

Research Brief

Afterschool Classroom Quality Matters: Driving Academic Outcomes in Out-of-School Contexts

Good Shepherd Services afterschool programs, located in low-resourced New York City neighborhoods, share a commitment to creating safe, engaging, and inclusive learning communities. These programs help youth cultivate their talents and sense of belonging—which can foster the development of positive academic outcomes

Our Aim

To explore the connection between positive afterschool classrooms and academic outcomes for 3rd through 8th graders with and without social and behavioral risk.

Why it Matters

Youth living in urban communities spend significant time in publicly-funded afterschool programs. Afterschool can be an important lever addressing social and educational issues related to inequality. Research links high quality afterschool programs to the development of social-emotional skills and improved academic behaviors and performance.



Photo courtesy Good Shepherd Services

What We Found

1) **What does a positive afterschool classroom look like?**

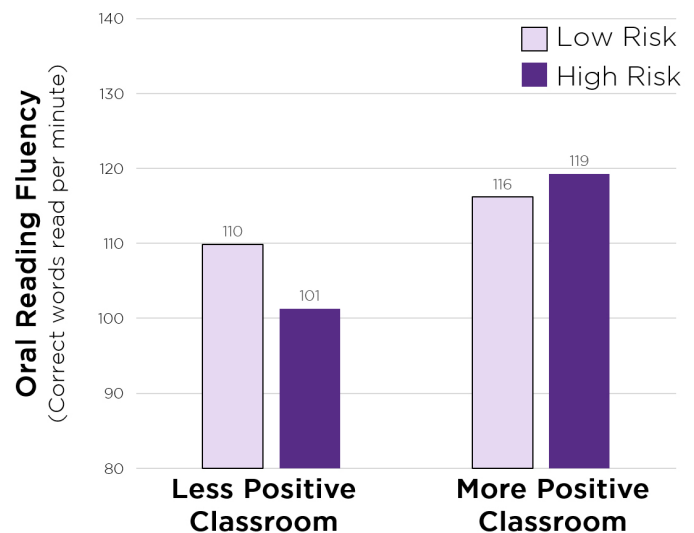
Positive afterschool classrooms are observed to have **warm interactions, responsive instruction, and organized behavior management.**

2) **Do positive afterschool classrooms promote academic outcomes for urban youth?**

More positive afterschool classrooms **predicted stronger academic skills** across a year.

3) **Do positive afterschool classrooms benefit youth with social and behavioral risk?**

All students benefitted from positive classrooms; **youth with social and behavioral risk benefitted more.** In fact, high risk youth and low risk youth perform equally well in classrooms with more positive environments.



What It Means

- ✓ **Researchers.** Investigate efficient and effective methods for afterschool organizations to build positive environments for educators and youth.
- ✓ **Policymakers.** Increase access to high quality afterschool and extended day learning. Support initiatives to develop and sustain the capacity of the afterschool workforce.
- ✓ **Practitioners.** Seek training and mentoring to develop the skills to facilitate positive afterschool classrooms. Offer training and mentoring to novice afterschool educators.
- ✓ **Funders.** Support and sustain high quality afterschool programs as an essential part of the learning ecosystem and a valuable strategy in addressing educational inequality.



Photo courtesy Good Shepherd Services

How We Conducted the Research

Participants: 256 youth from 18 afterschool groups located in 5 program sites in New York City.

Method and Analysis: Using data (youth-report, staff-report, observations) collected during fall and spring of the 2015-2016 academic year, two-level mixed regression models were fitted. A risk score was calculated for each participant based on youths' self-report of social competence, peer affiliation, behavioral conduct, and misconduct. Higher risk youth have scores one standard deviation above the mean and lower risk youth have scores one standard deviation below the mean. Key predictors were youth risk score, fall classroom environment (Promising Practices Rating Scale; Vandell et al., 2005/2012), and the cross-level interaction of risk and classroom environment.

Results: This brief focuses on academic outcomes (oral reading fluency via easyCBM), but the published manuscript also examined academic engagement and self-concept. Fall afterschool classroom environment significantly and positively predicted spring oral reading fluency ($b = 7.95, p < .01$). No main effect was found for social-behavioral risk on spring oral reading fluency ($b = -2.04, p = .28$); however, the interaction of risk and classroom environment was statistically significant ($b = 6.69; p < .01$).

To read more about this study's theory, methodology, and findings, see:

Cappella, E., Hwang, S. H., Kieffer, M. J., & Yates, M. (2018). Classroom practices and academic outcomes in urban afterschool programs: Alleviating social-behavioral risk. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 26*(1), 42-51.