School Age Child Care Programs Get Results

Situation
Child Care Connections is an after school child care program, sponsored by the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System, that provides school age children a place to go when school is out for the day, but parents are still at work. There are seven school age child care sites (SACC) in the state of Idaho currently receiving grant funding — in Gooding, Idaho, Lincoln and Nez Perce counties. These SACC sites provide care for children ages 5 to 12 every afternoon after school.

Response
Recently a survey was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the SACC programs. The survey included parents with children in the program, program staff and principals/teachers with SACC program children in their classrooms.

Results
The majority of parents have only one child involved in the SACC program (79%), with a small group (21%) having two children in the program. Over 95% of the parents and 90% of the children were very satisfied with the program. The parents feel that the after school child care programs have good to excellent health and safety arrangements, educational and recreational activities, location convenience, hours of operation and transportation. Most parents feel that their children have improved in several areas since their involvement in the SACC program, including ability to concentrate, knowledge of community and communication with school personnel.

The after school child care programs are not only benefiting the children but also the parents in numerous ways. Parents report that they are less likely to be late to work, miss days of work, or leave work early now that they are involved with SACC. Parents also report that family life is slightly better, especially in relationships with their children and involvement in their child’s education. The SACC programs are rated as being affordable to very affordable by over 90% of the parents. The SACC programs were reported to be successful in helping students complete higher quality homework, improve attendance records, prevent students from being placed in special education classes, decrease behavioral problems, improve cooperation with teachers, increase parent involvement in school activities and decrease vandalism to school property. In addition, SACC programs have helped shy children become more outgoing, taught children how to be more skilled at joining group activities and helped rejected children make new friends. Over 80% of parents involved in the after school child care programs report that the program is very successful.

The majority of parents involved in this study were females (73%) in the 31 to 50 year age bracket (79%). Most families include two parents (70%) that both work full time (over 80%).
The staff at the SACC programs are key to the success that has been reported in all of the program sites. The program staff report an average of twelve children in each program site, with two adult staff. Volunteers are also involved in the child care program, with both adult and youth volunteers.

The majority (57%) of the program staff feel that their community has become a better place to live as a result of SACC, with comments like “This program has helped children become better people, therefore a nicer neighborhood has evolved.” Program staff feel that some of the major obstacles are awareness of parents about the need for structured after school programs, limited funding and lack of volunteers.

Program staff average 32 years in age and are predominantly female. Almost half of the program staff are college graduates (43%) and most have little to no previous experience with Cooperative Extension before becoming involved in the SACC program.

The school principals and teachers often see as much or more of the end result of after school child care programs as parents do. Most teachers (67%) are familiar with the SACC programs, although only a few are very familiar (9%). The school age child care programs have only been available to children for a few years, with the average existence of a little over a year for these four counties.

Teachers feel that the SACC programs are helpful in completion of homework, improved grades, development of new topics of interest, improving overall school performance, helping children handle conflicts by talking instead of being violent and in getting shy children to be more outgoing. The majority of teachers feel that the SACC programs are successful and have enhanced the community.

Some of the comments from teachers and principals with students involved in the program include “They have increased in computer skills, general knowledge and interest in many varied topics.” Another teacher says “My second grade student loves to go to the program. He feels accepted and has learned socially accepted skills in dealing with others. It also gives him the security of having a place to go after school.” A comment by one teacher says “I have a child in my room whose parents were considering retention, but sent him ahead anyway. He was in the low reading group and very shy. Now he is in the middle reading group and even seems to have more confidence in himself.”

The after school child care programs give parents security and peace of mind about their children during the after-school hours and they provide the children the opportunity to learn in structured, educational activities. The programs have been very successful with parents, children, program staff and educators.

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