A Dissertation

entitled

The Effects of the After School Program Kids Unlimited on Students' Academic

Performance on the Ohio Achievement Assessment

by

Kevin Pfefferle

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Administration and Supervision

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Cynthia Beekley, Ed.D., Committee Chair

_____
Nancy Staub, Ed.D., Committee Member

_____
Dale Snauwaert, Ph.D., Committee Member

_____
James Fritz, Ed.D., Committee Member

_____
Patricia R. Komuniecki, Ph.D., Dean
College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo
December 2011

An Abstract of

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This study investigates whether students who regularly attend the after school

program Kids Unlimited show greater academic gains on the Ohio Achievement

Assessment than students at the same schools who do not attend Kids Unlimited. This

study also investigates whether there is a difference in Ohio Achievement Assessment

scores between students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited and those who do not based

on gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, or school

site. And finally, this study investigates whether students who have attended Kids

Unlimited for more than one academic year attain higher Ohio Achievement Assessment

scores than students who have attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one school

year.

The results of the study show that no significant differences were found in Ohio

Achievement Assessment scores for students who regularly attended the after school

program Kids Unlimited when compared to students at the same schools who did not

attend Kids Unlimited. Statistical differences were found in Ohio Achievement

Assessment scores for reading based on gender, grade-level and race and significant

differences were found for math achievement scores based on school site, grade-level and race. These differences should be interpreted with caution due to similar significant results for non-Kids Unlimited students and low sample sizes. Finally, no significant differences were found in achievement assessment scores for students who attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year when compared to students who attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one school year.

I would like to dedicate this study to my wife, Jamie, and our two children, Ella and Cale. To Jamie, I can't begin to thank you for the support, encouragement, and sacrifices you offered to me throughout this journey. You believed in me and allowed me the time necessary away from our family to complete this goal. Without your love and support, accomplishing this goal would have meant nothing.

To our children, Ella and Cale, I will always regret that the time I spent working on this study was time I could have spent with you. While it weighs heavily on my memory, I can only hope that one day, the value of education and this experience will be appreciated by you both.

Finally, I would like to thank my entire family for their support and time helping Jamie and I through these past few years. The hours you spent helping and encouraging us was always unquestioned and a true reflection of your love for us. To my mom, Sue, and dad, Bob, thank you for being the wonderful role models in my life that allowed me to be the person I am today. Thank you, and God Bless.

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Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In today's family, more than ever before, it is likely that both parents are working full-time jobs more than in traditional families of 50 years ago. In the past, it was commonplace to have the father working at a full-time job while the mother of the family stayed at home to care for the children. Today, a responsible adult is not always present when a child arrives from school. Because of this, communities whose children are consistently unsupervised during the hours of 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. see an increase in crime rates (Ascher, 2006). Weisman and Gottfredson (2001) have reported that, depending on the nature of children's environment, unsupervised time puts children at risk for negative outcomes behaviorally and academically, including drug use and other types of behavioral risks (as cited in Durlak & Weissberg, 2007).

Each day in America, some 15 million children are without supervision or are on the streets following the school day (After School Alliance, 2009). Most children spend their day under some form of structured supervision, such as school, or under the care of a supervised adult or authority figure. However, when a gap exists in the time the school day ends and when a parent arrives home from work, opportunities to engage in unsafe behaviors are available to children who are not always mature enough to make responsible decisions. This gap, if not structured, forces children into an unsupervised

environment that could lead to potential academic and safety risks. According to the report *America After 3 PM, 2009,* two major factors have contributed to parents' inability to send their child(ren) to after school programs: (1) an inability to pay for such programs, and (2) an inability to provide appropriate transportation from school (After School Alliance, 2009).

Approximately 38 percent of parents who are unable to provide supervision for their children would prefer to have a safe, structured setting for their children to attend after school if one were available to them (After School Alliance, 2009). Making an after school program available to school-aged children typically has been the responsibility of the community, government, or school system in which the family resides. However, availability of after school programs is associated with a price tag. In other words, funds are needed for facilities, overhead costs, personnel, equipment, training, and, in some cases, transportation. Consistent funding for many after school programs in some cases has been provided by government grants or private donations assisted by parental tuition fees.

What is not well known and continues to be debated is the extent to which after school programs impact academic outcomes of students who attend them. The purpose of this study is to determine whether attendance at Kids Unlimited, a localized urban after school program, has a significant impact on the academic outcomes of the children that it serves when compared to same-school peers who do not attend Kids Unlimited.

1.2   Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to determine whether a significant difference exists between students who have attended Kids Unlimited regularly and their same-school peers who have not attended Kids Unlimited in the following areas: (1) academic achievement as measured by results on the Ohio Achievement Assessment in the areas of reading and math, (2) reading and math achievement assessment scores based on gender, grade level, socio-economic status (measured by free-and reduced-lunch qualification), special education services (measured by students who are on an IEP), race, and school site, and (3) reading and math scores on the Ohio Achievement Assessment between students who attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year when compared to students who attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one academic year.

1.3   Rationale

Academic outcomes are highly scrutinized areas of evaluation for after school programs. Such scrutiny exists because many after school programs claim to promote academic gains by virtue of the guidance and teaching that they offer to students who attend them. Additionally, many parents whose children attend after school programs expect academic growth because their children spend more time on academic-related programs beyond the typical school day.

Limited research has been conducted on after school programs and their effect on learning outcomes (Ascher, 2006). The few research studies that have been conducted on this topic have provided controversial conclusions about the relationship of after school

3

programs and academic outcomes. Pittman et al. (2004), Ascher (2006), and Halpern (2004) have indicated that after school programs do provide valuable community services and serve as a moderate deterrent for some problematic behaviors. However, they report that the academic value of such programs is dubious.

This study seeks to explore more specifically the relationship between one after school program located in a medium-size Midwestern city and scores on a statewide achievement assessment. Kids Unlimited is a local after-school program located in urban Toledo, Ohio. The core focus of Kids Unlimited is reflected in three fundamental areas: academics, character development, and self-discipline. Kids Unlimited focuses primarily on under-served populations and seeks to help participants develop stronger academic and social skills while emphasizing the importance of positive values and character development (www.kidsunlimitedtoledo.org).

The results of this study can benefit three primary constituencies: parents, teachers, and after-school program administrators. First, the results of this study can benefit parents who send their child(ren) to after-school programs. For parents who are sending their child(ren) to an after school program such as Kids Unlimited, it should be important to know whether or not the time spent after school in a structured program has a measurable effect on academic assessment scores and on character development and self-discipline. If parents are aware of the potential of after school programs in promoting academic gains, they can make more informed decisions about whether to enroll their children in such programs and whether to moderate their expectations. Secondly, for an administrator or teacher, the results of this study can be beneficial in ways that promote or advocate for future after school programming for struggling or at-risk students.

Educators are in need of proven resources that extend beyond the school day which support and supplement the values of the school building/classroom. Knowing that such alternatives exist could prove to be the missing link between school success or failure for many students in need of extra support. Third, this study can contribute to the current after school program research that exists in the areas of student achievement, character development, and self-discipline. All of these areas of after school programming are in search of more conclusive evidence that connections exist between after school programming and positive impacts on academic achievement and at-risk student behavior.

1.4   Research Questions/Hypotheses

RQ1

Do elementary and middle school students who regularly attend the after school program Kids Unlimited show greater academic gains on the reading and math Ohio Achievement Assessments than students at the same schools who do not attend Kids Unlimited?

RQ2

For elementary and middle school students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited, is there a difference in reading and/or math achievement test scores based on gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, or school site?

RQ3

Do students who have attended Kids Unlimited for more than one

academic year attain higher reading and/or math achievement test scores than students who have attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one school year?

It is hypothesized that students who attended Kids Unlimited regularly will have significantly higher reading and math scores on the Ohio Achievement Assessment than their peers who do not attend Kids Unlimited regularly. It is also expected that there will be a significant difference in Ohio Achievement Assessment scores for students who attend Kids Unlimited based on gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status and school site. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that a significant difference will exist on Ohio Achievement Assessment scores for students who attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year when compared to students who attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one academic year.

1.5   Significance of the Study

Urban school districts in Ohio and across the country strive to provide the best educational system for their students in spite of obstacles that make teaching and learning difficult. Such obstacles include lack of resources and appropriate facilities, student transiency, poor student attendance, and inconsistent parental involvement. Societal issues also have had an impact on student achievement and behavior, including higher poverty rates, higher crime rates, and a higher population of minority students. More specifically, the Toledo Public School system (TPS) has experienced a black/white student achievement gap on standardized Ohio Achievement Assessments (Durant, 2007, Ohio Department of Education, 2011). The Toledo Public School district services more

than 22,277 students, more than half (66.2%) of whom are living in poverty, and 58.4% are minorities (Ohio Department of Education, 2011).

Currently, Kids Unlimited works with inner-city Toledo students who choose to attend neighboring charter schools that are not affiliated with TPS and are actually in direct competition with TPS for students. The student clientele for the charter schools that Kids Unlimited services are primarily minority students who live in poverty on the same streets where their neighbors attend TPS elementary and middle schools. The TPS district has never achieved a district rating higher than "Continuous Improvement" on the State of Ohio Report Card (Ohio Department of Education, 2011). Kids Unlimited is a Toledo-based after school program that may help close this academic achievement gap that for so long the school system, Toledo students, and their parents have been unable to close. If Kids Unlimited can show that its program contributes to increasing student achievement, TPS could one day partner with Kids Unlimited and offer its services to students within the TPS district.

In addition to determining whether students who attend Kids Unlimited experience improved academic performance, this study will contribute to the existing research on the academic outcomes of after school programs. It will do so by examining Ohio Achievement Assessment scores in reading and mathematics for students in grades three through eight who have regularly attended Kids Unlimited and those who have not regularly attended Kids Unlimited. This study will also serve as a blueprint for community-based after school programs that are similar to Kids Unlimited and that service students in desperate need of academic support. Finally, this study may reveal

program quality strengths and weaknesses in an after school formula that can be incorporated into TPS schools and possibly into additional urban school districts in Ohio.

1.6 Definition of Terms

After-school Program: A privately funded or government-funded program that serves school-age children in the hours after school or in the summer. Program goals can include but are not limited to location, interests of those who fund the program, staff training and availability, community interest and involvement, and student participation and attendance.

Learning Outcomes: Learning outcomes are measured through the use of Ohio Achievement Assessment scores in the subjects of reading and math.

Ohio Achievement Assessment: The Ohio Achievement Assessment is a standardized assessment provided by the Ohio Department of Education to school districts in the state of Ohio as a standard measure of learning in the subjects of reading, math, and science in grades three through eight.

Quality Programs: The quality of after school programs is determined based on the missions and goals of the program and the ability of that program to accurately and effectively measure the outcomes associated with those missions and goals.

School Site: The school that Kids Unlimited students attend during the school day is also the same location for the students who attend the Kids Unlimited program. School site and program site are the same locations.

Regular Attendance: Attendance to Kids Unlimited on the basis of 65%-75% attendance each week when compared to a full week that the after school program was made available.

Socio-economic Status: Socio-economic status of participants (i.e., students) refers to their eligibility for the federally funded National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

Special Education Services: Special education services refer to instruction for students who have been identified with a disability. Students who qualify for special education services require accommodations and/or modifications to their education and are provided with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plan which outlines the conditions under which specialized instruction may occur.

Structured Supervision: This term refers to the supervision of school-age youth by an adult in a safe environment.

Time on Task: This term refers to the time students spend on academic-related tasks outside the school day.

1.7 Delimitations

This study focuses on a single after school program offered to inner-city youth in Toledo, Ohio. Therefore, this study is limited to one Midwestern city and one after school program. Additional factors other than participation in an after school program may contribute to improved test scores not accounted for in this study, such as students who receive outside tutoring, academic differences at school sites, curriculum differences at school sites and general instructional differences to name a few; in addition, after school

programs may vary in their programming and content. Data will be gathered from the 2007-2008 school year through the 2010-2011 school year--a total of three years. As a result, various economic, educational, and political factors may also have played a role in any variations seen in students' achievement test scores during this time period.

The after school program Kids Unlimited has been working with five inner-city charter schools and a portion of their students in an effort to improve academic learning outcomes as measured by Ohio Achievement Assessments and develop students' character and self-discipline. The sample for the study includes students who attended a Kids Unlimited program at any one of the five charter schools during the school year and were administered the Ohio Achievement Assessment in reading and math by one of the charter schools. The study includes only students who have regularly attended Kids Unlimited and their classmates who have not regularly attended Kids Unlimited.

1.8   Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 consists of the following sections: statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the rationale that supports the study, the research questions this study seeks to answer, the significance of the study, the underlying assumptions upon which this study has been built, definitions of important terms, and a description of the remainder of the study. Chapter 2 reviews and summarizes research from scholarly journals and other credible sources. The literature review is composed of the following sections: history of after school programs, technological factors, economic factors, social factors, legislation, quality programming, participation and attendance, evaluations of after school programs, academic impacts, perceptions and

impact on ethnic minority youth, time-on-task, and Kids Unlimited. Chapter 3 presents

the methodology for this study and includes the following sections: introduction, research

design, research questions, sample, population and participants, data collection

procedures, data analysis, limitations, assumptions, and summary of chapter 3. Chapter 4

presents the results of the study. Chapter 5 summarizes the results of this study and

includes the following sections: summary of the problem, purpose of the study, summary

of the sample, review of methodology, research findings, additional findings,

implications for action and practical recommendations for after school programs,

limitations, recommendations for future research and a conclusion.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to After School Programs

Fundamentally, the mission for any after school program is to provide a safe environment for children while they are in the absence of their parents/guardians. According to a study conducted by the agency Afterschool Alliance in a report titled *America After 3PM* (2009), "The aspects of after school programs that produce the highest levels of satisfaction include safety" (America After 3PM, 2009, p. 5). Unsupervised children can pose a danger to themselves as well as those around them if they are left to function in unsupervised environments. According to the *America After 3PM* report (2009), "More than a quarter of America's school children (15.1 million children or 26 percent) are on their own after the school day ends, and before parents get home from work" (p. 3). According to the same study, 8.4 million children have attended some form of after school programming (America After 3PM, 2009). Of those 8.4 million children who have attended after school programs, 70% are elementary students, and 41% are from low-income housing (After School Alliance, 2009).

