

THE IMPACT OF AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS ON THE ACADEMIC  
ACHIEVEMENT OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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by

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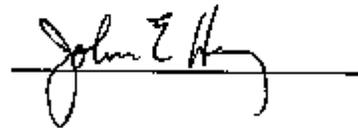
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*I dedicate this Master's Research Project to my parents, Terry and Cathy Lee. Their love and support encourage me to achieve my goals, and inspire me to never give up on my dreams.*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

In the United States the majority of school age children come from families in which both parents work. On average, school age children spend between 20 and 25 hours per week unsupervised (Feinstein, 2003). Because of the economic demands that parents face today the amount of time they spend with their children is often limited. Not having adult guidance at home restricts children from getting assistance with their school assignments. Working in the after school program at the Athens Community Center in Ohio, led me to question whether after school programs have a positive effect on children's academic achievement and what other programs are available to parents and students. During my employment, tutoring students from different economic and academic backgrounds enabled me to understand that students have different learning abilities and styles. Are after school programs the key for students to get extra help to succeed in their education?

Due to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) there has been a growing demand for accountability of our nation's students' learning. However, students who are at a disadvantage by not having extra support at home will surely be left behind. Children who learn at a slower pace need extra guidance and instruction to help them advance their education. Different types of afterschool programs can provide students and parents with

the opportunity to seek out additional education. Will giving students this extra educational support during after school hours bring positive results?

In 2010 the National Middle Childhood Association (NMSA) released *This We Believe*, a belief statement consisting of three essential elements that Middle Schools should provide to ensure that all students receive a quality education. According to NMSA (2010), successful middle schools provide “comprehensive guidance and support services to meet the needs of young adolescents” (p. 7). NMSA encourages schools to target all different learning styles, provide supplemental instruction for students who need the extra support and help them grow socially in their academic surroundings. Can afterschool programs apply these factors and offer additional educational support in safe environments for students to grow academically and socially?

#### Research questions

This Master’s Research Project will address the following research questions:

- What kinds of after school program models have been documented in the research literature?
- What is the impact of different after school programs on increasing the academic achievement of middle school students?

#### Purpose

The purpose of analyzing the research literature on after school programs is to understand whether the idea of after school supplemental instruction is effective in increasing academic achievement among middle school students. The purpose of this research paper is to review the research literature on afterschool and extended school-day programs and to describe potential strategies that communities can use in collaboration

with schools to create effective after school programs to increase academic achievement among middle school students.

### Limitations

Even though the successes resulting from the use of after school programs seem apparent, the most useful ways to benefit from this opportunity are not well understood as existing after school programs vary in purpose and in operation. There are few studies on the effects of specific after school programs. Selection bias is a frequent problem as students who voluntarily attend various after school programs may differ from those who choose not to do so. Furthermore, the limited research has primarily involved at-risk students who generally show an increase in academic achievement because most start from a failing grade and thus the “floor effect may have prevailed” (Collins & Onwuegbuzie, 2001).

In addition, after school programs and regular school-day programs are not exactly connected, so studying the effects of the after school program on regular school day academics is difficult. After school programs may exist in many different forms, and provide service for students from many different schools.

### Definition of terms

#### Academic achievement

Academic achievement is one factor that can determine whether after school programs are effective for middle school students. Academic achievement is the increase in letter grades and the percentage scores of the students in the core subject, math, language arts, science and social studies. Studies evaluate whether there are any

variations in the students' classroom scores while they are in the after school program (Collins & Onwuegbuzie, 2001).

Along with grades, academic achievement can also be correlated with students' motivation towards school. At-risk students primarily have a negative attitude concerning their school work, due to frustration or lack of background knowledge. An increase in motivation to complete school work can therefore also help to increase grades and percentage scores in the classroom (Collins & Onwuegbuzie, 2001).

#### After school programming

After school programs' curricula all vary and have different types of models in place in order to serve the specific needs that a school or community is trying to target. After school programming refers to the organization and structure of the various models and set ups of after school programs (Mass Insight Education, 2002).

#### After school program

After school programs consist of supplemental academic instruction for students during after school hours. These programs are made up of a variety of different curricula and model structures and use different approaches to reach the needs of the target population of students (Feinstein, 2003).

#### Middle school

Middle school is the grade levels between elementary and high school. The grades determined in middle school can vary from school to school, but the foundational elements are similar. The National Middle Childhood Association (NMSA) believes that for middle schools to be successful, students must be successful; for students to be successful, the school's organization, curriculum, pedagogy, and programs must be based

on the developmental needs and wellbeing of young adolescents. This concept is at the heart of middle level education (NMSA, 2010).

#### At-risk students

At-risk students have failing grades accompanied with negative behaviors and attitudes towards education. Some at-risk students have been previously retained at lower grade levels, and have been in trouble with the school administration and/or the teaching faculty. At-risk students are the most likely candidates for dropping out of school (Collins & Onwuegbuzie, 2001).

#### Tutorial counseling program

A tutorial counseling program is comprised of well-trained tutors and a group of at-risk students. After school tutorial counseling programs are geared towards supporting the academic needs of students, as well as reducing their at-risk behavior through counseling services. Each tutoring session addresses the four core content areas of language arts, science, mathematics, and social studies (Edmonson & White, 1998).

