

*The Home Team Afterschool Program at Frances S. Tucker Elementary,
Miami-Dade County, FL, 2018-2019 Academic Year*

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Afterschool Programs and Student Success

Research has found that a child's social class is one of the most significant predictors of their educational success. Additionally, gaps in performance that begin early on in a child's life persist throughout the following years. (Garcia & Weiss, 2017) These findings are increasingly noteworthy when considering the growing disparities in wealth distribution in the country. According to the Gini index of income inequality, income inequality was significantly higher in 2018. The Gini index was 0.485 in 2018 compared to 0.482 in 2017; an increase of 0.6%. Additionally, since 2006, the national Gini index has increased 4.5%. (Household Income: 2018 American Community Survey Brief, 2019). For this reason, many parents, educators, and community members turn to afterschool programs to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds overcome the barriers to success they face.

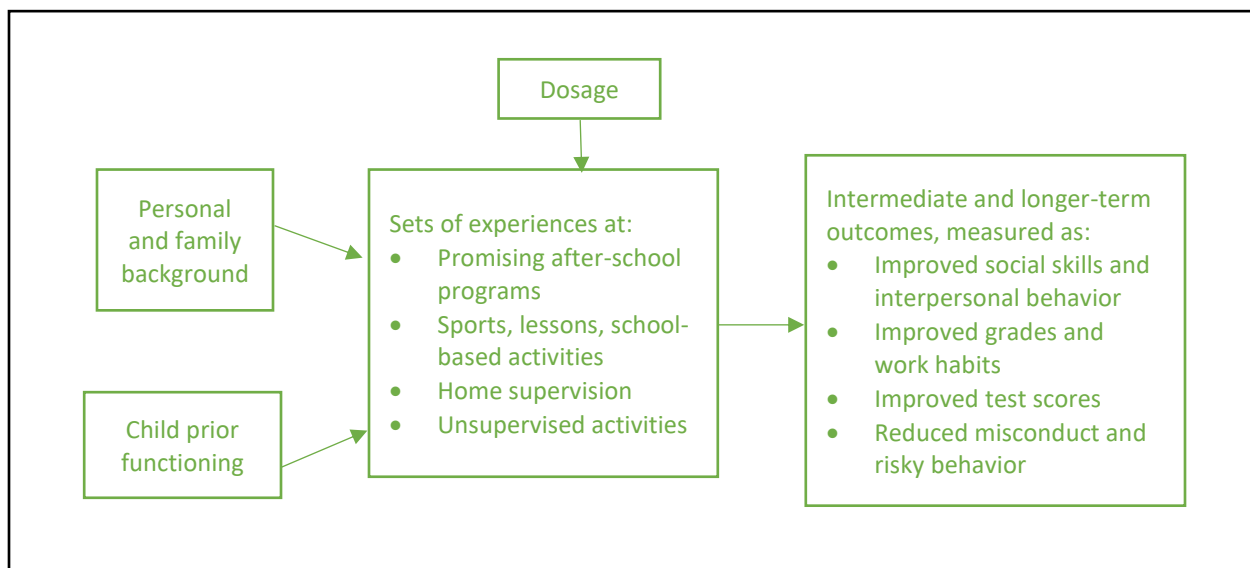
A study of 35 afterschool programs found that participation in a high-quality afterschool program is linked to gains in standardized test scores and work habits as well as decreases in

behavior problems among disadvantaged students (Vandell et al, 2007). The programs studied used a mix of recreational, arts, and enrichment activities, along with age-appropriate learning opportunities (tutoring and games) geared towards improving math and reading skills. Vandell found that elementary school students that regularly participated in afterschool programs and other supervised activities had “gains of 20 percentiles in math achievement test scores” compared to students with little to no participation in supervised activities. Additionally, teachers reported an increase in the students’ social skills and prosocial behaviors. There was also a decrease in reports of student’s engaging in problematic behaviors such as skipping school and getting into fights relative to the unsupervised students.