In Ohio, "30% (608,657) of Ohio's K-12 children are responsible for taking care of themselves after school. These children can spend an average of 8 hours per week unsupervised after school" (America After 3PM, 2009, p. 1). According to the *America After 3PM* (2009) report, "30% of all Ohio children not in after school programs would

be likely to participate if an after school program were available in the community, regardless of their current care arrangement" (p. 1). In fact, "In Ohio, the public schools are currently the largest provider of after school programs. YMCA's, Boys & Girls Clubs, the city or town and religious organizations round out the top five providers of after school programs in the state" (America After 3 PM, 2009, p. 2).

Establishing the need for after school programs in Ohio and across the nation has been a function of the After School Alliance. The number of school-aged children who remain unsupervised after school has increased from 2004 to 2009 (America After 3 PM, 2009). Nationally, the percentage of children who have engaged in self-care has grown by more than one million students during that same period (America After 3 PM, 2009). Additionally, the percentage of kids who would participate in an after school program were one available to them has risen 8% nationally (from 30% to 38%) and 7% in Ohio (from 23% to 30%) (America After 3 PM, 2009). The lack of availability of after school programs has placed more students than ever before at risk by allowing them to remain unsupervised and in their own care.

The literature focusing on after school programs reflects a broad spectrum of issues, including safety, effects of social environments, academic impacts, programming, participation and quality, and perceptions by students, parents, and teachers. After school programs were initially designed to provide school-age children with a safe environment after school, but the role of after school programs has evolved and expanded to include academic improvement, help with homework, social interactions, and, in some cases, youth sports activities. According to the report *America After 3PM* (2009) parents with unsupervised children after school benefit from help "with social skills, keeping kids

safe, providing opportunities to be physically active and helping their child[ren] succeed in school" (p. 4).

2.2 History of After School Programs

Based on their name alone, parents, teachers, and program administrators might assume that after-school programs have emerged from the educational fabric of this country. However, after school programs have emerged as a result of the needs of American culture at various points in the country's history, and they have played an important role in the development of American society.

Initially, after-school programs were localized gathering places strongly associated with attempts to reduce unstructured time among America's youth and strengthen the industrial workforce. According to Halpern (2002), "After-school programs first emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in the form of small, idiosyncratic *boys clubs*, often no more than a storefront or room in a church or other local building" (p. 180). Halpern (2002) identified two trends that pointed to the fundamental need for early after school programs for youth in America. The first trend was the declining need for paid child labor in urban settings at the close of the industrial revolution in the United States. As this demand for child labor declined, it left no supervised location where children could assemble following the school day. The second trend Halpern (2002) identified "was the growth of schooling, fueled by passage of compulsory education laws, large scale investment in school construction, and the greater availability of children to attend school" (p. 180).

During this time, the immigration tide also fueled the necessity for quasi-after school programs as many families brought children to the United States who lacked proficiency in English. "In these centers children of immigrants were taught English skills and provided with minimum health-care services and some limited food and clothing" (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005, p. 12). Services were typically provided by middle-class volunteers and financially supported by donations from philanthropists of the time (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005).

While the urban street settings did provide for some unstructured freedom, release from household chores, and playtime for children, it was viewed by many adults and those in authority to be too great a temptation for "unsavory characters, unwholesome temptations, and illegal activities" (Halpern, 2002, p. 181). Urban residents began to experience the ill-effects of unstructured supervision in their communities. Community members discovered that a lack of supervision led to an increase in risky behavior and violent crime during the first three to four hours after school release (Ascher, 2006; Kugler, 2001; Lewis, 2000).

As a result of these three to four hours of unsupervised, unstructured time available for children during after-school hours (combined with the observation that unstructured play led to unwelcome problems), educational administrators generally responded in one of two ways. One response was the initiation of the organized playground movement, and the other was "the development of indoor programs for after-school play, recreation, and informal education" (Halpern, 2002, p.182).

Many different local agencies sponsored local after school programs, and each sponsor set its own policies and priorities (Halpern, 2002). After-school programs were

as much then as they are now funded primarily through private investment and local sponsors. In the wake of private and local organizations financing the after school program movement, government agencies and local politicians began to acknowledge a legislative role in after school funding.

2.3   Technological Factors

One factor that had an impact on the educational system and after school programs during the latter part of the 19th century was the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution had introduced technological advancements into the industrialized workforce. These technological advancements required new skills and training in a workplace environment that was rapidly changing. In addition, these technological advancements and training formalized the working environment as well as shifted the workforce for the first time from agricultural to industrial. By 1920, for the first time in the United States, the manufacturing sector outnumbered the agricultural sector (Baker, Hoser & Householder, 1992) This transition created a more standard shift-style work schedule and assembly-line-type efficiency that eventually began to impact the social foundations of educational philosophy, the structure of the school day, and subsequently, the activities in which students engaged during their after-school time.

As the Industrialized Revolution evolved and permeated society, "The public school, like the larger industrial model it resembled, altered children's consciousness of time, demanding that they learn to submit to punctuality, efficiency, and adherence to schedules" (Halpern, 2002, p. 180). As a result, enrollment in schools increased at the end of the 1800's and during the turn of the century but not necessarily as a result of

population increases. Bodilly and Beckett (2005) stated that in 1879-1880 total enrollments in public schools were greater than 9,500,000, and by 1929, the number had more than doubled to 25,500,000. The industrialized movement and the required skills necessary to evolve with and adapt to that movement unquestionably influenced the increased demand for students to be in school and stay in school longer.

2.4   Economic Factors

A second factor that impacted the educational system and after school programs was The Great Depression and World War II. These two events created a tremendous impact on education and the after school programs that were in place at the time. Because of a lack of public funding available during the Great Depression (and subsequent recovery) and because government funding during World War II was diverted for military materials, little money was available to support after school programs. While government funding for after school programs was lacking during this critical time in U.S. history, World War II, in turn, played a direct role in establishing a need for after school programs. Men left home to fight the war while women were sent to the factories to aid in the war effort. As a result, many schools stayed open late to provide extra-care for children who had no place to go (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005). This era marked the phenomenon of the "latch-key" child and support for children after school became relevant.

2.5   Social Factors

A third factor that impacted the educational system and after school programs was a newly emerging social landscape. As a result of the need by many parents to leave their children at home unsupervised, after school time issues began to draw a great deal of attention socially and politically. For the first time in the history of after school programs, the U.S. government recognized a need to support children left unsupervised but did so in small efforts at first. During the Roosevelt administration, modest allocations of New Deal funds were used to support some after school efforts (Halpern, 2002). This small monetary acknowledgment marked the first time that after school programs were funded by an organization, government, or entity other than philanthropists and private donations. However, funding from the government for after school programs did not significantly increase until the latter part of the 20th century. Efforts by the U.S. Government at the end of the 20th century reflected the nation's support for government funding of after school programs. This support expanded beyond latch-key supervision issues, and, combined with academic accountability and a growing national awareness that the U.S. education system was not keeping pace globally, provided the impetus for expansion of after school programs.

Another social factor that impacted the educational system and after school programs was the growing number of women joining the workforce. Bodilly and Beckett (2005) had found that "shifts in the economy, in family bread-winner patterns, and in the education of women brought more women into the labor market, including women with school-age children" (p. 16). This pattern shift left many school-age children unsupervised or in the care of siblings and as a result, child-care services began to expand

rapidly. Between 1977 and 1997, child-care establishments with payrolls more than tripled due to the shifting patterns in the women's workforce and subsequent increased need for child-care (Bodilly and Beckett, 2005).

Additionally, social factors that influenced the education system and after school programs were not limited to finances and gender progression in the latter part of the 20th century. As the number of unsupervised children grew and paralleled changes in the workforce, urban cities began to see changes that had an impact on how education and after school programs were provided and unsupervised children were dealt with. Negative perceptions of urban cities and their safety began to grow along with concerns of "intergenerational poverty, drug abuse and violent crime" (Bodilly and Beckett, 2005, p. 15). This change in environmental and educational climate began to refocus the thinking on after school programs and how they could have a positive impact on crime prevention and more positive youth activities.

2.6 Legislation

An important factor in the availability of after school programs is the financial resources available for their operation. For many after school programs, financial resources are supplied through important government legislation that allows federal and state tax dollars to be used for after school services. A review of this legislation reveals the impact that the government has had on the development, availability, and ongoing operations of after school programs.

On April 9, 1965, Congress passed the most expansive federal education bill in the history of the United States: the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Lyndon Johnson, the U.S. President at the time and a former teacher, presented this bill to Congress in an effort to create equity and increase access to education for all students, especially those who live in poverty (Borwn-Nagin, 2004). Since 1965, Congress has reauthorized the ESEA several times. In 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) continued the focus of the ESEA, which was to place funding in poor schools with low achieving students (Jorgenson & Hoffman, 2003).

In the latter part of the 20th century, the U.S. education system shifted its role from strictly a resource for funding to one of an administrator with an emphasis on increased accountability at the state and local levels. On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. With NCLB, a new era began--one in which accountability, local control, parental involvement, and evidence-based funding became the cornerstones of the nation's education system (Jorgenson & Hoffman, 2003, p. 6). New NCLB regulations differed from those found in prior legislation in that the NCLB ostensibly has been driven by high-quality instruction, increased accountability for student achievement, and public accountability that enables community members to verify the success of students.

As part of the reauthorization of the NCLB in 2002, a subsection of the law called 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) was introduced. This subsection was specifically designed to support before school and after school programs and required funding from the U.S. Department of Education to be transferred to the state level (Afterschool Alliance, 2009). This transference allowed increased state control of federal funds to support programs serving low-income student populations.

In 1998, the first year 21st CCLC programs were enacted, $40 million was appropriated to fund after school programs. Since 1998, appropriated funding has increased to $1.16 billion for fiscal year 2010 (Afterschool Alliance, 2009). The money applied to 21st CCLC programs has been focused on providing students with (1) academic enrichment activities that help students reach achievement standards; (2) a wide range of social programs that include drug and violence prevention, arts, music, technology, and social development activities; and (3) related educational development services (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Since the early 1960's, the federal government has made it a financial priority to provide aid and close the achievement gap that persists among the members of various socio-economic levels in U.S. cities. While the appropriations for funding have increased with improved economic conditions, they nevertheless have failed to provide the necessary resources to reach all students who have been identified as low-income and under-achieving. This increased funding and widening achievement gap suggests that after school programming has become more relevant than ever before. Even President Obama has indicated his intention to continue providing critical financial support to aid programs such as Early Head Start and Head Start. In addition, as a sign of public support for these programs, voters also have indicated that they would support an increase in funding for after school programs even if it would lead to a tax increase (N.I.O.S.T., 2009).

While an increasing amount of attention has been leveled at after school programs, shortfalls in both funding and the number of after school programs have continued to plague the educational system. Historically, limited funding and demands

for more after school programs and staffing for after school programs have presented a significant challenge. According to a recent survey, "Nearly 80% of youth workers are satisfied with their jobs, but low wages significantly impact the high turn-over rate in this field" (N.I.O.S.T., 2009, p. 6). In addition to low wages and dwindling benefits for staff, lack of funding has set limitations on the types, variety and quality of after school programming that can be offered.

The growing attention that private investors and various levels of government have given to after school programs reflects the relevance that after school programs have in political and civil arenas. Being able to blend civic missions with after school and out-of-school-time goals allows our next generation an opportunity for community engagement and productive citizenship (Schmeider-Munoz, Politz, 2007). In some cases, after school programs and out-of-school-time programs have been designed to bring youth closer together in an effort to teach tolerance across cultures, socio-economic landscapes and political points of view (Schmeider-Munoz & Politz, 2007). The attempts to measure the quality of what after school programs can produce in these categories has gained significant attention. The attention is no more prevalent than the quality of after school programs and their ability to improve students' academic performance.

2.7 Quality Programming

As after school programs have expanded in their scope and influence, quality of programming has become an important benchmark. In particular, the quality of after school programs has been an influential factor in measuring the impact that after school programs have had on intended program outcomes and missions. The ability of after

school programs to accurately measure their impact on the youth they serve has played an important role in the development and improvement of after school programs and can influence the customer base that a program services. For example, according to Westmoreland and Little (2006), 15.3 million additional k-12 children would participate in after school programs if a quality program were available to them in their community.

The research that has been conducted on after school program quality can be delineated into two broad categories based on the method of research: quantitative quality and qualitative quality. Quantitative methods primarily have been used to determine the quality of after school programs, and particular emphasis has been placed on studies that seek to base quality determinants on academic achievement in some form. Less emphasis has been placed on qualitative quality research even though perceptions of after school program constituents, directors, staff, teachers, and parents are important when determining quality. In addition, the ability of after school programs to understand what their communities expect from them and the differences that may exist between community expectations and actual services can have an impact on perceived program quality. Both methods have provided valuable insight into the ways that after school programs can be improved and linked more closely with academic outcomes as well as a more in-depth understanding of specific quality measures and frameworks that characterize the development and growth of after school programs.

Perkins-Gough (2003) has suggested that "studies of students who attend high-quality programs for a significant period of time show improvements in academic performance and social competence, including better grades, improved homework completion, higher scores on achievement tests..." (p. 88). However, most current

research that has been conducted on after school program quality has failed to identify a specific framework as the most effective model, nor has the literature base identified unequivocal criteria for defining the precise components that should comprise a quality after school program. In a recent study of characteristics of quality program models, Palmer, Anderson, and Sabatelli (2009) have identified six broad domains into which models of after school program quality have been categorized: 1) supportive relationships, 2) intentional programming, 3) strong community partnerships, 4) promotion of youth engagement, 5) physical safety, and 6) continuous quality improvement (p. 9). These six domains reach across all quality frameworks and represent an attempt to converge the broad scope of quality characteristics into more manageable groupings. Additionally, in an analysis of essential elements of quality after school programs, Hammond and Reimer (2006) also have identified a broad set of categories: 1) infrastructure elements, 2) program/practice elements, and 3) partnership elements (p. 11). The categories that these researchers have identified provide an historical perspective of the development of after school programs as well as a theoretical framework for identifying future directions for quality after school programming.