### Methodology

This Master's Research Project identifies and describes programs with an academic focus that have been shown to be effective in helping to increase the academic achievement among middle school children during non-school hours. Most of the research for the study was accessed from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database. "Academic achievement," "after school programs" were used as key search words and results were further limited to "middle childhood". Other information and articles were found in books and Internet websites dealing with after school programs. Also, studies through the National Middle Childhood Association were used

throughout the project to relate information back to the national standards for middle childhood education. This study identifies programs that have found evidence of the effectiveness of afterschool programs in increasing academic achievement. These are criteria used to identify and describe such programs.

#### Organization of study

This chapter raised the question whether after school programs are successful in increasing academic achievement among middle school students. It also stated the purpose and methodology of the research and how it will be conducted.

Chapter Two will review research literature that offers information on middle school students' after school routines and the need for after school programming. This chapter will also explore the different types of after school program models offered in communities and limitations due to funding.

Chapter Three presents an analysis of the research literature on after school programs. This chapter will evaluate whether after school programs are indeed effective in increasing academic achievement among middle school students.

To conclude the paper, Chapter Four will summarize the findings of this research project and conclude whether afterschool programs can increase the academic achievement among at risk middle school students. This chapter will also list recommendations on how afterschool programs can eliminate the achievement gap among at risk students.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Studies of after school programs have reported that they can increase academic achievement and reduce at-risk behaviors. However, some studies have reported that afterschool programs had no effect on important outcomes and even worsened academic achievement and student behavior. This has led to a debate about whether the research supports increased investment in afterschool programs. This chapter will review middle school students' current afterschool routine and different after school program models. Information will be presented about the academic and social activities these afterschool programs offer middle school students.

#### After school for middle school students

*Working Families and After School: A Special Report from America after 3 PM*, (After School Alliance, 2005) offers statistical data on how American families have changed over the past fifty years. In 1950, 56 percent of families fit the "traditional" image of one parent at home caring for children full-time, while the other parent held a job outside of the home. Today less than one-fourth of our nations' families fit that image because many more women are employed outside of the home. According to *Working Families and After school* both men and women are working more hours during the week. "Average work hours per adult increased 7.9% between 1960 and 1998. But while the work day has grown longer, the school day has not" (p.1).

*Working Families and After School* found that more than 14 million students in grades K-12 spend some time after school taking care of themselves. According to the survey, 39 percent of students in grades 6-8 who have two working parents are in self care. Forty-two percent of middle childhood students living in a single mother home are taking care of themselves when they are not in school. Ten percent of students living in a single father home are also in self care. Overall, 25 percent of students in grades K-12 take care of themselves after school (p. 1).

According to *Working Families and After School*, five percent of students in grades 6-8, who have two working parents, attend afterschool programs. Twelve percent of students that live in a single mother home, and only six percent in a single father home attend after school programs. Overall, 11 percent of our nation's K-12 children attend afterschool programs (p. 1).

The low percentage of students attending after school programs and the high rate of middle school students left unsupervised has led to trouble. Fashola (2002) described the negative effects of students coming home to an unsupervised environment.

“Numerous reports have documented that a high proportion of juvenile crimes is committed between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. each day, and these reports have created increased interest in strategies that will occupy students productively during these hours” (Fashola, 2002, p. 5). Are afterschool programs the answer to reducing at-risk behavior and increasing academic achievement?

#### Research limitations

There are many different variables involved when evaluating an after school program. Many programs have different academic or recreational goals, and are

organized to meet their specific objectives. Also, the amount of funding and the population of students and instructors can have a major impact on whether a program is effective in increasing academic achievement among middle school students. The programs listed in this chapter vary in organization, funding and staff, which can affect the success of these afterschool programs (Collins & Onwuegbuzie, 2001).

Afterschool Alliance's *Uncertain Times* (2006) reports that program leaders are serving a high-need population, serving more children than expected, and struggling to maintain their funding. The report shows that some after school programs are and can be funded through federal grants, like the 21<sup>st</sup> Century grant. Programs can also be funded by educational grants, nonprofit organizations and temporary assistance programs are available for parents who have to pay for their children who wish to attend community based after school programs.

Nearly all respondents to a web-based survey reported in *Uncertain Times* agree that more children in their communities could benefit from after school programs, if they were available. The survey found that during the 2005-2006 school year 75% of afterschool programs operated at or above maximum capacity. 87% of respondents said that there are children in their community who need afterschool programs and don't have access to them. After school programs are serving a high-need population. At more than 55% of the programs surveyed, more than three in five students qualify for free or reduced price lunches. When programs are forced to make changes due to budget cuts or stagnation, the most common response is to increase the fees parents must pay (p. 2).

After School Alliance's *Uncertain Times* (2006) found that programs which reported receiving 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers grants, were particularly

unable to meet the demand in their communities and in need of even greater support. The survey found that for afterschool programs receiving 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers grants 82% of programs were operating at or above maximum capacity, 72% of programs had more than three in five students who qualified for the free or reduced lunch program (p. 2).

After School Alliances’s *Uncertain Times* (2006) also found that many after school programs were still unable to meet the demand and that budget cuts and stagnation were having negative effects on the afterschool programs and the youth and families they served. A lack of secure long-term sustainability prevented programs from reaching more youth and families in their communities who could benefit from afterschool. The table below displays that the majority of after school programs did not feel confident about the security of their future funds.