Reisner et al. (2007) studied after-school programs that served high concentrations of ethnically diverse, low-income youth; the elementary school-aged children were 90% low income and 82% minority race/ethnicity. They found that teachers of the elementary-grades students reported that those who participated in high-quality afterschool programs and other adult-supervised experiences fared significantly better than students who were unsupervised after school. Additionally, the teachers reported that students that participated in afterschool programs and took part in other school or community afterschool activities for two years, had more positive work habits; showed more persistence in completing tasks; had better academic performance; had better social skills; and were less aggressive with their peers after two years of participation. Additionally, students tended to have a more consistent attendance when programs combined engaging and practical learning with positive adult and peer relationships. The main implication of this study is the importance of increasing the availability of high-quality afterschool programming and reducing the amount of time students spend unsupervised. (Reisner, 2007)

The research demonstrates that participation in high-quality afterschool programs is beneficial for youth from economically disadvantaged families. Involvement in these programs help students develop persistence, focus, and engagement which can translate to academic gains even if the afterschool program is not specifically targeting academic skills. Additionally, the findings suggest that such programs should involve the entire community to ensure that the largest number of students can be reached.

Figure 1: Theoretical linkages between afterschool experiences and student outcomes in elementary grades



Source: Outcomes Linked to High-Quality Afterschool Programs: Longitudinal Findings from the Study of Promising Afterschool Programs.

The Home Team

The Home Team is a multidimensional youth-support program committed to improving the lives of Miami-Dade County public school students through engagement with academic, sports, and business leaders. Serving the community since January 2016, the program fosters an inclusive and affirming environment for children in the greater Miami area who have limited

prospects and few mentors to guide and encourage them to achieve goals and pursue their passions. Because they understand the critical role that structured programs play in complementing the public-school experience, they provide several programs across various disciplines and group ages. These include literacy prep, homework assistance, robotics, coding, performing arts, environmental science, sports, and anti-bullying. All the programs aim to develop children physically, mentally, and socially while instilling the significance of sports, teamwork, accountability and discipline throughout all aspects of life.

The Home Team provides free services to students regardless of socio-economic background. In order to ensure diversity, it operates on a reward-based, incentive system. This includes, but is not limited to, coverage of all registration fees to participate in outside leagues and clubs, additional costs associated with youth sports leagues, opportunities to attend sporting events, plays, performances, shows, field trips, internships, community service opportunities, employment and college recruiting services. To date, more than 1,500 students have participated with half completing a full year with minimal absences. This program is unique because it is framed by behavior change theory, which calls for incentivizing full participation to attain maximum benefits. Incentivizing behavior change is an effective means for achieving expected changes when individuals are less likely to be intrinsically motivated.

Frances S. Tucker Elementary School

Located in Coconut Grove, Frances S. Tucker Elementary School currently handles grades Pre-K through fifth and houses an Environmental Science magnet that offers two top-notch science laboratories that students visit on a weekly basis. This school serves a multi-ethnic population that consists of more than 300 students (94% of the school population) from a

predominantly economically disadvantaged community. 55% of students identify as Hispanic, 38% Black, 3% White, and 3% as Other. Additionally, the school serves 21% of Students with Disabilities (SWD), which include gifted, learning disabilities, emotional/behavioral disabilities, deaf or hard-of-hearing, and mentally handicapped.

In partnership with the Everglades Foundation and Miami PAL, The Home Team provided a free after school program during academic year 2018-2019 at Frances S. Tucker Elementary. Offered Monday-Friday until 6pm, it focused on literacy, homework assistance, environmental science, sports, and dance and included a free meal. In order to be eligible, students must be formally enrolled at Frances S. Tucker Elementary, be Coconut Grove residents, be approved by the school administration, and have a minimum of a 3.0 grade point average in conduct.

Emphasizing its academic component, the program placed high importance on the reading portion of the afternoon. This dedicated time was an extremely valuable opportunity for students to get extra help in an area that has proven to be a weak point for the school due to its difficulty. From grades third through fifth, students participate in the FSA (Florida State Assessment), whose reading component has historically been the most challenging test for students. To prepare students for the rigorous test, The Home Team provided additional tutoring time with a formal instructor in a small group setting that allowed for more individualized attention, as well as longer time dedicated to individual tests. Additionally, The Home Team arranged for individual tutoring with a University of Miami student every Friday. During this one-on-one time, students received even more tailored help, including reviewing their own assignments or review for upcoming tests.