Because after school programs increasingly have become important components of communities and schools, together they have provided valuable services targeting at-risk youth. According to Pittman et al., (2004), "Whether explicit, embedded, or enrichment-focused, curriculum development, innovative program design, and professional development have become front-burner issues for programs operating in the out-of-school hours..." (p. 34).

The ability of after school programs to design and offer quality programs can be linked to funding that supports them. Where and how valuable funding resources are applied has influenced the degree to which changes in quality can be observed. Because unlimited funding is unrealistic, difficult financial decisions have been made to determine where funding can have the greatest impact on any given after school program. As a result, funding is often based on and linked to the academic gains made by participants, and the frequency of student attendance and participation largely serves as a measure of those gains. Most programs undergo a needs analysis to determine the most appropriate use of available resources, and financially, after school programs are no different than other businesses or educational settings and must carefully allocate their funds typically to one of the following areas: infrastructure, program/practice or partnership elements. However, in addition to infrastructure elements, program quality practices and partnerships with the community, after school programs are able to make measurable gains in quality and performance only if students and parents commit to attending after school programs on a consistent basis. The after school setting is fundamentally associated with quality and performance gains only if students attend on a regular basis and participate in the available programs.

2.8 Participation and Attendance

Research has shown that encouraging youth to participate and attend after school programs on a regular basis has been critical to outcomes related to the goal of these programs. Clearly, participation is a critical component of after school programs and their effectiveness. According to the Harvard Family Research Project (2008),

Participation in after school programs is associated with better attitudes toward

school and higher educational aspirations, higher school attendance and less

tardiness, less disciplinary action, lower dropout rates, better performance in

school (as measured by achievement test scores and grades), greater on-time

promotion, improved homework completion, and engagement in learning. (p. 1)

The relevance of participation and attendance varies according to the ages of the youth

the programs have targeted. For example, older youth, those over the age of 15, cited that

reasons for non-participation were due to the presence of younger students and the

perception that their friends would tease them for attending (Borden et al., 2005). As

students become older and more independent, they find structured environments such as

after school programs less appealing than alternative activities, such as spending time

with friends, getting involved in clubs or sports, or just spending after school time

without supervision. Not surprisingly, research has indicated that voluntary attendance at

after school programs decreases as students get older, especially as demands and

competition for students' time and attention increase (U.S. Department of Education,

2009).

In addition to age-based differences, participation in after school programs varies

depending on location of the program, whom the program is intended to target, and

background factors of the families living in those neighborhoods. Research conducted by

Borden et al. (2005) sought to address the factors that initiate student participation and

ultimately lead either to dropout or persistent participation, especially among ethnic

minority youth. These authors have recommended that after school programs should

clearly define the target audiences that they intend to serve and design programs through

the use of best-practices that identify the interests of the youth that comprise those target audiences. Additionally, they have suggested that administrators of after school programs develop relationships with the community and parents of the youth they serve.

After-school programs have begun to develop creative programs and incentive programs as a way to promote attendance and participation. However, Dynarski and colleagues (2003) have suggested, "More attendance alone may not make measurable differences in outcomes" (as cited in Chappell, 2006, p. 10). As a result, in order to better determine the role of attendance and participation in producing more desirable outcomes, attendance and participation must be examined and measured beyond casual observances of participation and non-participation by staff members or program administrators. After school programs have found that they have a responsibility to define and relate specific program outcome variables to stronger and more robust measures of attendance and participation.

Because attendance is an important data factor in after school programs, a key question to consider is how often students must attend an after school program in order to benefit. Fiester, Simpkins, and Bouffard (2005) have suggested, "attendance data are key to linking program participation with youth outcomes" (p. 91). According to these authors, basic absolute attendance is the most often used source for attendance measures in after school programs. However, these authors also have suggested that additional research on attendance effects should be conducted in the areas of intensity, duration, and breadth (Fiester, Simpkins & Bouffard, 2005). Attendance has been used by program directors for "program planning, and to demonstrate to funders, government agencies,

and other stakeholders that they are serving their targeted numbers and populations of youth well" (Fiester, Simpkins, & Bouffard, 2005, p. 91).

Typically, after school programs have measured participation simply by observing those who participate and those who do not participate, and research has shown that attendance at a rate beyond 50% is fairly typical. (Ascher, 2006; Dreyer, 2010). The ability to add context to attendance and participation is a component of after school programming quality and evaluation. In some cases, the types of programs being offered dictate the measures by which attendance is collected. In any case, appropriate measurement of attendance is paramount for after school programs seeking to demonstrate effectiveness for the youth that they serve.

2.9   Evaluation of After School Programs

Research focusing on the evaluation of after school programs has been increasing in recent years. As economic, social, and academic pressures have increased, the pressure on after school programs to provide evidence-based results has been mounting. However, as one researcher has claimed, "It is difficult to make specific recommendations from the body of research on OST programs when research and evaluation reports give only vague references to the intervention, such as *homework help*, and provide no measures of the degree to which the intervention was implemented" (Lauer et al., 2006, p. 306). In addition to quality issues in after school programs, a lack of validity in evaluating them can be observed through differences in outcomes and availability.

As the push for academic accountability grows, many after school programs are fumbling to find ways to justify their academic value to their constituents. In reality, "about half of all current private providers of supplemental services... know little about their programs or how they have affected student learning" (Ascher, 2006, p. 138). Ascher (2006), further pointed out that "The federal supplemental services program was inaugurated at a time when research was at-best inconclusive about the impact of out-of-school instruction on student achievement" (p. 139). Ascher (2006) has concluded that "Despite four years of supplemental services and hundreds of millions of dollars spent on out-of-school tutoring, we still know little about the effects of tutoring on student achievement" (p. 140).

In the absence of specific, clear, and measurable goals, many educators have adopted the idea that after school programs should focus on enhancing academic performance. "In most instances, this has meant adoption of enhanced academic achievement as a central desired outcome and use of standardized tests in reading and math as a primary method of determining whether that outcome has been achieved" (Halpern, 2004, p. 117). Indeed, this seems to be a reasonable approach to evaluating the effectiveness of after school programs, as research has indicated, "OST programs in which activities are both academic and social can have positive influences on student achievement" (Lauer et al., 2006, p. 307).

The challenges of evaluating social programs in general and after school programs in particular and the inadequacy of standardized tests as measures of after-school program effectiveness are clear, but they are not causes for pessimism. Lack of evidence of program effects on standardized achievement test scores says nothing about

the benefits and or limitations of after school programs, their role in children's lives, or the conceptual and practical challenges faced by the after school field (Halpern, 2004, p. 123). By using standardized achievement tests, the collection and subsequent comparison for academic skills is more easily understood and readily compared across specific groups of students. It is for these reasons many studies use standardized tests as the central means for comparing academic ability.

2.10 Academic Impacts

Parents and stakeholders who send their children to after school programs have extended their expectations beyond safety and social benefits. In response to sending their children to after school programs, parents have considered academic growth and learning expected (if not intentionally specified) outcomes. Because of the funding pipeline that supports many after school programs, the expectation that an academic result will be observed often has been a prerequisite for funding from organizations. According to Jenner and Jenner (2007), "Federal funding for some after-school programs is now directly contingent upon academic growth" (p. 214). Many local and private investors in after school programs have followed the government's lead, and positive results in the form of improved learning outcomes and academic growth have now become generally expected by their financiers.

"Academic growth" is broad term that can be measured in a variety of ways. In some cases, academic growth can be an increase in grade point average, an increase in class participation, increases in the number of homework assignments turned in, and improvements on individual assignment grades in general. In one study, "Students'

perceptions indicated that the program improved their grades, that the teachers helped them understand why they were participants, that their teachers were interested in them, and that they were prepared for class" (Jackson-Chapman et al., 2006, p. 231). As the push for academic accountability has continued to grow, many after school programs have been fumbling to find ways to justify their academic value to their constituents, and attaching expectations related to academic outcomes to after school programs has been emerging as one of the most popular ways of achieving this goal.

One particular area that has received much attention related to the impact that after school programs can have on academic achievement is standardized test scores. Studies have reported, "Policymakers remain narrowly focused on test scores as the singular measure of success" (Jenner & Jenner, 2007, p. 216). Huang and colleagues (2000) have also noted, "As policy makers increasingly focus on the academic outcomes of after-school programming, standardized test scores have become the chosen measure of success" (as cited in Jenner & Jenner, 2007, p. 214). Because of this focus, many after school programs have focused their measures of academic success on potential impacts that their programs may have on standardized test scores. What remains unknown is the extent to which after school programs impact standardized test scores and how those differences are measured based on other learning-related variables.

The ability of after school programs to prove positive academic outcomes is related to factors that may impact whether after school sites remain operational. According to Halpern (2004),

> Virtually every one of the many new public initiatives in states and cities throughout the country is justified by the need to improve academic achievement.

> For example...local programs will have to be recertified every three years, based
>
> on attendance goals and children's progress on standardized tests (p.114).

Such standards of evaluating after school programs based on their ability to improve test scores could prove to be detrimental to the ability of after school programs to attract and retain well-trained staff, provide various program options, or even remain operational. The ability to provide evidence that links academic enhancement with after school programs ultimately determines their value to the students they serve and the community.

Despite the renewed interest in linking after school programs with clear academic outcomes, some researchers have concluded that this link is tenuous at best. For example, Pittman and colleagues (2004) have noted that "Creating environments in which students feel engaged and connected increases their interest in learning and decreases their experimentation in high-risk behaviors, but it does not, in and of itself, lead to improved academic achievement" (p. 24). Ascher (2006) has noted,

> In fact, some evidence suggests that effective after-school programs combine
>
> academic experiences with the social and developmental activities and that,
>
> because what is most important for students is active participation, a structural
>
> alignment of in-school and after-school programs may actually limit student
>
> learning (p. 139).

Pittman et al. (2004), Ascher (2006), and Halpern (2004) have indicated that after school programs provide valuable community services and serve as a moderate deterrent for some problematic behaviors. However, they report that the academic value of such programs is dubious. According to Halpern (2004),

With respect to the specific issue of standardized achievement tests as an outcome measure for after-school programs, most of the experiences children have in most programs, beyond doing homework, have little or nothing to do with the narrow, specific, disembedded skill measured on such tests (p. 120).

Furthermore, "[e]ven if we set aside their lack of validity in capturing most of the possible effects of after-school experiences, achievement tests are inherently limited measures of children's learning and growth, whether in school or outside it" (Halpern, 2004, p. 121). Some researchers go on to say "At their best, participation in after-school homework programs can help students maintain their academic standing...and develop attitudes and skills that would facilitate their success in school after the program is over" (Cosden et al., 2004, p. 224). This research suggests that measuring for academic performance or gain as it may relate to attending an after school program may not be relevant or measurable to that program until the student(s) have left the program.

2.11 Perceptions and Impact on Ethnic Minority Youth

Since their inception, after school programs have been designed to provide safe environments for children and close an achievement gap that exists between America's poor and non-poor students. The poor students in this country in need of after school programs are often found in low-income and urban neighborhoods. "Numerous studies have demonstrated that after school programs have a positive impact on the academic and social well-being of low-income and minority children, families, and communities" (Robinson, 2008, p.13). Many students in these low-income communities are minorities, and the impact that after school programs have on low-income minority students has

comprised a small but growing segment of the existing research. According to the Afterschool Alliance in a report from 2009, 86% of students who attend programs in which the majority of participants are African American qualify for free/reduced price lunch (compared to 67% of after school programs overall). Research by Posner & Vandell (1994) has clearly indicated that African American children are important beneficiaries of after school programs:

> They [Posner & Vandell] concluded that low-income African American children who attended after school programs consistently performed better in reading, math, and other subjects than did their peers who took care of themselves, had maternal care, or had informal adult supervision during the after school hours. (as cited in Woodland, 2008, p. 541)

The ability of after school programs to produce and substantiate high-quality, measurable effects for African American youth could have an impact on their ability to attract funding to support underprivileged students in low-income urban settings. The continuation of existing after school programs and the development of new after school programs in low-income neighborhoods have been clearly linked to the critical demand that exists for their operation. According to a report by the Afterschool Alliance (2009), 90% of children in communities comprised primarily of African Americans report that they need additional after school programs.

In addition to the growing need to better understand how after school programs can enhance academic performance among African American youth, research is also lacking related to barriers that prevent their involvement. According to Robinson (2008), African American parents reported that "Lack of transportation, affordability, and

proximity of the ASP to home, school or both are barriers" (p. 13) to the enrollment in after school programs as they exist today. If these logistical barriers can be overcome to help physically get students to after school program sites, these programs may be able to sustain existing after school programs in these neighborhoods or better yet help to start future programs in low-income urban settings.

As historical, political, and economic factors have continued to shape the topographical landscape of after school programming, the need to further understand the types of programs offered, the methods by which they are offered, and the underlying reasons for offering these programs has become central to the existence and sustainability of the after school market. Pittman et al. (2004) have pointed out one potential path for the future of after school programs:

> The challenge is to create the space in which these (after school) programs can accurately describe the content of what they offer and the context in which they offer it, and then determine the extent to which they can and should be held accountable for academic and nonacademic outcomes (p. 40).

This emphasis on accountability provides an evidence-based approach to determining the value of after school programming and at the same time promotes continuous improvement. This study seeks to add to the existing literature base on after school programs through an examination of one after school program's mission to improve academic achievement and simultaneously build appropriate character traits in the young students it serves.

2.12 Time-on-Task

The concept of time-on-task can be described as the amount of time students may spend on a specified academic-related task. In the context of this study, time-on-task refers to the time students spend on academic-related tasks outside the traditional school day. The debate over the value of increased time-on-task activities within after school settings and how that time-on-task is associated with improved academic performance is relevant to current literature on after school programs, their funding, and increased accountability.

As evident in scholarly literature focusing on after school programs, the overall academic effectiveness of after school programs has been largely debated by parents, educators, researchers, and investors. This debate has grown along with the rates of participatory fees, private funding, government funding, and increased accountability. Many after school programs, which rely on outside sources for funding, are accountable for the services they provide to students. Since increased levels of funding are matched with increased levels of accountability, after school programs typically have promoted themselves as organizations that produce gains in academic achievement. Many of these gains in academic achievement have been linked with the concept of time on task.

