

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Cycle of Assessments and Improvements Boosts Afterschool Quality**

*Study says staff-focused process creates better services for youth*

Afterschool programs get better the more they assess themselves and make changes based on those assessments, a new study says.

The study, [\*Continuous Quality Improvement in Afterschool Settings: Impact Findings from the Youth Program Quality Intervention\*](#), found that a cycle of assessing staff practices, planning based on the assessment, and targeted training improves the quality of services delivered to young people in afterschool programs.

It says the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI) model increases program quality among a wide range of afterschool systems, is sustainable and cost-effective, and might boost staff retention.

The findings come at a time when the afterschool field has made quality improvement a top priority. While growing evidence shows that afterschool programs can boost academic achievement, improve social and civic skills, and reduce risky behavior, many programs don't realize that potential – and “a primary reason for this may be the quality of experiences available to youth in these settings,” the report says.

The study validates a specific type of professional development: a continuous process in which managers support staff in their efforts to improve.

“This is a tangible example of a positive connection between research and practice, and represents an important step forward for the field,” said Bob Granger, president of the William T. Grant Foundation, which funded the study conducted by the [David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality](#). “Afterschool staff come and go quickly, are part-time, and programs have limited infrastructure to support improvement. Despite those challenges, the YPQI produced substantial improvements in line-staff practice.”

### **Measuring Impact**

The YPQI seeks to improve quality at the point of service – the place where youth and staff come together. The intervention is a multi-month cycle that leads with performance assessment, then engages staff in planning and improvement based on the assessment.

The YPQI, created and administered by the Weikart Center, is being implemented by more than 70 afterschool networks in 27 states.

The study examined 87 afterschool sites in five provider networks, over four states, between 2006 and 2008. Sites included a mix of rural and urban settings as well as a diverse set of program types and funding streams. It used random assignment to create an experimental group that went through the YPQI and a control group that did not, the first experimental study of its kind in afterschool.

The study draws the following conclusions:

- The YPQI improves program quality, and high implementation of continuous improvement practices leads to higher quality. At afterschool sites assigned to the YPQI, the quality of instruction improved both overall and in several areas that site teams targeted for improvement.
- The length of staff employment at participating sites increased, “suggesting that the YPQI continuous improvement practices may reduce staff turnover over time.” Also, quality improvements were not significantly affected by manager turnover, staff education, or youth-adult ratios.
- The YPQI works across different types of afterschool systems and policies. Sites implementing the model included a fee-based school-age afterschool system in a large urban district, a state network of 21st Century Community Learning Centers, a coalition of nonprofit youth programs, and an afterschool system funded by a state human service agency. The study found “almost no significant differences in effects between these networks.”
- The YPQI appears to be a sustainable, cost-effective, lower stakes model for continuous quality improvement. “The improvements set in motion by the YPQI were still present a year after the intervention ended,” the report says.

The report, an executive summary, and a policy brief are available at [www.cypq.org/ypqi](http://www.cypq.org/ypqi).

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The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program empowers education and human service leaders to adapt, implement and bring to scale best-in-class, research-validated quality improvement systems to advance child and youth development. The Center is a division for the Forum for Youth Investment. 734-961-6900 [www.cypq.org](http://www.cypq.org).

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