

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MINN-LINK BRIEF #18

Educational Outcomes for Children Participating in Athletes Committed to Educating Students (ACES)

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LINK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue, we evaluated the educational outcomes of students who participated in the Athletes Committed to Educating Students (ACES) after-school tutoring and mentoring program as compared to their peers. ACES seeks to close the achievement gap of at-risk students in grades four through eight in Minneapolis and Saint Paul Public Schools. In particular, this study focused on change over time in school attendance, school mobility, and academic proficiency as well as graduation and dropout rates. Findings suggest that ACES participation benefits students on some educational indicators. Frequent participation was associated with increased reading proficiency over time compared to non-ACES students, significantly higher attendance, and significantly higher district-level enrollment. Although math proficiency and graduation rates were higher for frequent ACES participants than those of their peers, differences were not statistically significant.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. A big challenge in working with children involved in child protection may be facilitating school stability. CPS-involved children tend to have higher mobility rates (i.e., increased school transitions) and experience poor attendance as a result. How can after-school programs like ACES affect students' attendance and mobility rates? In your role, how can you support the educational stability of children in CPS?
2. This study's findings showed that a high-level of ACES participation was associated with higher graduation rates (including on-time graduation). However, dropout rates were similarly high for students involved in ACES and their peers. This finding may suggest that it is difficult to engage high-school students not only in school but also in after-school programs. What are some of the challenges engaging high-school students (particularly those with multiple dropout risk factors) in school programs? In what ways can after-school programs adapt to fit the needs of high-school students?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. After-school programs may have a positive impact on academic achievement and child outcomes. What other ways do after-school programs benefit children? What are some after-school programs that would be appropriate for students involved in child protection? What are some of the existing barriers students involved in child protection may experience participating in after-school programs?
2. Cross-system collaboration is important to address the educational outcomes of students involved in various systems of care. In what ways can you advocate for the after-school involvement of children in child protection? Are systems in place to provide children with opportunities to participate in after school programs?
3. After-school programs, such as ACES in this study, often require money, resources, time, and dedicated individuals to ensure programming is successful. What are some ways you and your organization can support your local after-school programs? Are resources available at your county to assist children and youth in participation (e.g., transportation, enrollment fees, etc.)? What barriers exist?