Studies and research related to time-on-task vary regarding the overall effectiveness of its academic impact. Attributing time-on-task as the variable that directly influences academic gains has created some debate in the research; however, while time-on-task has been implicated as a factor that influences students' academic achievement, other variables also have been investigated. Accommodating additional variables, such as environmental influences, specific individual needs, psychological support, emotional

support, and structured activities, can help investigate claims about the relationship between time-on-task and academic improvement. For example, Bohnert et al., (2008) have noted, "Adolescents who participate in structured activities [outside of school hours] have demonstrated less negative psychological and academic outcomes" (p. 518). Additionally, adolescents who are involved in structured activities in their discretionary time perform better academically (Bohnert et al., 2008).

However, according to Hattie (2009), structured activities, especially those with a curricular focus, must be deliberate in order to observe positive academic effects. Furthermore, Van Gog and colleagues (2008) have noted that "Deliberate practice refers to the relevant practice activities aimed at improving performance; it needs to be at 'an appropriate, challenging level of difficulty, and enable successive refinement by allowing for repetition, giving room to make and correct errors, and providing informative feedback to the learner' " (as cited in Hattie, 2009, p. 185). This perspective has been supported by Bohnert et al., (2008), who have "highlight[ed] the importance of creating programs that address the unique needs and interests of [low-income, African American] adolescents by offering well-organized, challenging, and engaging activities" (p. 536). In a secondary data analysis of engaged learning in secondary-age students, Young (2010) also found that "Learning environments with demanding requirements that allow student autonomy and provide instructional support foster higher curricular engagement leading to greater academic achievement" (p. 12). Academic achievement in this case was measured by student GPA, and this study supports the idea that an appropriately structured environment with curricular engagement yields positive academic outcomes.

For after school programs who seek to make an academic impact on their students, it is important to note that gains in basic human needs such as psychological, environmental and emotional are occurring subsidiary to academic goals. The literature on time-on-task supports the conclusion that time spent on assignments cannot alone produce specific academic gains without some attention given to specific skills and tasks. Rather, time-on-task must include focused, specific attention on individual students' skills and needs with appropriate feedback in order to improve academic performance (Van Gog et al., 2008, as cited in Hattie, 2009).

For an after school program such as Kids Unlimited, the focus of this after school study, it is important to understand the background, design, and purpose of the program. Kids Unlimited is an after school program that serves an urban, low-income, minority population of students who seek to improve their academic performance in conjunction with character development and self-discipline.

2.13 Kids Unlimited

In February 2006, an urban after school program called Kids Unlimited began serving a limited population of school-aged inner-city Toledo youth with the following mission:

"Kids Unlimited commits to offering children in under-served areas the opportunities they need to reach their fullest potential. We will do this by helping them develop the necessary academic and social tools, along with a strong sense of values and character, within an atmosphere of love and respect." (www.kidsunlimitedtoledo.org).

The Kids Unlimited program was co-founded by Chris Amato and Lisa Gathard with a program core focus on three areas: academics, character development, and self-discipline. These three components were selected as the core focus for Kids Unlimited based on best practices of successful after school programs within the research collected by Lisa Gathard. Today, the Kids Unlimited program is operated by a board of directors and operates at five school sites.

Kids Unlimited is funded primarily through private donations and minimal weekly tuition fees from parents. Because of financial resources, Kids Unlimited is able to operate within only five school sites and accept no more than 50 students per site into the program. Kids Unlimited advertises that its program provides daily instruction and supervision with an approximate staff-to-student ratio of one team leader to ten students. Kids Unlimited operates during the school year on a Monday-through-Friday basis starting at 3:00 p.m. or 3:30 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. or 6:15 p.m. based on school site. In addition, the program serves students during the summer months on Mondays through Fridays from 7:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m ., and during these months, the program offers field trips to various locations within the city.

The Kids Unlimited program is available to students who attend school at any of the five cooperating school sites (see Table 4.1):

Table 4.1
Numbers of Students and Team Leaders at Each School Site

	School C	School M	School R	School Q	School N
Pre-K, Kindergarten	9	10	7	5	4
Grade 1	6	8	5	10	7
Grade 2	5	8	3	9	7
Grade 3	5	10	10	8	4
Grade 4	4	4	6	5	6
Grade 5	9	4	7	7	5
Grade 6	5	0	6	6	6
Grade 7	6	0	6	0	0
Grade 8	0	0	0	0	0
Total No. of Students	49	44	50	50	39
No. of Team Leaders	5	5	5	5	5

A major advantage of the Kids Unlimited program is that it operates at the school site where the students already attend. As a result, transportation from school to the after school program is unnecessary. Because transportation demands are alleviated, parents need only be concerned with picking up their children from school each day at 6:00 p.m. or 6:30 pm instead of at the end of the normal school day.

While Kids Unlimited operates at the school where the students attend, the program hires and utilizes its own staff. The staff consists of 34 total staff members, including a site director at each of the five school locations, five team leaders who are responsible for varying grade levels as determined by their location, one program director responsible for overseeing the five site directors and a director who was hired in 2011 in charge of academics. Chris Amato oversees the operations of the entire program and is responsible for supervising the program director and the director in charge of academics.

Team leaders, who implement activities for the students, are responsible for carrying out lesson plans and following the daily schedules set forth by the site directors. Team leaders are hired in a two-step interview process. They must have a minimum of a high school diploma or its equivalent, they must submit appropriate background checks, and they must take an academic skills test for Kids Unlimited prior to being allowed to work with students. Kids Unlimited advertises a ratio of one team leader for every ten students. This effort helps to ensure small class sizes and more individualized attention for every student.

In the same way that ensuring quality leadership and instruction is important at many public and charter schools, evaluating the staff is an important component of the success and accountability of the Kids Unlimited program. In the past two years, Kids Unlimited has been formulating and implementing a system for evaluating the employees of the program. Currently, team leaders are evaluated on the following criteria: attendance and punctuality, dependability, attitude, specific job skills and productivity, and interpersonal relationships and communication. Site directors perform the evaluations; they are then documented and forwarded to the program director. The

individual site directors are also evaluated. These evaluations are performed informally once a week and performed formally on a quarterly basis. Site directors are evaluated on their performance of various tasks ranging from record keeping and enforcing team leader dress code to planning appropriate lessons and communicating effectively with parents..

Each of the five school sites where Kids Unlimited operates follows a daily schedule prescribed by the individual site director. The after school programs begin following the end of the school day with a snack and bathroom break for all of the students. The after school programs conclude by 6:00 p.m or 6:30 pm depending on the site with cleanup and dismissal. In between the start of the daily activities and dismissal is where Kids Unlimited addresses its program core focus: academics, character development and self-discipline.

The first program component of Kids Unlimited is academics. At each site, team leaders address specific academic areas, in particular reading and math. Reading skills are practiced in a small-group format, and often Ohio Achievement Assessment workbooks and materials are used. Team leaders also teach math skills in a small-group format and use similar Ohio Achievement Assessment workbooks and flashcards. In addition, team leaders assist students in completing their homework. The Kids Unlimited staff attempts to work very closely with the school staff in an effort to provide complementary instructional support. Academic decisions about reading and math activities can be based on school and computer-based Scantron exams that each school may require its students to take, or team leaders may choose to use Study Island worksheets that are produced for students based on school assessments. Both Scantron and Study Island are computed-

based programs that evaluate students' skills in the areas of reading and math. Currently, not every school site that Kids Unlimited works with is able to utilize Scantron or Study Island. In these cases, team leaders make academic decisions based on informal evaluations of students' skills in light of their current grades.

The second program component of Kids Unlimited is character development. Beginning in the 2010-2011 school year, Kids Unlimited implemented the Character Counts character development program. This program is designed to formalize methods for teaching students six basic values: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. These values represent core concepts that Kids Unlimited believes should be incorporated into its curriculum. Team leaders are allowed the freedom to teach these character traits in a variety of ways in their classrooms. The team leaders often take one word a day (e.g., "respect") and focus on the definition of that word. They ask students how this word might be defined and then ask them how they might incorporate its definition into their daily lives. Students are asked to find examples of the definitions of these words and apply them to different circumstances and situations in their lives.

The third program component of Kids Unlimited is self-discipline, and this component is addressed in a variety of ways with the Kids Unlimited students. The goal of self-discipline for Kids Unlimited students is accomplished primarily through having the students play board games. The students play chess, checkers, and Connect Four ostensibly as a means of allowing them some "recreation time" away from reading, math and homework. However, the hidden goal is for the students to learn to cooperate with one another using a competitive tool. Another hidden goal using the board games for self-

discipline is trying to get the students to exercise patience and sit still while completing a task without having to get up and move around the room. Yoga is another alternative method Kids Unlimited has recently introduced at two of its school sites to teach students self-discipline.

Chapter 3
Method

3.1 Introduction

During the past two decades, public demand for after school programs has increased in the U.S. due to a need for supervision, recreation, and, most recently, academic enrichment. As a part of this increased public demand,

> Policymakers, funders, and youth program directors are looking for ways to ensure that the dollars and efforts they are allocating to programs are indeed having an impact on the youth they are serving (American Youth Policy Forum, 2007, p. 1).

More recently, after school programs have become increasingly accountable for their program missions and goals. This increase in accountability is especially evident in programs that advertise a mission in academic enrichment, character education and self-discipline, such as the after school program Kids Unlimited. The vast majority of students who attend Kids Unlimited are minority students who live in high-poverty and low-income neighborhoods. Understanding the potential impacts an after school program can have on this population of students can inform the direction of future after school programs.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether a significant difference exists between students who have attended Kids Unlimited regularly and their same-school

peers who have not attended Kids Unlimited in the following area of academic achievement as measured by results on the Ohio Achievement Assessment in the areas of math and reading. Secondly, this study seeks to identify whether significant differences exist on achievement assessment scores among students who attend Kids Unlimited on a regular basis when compared with scores of students in the same schools who do not attend Kids Unlimited based on gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education services race, and school site. Finally this study is to determine whether a significant difference exists on reading and math scores on the Ohio Achievement Assessment between students who attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year when compared to students who attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one academic year.

3.2   Research Design

In recent years, after school programs have become increasingly more accountable in their ability to produce gains in academic performance. Even though a number of studies have been conducted to explore their effectiveness, the degree to which after school programs influence academic gains in achievement has remained unclear (Granger et al., 2007). This study is designed to explore the influence of the after school program Kids Unlimited on academic achievement.

This study used quantitative methods—specifically t-tests and regression analyses—to determine whether there was a relationship between reading and math achievement assessment scores of students who have regularly attended Kids Unlimited and their same-school peers who have not regularly attended Kids Unlimited. This study

also seeks to determine whether significant differences exist in math and reading achievement assessment scores between students who have attended Kids Unlimited longer than one academic year and students who have attended for a maximum of one academic year.

3.3   Research Questions

This proposal seeks to address the following research questions as they pertain to the after school program Kids Unlimited. Each research question is accompanied by a hypothesis and a null hypothesis.

RQ1. Do elementary and middle school students who regularly attend the after school program Kids Unlimited show greater academic gains on the reading and math Ohio Achievement Assessments than students at the same schools who do not attend Kids Unlimited?

H1. Elementary and middle school students who regularly attend the after school program Kids Unlimited show greater academic gains on the reading and math Ohio Achievement Assessments than students at the same schools who do not attend Kids Unlimited.

H01. Elementary and middle school students who regularly attend the after school program Kids Unlimited do not show greater academic gains on the reading and math Ohio Achievement Assessments than students at the same schools who do not attend Kids Unlimited.

RQ2. For elementary and middle school students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited, is there a significant difference in reading and/or math achievement test

scores based on gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, and/or school site?

H2. For elementary and middle school students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited, there is a significant difference in reading and/or math achievement test scores based on gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, and/or school site.

H02. For elementary and middle school students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited, there is no significant difference in reading and/or math achievement test scores based on gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, and/or school site.

RQ3. Do students who have attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year attain higher reading and/or math achievement test scores than students who have attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one school year?

H3. Students who have attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year attain higher reading and/or math achievement test scores than students who have attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one school year.

H03. Students who have attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year do not attain higher reading and/or math achievement test scores than students who have attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one school year.

3.4 Sample/Population/Participants

Participants in this study were selected from five charter schools located in urban Toledo, Ohio. Two of the five charter schools are sponsored by the same organization, and three charter schools are each sponsored individually by other organizations. All five schools are located within the Toledo Public School system and serve student populations in low-income neighborhoods with poverty rates of 90% and above.

Participants in this study consisted of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited and their same-school peers who did not regularly attend Kids Unlimited and who were in third grade through eighth grade at charter schools Q, N, and R. Participants also consisted of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited and their same-school peers who did not regularly attend Kids Unlimited and who were in third grade through fifth grade at charter school M and third grade through sixth grade at charter school C. All five participating charter schools cooperating with Kids Unlimited contain grade-level enrollments that consist of kindergarten-aged students, first-grade students, and second-grade students. However, because Ohio Achievement Assessment results can be obtained only for students who are grade-level appropriate and qualified to take the achievement assessments (i.e., students in third through eighth grades), all kindergarten through second-grade students are excluded as participants. Consent to gather and collect the information requested for this study was confirmed by each of the charter school's directors and/or data coach through personal, face-to-face conversations.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

This study is a secondary collection analysis utilizing data that had been collected by Kids Unlimited staff members as well as staff members of the five charter schools cooperating with Kids Unlimited. Data collection began in June of 2010 and was completed in July of 2011. In June of 2010, the researcher met with the co-founder of the after school program Kids Unlimited to determine which charter school sites had been operating in cooperation with the Kids Unlimited program. In August 2010, the researcher met with the Kids Unlimited coordinator of program directors to request that attendance records of students who have participated in Kids Unlimited be available to ensure a match of participants to nonparticipants of cooperating schools. In December 2010 and January 2011, the researcher met individually with each of the program directors at each of the cooperating charter schools. The purpose of these meetings was to inform the program directors about the details of the study, to enlist their cooperation, and to request that they collect the necessary data to answer the research questions.

The reading and math achievement assessment scores for Kids Unlimited participants and nonparticipants at each of the cooperating charter schools up to the 2010-2011 school year was collected during the months of February through June of 2011. Additionally, the directors of the charter schools were asked to provide the students' grade levels, gender, ethnicity, free- and reduced-lunch status, and special education status for each student enrolled in the participating grade levels for each year that the charter school has been in cooperation with Kids Unlimited.

