In the Zone: An Investigation of the XY-Zone Program on Developmental Assets of At-Risk Male Youth

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Abstract: *The XY-Zone program is a leadership and peer support program that guides adolescent males as they journey into manhood. This mixed methods study examined the influence of the XY-Zone program on developmental assets and academic markers of males in grades nine through 12 who were identified as youth at risk of dropping out of school. Results revealed significant positive increases in developmental asset total scores, two asset categories, and two asset contexts. Findings also indicated that youth enrolled in the XY-Zone program improved in academics, behavior, and attendance. Qualitative findings identified four overall positive themes about the XY-Zone program. The XY-Zone program demonstrates promise as an intervention to increase developmental assets of at-risk male youth.*

Young men in high school struggle daily to negotiate competing definitions of success and masculinity as they mature and progress through school. For students from low-income families, additional barriers complicate their aspirations for success, including limited access to resources and an increased risk of dropping out of school (McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2016). Despite a steadily increasing graduation rate, schools continue to see high numbers of students who are disengaged, underserved, and at risk of dropping out. Specifically, every year 1.2 million students drop out of school (Miller, 2011), which is more than 7,000 students dropping out of school every day. The status dropout rate, meaning the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential, was reported as 6.4% in 2014 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). The odds of dropping out increase for African American and for Hispanic students, with a status dropout rate of 7.4% and 10.6%, respectively, compared to 5.2% for White students (NCES, 2016). On average, high school students from low-income families drop out of school at six times the rate of peers from higher-income families (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011).

While alarming, these statistics do not adequately capture the harsh reality facing high school dropouts and the communities that support them. When students drop out, they face a lifetime of limited opportunities. For example, research shows that dropouts are more likely to end up living in poverty, suffer poor health, be dependent upon social services, or enter the criminal justice system (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). Dropping out has the potential to destabilize the lives of young people. It is estimated that high school dropouts will cost taxpayers more than $292,000 in lost tax revenues and incarceration costs (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009).

Across all racial and ethnic groups, young males are graduating at lower rates than their female peers: 68% compared to 75%, respectively (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). In their review of the literature on barriers to success for young men of color, Lee and Ransom (2011) assert that both African American and Hispanic students overwhelmingly view academic achievement as not masculine. Their analysis also shows that young men of color attribute their difficulty in school to factors such as poverty, lack of support from family and community, and lack of access to resources and educational necessities, including teacher expectations, counseling engagement, and adequate preparation and support (Lee & Ransom, 2011). Lys (2009) suggests that young men are especially vulnerable to negative influences and behaviors as they transition from middle to high school and from adolescence to manhood.

While young men are faced with numerous risk factors, schools and communities can provide youth with developmental support to promote personal and school achievement. Research shows that a myriad of developmental influences can contribute to school success, including family support, positive peer influence, participation in after-school programs, relationships with caring adults, service-learning, school engagement, and social competencies (Bagwell, Schmidt, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 2001; Billig, 2004; Fletcher, Newsome, Nickerson, & Bazley, 2001; Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002; Heinze, Jozefowicz, & Toro, 2010; Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003; Malecki & Elliot, 2002; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2004; Shiner, 2000). Greenberg et al. (2003) asserted that the most effective prevention programs for youth are those that promote the developmental assets of students and improve the school–community environment. The Search Institute created the developmental assets framework based on more than 20 years of research on positive youth development (Mannes, Roehlkepartain, & Benson, 2005). Developmental assets are defined as building blocks of healthy youth development (Search Institute, 2007). Studies have shown that youth who have more developmental assets are less likely to engage in risky behaviors and more likely to engage in positive social behaviors (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Bleth, 2000; Taylor et al., 2003). Thus youth development programs should strive to increase developmental assets, which can contribute to personal and school success for youth.

