



## Summary of Independent Evaluation

### Interfaith Action's Culturally Based, Community-Connected Youth Development Programs

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#### Evaluators

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#### Programs Evaluated

- **Project SPIRIT**, an African-American culturally based after-school program with 71 elementary school students (grades K-5) at four St. Paul elementary schools; 99% of students and 90% of staff are African American; all students living at or below 200% of Federal poverty line
- **American Indian Youth Enrichment (AIYE)** program serves up to 100 American Indian students with both after-school and summer programs; all students and staff were American Indian; all students living at or below 200% of Federal poverty line

#### Methodology

- **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** was used as an inquiry framework to examine how the two programs support basic needs, safety and security, social belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization in culturally specific and developmentally appropriate ways.
- **Data collection** included classroom observations; reviews of curriculum; review of student work and staff records on student work; and interviews with students, parents, and staff.
- **An extensive literature review** connects the data collected to the evaluation's conclusions.

#### Learning

- **Community Difficulties Become Children's Difficulties.** What happens in the community filters into the classroom and after-school programs through children. Therefore, the effects of poverty are carried into learning environments.
- **Effectiveness of After-School Programs Should Not Be Measured Based Only on Academic Gains.** First, it is impossible to know what time of day academic gains were achieved. Second, the after-school time slot is not an appropriate time to focus mainly on academic gains.
- **Culture is Protective.** Culturally relevant and specific out-of-school time programming, *done correctly*, is one of the most protective infusions we can give to children living in poverty. Ample research supports this finding.
- **Culturally Based, Community-Connected Youth Development Programs Should Accomplish Ten Things**
  1. The students should *get fed*
  2. The students should *be safe*
  3. The students should *get help*, as needed, *completing their homework*
  4. The students should *get help solving personal problems*

5. The students should *feel cared about, valued, and important*
6. The students should engage with *culturally appropriate and stimulating learning resources* and *develop a strong connection to their cultural heritage and identity*
7. The students should get exposed to *positive role models* and *build positive relationships as part of a culturally specific community*
8. The students should *develop interpersonal skills*
9. The students should *develop positive self-esteem* grounded in their individual strengths and qualities
10. The students should be *encouraged to aspire to live a fulfilling life.*

## Key Findings & Recommendations

The findings and recommendations include:

- **Both Interfaith Action out-of-school time enrichment programs – Project SPIRIT and American Indian Youth Enrichment -- show substantial positive impacts** on student participants related to cultural identity and connections. Importantly, these positive impacts are different from those of more traditional after-school programs.
- **Evaluators recommend that we re-conceptualize, support, and fund these programs as culturally based, community-connected, youth development programs.** “After-school” simply describes when these programs occur. These culturally focused, community-connected, student-centered, and trauma-informed Interfaith Action programs help students with homework and support all dimensions of healthy youth development, including strong cultural identity, which is positively related to academic outcomes.

## New Instrument

- ***The Old Approach of Assessing After-School Programs Based Solely on Academic or Literacy Gains Was Misguided.*** Typical standardized evaluations do not take into account the role of culture in learning, yet extensive research now documents the importance of culturally appropriate learning environments and the role that a strong cultural identity plays in academic and social outcomes. With this evaluation, the researchers have developed a more meaningful, culturally responsive approach to evaluate culturally based community-connected out-of-school time educational programs.
- ***The Evaluators Developed A New, Powerful Instrument for Assessing Culturally Based Community-Connected Youth Development Programs*** The appropriate tools to evaluate these programs must be much more complex than traditional standardized tests. We now have a robust model for assessment.

## Interfaith’s Takeaways

- ***The new instrument is a powerful tool for assessing culturally based community-connected youth development programs.*** The appropriate tools to evaluate these programs must be much more complex than traditional standardized tests. We now have a robust model for assessment.
- ***American Indian Youth Enrichment and Project SPIRIT both achieve all of the key competencies required of culturally based community-connected youth development programs.*** The evaluators concluded that American Indian Youth Enrichment and Project SPIRIT both meet all of the needs articulated in Maslow’s Hierarchy as interpreted in the new evaluation instrument.