The collection of 2010-2011 school-year reading and math achievement assessment scores occurred during June and July of 2011. Demographic information was

gathered from school records, such as grade level, gender, special education status, race, and socio-economic status. Students' reading and math scores were provided by school personnel via the Ohio Department of Education state website that reports to all sponsoring organizations, districts and schools specific testing information as they relate to individual students. Information on district and school report cards are available to the public through the ODE website. However, specific student scores and demographic information were made available through the Success Ohio Portal, a website available to school district superintendents and their designees who have been issued a user name and password. The Success Ohio Portal is password protected in order to preserve the anonymity of the students in each school and district.

Each participating charter school was invited to participate in the study via a letter of invitation provided by the researcher. School personnel with access to the Success Ohio Portal were asked to collect reading and math achievement assessment scores for all students who took the Ohio Achievement Assessment at their school for each year students have participated in the after school program Kids Unlimited.

Information was gathered on an Excel spreadsheet that was provided electronically to each school's director or data coach. The letter of invitation requested that student names be omitted from the information in order to protect the anonymity of the students. Rather, students names were replaced with a numerical identifier in order to protect student identity yet enable the researcher to examine achievement score increases or decreases by an individual student from one year to the next.

Kids Unlimited school site directors via their attendance records provided information regarding attendance at Kids Unlimited. In many after school research

studies, records of attendance at after school programs are often dichotomous (e.g., attendance vs. non-attendance). This study used attendance information that was made available to the researcher but relied primarily on site director's observations and estimations of student attendance. Attendance for students who were a part of the Kids Unlimited program was reportedly higher than the standard 50% as defined by regular attendance in this study during the school year. Kids Unlimited is offered to students five days a week throughout the school year and during the summer.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis of this research study included several steps. First, student achievement assessment scores in reading and math were collected for all students eligible to take the assessments for each year that the charter school participated with Kids Unlimited. Second, the researcher requested student demographic information, such as gender, race, grade-level at the time of the assessment, socio-economic status, and special education status for the participating students eligible for this study. This information was collected in an Excel spreadsheet, and the statistical software program Minitab was used to analyze the data. Minitab is a statistical software package used extensively in business, professional, and academic settings.

The data analysis consisted of a series of two-sample t-tests and a series of regression analyses. The analyses are intended to determine whether differences exist between achievement assessment scores of two groups of students: (1) those students who attend the after school program Kids Unlimited and (2) those students who do not.

In addition, a regression analysis was used to determine the amount of variance accounted for in the reading and math achievement assessment scores for students who have regularly attended Kids Unlimited and those students who have not based on gender, grade-level, race, socio-economic status, special education status and school site. Finally, reading and math scores of students who have attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year were compared with the reading and math scores of students who have attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one year.

3.7 Limitations

Several limitations have been identified as potential barriers to this study. The first limitation is sample size. Because a relatively limited number of students have attended Kids Unlimited at each of the charter school sites, the sample size is relatively small compared to the number of same-school peers who have not attended Kids Unlimited. Consequently, the results of this study may not accurately represent the larger population and, additionally, may not be generalizable to other populations.

Another limitation is the absence of a research-based curriculum within the Kids Unlimited program and potentially varying definitions of the term "academic enrichment" in the Kids Unlimited mission statement. Although some curriculum design is present in the Kids Unlimited program, curriculum specifically targeted to improve reading and math scores on the Ohio Achievement Assessment has not been implemented, nor has Kids Unlimited ever performed a self-program quality assessment. Rather, the term "academic enrichment" could include assistance ranging from general homework help to tutoring in specific content areas and skills. This suggests that any

significant differences in assessment scores between Kids Unlimited participants and non-participants may not be the result of participation in Kids Unlimited.

A third limitation is a lack of knowledge about students' academic backgrounds beyond their attendance at school and potential participation in the Kids Unlimited program. For example, it is unknown whether participants and non-participants may have received additional academic support in another setting. A true understanding of students' motivation for learning and participation in after school programs is also lacking, as well as information regarding Kids Unlimited staff members (e.g., training, education levels, teaching experience, etc.). As a result, it may be misleading or premature to attribute any potential academic gains to participation in such a program.

A fourth limitation is the amount of academic information that Kids Unlimited collects on its participants. Students who attend Kids Unlimited are not typically adminstered pre-tests or post-tests to determine their reading and math skills prior to beginning or ending each school year. If Kids Unlimited were to administer pre-tests, these assessments might allow researchers to more accurately determine the specific skill levels of the students at the start of the school year, which could result in prescriptive instruction that allows for post-test growth measurements at the conclusion of the school year.

A fifth limitation is the variance in each charter school's curriculum for both reading and math. Because charter schools have different sponsoring organizations for the curriculum that is taught, each school's curriculum in reading and math is likely to vary based on the following: sponsoring organization's curricular direction for reading and math, course materials and resources used at each school, and level of teacher

training for reading and math at each school. Because each of these variables can be different at each school, comparing differences in standardized reading and math achievement assessment results could be a result of differences in curricular variables and not necessarily attendance and program variables associated with Kids Unlimited.

3.8 Assumptions

This study and its methods are based on several important assumptions that should be illuminated. One assumption is that the sample to be studied is a representative sample of all of the students who attended the five charter schools that Kids Unlimited serves and were administered the Ohio Achievement Assessment. Because data pertaining to student testing and attendance must be collected through secondary school or program personnel, it is assumed that the information collected will be accurately recorded. It is further assumed that all testing protocols associated with the Ohio Achievement Assessments were followed in accordance with standardized procedures. Additionally, it is assumed that the Ohio Achievement Assessment is an accurate measure of student learning and that it is a valid and reliable assessment instrument.

3.9 Summary

Chapter 3 describes the methods used within this study, including the research design, the research questions, the data collection procedures, the data analysis procedures, the limitations of the study, and the assumptions. Chapter 4 includes the results of the data analysis in response to this studies research questions.

Chapter 4
Findings

4.1 Data Analysis and Results

During the past several decades, after school programs increasingly have been woven into the fabric of the U.S. academic educational model. As such, these after school programs ostensibly have been linked with improved academic performance; however, the research has been unclear about the extent to which various factors associated with after school programs result in improved academic performance. In order to explore the relationship between variables associated with after school programs and student performance on the Ohio Achievement Assessments, this study explored three research questions:

RQ1

Do elementary and middle school students who regularly attend the after school program Kids Unlimited show greater academic gains on the reading and math Ohio Achievement Assessments than students at the same schools who do not attend Kids Unlimited?

The first research question focuses on the potential influence that after school programs may have on students' academic performance. Academic performance was measured by scores on the Ohio Achievement Assessment (OAA) in the areas of reading and math. OAA scores were retrieved in reading and math for each student who attended

a Kids Unlimited partnering school. By comparing reading and math OAA scores of students who attend Kids Unlimited with reading and math scores of students from the same school who do not, the influence of after school programs on academic achievement was further explored.

RQ2

For elementary and middle school students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited, is there a difference in reading and/or math achievement test scores based on gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, or school site?

The second research question focuses on the potential influence that after school programs may have on students' academic performance but also takes into consideration various demographic variables of the students who attend Kids Unlimited--specifically, gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, and school site. Students who did not attend Kids Unlimited were not used in the data set for RQ2. Differences in demographic variables for students who attend Kids Unlimited could lead to potential improvements or adjustments to Kids Unlimited and other positive benefits for the after school program community. The same reading and math scores on the OAA were collected, and students who attend Kids Unlimited, regardless of their home school location, were included in one data sample.

RQ3

Do students who have attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year attain higher reading and/or math achievement assessment scores than students who have attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one school year?

The third research question focuses on potential differences in reading and math scores on the OAA between students who have attended Kids Unlimited for more than one school year and students who have attended the program up to a maximum of one year. Determining whether students who attended Kids Unlimited for more than one year yields a difference in reading and math OAA scores can provide valuable information to administrators of KU and other similar after school program administrators about the longitudinal influence that after school programs have on students' academic performance.

4.2   Analysis of the Data

The following section presents the results of the data collection and data analysis procedures.

4.3   Results of Research Question 1

RQ1

Do elementary and middle school students who regularly attend the after school program Kids Unlimited show greater academic gains on the reading and math Ohio Achievement Assessments than students at the same schools who do not attend Kids Unlimited?

To answer this research question, five two-sample *t*-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores (one t-test for reading scores and one t-test for math scores at each school) of elementary and middle school students who regularly attended the after

school program Kids Unlimited (n=167) with the mean scores of students who did not

regularly attend Kids Unlimited (n=1,059) (see Table 4.2 and Table 4.3).

Table 4.2
Summary of t-tests Comparing Reading Achievement Scores [95% CI] between KU and non-KU Students at Five Schools

School	n		M (SD)		p
	KU	NKU	KU	NKU	
R	34	249	397.8 (22.9)	395.3 (21.6)	0.279
Q	15	47	400.9 (15.3)	411.7 (24.8)	0.975
N	19	134	393.6 (26.3)	403.7 (21.3)	0.938
M	51	353	399.4 (29.8)	399.3 (28.7)	0.492
C	48	276	392.4 (33.4)	396.6 (25.2)	0.794

Note. KU = Kids Unlimited. NKU = Non-Kids Unlimited

Table 4.3
Summary of t-tests Comparing Math Achievement Scores [95% CI] between KU and non-KU Students at Five Schools

	n		M (SD)		p
School	KU	NKU	KU	NKU	
R	34	249	380.8 (22.9)	378.3 (20.7)	0.264
Q	15	47	398.3 (16.9)	401.3 (25.3)	0.699
N	19	134	389.3 (31.3)	391.6 (24.3)	0.617
M	51	353	401.1 (27.7)	397.3 (30.1)	0.184
C	48	276	394.3 (31.9)	395.4 (26.2)	0.591

Note. KU = Kids Unlimited. NKU = Non-Kids Unlimited

School R.

For school R, a t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of students who regularly attended the after school program Kids Unlimited (n=34) with the mean scores of students who did not regularly attend Kids Unlimited (n=249). For reading, there was no significant difference between the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited (M=397.8, SD=22.9) and the scores of students who did not regularly attend (M=395.3, SD=21.6) Kids Unlimited; t(41) = 0.59, p=0.279. These results suggest that for School R the after school program Kids Unlimited does not have an effect on reading achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on reading achievement assessments as a result of attending the Kids Unlimited after school program at School R.

For math, there was no significant difference between the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited (M=380.8, SD=22.2) and the scores of students who did not regularly attend (M=378.3, SD=20.7) Kids Unlimited; t (41) = 0.64, p=0.264. These results suggest that for School R, the after school program Kids Unlimited does not have an effect on math achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on math achievement assessments as a result of attending the Kids Unlimited after school program at School R.

School Q.

For school Q, a t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of students who regularly attended the after school program Kids Unlimited (n=15) with the mean scores of students who did not regularly attend Kids Unlimited (n=47). For reading, there was no significant difference between the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited (M=400.9, SD=15.3) and the scores of students who did not regularly attend (M=411.7, SD=24.8) Kids Unlimited; t(38) = -2.02, p=0.975. These results suggest that for School Q the after school program Kids Unlimited does not have an effect on reading achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on reading achievement assessments as a result of attending the Kids Unlimited after school program at School Q.

For math, there was no significant difference between the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited (M=398.3, SD=16.9) and the scores of students who did not regularly attend (M=401.3, SD=25.3) Kids Unlimited; t (35) = -0.53, p=0.699. These results suggest that for School Q the after school program Kids Unlimited does not have an effect on math achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that

students do not necessarily perform better on math achievement assessments as a result of attending the Kids Unlimited after school program at School Q.

School N.

For school N, a t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of students who regularly attended the after school program Kids Unlimited (n=19) with the mean scores of students who did not regularly attend Kids Unlimited (n=134). For reading, there was no significant difference between the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited (M=393.6, SD=26.3) and the scores of students who did not regularly attend (M=403.7, SD=21.3) Kids Unlimited; t(21) = -1.60, p=0.938. These results suggest that for School N the after school program Kids Unlimited does not have an effect on reading achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on reading achievement assessments as a result of attending the Kids Unlimited after school program at School N.

For math, there was no significant difference between the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited (M=389.3, SD=31.3) and the scores of students who did not regularly attend (M=391.6, SD=24.3) Kids Unlimited; t (21) = -0.30, p=0.617. These results suggest that for School N the after school program Kids Unlimited does not have an effect on math achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on math achievement assessments as a result of attending the Kids Unlimited after school program at School N.

School M.

For school M, a t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of students who regularly attended the after school program Kids Unlimited (n=51) with the mean scores

of students who did not regularly attend Kids Unlimited (n=353). For reading, there was no significant difference between the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited (M=399.4, SD=29.8) and the scores of students who did not regularly attend (M=399.3, SD=28.7) Kids Unlimited; t(64) = -0.02, p=0.492. These results suggest that for School M the after school program Kids Unlimited does not have an effect on reading achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on reading achievement assessments as a result of attending the Kids Unlimited after school program at School M.

For math, there was no significant difference between the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited (M=401.1, SD=27.7) and the scores of students who did not regularly attend (M=397.3, SD=30.1) Kids Unlimited; t (68) = 0.91, p=0.184. These results suggest that for School M the after school program Kids Unlimited does not have an effect on math achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on math achievement assessments as a result of attending the Kids Unlimited after school program at School M.

School C.

For school C, a t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of students who regularly attended the after school program Kids Unlimited (n=48) with the mean scores of students who did not regularly attend Kids Unlimited (n=276). For reading, there was no significant difference between the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited (M=392.4, SD=33.4) and the scores of students who did not regularly attend (M=396.6, SD=25.2) Kids Unlimited; t(56) = -0.83, p=0.794. These results suggest that for School C the after school program Kids Unlimited does not have an effect on reading

achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on reading achievement assessments as a result of attending the Kids Unlimited after school program at School C.

For math, there was no significant difference between the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited (M=394.3, SD=31.9) and the scores of students who did not regularly attend (M=395.4, SD=26.2) Kids Unlimited; t (58) = -0.23, p=0.591. These results suggest that for School C the after school program Kids Unlimited does not have an effect on math achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on math achievement assessments as a result of attending the Kids Unlimited after school program at School C.

