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JOHN W. GARDNER CENTER for Youth and Their Communities

Boys & Girls Club Participation and English Language Development Among English Learner Students

Background

An estimated one-quarter of California's public school students are not fluent in English. English learner (EL) students are expected to attain grade-level content knowledge while simultaneously working to improve their English language skills. Despite these instructional challenges, No Child Left Behind requires that EL students meet the same accountability standards as their English speaking peers.

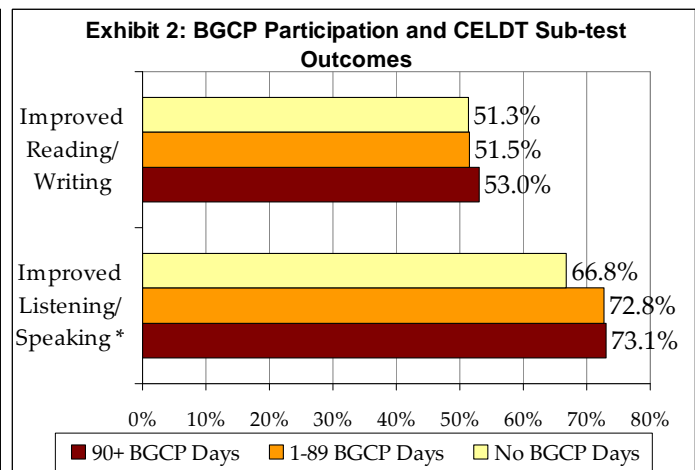
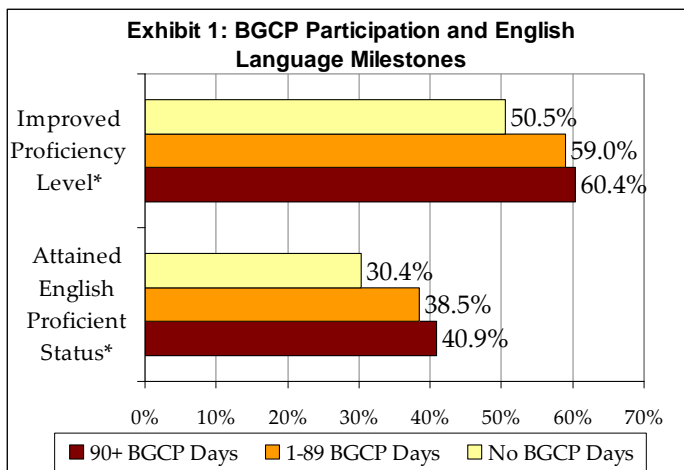
Many strategies have been explored to help EL students attain English fluency. In this analysis, researchers at the John W. Gardner Center (JGC) at Stanford University used the Youth Data Archive (YDA) to match EL students' achievement data from the Redwood City School District (RCSD) to attendance data from the Boys & Girls Club of the Peninsula (BGCP) to study the link between after school program participation and English language development.

Findings and Interpretation

Each year, EL students take the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) to assess their English language proficiency. Results from this analysis indicate that Boys & Girls Club attendance is associated with gains in English proficiency from one academic year to the next. Specifically, EL youth who participate in BGCP programming for 90 or more days in an academic year, compared to their peers who did not participate, are more likely to:

- Improve their CELDT proficiency level from one year to the next (60.4% versus 50.5%, Exhibit 1);
- Attain English Proficient status on the CELDT (40.9% versus 30.4%, Exhibit 1);
- Improve on the Listening and Speaking portions of the CELDT (73.1% versus 66.8%, Exhibit 2).

Findings do not show that EL students who attend BGCP perform significantly better on the Reading or Writing portions of the CELDT (Exhibit 2).



Notes: (1) Tabulations include all students in grades 1 through 7 during the 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07 academic years; (2) All tabulations are regression adjusted for factors including grade level, gender, ethnicity, school attended, Free/Reduced Lunch status, parents' education level, special education status, and timing of entry to U.S. schools; (3) Statistically significant effects ($p < .05$) are marked with an asterisk.

Why do students who attend BGCP improve more quickly on the Listening and Speaking portions of the CELDT? One possibility is that by working mostly with mono-lingual English speaking volunteers at the clubhouse may put EL students in situations that require them to speak or follow instructions in English, thus improving these skills. Alternately, aspects of BGCP programming or higher levels of student motivation may draw in EL students who would have gained English skills more rapidly than their peers, even if they had not participated. Further analysis does not find evidence that EL students who attended the BGCP were better prepared academically than EL students who did not attend. Additionally, the placement of the BGCP clubhouse on a school campus and the low cost of participation help ensure that many students have access to the program. Although BGCP participants may improve for a variety of different reasons, these findings imply that after school settings offer a clear opportunity for gaining both academic and non-academic skills.

From Findings to Action

Although the BGCP programming is not specifically focused on helping students to learn English, there are several possibilities for how after school programs might support the English language development of English Learners:

- Increase opportunities for language development through additional volunteer outreach and facilitation of peer teaching and bilingual interaction between EL and English-speaking youth;
- For non-school-based programs, minimize transportation and financial barriers to participation; establish "walking school buses" and recruit older participants to escort younger children.

This analysis points to the potentially powerful role of after school programming in helping students achieve English language proficiency. Through the YDA, the John W. Gardner Center is continuing to explore the complex relationship between after school program participation and school performance in a variety of settings.