Despite its academic and tutoring focus, The Home Team also understands the wide range of activities that shapes a well-rounded individual. The program schedule called for students to attend the reading/writing session every day and choose between art or recreational time on alternate days. This flexibility gave students the chance to finish their homework, work on areas in which they needed help, and participate in activities they enjoyed. Notably, the art program allowed students to express themselves in creative and productive ways while following directions, working on their social skills, sharing, and behavior improvement – identified as essential skills regardless of occupation.

Outcomes

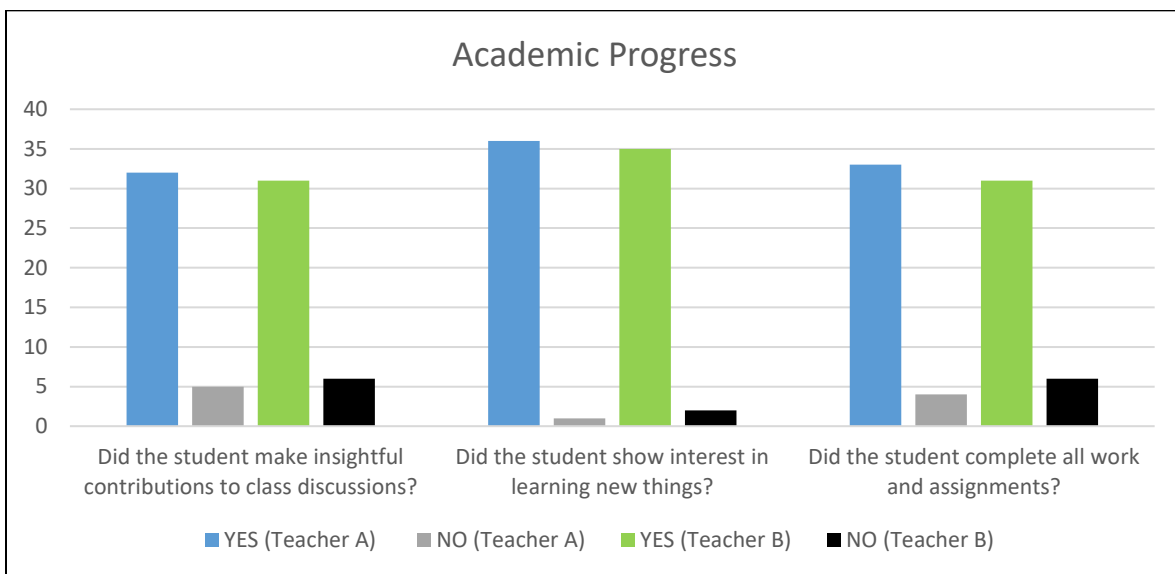
Attendance records indicate that a total of 56 students took part in the Home Team program at some point during the academic year. By the end of the program only 37 students remained actively participating; these students' data and scores will be the ones considered in this evaluation. Most of the students who did not complete the full-year program moved to other schools and were not assessed at the end of the year for the purposes of this study. About half the students took part in the program for the full academic year while the other half participated for half the academic year. The average number of absences was 22.44 days and the median number of absences was 19.5 days.

