Executive Summary

Research has repeatedly demonstrated the value of afterschool programs in promoting positive social, emotional, and academic development among youth, particularly those from vulnerable circumstances (Halpern, 2002; Durlak et al., 2010; Lauer et al., 2006). After-School All-Stars (ASAS) is one such afterschool program, which operates in urban settings across the United States.

The ASAS model strives to improve youth outcomes in areas identified as the three key program pillars: academics, enrichment, and health & fitness. Six cornerstones serve as the foundation for these pillars, including caring youth-adult relationships, engaging the community & family, intentional skill development, physical & emotional safety, strong school partnerships, and student voice & choice. ASAS Ohio implements this model at nine different schools across Columbus, Toledo, and Dayton. During the 2013-14 school year, 1021 youth were reached with these valuable programs.

For the second year, the Community and Youth Collaborative Institute (CAYCI) in the College of Social Work at The Ohio State University (OSU) partnered with ASAS Ohio to better understand the impact their programs are having on Ohio’s youth. Similar to year one, both process- and outcomes-evaluation methods were used in order to distill information about various outcomes associated with participation, as well as to explore the degree to which the program was being implemented with fidelity. As such, multiple data collection processes were used in the evaluation, including stakeholder satisfaction surveys, site observations, innovation-tracking logs, examination of program records, and pre-post outcomes surveys completed by youth. Several key findings emerged, highlighting both strengths of the ASAS Ohio programs, as well as areas for improvement.

Sites provided data about youth who attended the program. Based on this sample, in 2013-2014:

- 1,021 youth from kindergarten through eighth grades were served by ASAS Ohio.
- Both males (53.5%) and females (46.5%) participated.
- A majority of youth identified as African American (61.1%).
- The overwhelming majority of youth participants were eligible for a free or reduced lunch (85%), and just under 40% of youth lived with only one parent/guardian.
- ASAS Ohio programs operated on average 110 days in 2013-2014. Sites served, on average, 55 youth per day. Youth attended, on average, 54 days this past year (48.5% of the days offered).

Process Evaluation and Program Quality

To examine program quality, three strategies were employed:

- One observation was conducted at each of the ASAS sites for a total of nine observations. Observations occurred at the end of the school year and were structured around the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) observation tool.
• A content analysis was done on the comments that youth wrote on the Ohio Quality Assessment Rubric (O-QAR; described later) in response to the question, “Do you have any other thoughts about your afterschool program?”

• ASAS administrative and site leadership tracked local and state-wide innovations using a qualitative data-tracking log. Respondents were asked to indicate the type of innovation and which of the ASAS cornerstones the innovation enhanced. The thirty three logs completed during the year were returned to CAYCI for content analysis.

Across all parts of the process evaluation, individual sites and sessions excelled and struggled in different, unique ways. The tools and analyses used were intentionally structured to reflect the cornerstones of the ASAS program model, and results are presented here in that same way:

• **Physical and Emotional Safety:** During observations, strengths were noted in the areas of emotional and physical safety and supportive environment at sites. Innovations related to this cornerstone were documented as changes to internal programming as well as new partnerships helped continue to improve this already strong area.

• **Caring Adult-Youth Relationship:** Most of the innovations documented by ASAS staff occurred in this cornerstone. New staff recruitment strategies, behavior management plans, etc. were all recorded as “nuggets.” Youth’s comments also were favorable regarding their relationships with ASAS adults. During observations, interactions between staff and youth were mostly positive and engaging; however, some inconsistencies were noted across sites and sessions. Identifying, building upon, and disseminating best practices to all sites and staff will strengthen this area.

• **Community and Family Engagement:** Several innovations related to both community and family engagement were identified. New activities (e.g. animal classes, community gardening, etc.) were made available in partnership with other community agencies. Family events were hosted and set up in ways which showcased the skills youth were learning during the ASAS program.

• **Intentional Skill Development:** As stated, ASAS was able to offer many new opportunities for youth to develop new skills. Observation data, however, were more variant in relation to skill development. Best practices in place at some sites need to be replicated across the program in order to maximize the new learning opportunities.

• **Strong School Partnerships:** Commitment to school partnerships was seen both at the administrative and local levels. Partnerships with teachers helped bridge the school day and afterschool hours. The structure of the academic portion of the program model is adapted to each school.