Table 1.  
Funding security for the next 1-5 years

	Ohio		National Average	
Number of Respondents 49: (89%)	Not/ Somewhat Secure	Secure/ Very Secure	Not/ Somewhat Secure	Secure/ Very Secure
1-2 years	59%	41%	53%	47%
3-5 years	80%	20%	80%	20%

From “A Summary of Ohio Data from the Uncertain Times: Funding Insecurity Puts After School Programs at-risk Web-based Survey” (After School Alliance, 2006, p.3).

## Unsuccessful programs

A national evaluation completed by the U.S Department of Education on the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers Programs* in 2005 found that after school programs do not benefit all participants, and in some cases do not provide a safe and healthy environment for middle school students either. Although the academic focus of the programs was fully supported by school administrators and parents, the programs seemed to create problems for the middle school students. Some of the problems that arose were that students were less interested in academic classes than in the recreational or cultural activities that the programs provided. The *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers Programs* also had problems with attendance, recruiting, and retaining students (Burdumy, Dynarski, Moore, Deke, Mansfield, & Pistorino, 2005).

*The National Evaluation of the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Community Learning Centers Program* (Burdumy et al., 2005) assessed funding that Congress authorized to create the *21st Century Community Learning Centers* program in 1994. The program provides funding for academic and recreational activities in public schools during after school hours. The *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers* program grew from \$40 million in 1998 to \$2.5 billion in 2012 (<http://www.afterschoolalliance.org>).

The U.S Department of Education study used a sample of middle school students involved in *21st Century* programs and a control group of students not involved in the program but similar to those in the program. Student data were collected from 32 school districts and 61 centers in those districts. The evaluation selected students in the fall of

the school year and followed them for two school years. The original and first follow-up information was collected in 2000-2001, and second follow-up records were collected during the 2001-2002 school year. The evaluation report showed no discernable impact on reading test scores or grades. Homework assistance was the most common academic activity that the centers provided, but there was no impact of the program on the extent to which students completed homework or received help with it (Burdumy et al., 2005). Social interactions and behavior were also observed throughout the evaluation of the 21<sup>st</sup> *Century Community Learning Centers* program. Middle school students who were involved in the program displayed at-risk behaviors more frequently than students who were not involved in the program. Negative behaviors were higher among middle school students in the program group in comparison to those in the control group. Students in the program were more likely than the students in the control group to be disciplined by their regular school-day teachers and to be suspended from school (Burdumy et al., 2005).

### Successful programs

#### Peer tutoring program

Collins & Onwuegbuzie (2001) found that the after school program *After School Peer Tutoring Program* (ASPT), which received funding from the state and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century programs, was successful in increasing achievement levels of at-risk middle school students in a rural southeastern school district. The study examined a sample of 89 at-risk middle school students in grades 6-8 who participated in the ASPT program for one semester. Students' grades and behavior were what the study used to measure whether the program was successful in increasing the academic achievement levels among the group. The study examined the characteristics of the at-risk students

participating in the ASTP, its impact on their academic achievement, and the characteristics of students who benefited the most from the program.

The at-risk students in the study were nominated by their teachers based on failing grades in various content areas. African American students made up 60 percent of the sample population. Thirty-four percent of the sample was comprised of Caucasian-Americans, two percent comprised of Asian-Americans, while one percent was multiracial. Close to one-fourth of the at-risk students served in in-school suspension during the study.

The *After School Peer Tutoring Program* was geared towards supporting the academic needs of the students as well as reducing their at-risk behavior. Each tutee had a one-on-one tutor four afternoons per week, starting at 3:30 p.m. and ending at 4:30 p.m. Each tutoring session addressed the content areas of language arts, science, mathematics, and social studies. The students' tutors were made up of college students who were trained by retired middle school educators, and the assistant-superintendent of the school district. Daily updates were conveyed from the tutors to the teachers, parents and administration. Classroom teachers and parental involvement also played a crucial role in the ASPT (Collins & Onwuegbuzie, 2001).

Collins and Onwuegbuzie (2001) found that ASPT “was effective in increasing academic performance among its attendees, because the majority of students attained a passing score in their targeted subject areas” (p.17). “Indeed, between 60.7% and 69.7% of students attained a passing score in their targeted subject areas” (p. 17). They also found that the program was more effective in increasing achievement in the language arts

and social studies content areas. Students' grades increased the least in math compared to the other content area.

Collins and Onwuegbuzie (2001) also concluded that counseling services along with the tutorial services greatly reduced students' at-risk behavior and further increased their academic achievement. In each of the subject areas, students who did not receive in-school suspensions during the semester were more likely to receive a passing score than students who had been suspended. These results indicated that students' suspension had a negative impact on their academic achievement across the tutored subject areas.

#### Tutorial and counseling program

Similar to Collins and Onwuegbuzie (2001), Edmondson and White (1998) found that the "two major approaches for dropout prevention are counseling services and tutorial programs" (p. 2). Each of these approaches has been proven successful for at-risk students. One hundred and thirty-five students in grades 6-8 participated in the study. The population used for the study represented one-fifth of the only middle school in the district. This group of rural, low socioeconomic status students came from a region in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The study was comprised of three groups. Each group consisted of 45 students. The first group was sent to tutoring sessions only. The second group was sent to tutoring and counseling. The third group was the control group that did not attend tutoring or the counseling services.