Teacher Assessment

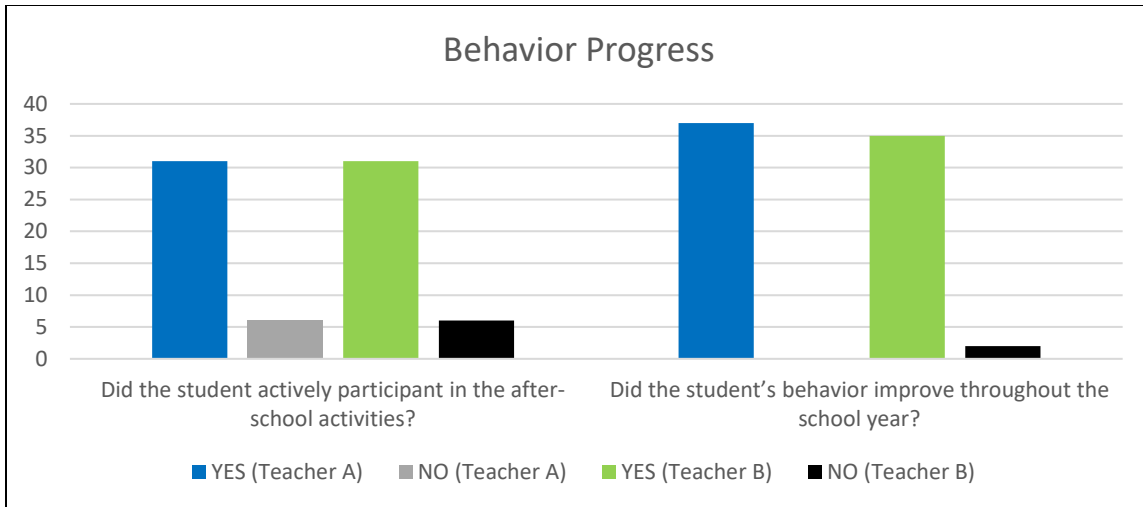
The Home Team asked their literacy instructor and their environmental science instructor to complete a brief questionnaire to evaluate each one of the 37 students still enrolled in the program by the end of the school year. To better assess the impact of the program, we have divided the questions into four categories: academic, behavior, personal, and overall. Each chart

below presents both teachers' answers placed side by side to better illustrate trends and agreements.

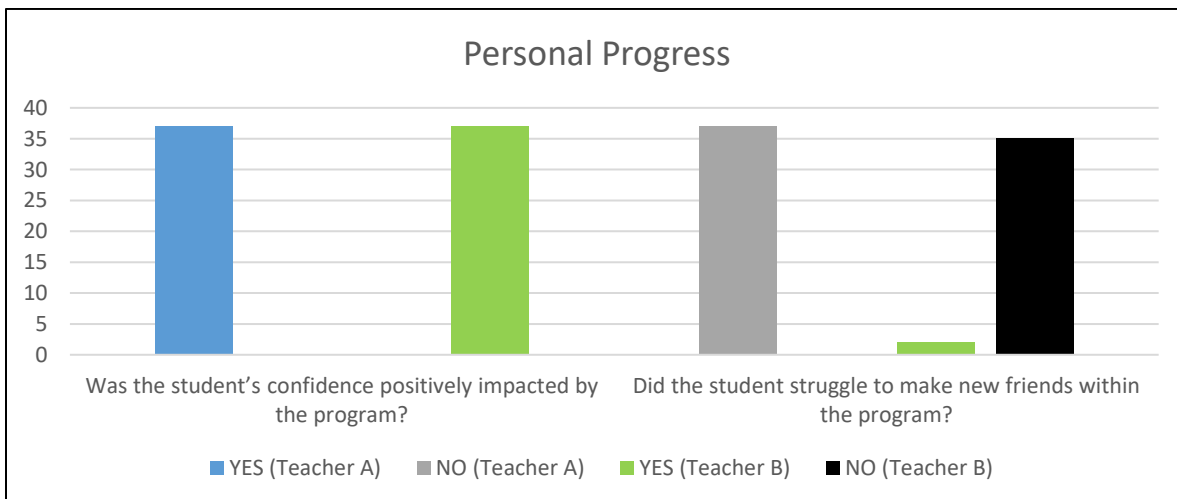
Due to its strong academic component, the first three questions related directly with performance in the academic progress category. Their answers, shown below, indicate quite the positive trend in all three aspects, as well as a sense of general agreement between the two teachers. Based on their consistent results, the vast majority of students made insightful contributions to class and showed interest in learning new things. The largest disagreement between the instructors was on the third question – teacher A indicated that only four students did not complete all work and assignments, while teacher B put six students in that category.



