OrchKids: An Examination of Student Outcomes

Executive Summary

This report provides the results of a quasi-experimental analysis of the effects of OrchKids out-of-school-time (OST) program participation on student outcomes. The study included students who participated in OrchKids from 2009-10 through 2016-17. Outcomes examined included mobility out of City schools, student attendance, chronic absence, suspension from school, and performance on state assessments in English/language arts and math.

Program Description

OrchKids has been offering free, year-round music-based programming to students across Baltimore for 10 years. In SY 2017-18, its OST program was based in six schools and served over 1,000 children in pre-K through 10th grade. The primary goal of OrchKids is to expose students and their family members to music and provide students opportunities to participate in musical ensembles. In its OST program, OrchKids also provides students with meals, academic instruction and homework support, as well as adult and peer mentorship via a network of partnerships with community-based organizations. Goals of the program include increasing participants’ exposure to classical music, increasing participants’ confidence and accomplishment as musicians, improving academic outcomes and supporting the development of 21st century skills such as collaboration, teamwork, self-discipline, and creativity.

Findings

Participants who joined the program in pre-K through 4th grade and persisted in the program for more than one year had higher average daily attendance, lower chronic absence, and were less likely to receive a suspension from school. Participants who joined OrchKids between 5th and 8th grade also had significantly higher attendance, relative to
comparison students. Comparisons of participant and comparison students’ state assessment outcomes in English/language arts and math also yielded positive findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Served</th>
<th>Length of Participation</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Began Participating in pre-K through 4th grade | 5 to 8 years (N=86)     | • Higher rates of attendance  
• Lower rates of chronic absence  
• Fewer suspensions  
• Less likely to leave City Schools  
• More likely to score proficient or advanced on MSA ELA and math  
• More likely to meet/exceed expectations on PARCC ELA |
| Began Participating in 5th through 8th grade | 2 to 4 years (N=244)    | • Higher rates of attendance  
• Lower rates of chronic absence  
• Fewer suspensions  
• More likely to score proficient/advanced on MSA math |
|                                           | 1 year (N=221)          | • More likely to be proficient/advanced on MSA ELA and math               |
|                                           | 2 to 3 years (N=30)     | • Higher rates of attendance                                                |
|                                           | 1 year (N=58)           | • No differences detected                                                   |

Analyses also demonstrated that relative to similar students, those who participated in OrchKids for 5 or more years were significantly less likely to depart City Schools during those years. This suggests that access to school-based arts enrichment programs may help retain families in the district.

Future research on OrchKids might examine the impact of participation on later outcomes in adulthood (e.g., college enrollment or degree completion), as well as collect qualitative data that could address ways that OrchKids promotes positive social attachment, identity formation, and family engagement in school.