Edmonson and White's research (1998) found that the program was effective in increasing academic achievement among middle school students, but did not directly state how this program was funded. Students in the tutorial and counseling/tutorial program groups showed an increase in GPA. The students who received the

counseling/tutorial program significantly improved in classroom behavior and self-esteem, when compared to students who received only tutorial assistance. The control group showed a decrease in its GPA scores from the first to third report card and no change in its behavior, because the students in this group had no supplemental help outside of school with their assignments.

#### Murfreesboro extended school program

The *Murfreesboro Extended School Program* started in 1986 at an elementary school in Tennessee. The program offered a combination of academic, cultural and recreational components. The times of the afterschool program were from “6:00 a.m. until 7:45 a.m. and then afterschool from 2:25 p.m. until 6:00 p.m.” In the afternoon students were grouped and then worked with a qualified staff person who provided academic tutoring. “Thirty minutes of the program was set aside for the students to work with tutors from Middle Tennessee State University, parents, and staff members from the school, who helped them with their homework” (Fashola, 2002, p. 18).

Along with the academic tutoring provided by the *Murfreesboro Extended School Program*, other activities such as “music, violin and guitar, arts, computer clubs, and foreign language were offered after the thirty-minute tutoring session. In addition, students had opportunities to engage in recreational activities, such as physical education, movies, handicrafts, dance, Brownies, and 4-H” (Fashola, 2002, p.18). Even though, Fashola (2002) found no evidence the *Murfreesboro Extended School Program* increased academic achievement among middle school students, it was successful in providing a safe environment with qualified staff to assist students with their learning needs.

Fashola (2002) found that *Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America*, designed to provide adult mentors for children coming from single homes, is not directly focused on academics but more on providing the youth of America with positive role models to look up to, and the option of a safe and healthy environment to attend an afterschool program. Fashola (2002) found that *Big Brothers Big Sisters of America* has shown that students involved in the program were less likely to “start using drugs, alcohol, or engage in violent behavior compared to a control group” (p. 51).

Fashola (2002) also found that the *4-H program* provides opportunities for youth to learn more about agricultural education and provide a safe environment for children after school. “The four Hs are Head (training youth to think, plan, and reason), Heart (training youth to be true, kind, and sympathetic), Hands (training youth to be useful, helpful, and skillful), and Health (training youth to develop health and vitality)” (p.52). Although there has been no research on whether the 4-H program is effective in increasing academic achievement among middle school students, it has been proven effective in improving behavior. Fashola (2002) found the following:

A survey of 114 participants explored the effects of the *4-H* program on self concept, aversion to negative peer groups, problem solving, and positive attitudes toward school work. Sixty-two participants responded to the study, the majority of the respondents stated that they had been involved in gangs prior to participation in the program and that the program helped to keep them out of gangs. Interviews with parents and teachers of the students also reported better problem solving, more interest in school work, better attitudes toward school work, and more enthusiasm toward learning (p.52).

The *4-H* program's positive afterschool environment provides middle school students with opportunities that encourage them to stay out of trouble and in school. Students who were involved in gangs were more likely to drop out of school compared to when they joined the *4-H* program. Even though statistics were not reported on increasing academic achievement, the survey's showed that students' motivation and enthusiasm towards their education increased and at-risk behavior decreased (Fashola, 2002).

#### Non-specific programs

Non-specific afterschool programs are a general overview of afterschool programs as a whole. Feinstein (2003) cited research that 39 out of 40 schools in Chicago increased their math scores while 30 out of 40 schools increased their reading scores due to the implementation of afterschool programs. She found that teachers rated children that were in afterschool programs as having better work habits and better interpersonal skills than those that either did not attend or attended on an irregular basis. "Students who attended afterschool programs had fewer absences, completed homework more often, and had fewer behavior problems in school, and scored higher on tests" (p. 33).

McElvain and Caplan (2001) found that afterschool programming can influence adolescents' school achievement and engagement in risky behaviors. The study found that almost 8 out of 10 students who engage in afterschool activities are A and B students, compared to 5 out of 10 students who do not. Teenagers left unsupervised during the school week are more likely than those who have supervision to use alcohol, smoke cigarettes, and engage in sex. Among the surveyed students 54 percent said they would not watch as much television or play as many video games if they had other things

to do after school. Most interesting, 67 percent of the students said they would probably participate in afterschool programs designed to help them improve their grades, develop leadership skills, and involve them in the community (McElvain & Caplan, 2001).

Mass Insight Education (2002) released information that also showed afterschool programs are effective in increasing academic achievement and provide “development and enrichment activities that are often not available during the school day” (p. 2). These extra activities offered by afterschool programs can enhance students’ social skills, as well as their motivation in school. “These activities, including arts and sports, provide alternative settings where children can excel and, in turn, this enthusiasm often transfers to the more formal environment of school” (p. 2). Students who have the advantage to attend these programs when they do not have adult assistance at home will grow academically as well socially.