A secondary analysis was conducted that combined participants of Kids Unlimited from all five schools. Two *t*-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores (one t-test for reading scores and one t-test for math scores) of elementary and middle school students who regularly attended the after school program Kids Unlimited (n=167) with the mean scores of students at all five schools who did not regularly attend Kids Unlimited (n=1,059). For reading, there was no statistically significant difference between the scores of elementary and middle school students at all five schools who regularly attended Kids Unlimited (M=396.5, SD=28.2) and the scores of students who did not regularly attend (M=398.8, SD=25.4) Kids Unlimited; t(210) = -0.96, p=0.832. These results suggest that the after school program Kids Unlimited does not have an effect on reading achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on reading achievement assessments as a result of attending the Kids Unlimited after school program.

For math, there was no statistically significant difference between the scores of elementary and middle school students at all five schools who regularly attended Kids Unlimited (M=393.4, SD=28.3) and the scores of students at all five schools who did not regularly attend (M=391.8, SD=27.3) Kids Unlimited; t (217) = -0.70, p=0.243. These results suggest that the after school program Kids Unlimited does not have an effect on math achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on math achievement assessments as a result of attending the Kids Unlimited after school program.

4.4 Results of Research Question 2

RQ2

For elementary and middle school students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited, is there a difference in reading and/or math achievement test scores based on gender, school, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, or school site?

To answer this research question, an analysis of variance was conducted to identify which of the factors (gender, grade level, socio-economic status, race, and school site) had a statistically significant impact upon the reading and math achievement scores. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the influence of the individual variables comprising the factors by examining their coefficients and associated t-scores. The findings from the ANOVA for KU students indicated that the factors of grade level, gender, and race were statistically significant.

4.4.1 Kids Unlimited Students

Reading scores. The findings from the regression analysis for RQ2 indicate that statistically significant differences were found in reading scores for grade level (p=0.008), gender (p=0.000), and race (p=0.002). More specifically, statistically significant differences were found in (a) reading scores at the fifth-grade level t(5) = -3.14, p = 0.002); (b) reading scores for females t(1) = 3.75, p = 0.000; (c) reading scores for African American students t(3) = -3.03, p = 0.003, (d) reading scores for Hispanic students t(3) = 2.44, p = 0.016, and (e) reading scores for Other students t(3) = -3.06, p = 0.003 (See Table 4.4).

Table 4.4
Results for Analysis of Variance for Reading Scores of Kids Unlimited Students

Variable	DF	Seq. SS	Adj. SS	Adj. MS	F	P
School	4	1712	2310.4	577.6	0.9	0.468
Grade Level	5	14654.6	10470.9	2094.2	3.25	*0.008
Free and Reduced Status	1	396.8	720.9	720.9	1.12	0.292
Gender	1	6451.3	9045.9	9045.9	14.03	*0.000
Race	3	10534.4	10417.6	3472.5	5.39	*0.002
Special Education	1	622.4	622.4	622.4	0.97	0.327

Note. R-Sq = 26.10%, R-Sq (adj) = 18.76%

These results suggest that grade level (grade level five), gender (female), and race (African American, Hispanic, and Other) are significant predictors of achievement scores on the reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Assessment. More specifically, these

results suggest that female students and Hispanic students are likely to achieve higher scores on the reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Assessment while African American and Other students are likely to achieve lower scores on the reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Assessment. These results further suggest that 18.76% of the variance in reading scores is accounted for by the variables grade-level, gender, and race (r^2 = 26.10%, r^2 (adj.) = 18.76%).

The findings for the regression analysis for RQ2 indicate that statistically non-significant differences for reading scores were found in the following variables: school (p=0.468), free and reduced status (p=0.292), and special education status (p=0.327). These results suggest that school, free and reduced status, and special education status are not significant predictors of achievement scores on the reading portion of the Ohio Achievement Assessment.

Math scores.

The findings from the regression analysis for RQ2 indicate that statistically significant differences were found in math scores for school (p=0.019), grade level (p=0.003), and race (p=0.003). More specifically, statistically significant differences were found in (a) math scores at School M t(4) = 2.45, p = 0.015; (b) the fifth-grade level t(5) = -2.76, p = 0.006) and third grade level t(5) = 2.08, p = 0.039; and (c) for African American students t(3) = -3.12, p = 0.002, for Hispanic students t(3) = 2.01, p = 0.046, and for Other students t(3) = -2.67, p = 0.008 (See Table 4.5). These results suggest that school (School M), grade level (grade levels five and three), and race (African American, Hispanic, and Other) are significant predictors of achievement scores on the math portion of the Ohio Achievement Assessment.

Table 4.5

Results for Analysis of Variance for Math Scores of Kids Unlimited Students

Variable	DF	Seq. SS	Adj. SS	Adj. MS	F	P
School	4	9112	7691.6	1922.9	3.03	*0.019
Grade Level	5	16943.5	12209.5	2441.9	3.85	*0.003
Free and Reduced Status	1	212.4	317.4	317.4	0.50	0.480
Gender	1	3.4	188.6	188.6	0.30	0.586
Race	3	9578.2	9406.5	3135.5	4.94	*0.003
Special Education	1	1371.7	1371.7	1371.7	2.16	0.143

Note. R-Sq = 27.99%, R-Sq (adj) = 20.84%

More specifically, these results suggest that students at School M and Hispanic students are likely to achieve higher scores on the math portion of the Ohio Achievement Assessment while African American and Other students are likely to achieve lower scores on the math portion of the Ohio Achievement Assessment. These results should be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes for students identified as Hispanic and students identified as Other. These results further suggest that 20.84% of the variance in math scores is accounted for by the predictor variables school, grade level, and race (r^2 = 27.99%, r^2 (adj.) = 20.84%).

The findings for the regression analysis for RQ2 indicate that statistically non-significant differences for math scores were found in the following variables: gender (p=0.586), free and reduced status (p=0.480), and special education status (p=0.143).

These results suggest that gender, free and reduced status, and special education status are not significant predictors of achievement scores on the math portion of the Ohio Achievement Assessment.

4.4.2 Non-Kids Unlimited Students

The second research question in this study seeks to determine whether differences in reading and math achievement scores are found on the basis of gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, or school site for students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited. After determining that significant differences were found among Kids Unlimited students for grade level, gender, and race (in reading scores) and for school, grade level, and race (in math scores), the researcher conducted a second regression analysis on the scores of students who did not attend Kids Unlimited. This analysis was conducted to determine whether any similarities or differences existed between the significant and non-significant factors of students who attended Kids Unlimited and those who did not. The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of results for the same variables in RQ2 regarding students who did not attend Kids Unlimited.

Reading scores.

An analysis of reading scores on the Ohio Achievement Assessment for students who did not attend Kids Unlimited indicated that all variables (i.e., gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, and school site) were significant at a value of $p=0.000$. Regarding the findings for the grade-level variable, statistically significant differences were found for grade five $t(5) = -6.42$, $p=0.000$ and grade six $t(5)$

= 2.54, p = 0.011. The results indicate that fifth-grade reading scores were significantly lower than other grades and that sixth-grade reading scores were significantly higher than other grades. These results show that 17.63% of the variance in reading scores is accounted for by the predictor variables gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race and school site (r^2 = 18.80%, r^2 (adj.) = 17.63%).

Math scores.

An analysis of math scores on the Ohio Achievement Assessment for students who did not attend Kids Unlimited indicated that all variables (i.e., grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race and school site) except for gender (p=0.958) were significant predictors of math achievement scores at the p=0.000 level, with free and reduced status at the p=0.001 level. Regarding findings for the grade-level variable, statistically significant differences were found for grade three t(5) = 4.38, p=0.000 and grade five t(5) = -7.64, p=0.000. The results indicate that third-grade math scores were significantly higher than fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades and that fifth-grade math scores were significantly lower than third, fourth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades. These results show that 24.87% of the variance in math scores is accounted for by the predictor variables gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race and school site (r^2 = 25.94%, r^2 (adj.) = 24.87%).

4.5　Results of Research Question 3

RQ3

Do students who have attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year attain higher reading and/or math achievement test scores than students who have attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one school year?

To answer the third research question, analyses were conducted separately for reading and mathematics scores. A *t*-test was used to compare the mean scores of elementary and middle school students who regularly attended the after school program Kids Unlimited for more than one year (n=58) with the mean scores of students who have regularly attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one year (n=109). For reading, there was no statistically significant difference between the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited for more than one year (M=391.4, SD=32.9) and the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one year (M=399.2, SD=25.0) Kids Unlimited; t(92) = -1.58, p=0.941. These results suggest that for all five schools combined, attending the after school program Kids Unlimited for more than one year does not have an effect on reading achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on reading achievement assessments as a result of attending the after school program Kids Unlimited for a longer period of time--specifically, longer than one year.

For math, there was no statistically significant difference between the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited for more than one year (M=390.3, SD=28.7) and the scores of students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one year (M=395.1, SD=28.1) Kids Unlimited; t (114) = -1.05, p=0.852. These results suggest that for all five schools combined, attending the after school

program Kids Unlimited for more than one year does not have an effect on math achievement scores. Specifically, these results suggest that students do not necessarily perform better on math achievement assessments as a result of attending the after school program Kids Unlimited or a longer period of time--specifically, longer than one year.

4.6 Summary

For RQ1, t-test results suggest that students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited do not perform better on reading and math assessments when compared to their peers from the same school who do not attend Kids Unlimited.

Multiple regression analyses for RQ2 suggest that grade level, gender, and race are significant predictors of reading achievement scores for students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited. Results further suggest that school site, grade level, and race are significant predictors of math achievement scores for students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited. However, results that are significant for race for both reading and math achievement assessment scores should be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes.

Finally, for RQ3, t-test results indicate that students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited for longer than one year do not perform better on reading and math assessments than students who regularly attend for a maximum of one year.

Chapter 5
Discussion

5.1   Summary of the Problem

After school programs have seen a dramatic increase in societal and educational demand during the last decade. As the demand for educational accountability, coupled with safe, structured environments for students of working parents, has continued its unprecedented rise, the ability of parents and schools alone to meet this demand has been inadequate. As a result, after school programs have emerged as one method of augmenting efforts to increase students' academic performance. These after school programs have increased in number throughout the United States and are funded through a variety of sources that help support the multi-faceted needs of those adolescents who require additional after school support. Particular focus has been placed on those after school programs serving under-privileged youth. In order to substantiate and justify state and federal funding, after school programs have been forced to provide evidence of their value and contribution to the local communities they serve, and this proof often has been required in the form of academic progress on standardized tests. Unfortunately, many after school programs have not provided objective, evidence-based justification that their programs substantially increase academic performance. Newly established after school programs and those that rely on volunteers and non-credentialed personnel, while well intended, have struggled to show substantial evidence that their curriculum plays a

significant role in the improvement of academic performance in the form of improved scores on standardized tests.

5.2   Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether attendance at Kids Unlimited, a localized urban after school program, has an influence on the academic outcomes of the children that it serves when compared to their same-school peers who do not attend Kids Unlimited. Additionally, this study explored differences within demographic groups of students who attended Kids Unlimited, including gender, grade level, socio-economic status (measured by free- and reduced-lunch qualification), special education services (measured by students who are on an IEP), and school site.

More specifically, this study provides an increased understanding about whether there is a difference in academic performance on standardized tests between students who have attended a school-based after school program and students who have not. And finally, this study provides additional insight into the demographic differences in academic performance that exist among students who attended Kids Unlimited for more than one school year and those who attended for a maximum of one school year.

5.3   Summary of the Sample

Participants of this study included all students in grades three through eight (n= 1,225) who attended the five schools cooperating with the after school program Kids Unlimited in Toledo, Ohio. Specifically, participants included students who attended

Kids Unlimited (n=167) at School R (n=34), School Q (n=15), School N (n=19), School M (n=51), and School C (n=48). Reading and math standardized achievement scores were collected for students who were administered the Ohio Achievement Assessment in each of the five schools, regardless of whether they participated in the Kids Unlimited program. The sample included Hispanics (n=60), African Americans (n=975), White (n=110), and Other (n=80). The sample also included males (n=573) and females (n=652).   Students in kindergarten through second grade who may have attended Kids Unlimited were excluded because Ohio Achievement Assessments are administered only to students beginning in the third grade.

5.4   Review of the Methodology

This study used quantitative analyses to determine whether a statistically significant difference existed on reading and math Ohio Achievement Assessment scores between students who regularly attended the after school program Kids Unlimited and students from the same school who did not attend Kids Unlimited. The study sought also to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in reading and/or math achievement test scores based on gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, or school site. And finally, the study sought to determine whether students who have attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year attained higher reading and/or math achievement test scores than students who have attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one school year. Specifically, *t*-tests and regression analyses were used to determine whether differences existed among these groups of students.

Participants from the study included students in grades three through eight who attended one of five charter schools in Toledo, Ohio. All five charter schools are located within the Toledo Public School system and serve students who live in low-income neighborhoods. Students who are in kindergarten through second grade were excluded from the study because the state of Ohio does not offer or require standardized assessments at these early grade levels.

Data collection for this study began in June 2010 following discussions with and approval by the co-founder of Kids Unlimited. Secondary data collection methods were used, which required data to be gathered and organized by charter school staff members as well as Kids Unlimited staff members. Charter school staff members also collected Ohio Achievement Assessment scores as well as demographic information that included gender, grade-level, socio-economic status, race, and special education status. Kids Unlimited staff members also contributed to the data collection process by providing rosters of students who attended the after school program to school staff members responsible for collecting data. This enabled school staff members to differentiate between students who attended Kids Unlimited and students who did not attend Kids Unlimited.

5.5 Research Findings

5.5.1 Research Question 1

Do elementary and middle school students who regularly attend the after school program Kids Unlimited show greater academic gains on the reading and math Ohio

Achievement Assessments than students at the same schools who do not attend Kids Unlimited?

Findings from the t-test analyses for RQ1 failed to show that statistically significant differences were found between reading and math achievement assessment scores of students who attended Kids Unlimited and students from the same schools who did not attend Kids Unlimited. This finding was further supported after the same analyses were conducted combining the scores of students from all five schools who attended Kids Unlimited with the scores of students from all five schools who did not attend Kids Unlimited. Again, the results indicated that the null hypothesis should not be rejected.

