After-School Program Engagement:
Links to Child Competence and Program Quality and Content

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Abstract: This 2-year study assessed program-level differences in after-school program (ASP) engagement in relation to child competencies (effectance motivation, social competence, school grades) and program quality and content. Participants were 141 children (M age 8.4 years) who attended 9 ASPs in an urban, disadvantaged city in the United States. Measures of competence were determined from classroom teachers’ ratings, and program engagement; quality and content were assessed primarily through observation. Results from a hierarchical linear model showed that program-level differences in engagement predicted children’s social competence and effectance motivation (but not school grades) in a linear, positive direction (p < .05). This relation held after modeling several selection factors and prior competence. Engaging ASPs were also significantly higher in program quality and tended to devote more time to enrichment activities and less time to homework and non-skill-building activities.