• **Student Voice and Choice:** Documented innovations pointed to ways in which youth were able to inform the overall direction of the ASAS program. Observation data about the availability of choice and leadership opportunities within individual sessions, however, were more variable. Intentionality is needed to give youth multiple avenues for voice and choice.
Outcomes Evaluation and Program Outcomes

**Pre-Post Program Outcome Surveys:** To better understand the impact of ASAS Ohio, youth completed pre- and post-surveys designed to reflect the three pillars of the ASAS model - academic achievement, health & fitness, and enrichment – as well as youth’s feelings of belonging. Program attendance data were examined in relation to the outcomes on this survey. Specifically, the analysis of attendance data revealed two primary groups: one group of students who were frequent and consistent attenders and another with those who attended infrequently and/or inconsistently. Post-outcomes also were compared across these two groups as well as between those youth that attended at least 80% of the time to those that did not. Finally, controlling for those youth who entered the program with the maximum possible scores, the percentage of youth who grew from pre to post on scales was examined. The outcomes evaluation points to several key successes:

- Frequent/consistent attenders (n=447) had better feelings about overall health and life skills than infrequent/inconsistent attenders (n=573) at post-test.
- Youth attending at least 80% of the time had significantly more favorable perceptions at the end of the year about their school and life skills, as well as less soda intake, than their low attending counterparts.
- 52% of youth who did not have a maximum score on the pre-test improved their academic motivations; whereas 43% improved their perceptions about school, in general.
- 46% of youth who did not have maximum scores on the pre-test grew in their perceptions of their leadership ability and 55% did so in their perceptions of life skills.

Please note the overall effect sizes are modest, and few differences were statistically significant.

Therefore, overall program impacts can still be improved. Additionally, there was significant variability in the month-to-month attendance among youth involved in the program, as well as data indicating that many youth drop out of the program and overall attendance declines throughout the course of the year. Retaining youths’ involvement and engagement in ASAS remains a challenge.

**Ohio-Quality Assessment Rubric (O-QAR):** Additionally, youth, parents and other stakeholders (e.g. teachers, ASAS staff, etc.) were asked to complete the O-QAR at the end of the school year. Data from 378 youth, 96 parents/caregivers, and 53 stakeholders in 2013-2014 were compared to those from 277 youth, 161 parents/caregivers, and 99 stakeholders in 2012-2013. Findings showcase that stakeholder responses were significantly more favorable in 2013-2014 than the previous year in relation to academic learning, health and fitness, and enrichment program components.

Finally, youth involved in ASAS perceive a strong sense of belonging to the program; and the youth in 2013-2014 report more favorable responses in this year compared to the previous year. There is still room for improvement in this area, however, as approximately one third of youth participants did not feel a strong sense of connectivity to the program. Targeting strategies aimed towards improving the engagement and quality of experience for all youth at ASAS remains a priority.

“I really think After-School All-Stars is a place that can make you succeed in the future and be able to make it into a good high school and carry on to a college.”

~ASAS youth participant
Implications

Data from the process evaluation demonstrated that the fundamental components of an effective afterschool program are in place at ASAS. Staff were consistently engaged with youth and provided a safe and supportive environment; the programs were creatively tailored at each site based on resources available through school and community partners; and staff identified innovations that demonstrated commitment to ongoing improvement. Not only were these and other strong features identified this year, but stakeholder data on the O-QAR survey suggest the improved operations in many programming areas compared to the 2012-2013 school year.

These strengths represent a strong foundation which ASAS can build upon as it addresses areas in need of improvement. Specifically, there was variance across sites and sessions in the extent to which best practices were in place, especially in the areas of ‘youth voice and choice’ and ‘intentional skill-building.’ There is room for greater intentionality and consistency in the implementation of these areas and in the alignment of program activities to key outcomes. Variance in sites ‘operations represents a strength but also a challenge as ASAS must decide upon its identity relative to the academic learning component.

Struggles with maintaining attendance proved to be a barrier. Whereas youth attended, on average, 56% of the time at the beginning of the program, this percentage had dropped to 44% by May 2014. Further, a third of youth reported not feeling a strong sense of connection to the program. New strategies are needed to keep youth engaged once they begin ASAS because, while the statistical significance was modest, better outcomes in select areas were documented amongst youth that consistently and frequently attended and/or attended more than 80% of the program.

Positive trends and improved outcomes also were documented among youth that came into the program with low scores. This may point to the fact that kids who most need ASAS services benefit most from involvement. Still, a sizeable portion of youth entered the program with maximum scores making it more difficult to show impact across the program. In order to continue to reach youth that most need afterschool programming, ASAS may consider targeting their recruitment and enrolling youth with poorer academic, health & fitness, or enrichment related behaviors.

In interpreting these results, there are limitations to the evaluation design that must be considered. For example, there may be selection effects if youth coming into the program already have favorable perceptions. Further, the pre-survey was collected after some programming had occurred. Goals for ongoing evaluation might include getting a true baseline, finding ways to collect both pre and post-surveys from a larger percentage of youth, and exploring opportunities to have a comparison group.

Overall, great work is being done at ASAS Ohio. The 2013-2014 school year was just its second year of state-wide operations. ASAS leadership and staff should be applauded for their ongoing efforts which have facilitated the many innovations and improvements documented in this evaluation. There is still work to be done in order to translate program improvements into more outcomes amongst youth beyond those that occurred in this past year. Hopefully, the evaluation process and report have helped to identify strategies whereby ASAS can build upon the strong foundation they have created as an afterschool program.