The academic impacts on students who attend after school programs have been largely debated. Research has shown that after school programs that provide an engaging environment may reduce at-risk behaviors and increase learning but not necessarily improve academic achievement (Pittman et al., 2004). Furthermore, academically based programs specifically designed to improve academic performance as well as offer social and developmental activities may limit the academic gains that are intended for after school students (Asher, 2006). Results from RQ1 support Asher's assertion that after school programs that promote academic gains, such as Kids Unlimited, do not always show significant differences in student learning. These results may reflect that after school programs, which place emphasis on initiatives above and beyond academics, have a difficult time proving gains in academic performance because of time spent on other program goals.

One reason why the results of RQ1 failed to show significant differences may be the absence of an implemented research-based curriculum for reading and math on the

part of Kids Unlimited which may have resulted in instructional decision-making processes that were either uninformed or under informed. Hattie (2009) has suggested that activities "with a curricular focus, must be deliberate in order to observe positive academic effects" (p. 185). The absence of a deliberate, structured curriculum may prevent the instructional personnel at Kids Unlimited from making informed decisions about the reading or math instruction provided to the students who attend the after school program. In addition, the skill levels of students who attend Kids Unlimited for support in reading and math were not measured at the beginning of the school year, students were not provided skill-specific instruction using a research-based curriculum model, and students were not regularly assessed regarding the progress (or lack thereof) of their reading and math skills throughout the year. The results of RQ1 refute some of the recent literature suggesting that structured activities outside of school, in isolation, can improve academic outcomes (Bohnert et. al., 2008, p. 518).

The absence of these critical components for specific reading and math assessment and remediation allows for Kids Unlimited staff to make only subjective judgments about how to instruct the students who attend the program. While Kids Unlimited staff often have access to students' grades, previous Ohio Achievement Assessment scores, and regular-school-day teachers, these informational resources cannot substitute for an objective pre-assessment diagnostic of skills, nor does it enable informed instructional decisions for skill remediation by Kids Unlimited staff. Van Gog et. al. (2008), along with other researchers, have suggested that deliberate practice of specific skills requires relevant practice at appropriate, challenging levels of difficulty with regular, informative feedback to the learner (as cited in Hattie, 2009, p. 185).

A second reason why the results of RQ1 failed to show statistically significant differences is that it is possible that students who choose to attend or are required to attend Kids Unlimited (and indeed, almost every after school program) may have lower Ohio Achievement Assessment scores in reading and math than their same-school peers to begin with. If this is the case, these lower reading and math scores make it difficult to determine if greater academic gains are a result of attending Kids Unlimited because these student's scores are already inferior to their peers. If Kids Unlimited were to measure specific academic outcomes among its participants (i.e., pre-test and post-test), it is possible that evidence may emerge for statistically significant gains from their program's specific academic initiatives.

5.5.2 Research Question 2

For elementary and middle school students who regularly attend Kids Unlimited, is there a difference in reading and/or math achievement test scores based on gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, or school site?

For students who attended Kids Unlimited, the results suggest that statistically significant differences did exist for specific factors related to math achievement scores. Those factors specifically are grade level, gender, and race for reading scores and school site, grade level and race for math scores. Specifically, fifth-grade reading and math achievement scores for students who attended Kids Unlimited were significantly lower than all other grade levels.

Several variables showed significant differences in both reading and math scores for Kids Unlimited students. The first variable in this discussion, grade level, was

selected in order to determine whether there were evident program predictors of achievement at one grade level over another. Results indicate that the scores of fifth graders were significantly lower than all other grades in both reading and math achievement assessment scores. It is reasonable to suspect that some intervening variable (or variables) in the fifth grade for Kids Unlimited students is responsible for these significantly lower scores. However, in context, it should be noted that according to the Ohio Department of Education website (ODE, 2011), fifth-grade scores as a state average have the lowest proficiency rating in both reading and math Ohio Achievement Assessments for 2010 and 2011 when compared to grades three through eight (www.ode.state.oh.us, 2011). In this regard, the results of RQ1 are not inconsistent with those found among other schools throughout the state. In addition, fifth-grade scores for non-Kids Unlimited students were also significantly lower in reading and math achievement assessment scores when compared to all other grades. For Kids Unlimited students, the only remaining significant results pertaining to grade level were that third-grade achievement scores in math were significantly higher when compared to all other grades. This result was also significantly higher for students who did not attend Kids Unlimited, making it difficult to determine whether the Kids Unlimited program initiative had a positive impact on third-grade math scores.

The findings for gender as a significant predictor of achievement assessment scores showed that scores were significantly higher for Kids Unlimited female students than Kids Unlimited male students. This finding was also reflected in non-Kids Unlimited female students when compared to non-Kids Unlimited male students in reading achievement scores. Once again, this finding makes it difficult to provide

evidence that the Kids Unlimited program is in some way responsible for the differences that exist between reading achievement scores for female students and reading achievement scores for male students.

Differences in reading achievement scores among the five school sites were not statistically significant for Kids Unlimited students. However, non-Kids Unlimited students at School C scored significantly lower than other school sites on the reading achievement assessment. Also, non-Kids Unlimited students at School N scored significantly higher than other school sites on the reading achievement assessment. These findings in isolation do not provide direct evidence that program differences occur from school to school with Kids Unlimited students in in terms of increased reading achievement assessment scores.

Difference in school site for math scores occurred only at School M for Kids Unlimited students. Once again, the potential impact that Kids Unlimited may have had at School M in math achievement scores requires more evidence since the same results were found at School M for non-Kids Unlimited students. Differences in students' achievement assessment scores based on school site provide negligible evidence that Kids Unlimited as an after school program has had a positive effect on students' scores. However, based on these same results, it could also be said that Kids Unlimited has not had a negative impact on students' reading and math achievement scores based on school site.

Race is the final variable in which reading and math scores were significantly different among African-American students, White students, Hispanic students, and Other students. In both reading and math achievement assessments, the scores of

Hispanic students were significantly higher than their Kids Unlimited peers, while African-American students and Other students were significantly lower than their Kids Unlimited peers. This finding in isolation should be interpreted with caution because the sample size of Hispanic students and Other students was small (5 Hispanic students and 13 Other students compared to 142 African-American students). This finding for African-American students is supported, however, because the results for non-Kids Unlimited students indicate that African-American students also performed significantly lower on reading and math achievement assessment scores than all other ethnic groups when combined. While this finding does not support any evidence or conclusions that Kids Unlimited has had a negative impact on African-American students, it does suggest that Kids Unlimited has not yet been able to close the achievement gap for this group of students. According to a recent dissertation study performed on low-income Title I students in Toledo, Ohio, "White students performed at or above proficient significantly more often than Black students" (Durant, 2007, p. 98), indicating that an academic achievement gap exists among low-income African American students and their peers of differing ethnic backgrounds.

Research has suggested that after school programs are perceived as having a positive impact on ethnic minority youth. As suggested by Robinson (2008), studies have shown that after school programs have an impact not only on students' academic performance but also their social well being, in particular those students from low-income, minority families. Furthermore, Posner and Vandell (1994) concluded, "low-income African-American children who attended after school programs consistently performed better in reading, math, and other subjects than did their peers..." (as cited in

Woodland, 2008, p. 541). While the results of this study did not support the hypothesis that Kids Unlimited has had a positive academic impact on minority youth as measured by reading and math achievement assessment scores, it is reasonable to suggest that if the program is capable of having an academic impact on students' achievement scores, this impact could first be observed and measured among low-income, African-American students. In a study of Toledo Public school students, Durant (2007) found that there were statistically significant differences in reading and math scores on the Ohio Achievement Assessment between low-income African-American students and White students. These results suggest an achievement gap exists between low-income African-American students and their White classmates. Based on this finding, because such an achievement gap exists between these two groups, administrators of an after school program such as Kids Unlimited might expect to first observe and measure the academic impact of their program among low-income, African-American students.

5.5.3 Research Question 3

Do students who have attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year attain higher reading and/or math achievement test scores than students who have attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one school year?

Findings from the t-test analysis for RQ3 failed to show that statistically significant differences were found between reading and math achievement assessment scores of students who attended Kids Unlimited for less than one year and the scores of students from the same schools who attended Kids Unlimited for more than one year. This finding supports recent literature indicating that attending after school programs for

a longer duration may not have a measurable impact on outcomes (Dynarski et al., 2006 as cited in Chappell, 2006, p. 9). This finding by Dynarski is refuted in the Harvard Family Research Project (2008), which states that participation is associated with better performance in school as measured by achievement test scores and grades.

For after school program research, Fiester, Simpkins & Bouffard (2005), state that the ability to link attendance and participation with specific program outcomes is critical in the evaluation of after school program effectiveness. After school programs have a responsibility to define specific program outcomes to stronger and more robust measures of attendance and participation. Only through such a process can after school programs such as Kids Unlimited make informed decisions about the effectiveness of their program and relate that effectiveness to attendance and participation.

One reason the results from RQ3 failed to show a significant difference in achievement assessment scores of students who attended Kids Unlimited for more than one year may have been that students who attended the program for a longer period of time felt less motivated to improve upon their reading and math skills than students who attended for a shorter time (i.e., less than one year). As students become older and more independent, demands for students' time and attention increase, and structured environments at after school programs are often less appealing, especially when compared to alternative activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). For many of the students who attended Kids Unlimited for more than one year, the competition for their attention while at Kids Unlimited may have had less to do with reading or math skill remediation and more to do with their desires to participate in other social/recreational activities. Because of this competition for student attendance, it is possible that the reason

students attended Kids Unlimited for more than one year was fueled solely by parental requirement and not an intrinsic motivation for students to learn. As a result, students who are not motivated to learn and improve their own reading and math skills (and who feel required by their parents to attend Kids Unlimited) could potentially feel a negative effect on their motivation.

A second reason the results for RQ3 failed to reject the null hypothesis may be that students who attended Kids Unlimited for more than one year may have felt less motivated to give their best effort toward reading and math skill remediation if there were no indicators from previous years that their efforts had a measurable impact. Research has suggested that attending an after school program creates an environment "in which students feel engaged and connected [and] increases their interest in learning...but it does not, in and of itself, lead to improved academic achievement" (Pittman et. al., 2004, p. 24).

Furthermore, many after school programs advertise their ability to reinforce positive behaviors and offer verification of improved academic-related results. However, as cited in Ascher (2006), only about 50% of after school programs have obtained data measuring the impacts of their programs on student learning. If after school programs could provide students who attend their programs with evidence of positive learning outcomes, additional factors related to academic performance, such as effort and motivation, may improve. Students who participated with Kids Unlimited for more than one year may have been looking for evidence that their effort produced results that aligned with program goals, and without such evidence, students who had attended Kids

Unlimited for more than one year may have put forth less effort than students in their first year with the program.

A third reason why the results of RQ3 failed to reject the null hypothesis may be that, as suggested by Dynarski and colleagues (2006), simply increased attendance in isolation may not have measurable impacts on program outcomes (as cited in Chappell, 2006, p. 9). Literature has suggested that additional research needs to be conducted on after school program attendance in the specific areas of intensity, duration, and breadth in order to better understand their influence as it relates to after school program outcomes (Fiester, Simpkins & Bouffard, 2005). Adding context to after school program attendance and participation may allow programs to link initiatives and academic results.

5.6 Additional Findings

A finding in RQ2 that was reported but not mentioned in the actual research question itself was that all variables (gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education status, race, and school site) were significant predictors of reading achievement assessment scores for non-Kids Unlimited students (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6
Results for Analysis of Variance for Reading Scores of non-Kids Unlimited Students

Variable	DF	Seq. SS	Adj. SS	Adj. MS	F	P
School	4	15453.3	13655.2	3413.8	6.42	*0.000
Grade Level	5	26804.6	27636.4	5527.3	10.39	*0.000
Free and Reduced Status	1	19112.2	11536	11536	21.69	*0.000
Gender	1	13099.8	7103.3	7103.3	13.36	*0.000
Race	3	29261.4	31575.4	10525.1	19.79	*0.000
Special Education	1	26946.4	26946.4	8982.1	16.89	*0.000

Note. R-Sq = 19.11%, R-Sq (adj) = 17.79%

The same finding was reported for math achievement assessment scores, with the exception that gender was not a statistically significant factor (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7
Results for Analysis of Variance for Math Scores of non-Kids Unlimited Students

Variable	DF	Seq. SS	Adj. SS	Adj. MS	F	P
School	4	64143	41359	10340	18.52	*0.000
Grade Level	5	47916	50928	10186	18.25	*0.000
Free and Reduced Status	1	15202	6215	6215	11.13	*0.000
Gender	1	1020	0	0	0.000	0.985
Race	3	48642	51886	17295	30.98	*0.000
Special Education	1	28295	28295	9432	16.89	*0.000

Note. R-Sq = 26.12%, R-Sq (adj) = 24.91%

Additionally, RQ2 scores for students in grade five were significantly lower than in all other grades in reading and math for Kids Unlimited students as well as non-Kids Unlimited students. This finding may indicate that there are potential instructional issues/deficits or problematic testing issues with the state assessment in grade five for both reading and math. For example, since the 2007-2008 school year and through the 2010-2011 school year, state-wide achievement testing data show that 5th grade reading scores and math scores have the lowest state-wide average when compared to reading scores and math scores from grades three through eight (www.ode.state.oh.us). Furthermore, regarding the use of standardized assessments as a valid and reliable measure of student learning, some researchers have suggested that "achievement tests are inherently limited measures of children's learning and growth, whether in school or outside it" (Halpern, 2004, p. 121).

More specifically in RQ2, an interesting finding was that reading and math scores of African-American students were significantly lower than their Kids Unlimited and non-Kids Unlimited peers of other races (i.e., White, Hispanic, or Other). While the sample of African-American students (n=142) outnumbered the other three ethnicity groups combined (n=25) in the Kids Unlimited program, it is reasonable to suggest that an achievement gap exists in reading and math for African-American students participating in the Kids Unlimited program at each of the five schools. Additionally, the reading and math scores of Hispanic students who attended Kids Unlimited were significantly higher than the scores of all other ethnic groups. However, these results should be interpreted with caution as the sample of Hispanic students was comprised of only five students and reflects only 3% of the total student sample.