#### Inconclusive programs

##### Books and beyond

The afterschool program *Books and Beyond* was designed to provide assistance to students experiencing difficulties or programs designed to provide assistance to students experiencing difficulties or to provide enriching opportunities for students in language arts. *Books and Beyond* program goal is to promote students to become avid readers. Students in grades K-8 are encouraged to watch less television and enjoy recreational reading time at the end of the school day. Children in grades 4-8 are expected to read 2,400 pages to receive a gold medal in the program. *Books and Beyond* is an afterschool program that targets students from “varying socioeconomic-status (SES) backgrounds, including gifted, at-risk, special education, and bilingual students” (Fashola, 2002, p.14).

Fashola's (2002) study of *Books and Beyond* included surveys of students involved in the program as well as students in a control group. She did not find "statistically significant" evidence to prove this program had any positive effects on middle school students' academic achievement or behavior. Students participating in *Books and Beyond* as well as those in the control group both stated that during the time of the program evaluation they spent less time watching television and more time reading.

Fashola (2002) reported that the *Books and Beyond* program existed in over 5,000 schools in 45 states, and was expanded to the preschool level with the *Ready to Read* program. The program has also been adopted by 130 elementary schools in the United Kingdom. *Books and Beyond* has also been used as a stand-alone, afterschool and extended-school-day program in schools, in boys' and girls' clubs, and in some afterschool community efforts in low-income housing projects. The *Books and Beyond Nonprofit Organization* (2012) has not posted any additional research or evaluations of the program, but indicates that the *Books and Beyond* program is currently still being used as an afterschool program model in the United States.

Voyager expanded learning program

The *Voyager Expanded Learning* (2007) afterschool program was originally developed in 1994 by Dallas entrepreneur Randy Best and Admiral Thomas B. Hayward. The *Voyager Expanded Learning program* has distributed its programs to more than 1,000 school districts, including New York City, Philadelphia, Richmond, Dallas, Roosevelt (Phoenix), Clark County (Las Vegas), and Washington, D.C. The afterschool program model now has evolved into in-school core reading programs, reading and math intervention programs, and professional development programs for school districts

throughout the United States. Fashola (2002) stated that the *Voyager Expanded Learning* program started out being available as an afterschool program for children in grades K-6.

Using a curriculum designed by a staff of curriculum writers in collaboration with subject area experts, the *Voyager Expanded Learning* program has designed curriculum units in reading (Timewarp), math (Lightspeed), biology (Dragonfly), business (Success City), the arts (Kaleidoscopes), history (Marco Polo), astronomy (Spaceship of the Imagination), physics (Mainspring), archeology and anthropology (Ice Age), and health (Pre+Med), among others. The goals of these units is to make learning interactive and meaningful by providing a cognitively stimulating, yet hands-on, approach to learning and problem solving in various areas (Fashola, 2002, p. 25).

Fashola (2002) suggested the findings on the effectiveness for the *Voyager Expanded Learning* program were inconclusive. Students participating in the program and the control group both showed an increase in their grades in math and reading. However, “results of the Houston Independent School District study showed that students enjoyed the program, and teachers and administrators felt that it helped the students and that they would use it again” (p. 26).

#### Hands on science outreach

According to its official website the *Hands on Science Outreach* (2012) program began in 1980 as a community-based informal science program in Montgomery County, MD. In 1982, *Hands on Science* came under the sponsorship of the *Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Association's Nonprofit Corporation, Education Programs Inc.*, to help offer programs to schools in the county. The program tried to encourage all children in grades K-6 to explore science subject. The program can help students with

“problem solving skills and confidence in participating in science activities” (Fashola, 2002, p. 26). According to Fashola there was no conclusive evidence that the *Hands on Science Outreach* was effective in increasing academic achievement among middle school students. “The study exhibits many of the characteristics endemic to many afterschool evaluation studies: As students were self-selected, they can be assumed to have higher motivation” (Fashola, 2002, p. 27).

#### Project impact

Fashola (2002) also discussed the afterschool program model, *Project IMPACT*. The acronym IMPACT stands for *Increasing Maximal Performance by Activating Critical Thinking*. The program began in California and was adopted by 480 public school districts, 2,384 public schools, and 124 private schools. This program is available for students K-12 and works with problem solving and critical thinking skills in language arts and math. Originally, Project Impact was not designed as an after school program and has not been evaluated.

#### Study skills across curriculum

The *Study Skills Across Curriculum* program was designed to prepare middle school students in grades 5-8 for high school. The program was intended to help students develop good study skills such as note taking, time management, reading strategies and test taking. Although this program was originally not designed as an afterschool program, likewise there was no conclusive evidence it was effective in increasing academic achievement among middle school students (Fashola, 2002).

#### New York City beacons

The *New York City Beacons* program was created to eliminate violence and crime among youth and their families, and offering children positive afterschool activities and a safe environment. The program was designed to focus on academics, recreational and cultural activities. The four main objectives of the *New York City Beacons* program were “youth development, parental involvement, and family support, school-home-community linkages, and building safe and supportive neighborhoods for child and youth development” (Fashola, 2002, p. 46). The *New York City Beacons* program was offered in 40 schools throughout New York City in 2002. Fashola (2002) found no conclusive evidence that it had any positive effects of increasing the academic achievement among middle school students.

### Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the research literature that found many middle school students are being left unsupervised which creates academic and social problems. After school programs are one of the resources schools and parents resort to help increase the academic achievement of at-risk middle school students. Also, this chapter presented evaluations that showed the impact of after school programs on academic performance among middle school students fell into three categories: ineffective, effective or inconclusive.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FINDINGS

Research on whether afterschool programs are effective in decreasing at-risk behavior and increasing academic achievement among at-risk students was presented in chapter two. This chapter will review whether the after school programs, discussed earlier, follow the guidelines listed by the National Middle School Association as having the characteristics of a successful program for middle school students. Information will be presented about whether these programs offered the essential elements needed to provide assistance in increasing academic achievement and reducing at-risk behavior.

Studies in chapter two showed that middle schools have struggled to create a safe and enriching environment for their students. After school programs have been used as additions to schools and a place for children who lack parental supervision. Since these programs are an extension of school, they need to align with the standards developed by the National Middle School Association.

NMSA presents three categories of a successful middle school which are subdivided into sixteen essential elements. The three main categories each focus on specific objectives: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Leadership and Organization; Culture and Community. There are characteristics listed under each category to describe their purpose. “The sixteen characteristics are grouped in these

three categories. The characteristics are, however, interdependent and need to be implemented in concert" (p. 13)

The five characteristics listed under Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment detail the need for a rigorous curriculum, differentiated instruction, and an authentic assessment program in order to provide achievable and challenging learning tasks to reflect the high expectations held for all. It also states that educators need to understand the needs of their adolescent audience and use multiple learning strategies and teaching approaches to engage them in the classroom.

The five characteristics listed under Leadership and Organization highlight the need of educators to continually update and revise their instructional practices to reach the needs of an ever changing youth culture. Also, educational programs for middle school students need to develop a shared vision and an understanding of best practices and educational research involved in instructing middle school pupils. In addition, these programs should provide middle school educators with professional development and organizational structures that foster purposeful learning and meaningful relationships (p. 14).

Six characteristics characterize a strong Culture and Community for middle school students. They include the need for the school and instructors to set up a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment for all students as well as provide an adult advocate for each student and actively involve the community and families in the students' course of study (p. 14).

Lacking programs

Reporting on the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers Programs* in 2005, the U.S Department of Education found that after school programs do not benefit all participants and in some cases do not provide a safe and healthy environment for middle school students either. The programs listed in the study did not align with two of the three essential categories listed by the NMSA. Although the academic focus of the programs was fully supported by school administrators and parents, the programs seemed to create problems as it did not offer a challenging curriculum. This created problems that arose when students were less interested in academic classes than in the recreational or cultural activities that the programs provided.

The *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers Programs* also had problems with attendance, recruiting, and retaining students (Burdumy, Dynarski, Moore, Deke, Mansfield, & Pistorino, 2005). The programs in this study also did not meet the essential Culture and Community requirement of providing a safe and inclusive environment in which students can thrive as learners.

#### Successful programs

The *After School Peer Tutoring Program* [ASTP] was geared towards supporting the academic needs of students as well as reducing at-risk behavior. The students' tutors were made up of college students who were trained by retired middle school educators and the assistant-superintendent of the school district. Daily updates were conveyed from the tutors to the teachers, parents and administration. Classroom teachers and parental involvement also played a crucial role in the ASPT program (Collins & Onwuegbuzie, 2001). The collaborative efforts of all involved in the ASTP program aligned with Leadership and Organization. The communication between the tutors, teachers, school

and parents helped to create the vision for the program's goals. "This vision becomes the basis for a concise, collaboratively developed mission statement supported by all stakeholders – students, teachers, administrators, families, board of education members, and the community" (p. 27). ASTP's leadership and organization enabled the program to develop a challenging academic program in which at-risk middle school students could grow as learners.

At-risk students were characterized in chapter two by their failing grades, negative attitude toward education, and as the most likely candidates for dropping out of school (Collins & Onwuegbuzie, 2001). An afterschool program, combining tutoring and counseling, appears to be effective in increasing academic achievement and reducing at-risk behavior. Edmonson and White's research (1998) concluded that students who participated in the counseling/tutorial program significantly improved in classroom behavior and self-esteem in comparison to those who received only tutorial assistance. *This We Believe* asserts that in order to become a fully functioning, self actualized person, each adolescent should be able to "recognize, articulate, and make responsible, ethical decisions concerning his or her own health and wellness needs" (p. 12) and have the "knowledge and skills [he or she] need[s] to take responsibility for [his or her life], to address life's challenges, to function successfully at all levels of society, and to be [a] creator... of knowledge" (p. 13). This program displayed the characteristics of creating a culture and community within the learning environment. The counseling and tutorial program promoted student empowerment because it gave students the tools to verbalize and deal with their personal issues at school and/or in the home. The program helped to eliminate their personal problems that deterred them from their education.

The *Murfreesboro Extended School Program* offered a combination of academic, cultural and recreational components. Along with the academic tutoring provided by the *Murfreesboro Extended School Program*, other activities such as “music, violin and guitar, arts, computer clubs, and foreign language were offered after a thirty-minute tutoring session. In addition, students had opportunities to engage in recreational activities, such as physical education, movies, handicrafts, dance, Brownies, and *4-H*” (Fashola, 2002, p.18). Even though this program did not exhibit any conclusive evidence that it increased academic achievement among at-risk middle school students, it did offer varied types of outlets and instruction, which align with characteristics listed under Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, and Culture and Community.

