

Afterschool programs evaluated for community support, resources

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Afterschool programs seem to be most effective when their organization and implementation is supported by both organizational and community resources, according to Penn State human development researchers.

Using a tool to help bridge the gap between research and real life, the researchers evaluated an afterschool program called the Good Behavior Game.

"The Interactive System Framework for Dissemination and Implementation is the tool that helps us to bridge research and practice by synthesizing the available research and figuring out what it will take to help real people and communities use that research," said Emilie Phillips Smith, professor of human development and family studies.

There are three aspects to the Interactive Systems Framework that evaluate the effectiveness of translating research into practice when it comes to preventing substance abuse and [problem behavior](#) in school-age children. Smith and colleagues focused specifically on the delivery of the Good Behavior Game, and used the Interactive Systems Framework as their guide. They reported their findings in a recent special issue of the *American [Journal of Community Psychology](#)*.

The [Good Behavior](#) Game (GBG) was developed to help improve behavior in elementary school classrooms, and has been proven effective in reducing substance abuse in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. In this study, the researchers introduced GBG in 12 school-based

afterschool programs in both urban and rural areas in Pennsylvania and monitored the ability of each program to successfully implement the game.

Eight of the programs were randomly assigned to implement GBG, while the remaining four programs served as the control and continued without any changes.

The researchers assessed each organization's resources, such as staffing ratios, space, materials and regular internal communication, as well as its connectedness to community resources. To help determine afterschool organization resources, program directors completed surveys that asked questions about resource availability, organizational structure and management style. The same survey measured community collaboration using questions addressing the afterschool program's level of collaboration with community agencies, schools and parents; number of volunteers for programs; materials and supplies; funding; and the number of community collaborators that provided resources for children.

Implementation of GBG on the eight sites using the intervention was measured by those coaching the afterschool program staff on best practices. The coaches measured both quantity and quality of implementation.

The researchers found that afterschool programs that rated high for organizational ability, but low for community involvement were less likely to implement GBG effectively. Programs that had a lot of community involvement, but little organizational ability were less likely to implement GBG effectively. If a program had [community involvement](#) as well as organizational resources, it fared well.

"This study highlights the importance of considering interactions among multiple levels of general capacity in efforts to promote evidence-based

practices in afterschool settings," the researchers wrote.

Good internal organization and the capacity to connect to the community in meaningful ways are trademarks of programs that implement best practices well.

Smith noted that these findings are based on phase one of their pilot study. She and her team have already expanded the implementation of GBG to 72 afterschool [program](#) sites, and are further exploring its influence and effect.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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