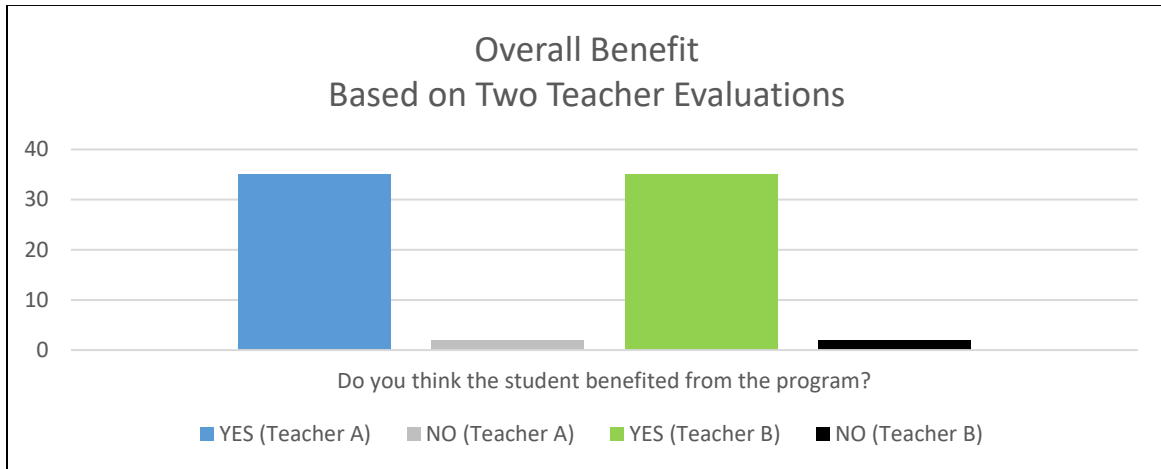
Because the Home Team is also cognizant of the importance of classroom behavior and being involved in after-school activities, teachers were also asked to evaluate those aspects. Once again, we see positive and consistent results indicating that 84% of students are actively participating and that mostly every single student's behavior improved.



Finally, teachers answered subjective questions regarding the students' personal growth. They were asked whether they thought students' confidence was positively impacted by the program and whether they struggled to make friends. On par with our prior findings, we can report that both teachers indicated that every single student benefited from the program and the vast majority did not struggle to make new friends. These statistics are very encouraging and speak to the value of the program.



Lastly, the teachers answered whether they thought the students benefited from the program. As shown on the chart below, both teachers had identical answers and agreed that 95% of students benefited from participating. These high marks are very hopeful and indicate that while there is always room for improvement, the Home Team program has already had a positive impact on the community it intends to serve.



i-Ready Results

Diagnostic i-Ready reading scores were used to determine academic improvement for the program participants. Students took the initial i-Ready test in August/September 2018 and took the final i-Ready test in May 2019. The scores were compared to determine whether there were changes in the scores. The analysis showed that 94.3% of students had an increase in their scores with the average change being a 35-point increase, or 7%. Figure 2 illustrates the percentage change in i-Ready scores for all students studied.

At the beginning of the year, students are assigned an individual typical growth and stretch growth goal. Typical growth indicates the average growth at each grade and placement level. Stretch growth shows how much a student needs to grow to reach a level of proficiency if they were below grade or advanced proficiency if they were on grade. By the end of the

academic year, 57 percent of students reached or exceeded their typical growth goal, and 43 percent of students reached or exceeded their stretch growth goal.

Grade Level Changes

We looked at grade level placement change to determine whether there were improvements from the initial i-Ready test to the final test. At the conclusion of the academic year, 8.6% of students had moved up two or three grade levels. A total of 54.3% of students' final overall placement was one level higher than their initial overall placement. This means that a total of 62.9% of the students improved their grade level placement by the end of the academic year. Additionally, while only 27% of the students scored "on or above grade level" at the initial i-Ready test, 65% scored "on or above grade level" at the final i-Ready test (Figure 3).