Fashola (2002) found that *Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America*, designed to provide adult mentors for children coming from single homes, is not directly focused on academics but more on providing the youth of America with positive role models, and the option of a safe and healthy environment to attend an afterschool program. *This We Believe* states, “Comprehensive guidance and support services to meet the needs of young adolescents,” also is a characteristic of the essential category of culture and community of what successful schools should offer middle school students. (p. 14) Increasing academic achievement and eradicating at-risk behavior among middle school students will materialize if extra support is offered.

Fashola (2002) also found that the *4-H program* provides opportunities for youth to learn more about agricultural education and provide a safe environment for children after school. The *4-H program*’s positive afterschool environment provides middle school students with opportunities that encourage them to stay out of trouble and in

school which builds the culture and community of a program. NMSA states, “An environment that is inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all promotes in-depth learning and enhances students’ physical and emotional well-being” (p. 33). The *4-H program* reflects one of the essential categories listed by NMSA by creating a strong Culture and Community.

### General findings

This section offers a general overview of afterschool programs. Feinstein (2003) stated, that “Students who attended afterschool programs had fewer absences, completed homework more often, had fewer behavior problems in school, and scored higher on tests” (p. 33). After school programs provided the students with the knowledge and skills they need to take control of their lives, which aligns with the characteristics of Culture and Community. *This We Believe* argues that empowerment is one of the essential attributes of educating young adolescents (p.14). Adolescents who have more opportunities to receive assistance with their school work are more likely to have a positive experience in school compared to adolescents who are unable to receive help if they are struggling with the grade level curriculum. Students who are able to receive assistance are less likely to engage in problem behaviors such as fighting, bullying, truancy, vandalism and substance use.

McElvain and Caplan (2001) found that afterschool programming influences adolescents’ school achievement and engagement in risky behaviors. Recognizing that every student can learn and holding them to high expectations is another key to helping them increase their academic achievement and eliminate at-risk behavior. NMSA (2010) acknowledges that challenging students aligns with the characteristics of Curriculum,

Instruction and Assessment. Students vary developmentally, and after school programs can assist in making sure students are able to understand the curriculum as well as encourage them to become independent thinkers.

Mass Insight Education (2002) found that students who have the advantage of attending these programs when they lack adult assistance at home will progress academically as well socially. This research study met the Culture and Community characteristic that, “every student’s academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate” (p. 14). Having extra adult supervision and support helps to create a community for the student, and extra encouragement to improve in school and behavior. “Academic success and personal growth increase markedly when young adolescents’ affective needs are met” (p. 35).

#### Inconclusive findings

The afterschool program *Books and Beyond* was designed to provide assistance to students experiencing difficulties as well as to provide enriching opportunities for students in language arts. Although *Books and Beyond* allowed students from “varying socioeconomic-status (SES) backgrounds, including gifted, at-risk, special education, and bilingual students” to participate, Fashola (2002) did find no “statistically significant” evidence to prove this program had any positive effects on middle school students’ academic achievement or behavior (p. 14).

The *Voyager Expanded Learning* (2007) evolved into in-school core reading programs, reading and math intervention programs, and professional development programs for school districts throughout the United States. Fashola (2002) argued the findings on the effectiveness for the program were inconclusive. Students participating

in the program and the control group both showed an increase in their grades in math and reading. Yet, “results of the Houston Independent School District study showed that students enjoyed the program, and teachers and administrators felt that it helped the students and that they would use it again” (p. 26). Even though the data does not conclude this program was effective in increasing academic achievement among at-risk students it does align with Leadership and Organization. As NMSA suggests, “Successful middle grades schools are characterized by the active engagement of students and teacher” (p. 16). Using this program as a professional development tool for teachers helped them to better understand the students they taught, and bridge the gap for struggling, at-risk students.

According to its official website the *Hands on Science Outreach* (2012) program helps students with “problem solving skills and confidence in participating in science activities.” However, Fashola (2002) found that the *Hands on Science Outreach* study exhibits many of the characteristics endemic to afterschool evaluation studies: As students were self-selected, they can be assumed to have higher motivation” (p. 27), suggesting there was no conclusive evidence that it was effective in increasing academic achievement. Fashola did note, however, that the program appeared to help students with “problem solving skills and confidence in participating in science activities” (p. 26), thus providing a curriculum that is challenging exploratory, integrative, and relevant. “Marshalling their sustained interests and efforts, and providing challenging curriculum can actively engage young adolescents” (p. 18). Even though statistical evidence indicated that the program does not increase academic achievement among middle school

students, it does align with the characteristics of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Fashola (2002) also assessed *Project IMPACT* which was available for students K-12 and focused on problem solving and critical thinking skills in language arts and math. This program was not evaluated, but provided curriculum that is exploratory and led to enriching experiences which are the fundamental components of a school serving young adolescents. This program also aligned with the characteristics of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.

The *Study Skills Across Curriculum* program was designed to prepare middle school students in grades 5-8 for high school. The program was intended to help students develop effective study skills such as note taking, time management, reading strategies and test taking. *Study Skill Across Curriculum* also aligned with the characteristics of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, “When teachers help [students] see the many connections that link various topics and subjects, [they] recognize the holistic nature of all knowledge. [Students] need to study concepts and learn skills in areas that interest them as well as in those determined by adults” (p. 22).