From a school-site perspective, the math scores of students who attended Kids Unlimited at School M were significantly higher than the math scores of Kids Unlimited students at other school sites. These results suggest that the Kids Unlimited program has a positive effect on math achievement assessments for students who attend School M. However, students who did not attend Kids Unlimited at School M also statistically outperformed non-Kids Unlimited students at all other schools except for School N in math and females from all five schools who did not attend Kids Unlimited also significantly outperformed male students who did not attend Kids Unlimited on the reading achievement assessment as well. Reasons these differences occurred in reading results for females in both Kids Unlimited and non-Kids Unlimited groups may be related to studies that have found that girls have a more positive attitude toward recreational reading than boys do based on achievement assessment results. Non-Kids Unlimited students from both School M and School N performed significantly higher than non-Kids Unlimited students from the other three schools on the math achievement assessment. Differences between math scores for School M and School N from other school sites may be a result of differences in the math curriculum being taught, personnel, resources, staff training, assessment protocols, instructional strategies, and ability levels of the student populations each school serves as well as many other variables not included in this study.

Findings for gender indicated that female students who attended Kids Unlimited outperformed male students who attended Kids Unlimited significantly on the reading achievement assessment. Likewise, it should be noted that female students from all five schools who did not attend Kids Unlimited also significantly outperformed male students on the reading achievement assessment as well. Reasons these differences occurred in

reading results for females in both Kids Unlimited and non-Kids Unlimited groups may be related to studies that have found that girls have a more positive attitude toward recreational reading than boys do (Logan & Johnston, 2009). Furthermore, to strengthen the significance of the results in reading for females and males who are economically disadvantaged, this gap is supported by Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson (2007), who have stated, "The gender gap in reading seems to be characteristic mainly of children from economically disadvantaged families" (p. 115). These reading achievement gaps in economically disadvantaged females were defined in this study by free and reduced lunch status. It is reasonable to conclude that females significantly outperformed males on reading assessment scores due to this existing gender gap in reading, thus explaining why these results are reflected in the scores of both Kids Unlimited females and non-Kids Unlimited females.

Free and reduced lunch status was found to be a significant variable in both reading and math achievement scores for students who did not attend Kids Unlimited. However, differences in reading and math scores were not significant for students who did attend Kids Unlimited and were on free and reduced lunch when compared to those students who were not on free and reduced lunch. One reason that free and reduced lunch status was not a statistically significant factor among the Kids Unlimited group could be the small sample size of the comparison group of the students who were not on free and reduced lunch and also attended Kids Unlimited.

5.7 Implications for Action and Practical Recommendations for After School Programs

In their early history, after school programs were designed to fulfill particular community needs--specifically needs related to safety and supervision. For many after school programs, the staple mission was to occupy adolescents' time for three to four hours after school that otherwise through lack of supervision led to an increase in risky behavior (Kugler, 2001; Lewis, 2000; Ascher, 2006). In response to the authorization of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, curriculum decisions about after school programming have shifted, focusing more on academic standards and test scores and less on behavioral supervision.

In education today, accountability has become increasingly important, and schools have faced mounting pressure to provide evidence that their students are performing at high academic levels. This pressure has resulted in an academic mandate for many after school programs. For many after school programs that seek private funding and donations, the preferred measure of demonstrating evidence of improved academic performance is through standardized test scores (Huang, 2000; Jenner & Jenner, 2007). However, a definitive direction for after school programs is unclear as some experts have suggested that while after school environments may increase students' interest in learning, they do not in and of themselves lead to improved academic achievement and at their best may only help students maintain their academic standing (Pittman et al., 2004; Cosden et al., 2004).

Even though the research points to the general inability of after school programs to improve standardized test scores, these assessments are still widely regarded as the preferred measure of success for students as well as the preferred method of

legitimization for after school program funding (Jenner & Jenner 2007; Halpern, 2004). For this reason, after school programs should implement standardized research-based curriculum models that are designed to improve their students' skills in reading, math, and writing. As after school programs begin to implement a more standardized curriculum model, students' individual deficiencies can be addressed and more appropriately remediated.

Researchers have conducted very few studies on the potential academic impact that could be made by strengthening the relationship between students' classroom teachers and their after school program facilitators. However, in the case of Kids Unlimited, this relational gap has been reduced somewhat because the Kids Unlimited program operates in the same school buildings/classrooms that the students attend during their normal school day. It is possible that this proximity factor could one day prove critical to the students' academic growth by a seamless continuation of services in the after school setting. If after school program administrators and staff have the ability to reinforce the skills taught during the school day, this advantage may prove to have a positive reciprocal effect on students' academic growth.

While academic growth through increased test scores is the most visible way to justify and legitimize support for after school programs, it is equally important that after school programs appropriately provide the resources necessary to support other mission values. In the case of Kids Unlimited, its core focus is three-fold: (1) academic achievement, (2) character development and (3) self-discipline. In order for Kids Unlimited to remain consistent in reconciling the values in its core focus with actual on-site practices , it is crucial that after school programs such as Kids Unlimited support

program goals (e.g., self-discipline and character development) through models that are research-based and supported by assessments that appropriately measure whether program outcomes are being met.

If the faculty and staff members of after school programs can continue to develop relationships with partnering schools, administrators, teachers, and parents, their ability to provide quality services should greatly benefit the students they all serve as members of the academic community. After school programs must begin with a clear mission and goals that suits all constituents in their communities, do so in a way that is research-based and evidence producing, and ultimately provide quality services through caring, well-trained staff members who promote a safe and risk-free environment. If after school programs can strengthen these approaches to student services, it becomes more likely that these programs will be viewed as increasingly valuable assets among stakeholders within the academic community.

5.8   Limitations

The results of this research must be viewed in light of specific limitations. Analyzing these limitations provides context that may facilitate a more complete understanding of the results of this study as well as a guide for future research. Five specific limitations are presented below:

One limitation was the sample selection used in this study. The sample consisted of students in one after school program in Toledo, Ohio. Using data collected from only one after school program in a specific geographical location can limit the generalizability of the results to other after school programs.

A second limitation of this study was the sample size of specific sub-groups of students. For the following groups, race (Hispanics n=5, White n=7 and Others n=13), free and reduced lunch (not qualified for free and reduced n=4) and special education students (identified as special education n=3) sample size served as an additional limitation as predictors of academic achievement for both reading and math scores on the Ohio Achievement Assessment.

A third limitation of the study was the method of data collection. In this study, secondary sources were responsible for data collection in order to protect the anonymity of the individual students. As a result, accuracy of the data collected was dependent on secondary sources at all five school locations. At all schools, secretaries, teachers, and some administrators helped collect test scores and demographic information. Therefore, it is assumed that all data collected by secondary personnel regarding attendance and subsidiary protocol information (i.e., record keeping, lesson planning, Kids Unlimited program information, etc.) were accurately reported by the staff at both Kids Unlimited and the cooperating schools.

A fourth limitation of the study was the difficulty distinguishing between students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited and those who attended but did not do so on a regular basis. As defined by the Kids Unlimited Program Coordinator, students who attended Kids Unlimited on a regular basis attended the program between 65% and 75% of the time on average during the week. While this number exceeds the threshold recommended by some researchers who suggest that an average of 50% attendance is an adequate definition of "regular attendance," the accuracy of attendance records as well as the interpretation of observed regular attendance by Kids Unlimited staff should be

considered a limitation of the study. If more accurate attendance data were to be collected on Kids Unlimited participants, the duration and intensity of the program's impact could be more accurately measured and assessed.

A fifth limitation of the study was that Kids Unlimited did not use a research-based curriculum to teach skills that were intended to be reflected by student performance on standardized reading and math tests. Because Kids Unlimited used a non-standardized, non-research-based curriculum model for instructing students, cause-and-effect relationships that indicate how Kids Unlimited impacted students in their academic growth must be interpreted with caution. In addition, the staff members who serve as Kids Unlimited facilitators are not professionally trained teachers, and their backgrounds and specific training in reading and math skills are varied. Since the level of instruction at one school site can vary when compared to that of another site, generalizations about the academic impact of Kids Unlimited across numerous sites should be limited.

5.9   Recommendations for Future Research

The results, implications for action, and limitations of the current study provide a solid foundation for suggesting recommendations for future research. The following recommendations are suitable for both the Kids Unlimited program and all after school programs:

First, future research should attempt to include additional variables that would allow for a more comprehensive evaluation of the benefits of participating in Kids Unlimited, particularly as these benefits relate to individual and specific program goals. Since Kids Unlimited was founded upon three core elements (i.e., academic achievement,

character education, and self-discipline), future studies should consider measurements that address all three categories of the Kids Unlimited program (either individually or collectively) in order to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the after school program.

Second, future evaluation studies of the program Kids Unlimited might also feature qualitative methods, such as interviews of KU parents, staff, and students, in order to capture their perceptions of KU benefits. Perceptions of program impacts could serve as a valuable evaluation tool for the KU program and provide quality-control feedback otherwise not measured when collecting quantitative data.

Third, motivation for parents to include their children in attending an after school program should be considered. The number of variables and different types of variables that motivate parents and students to participate in after school programs could provide a future research target. If these motivational factors are considered in future research on after school programs, they could then be compared to the program's goals to determine whether motivating factors for attending after school programs and program goals support one another in a positive way.

A fourth recommendation for future studies is to examine after school program differences found between programs using time-on-task models and those programs using research-based curriculum models to achieve an academic impact. By comparing programs with vastly different approaches toward improving academic achievement, the components required to academically enhance after school programs could be better understood and strengthened.

A fifth recommendation is to identify the credentials and instructional qualifications of staff members and facilitators of after school programs. After identifying these credentials and qualifications, evaluations of the quality of after school programs can include assessments of staff quality and training as well as instructional fidelity. By measuring staff training, qualifications, and educational backgrounds, future researchers can better evaluate the impact that staff have on the fidelity of instruction provided to their participants.

A sixth recommendation for future studies of after school programs is to consider the measurement tools associated with determining academic growth. Many studies, like this one, have used standardized academic achievement tests as a comprehensive tool for measuring learning. Seeking other ways to measure academic growth and learning should be explored in order to better determine how students' regular school day instruction differs from the treatment effects of attending an after school program.

A seventh recommendation for future studies of after school programs is to explore internal measurements of after school programs. For example, pre-test and post-test measurements of student learning administered by individual after school programs may lead to a better understanding of the academic impacts that these programs offer. Evaluating specific impacts of after school programs through pre-intervention and post-intervention assessments could provide a better understanding of the differences between instructional impacts of the regular school day on student learning and instructional impacts of after school programs on student learning.

An eighth recommendation for future studies of after school programs is to consider academic growth as it relates to student age and grade level. As students get

older, the complex motivation and eagerness to please their parents, teachers, and themselves through standardized achievement tests should be better understood. Furthermore, standardized achievement tests currently do not include students younger than grade three. By finding more comprehensive tools for measuring learning and academic growth beyond standardized tests, students who are younger than grade three and attend after school programs could then be included in future after school program evaluations and studies.

For after school programs seeking to measure long-term impacts, future evaluations should consider measurement tools that account for longitudinal data collection. After school programs typically serve students at various age levels, and evaluating the long-term effects of participation in after school programs using longitudinal methods can help future after school programs to plan for long-range goals that positively influence students in a variety of areas that extend beyond academic performance.

5.10 Conclusion

Each day in America, millions of children are without supervision or are on the streets following the school day. As a result, many parents worry about their child's after school safety and activities. For this reason, the demand for after school programs and their services has greatly increased. Subsequently, many after school programs such as Kids Unlimited advertise an academic impact that expands beyond the instruction students received during the school day. Increased accountability for such an impact has

risen dramatically, and providing parents and private donors the assurance that such impacts are being made has proven problematic.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a significant difference existed between students who have attended Kids Unlimited regularly and their same-school peers who have not attended Kids Unlimited in the areas of reading and math academic achievement as measured by results on the Ohio Achievement Assessment. Additionally, this study intended to identify whether significant differences existed on reading and math achievement assessment scores among students who attended Kids Unlimited on a regular basis when compared with scores of students in the same schools who did not attend Kids Unlimited based on gender, grade level, socio-economic status, special education services, race and school site. Finally, this study investigated whether students who had attended Kids Unlimited for more than one academic year attained higher achievement test scores in reading and math than students who had attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one school year.

The results of the study indicated that no significant differences existed on reading and math achievement assessment scores for students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited when compared to their same school peers who did not attend Kids Unlimited. This finding indicated that Kids Unlimited had no academic impact on the Ohio Achievement Assessment results for students who regularly attended the program.

Results for differences in achievement assessment scores for students who regularly attended the Kids Unlimited program based on specific demographic variables indicated few significant differences in the areas of grade level and race for both reading and math scores and gender differences in reading scores and school site differences in

99

math scores. The significant differences in these variables were accompanied by similar significant differences in reading and math scores from students who did not regularly attend Kids Unlimited or variables with low sample size.

Finally, the results for students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited for more than one year when compared to students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one year were not significantly different on reading and math achievement assessments. These results indicate that students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited for more than one school year received no greater educational impact in reading or math as measured by Ohio Achievement Assessments than students who regularly attended Kids Unlimited for a maximum of one school year.

The results of this study suggest that opportunities exist for future research on after school programs in general as well as the Kids Unlimited program in particular. Direction for future research includes addressing variables beyond academic impacts that after school programs may have on the students who attend them. More specifically, future research could be conducted in the following areas: perceptions of various stakeholders, parental and student motivation, programs with various curriculum models, staff training techniques, programs with alternate methods for measuring academic impacts, and longitudinal research on program impacts. In particular for the Kids Unlimited program, additional research could be conducted on one of the two or both remaining program goals as stated in the Kids Unlimited core focus--i.e., character education and self-discipline. Once pursued, each of these factors could inform the current literature on the various impacts of after school programs as well as Kids Unlimited and their future.

The results of this study concluded that Kids Unlimited had no statistically significant academic impact on students' Ohio Achievement Assessment scores. However, these results should in no way suggest that Kids Unlimited is not having a positive impact in other ways on the young lives of the students it serves. The pursuit of the Kids Unlimited program to provide their services should not be under valued based on the results of this study, which focused on only one component of the programs core focus - academics. The benefits of a program such as Kids Unlimited for the many students it serves cannot be measured.

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