Figure 2. change in i-Ready Scores

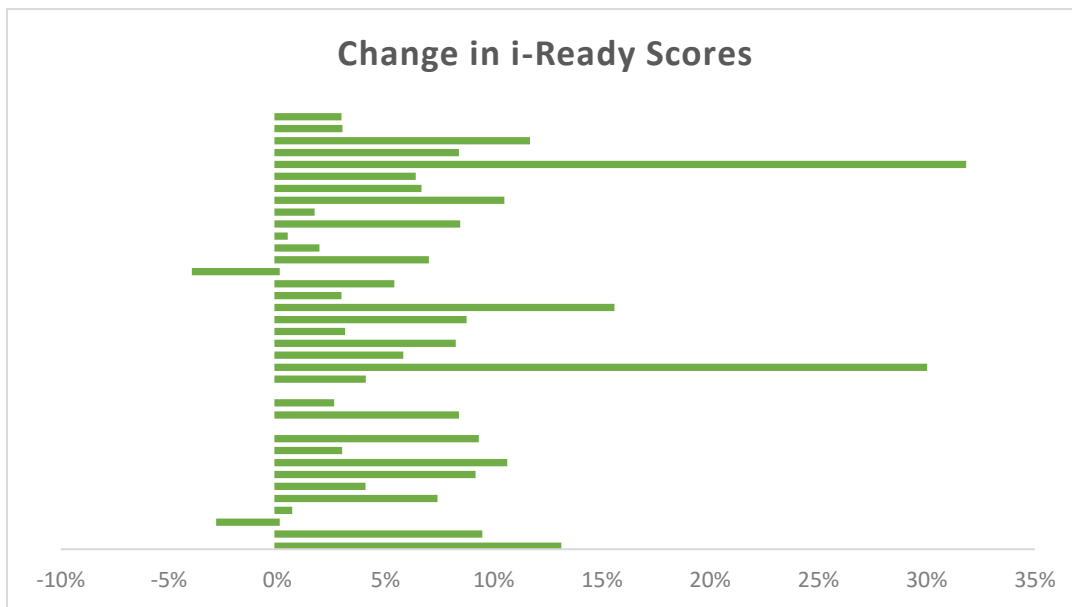
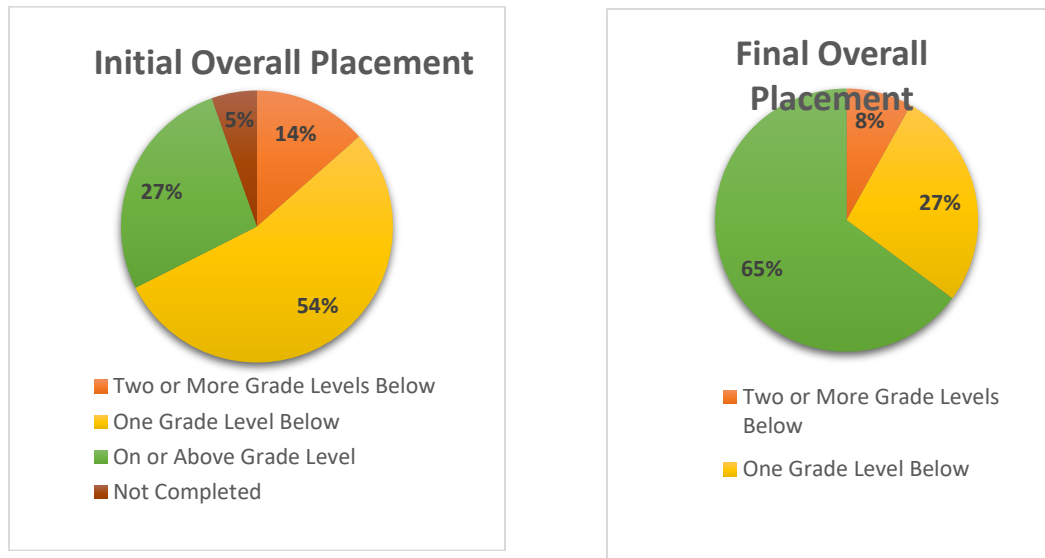


Figure 3. Change in grade level placement



Discussion

The limitation of this study is that we do not have a comparison group of similar students who did not receive aftercare services in order to show that any improvements in results can be attributed to the program provided by the Home Team. However, the results are very encouraging, given the challenging socio-economic environment of the majority of the students at Frances S. Tucker Elementary. The teachers who provided services in the program rated highly the academic, personal, and behavioral progress of the students, and the overall benefit of the program. We also document an increase in on or above grade level placement by the end of the school year, with 6 out of 10 students meeting typical growth goals, and 4 out of 10 students meeting stretch growth goals.

In the future, the Home Team should continue to track performance in their programs through teacher, student, and parent surveys, as well as academic measures in order to document consistently the positive impacts of those services in the Miami-Dade County communities.

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