The *New York City Beacons* program was created to eliminate violence and crime among youth and their families, and offered children positive afterschool activities and a safe and productive environment. Even though this program lacked conclusive evidence that it helped to increase academic achievement among middle school student, it did meet the characteristics of Culture and Community, “Young adolescents are presented with innumerable and often fateful choices” (p. 37).

## Conclusion

Research indicates that afterschool programs have varying degrees of success in increasing academic achievement among at-risk middle school students. Evaluating each program using the three essential categories in *This We Believe* can serve well to determine what programs need to fix, add or continue in order to increase academic achievement. Programs that failed to increase academic achievement among at-risk middle school students did not align with the characteristics of a successful middle school. In order for after school programs successfully increase academic achievement among middle school students they need to align their curriculum and philosophies with the three essential categories outlined in *This We Believe*.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

Due to the increasing number of middle school students being left unsupervised after school has led people to question whether after school programs can provide effective academic support for at-risk students. Do tutoring and enrichment activities enough to help bridge the gap for students who are lacking the skills they need to excel to the next grade level? In order to address this important issue, this Master's Research topic sought to address the following two questions:

1. What afterschool program models have been documented in the research literature?
2. What is the impact of afterschool programs on increasing the academic achievement of middle school students?

These were the two central questions for this research project. However, the debate about which afterschool program is most effective will likely continue. An analysis of the research literature provides a starting point for discussion about different types of after school programs for middle school students.

Chapter Two reviewed the research literature with regard to the effectiveness of afterschool programs. Three categories – unsuccessful, successful, and inconclusive – provided insight into what it is afterschool programs do to in fact increase academic achievement among at-risk students.

Chapter Three evaluated whether the afterschool programs reviewed in the research literature aligned with the three essential categories of an effective middle school: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Leadership and Organization; Culture and Community (NMSA, 2010). An evaluation of each program using these three essential categories, delineated in *This We Believe*, can serve to determine avenues for how afterschool programs can serve to increase academic achievement. Programs that failed to increase academic achievement among at-risk middle school students did not align with the characteristics of a successful middle school. In order for afterschool programs to successfully increase academic achievement among middle school students they need to align their curriculum and philosophies with the three essential categories outlined in *This We Believe*.

The research literature suggests that afterschool programs can indeed increase academic achievement among middle school students but to do so they provide: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Leadership and Organization; Culture and Community. Programs that align with NMSA's recommendations for effective middle school educators can ensure at-risk students' academic achievement will improve over time.

Effective afterschool programs have to provide a “challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant” curriculum (NMSA, 2010, p. 28). Afterschool programs will

not increase academic achievement among at-risk students if they do not provide assistance for content that is being covered during the school day. Students will demonstrate growth when they are engaged in purposeful learning during after school hours, and receive support in subject areas in which they struggle.

Programs that have strong leadership and knowledgeable instructors will better meet the needs of the at-risk students who participate in afterschool programs. “When a shared vision and mission statement become operational, middle grades educators implement appropriate practice to develop challenging academic programs; they develop criteria to guide decisions and a process to make needed changes” (NMSA, 2010, p. 28). Aligning afterschool curriculum with the curriculum that is being taught during the school day will provide instructional support to at-risk students and lead to an increase in their academic progress.

“Every student’s academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate” (NMSA, 2010, p. 35). Creating a strong culture and community in an afterschool program will ensure that at-risk students receive the quality care and attention they need during after school hours to support their academic goals. Offering at-risk students a safe place where they receive assistance and have positive interactions with educators will enhance their opportunities for academic growth.

### Conclusion

Even though research has found that afterschool programs can be successful in increasing academic achievement among at-risk students, programs need to make sure to align with the standards set by the NMSA. Programs will be only be successful when they keep the child’s best interests at heart. In order for at-risk students to excel,

afterschool programs need to provide strong leadership. In addition, they need to create a strong culture and community that will ensure safety and provide emotional support. Finally, afterschool programs need to offer a curriculum that engages students through active and purposeful instruction and assessments.

### Recommendations

After school programs need to have strong leadership and be organized. Students will not thrive unless the program has a strong vision and “leaders who are committed to and knowledgeable about this age group.” (p. 28) Afterschool programs for middle school students need to be organized and operated by “educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so” (NMSA, 2010, p. 18). When the afterschool program constitutes a collaborative effort between the school and the afterschool program, students will have greater potential for academic success.

In addition, the community and its culture play a significant role in helping afterschool programs increase academic achievement among middle school students. A successful afterschool program that “is an inviting, supportive, and safe place and a joyful community that promotes in-depth learning and enhances students physical and emotional well being” will help at-risk students excel in their academic endeavors (NMSA, 2010, p. 33).

After school programs in which “students and teachers [are] engaged in active purposeful learning” will also be more likely be successful in increasing academic achievement among at-risk students (NMSA, 2010, p. 16). Providing students with an exploratory and integrative curriculum will help them discover their strengths and

weaknesses. Pairing active learning with assessments help afterschool programs to measure students' progress and chart their future goals.

When afterschool programs effectively address the three categories, defined by the NMSA, they will be on target to increase academic achievement among at risk middle school students

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