris Gabrieli, co-founder and chair of Massachusetts 2020, and Mr. Richard Murphy, vice president of the Academy for Educational Development and Director of the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, served as discussants for Dr. Noam's paper. The panelists elaborated on several important themes, informing the discussion with illustrations from their practical experiences in the field. The comment was made that the term "collaboration," unfortunately, connotes "no money and lots of meetings" to many observers. The discussion focused on the factors that need to be in place before true collaborations around after-school programs can be achieved. These factors include: 1) collection and distribution of continuous baseline data on what programs exist in each community and how much they cost; 2) cross-training of in-school and after-school staff; 3) management of public school buildings by professional building managers who then relieve principals, secretaries, or other school staff of the primary duties of organizing and scheduling facilities, allowing resources to be available to students at expanded hours; 4) identification of shared outcomes between schools and community-based organizations; and 5) acknowledgement of the resource gap between what we have and what we need.

The discussion moved to an intriguing point about maintaining effective partnerships and the identity of after-school programs. Since academic achievement is a mission that all funders and constituencies can support, building the identity of after-school programs around improving academic achievement may create successful collaborations with various public and private partners. After-school programs have an unprecedented opportunity to begin supporting and supplementing schools, which are now being held to tougher standards and may be more willing to partner with after-school efforts. In response to this idea, participants worried about making after-school programs responsible for improving academic achievement.

While participants debated the merits of focusing after-school programs on academic achievement, the point was made that this strategy requires an organized effort to involve parents because "programs can produce positive results that can be undone if they don't get additional support [at home]." It was suggested that mentoring programs for parents, in which experienced parents who understand and feel connected to the school system mentor other parents. It was thought that this approach might be particularly useful for immigrant parents who sometimes feel disconnected from their children's school.

### *Lessons from the Field*

Following the paper presentations, the Seminar featured a panel discussion with three practitioners from the field who discussed the importance of gender and multicultural issues in after-school programs. The panelists included Dr. Heather Johnston Nicholson, Director of Research at Girls Incorporated, Mr. Ronald Blackburn-Moreno, President and CEO of ASPIRA, and Dr. Laurie Olsen, Executive Director of California Tomorrow. Panel members highlighted the need for gender, racial, ethnic, and class equity in after-school programs and underscored the importance of reducing barriers to participation and offering curricula that value all youth. In addition, panelists stressed the benefits of youth involvement in designing their own programs. Such engagement is very empowering, particularly for minority youth and young women, since it engages them in leadership opportunities they might not otherwise have. A lively debate followed these presentations and considered issues of cultural diversity and language barriers in after-school programs. Participants noted that there is a balance to be struck between valuing the cultural experiences of immigrant students and families and fostering their desire and ability to learn English and better integrate into the school environment. When possible, after-school programs should hire multilingual staff from diverse backgrounds who can help students effectively bridge cultural or social divides.

During this discussion, the importance of engaging families in after-school programs was again raised. The point was made that these programs have the opportunity to empower students and parents alike. One discussant offered specific suggestions for enticing overworked parents to join in activities, including: scheduling parent activities at meal time; providing child care and transportation; and making reminder phone calls prior to the event. Another suggestion was made to hold parent activities in a non-school setting, such as a church or community center, where parents may feel more comfortable.

### General Conclusions

The following general conclusions regarding after-school programs emerged during the course of the seminar discussion.

*After-school providers are coming under increased pressure to provide scientific evidence to prove the definitive effects of programs; however, traditional methods of scientific research may not be the most suitable for studying community-based after-school programs.* Theory-based evaluations present new possibilities. Because of the complex nature of many community-based after-school programs, random assignment evaluations are not easily implemented and often prove costly. Theory-based evaluations are growing in popularity with many foundations and scholars who see the benefit in creating substantive theories about how programs work and why. Theory-based evaluations explore the links necessary to fully establish a well-coordinated youth program. Consequently, researchers and program developers are better informed about the specific components of a program that contribute to overall success as well as those aspects of the intervention that may need attention.

*Policymakers and program developers must be cautious when concluding that a program is ineffective based on outcome evaluations that do not include an implementation analysis.* Researchers voiced a concern that some studies conclude that a program is ineffective without first conducting an implementation analysis. An implementation analysis is crucial in determining whether the study participants received the intended treatment and the necessary "dosage" to achieve the expected outcomes. It is possible that an after-school program has the potential to be effective, but a particular study did not capture its potential because the program was not implemented properly. Policymakers and program developers are urged to carefully examine the results of an implementation analysis to ensure its adequacy. Based on this information, decisions need to be made about changing the process of delivery before an outcome evaluation should be undertaken.

*After-school programs work better when they are linked to schools, families, and other programs in which youth participate, and if a full-time coordinator is hired.* Recent studies suggest that community-based programs for youth are more effective when they integrate family, schools, and communities into their program interventions. When collaborating with schools, a full-time coordinator should not only oversee the program on a daily basis, but also help to minimize conflicts that typically arise. The coordinator's ability to maintain good relationships with the school principal, teachers, staff, family members, and youth themselves can have an important impact on the success of the program.

*The best after-school programs are dynamic, adaptable, developmentally appropriate, and involve youth in program design.* Recent studies suggest that the most successful community programs for youth are quite dynamic – frequently adapting activities to the clientele as well as involving the youth themselves in designing and planning new aspects of the programs. To achieve long-term success, program providers must pay close attention to the individual needs of the target population rather than simply importing a ready-made, “cookie-cutter” program that proved successful elsewhere. In addition, programs must take into account participants’ age and experience across the developmental spectrum. For example, programs that target 14-18 year olds – the hardest group to reach through after-school programs – should respect the important input of teenagers. Programs should look for ways to directly involve them in planning program activities or providing services to younger children.

*The tension between whether an after-school program should focus on “problem prevention” or “health promotion” strategies is commonly felt by program providers, but represents a false dichotomy and must be reconsidered.* The tendency of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to prioritize or differentiate between “problem prevention” and “youth development” needs to be carefully reconsidered. Advocates of after-school programs must realize that in order for many of our youth to make successful transitions to adulthood, they need programs that not only support relationship building, personal and social skills development, community participation, and arts and recreation, but also programs that focus on problem prevention and poverty reduction. After-school programs that focus on health (physical and emotional), education, and employment issues are valuable in conjunction with those that focus on youth development. Rather than debating the merits of one over the other or viewing “prevention” and “promotion” as opposing strategies, we must offer a compendium of after-school services that acknowledges the interconnectedness of the two.

*Although adolescence is often conceived of as a time of separation and individuation, we now know that it is also a time when adolescents need to feel a sense of belonging and connection.* After-school programs can provide a unique opportunity for forming relationships and a sense of community. Developmental psychologists emphasize that after-school programs have the potential to foster meaningful relationships with both peers and adult mentors alike. Research suggests that these significant relationships help foster resilience in youth. Given the debate about the role after-school programs should play, researchers and practitioners alike agree that significant relationships formed through after-school programs are among the essential key ingredients for long-term success of youth.

*More genuine collaboration is needed among researchers, program developers, providers, and program evaluators.* There are very few theory-driven models that pertain to after-school programs for youth. In order to develop such models, genuine collaboration is needed between all stakeholders.

## References

The following papers were presented at the seminar:

1. “Community-Based Programs for Youth: Lessons Learned from General Developmental Research and from Experimental and Quasi-experimental Evaluations” by Janice Templeton and Jacquelynne S. Eccles, University of Michigan.
2. “Getting School-Based After-School Programs Off the Ground” by Jean Baldwin Grossman, Princeton University.
3. “After-School Time: Toward a Theory of Collaborations” by Gil G. Noam, Harvard University.

The following papers were referenced in this summary:

- Cook, T.D., Hunt, H.D., Murphy R. F. (in press) Comer’s School Development Program in Chicago: A Theory Based Evaluation: American Educational Research Journal
- Noam G. Adolescent development and the psychology of belonging. In Doctors S (ed.) Annual of Adolescent Psychiatry. New York: Jason Aronson 2000.

*The Urban Seminar Series on Children's Health and Safety* brings together researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who have a common interest in improving the health and well being of urban children. The series of six, semiannual seminars is sponsored by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and directed by William Julius Wilson at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. The seminars highlight the latest research on selected topics related to children's health and safety, and are designed to complement RWJF's Urban Health Initiative.

The mission of the **Urban Health Initiative** (UHI) is to improve the health and safety of children and youth. Local campaigns in Baltimore, Detroit, Oakland, Philadelphia, and Richmond participate in the UHI. Each campaign seeks to change the major systems that serve children in order to improve youth health and safety statistics throughout the entire city or metropolitan area. The UHI National Program Office is located at the University of Washington and is headed by former Seattle Mayor Charles Royer.

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