Developmental Assets and Dropout Prevention
XY-Zone Program

The XY-Zone program was developed to promote male involvement in dropout prevention efforts in Austin, TX. Originally known as the East Austin Male Involvement Project, the program officially began in 1999 with Communities In Schools (CIS), a dropout prevention program, acting as the primary service provider (Aguiniga, Streeter, & Horowitz, 2007). XY-Zone is an extracurricular youth development program comprised of *males* in grades 9–12 who are at risk of dropping out of school. The mission of the XY-Zone is to support and guide adolescent males as they transition into manhood, helping them to succeed in school and prepare for life by fostering positive relationships and personal responsibility. XY-Zone program goals include the following: (a) students will stay in school and improve grades, attendance, or behaviors; (b) students will be empowered to focus on their futures, prepare for higher education and/or long-term employment, and break the cycle of poverty; (c) students will become leaders, advocating for nonviolence, respect towards women, and peaceful communities; and (d) students will transform their lives by instilling the five "pillars," also known as the 5 Rs: Respect, Responsibility, Relationships, Role Modeling, and Reaching Out. Program services for XY-Zone include weekly or biweekly groups, field trips, a service-learning project, a campus-based engagement project, and a male youth camp.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to enhance the evidence base for dropout prevention by providing mixed methods results of the impact of the XY-Zone program on at-risk male youth. This investigation explored the influence of the XY-Zone program on developmental assets and academic markers of males in grades 9–12 who were identified as youth at risk of dropping out of school. Developmental assets were chosen as a dependent variable since the focus of the XY-Zone program was to increase leadership skills, character development, and connections to external resources, all of which can be measured by the Developmental Assets Profile (DAP; Search Institute, 2014). The research questions for this study were:

1. Does the XY-Zone program increase DAP total scores for participants?
2. Does the XY-Zone program increase the eight developmental assets of participants?
3. Does the XY-Zone program increase the five asset contexts of participants?
4. Does the XY-Zone program help participants improve in academics, behavior, and attendance?
5. What are the subjective experiences of participants in the XY-Zone program?

This study can contribute to dropout prevention research by presenting quantitative data on how the XY-Zone program influences DAP total scores, asset categories, asset contexts, and academic markers. Results from the qualitative analysis include youth voices of their subjective experiences in the XY-Zone program.

Method
Participants

Participants for this study were males in grades 9–12 who were enrolled in the XY-Zone program through a local CIS affiliate program in the southwestern United States. The participants attended one of the 15 high schools in the area served by CIS. All students who enrolled in the XY-Zone program were referred by a teacher, parent, or self-referral for challenges in academics, behavior, and/or attendance, and met one or more of the risk factors defined by Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2010). XY-Zone Coordinators, who were CIS site coordinators who facilitated the XY-Zone program, specifically targeted students with little social or academic support whose potential for thriving in school was limited by a lack of basic needs, peer pressure, gang involvement, substance abuse, or family disruption/dysfunction. Students were required to obtain consent from a parent or guardian prior to enrollment.

Twenty boys from each of 15 high schools were targeted for the XY-Zone program. A total of 290 participants were enrolled in XY-Zone in Fall 2015 and completed the pretest and 310 participants were enrolled in Spring 2016 and completed the posttest. Some participants who completed the pretest did not complete the posttest due to moving away from the school, attendance on the day of the posttest, or not taking the time to complete the posttest due to other school commitments (e.g., class, school activities). Some students who completed the posttest did not complete the pretest for the same reasons listed above or because they enrolled later in the school year. Thus the total number of participants who completed both the pretest and posttest was 248. All 310 students who were enrolled in XY-Zone in Spring 2016 completed the qualitative survey. Table 1 presents the student demographics.

Measures

CIS database. Demographic information was collected through a case management database program used by the local CIS affiliate program. The CIS database program collects student and family demographics, referral information, individual goals for students, services provided, and progress toward each goal.

Developmental Assets Profile. The Developmental Assets Profile (Search Institute, 2014) was used as the pretest and posttest measure. The DAP is a 58-item measure that assesses young people's strengths and supports through both internal and external assets. Some examples of statements from the survey include: "I enjoy learning;" "I am developing a sense of purpose in my life;" and "I have friends who set good examples for me." Participants who complete the DAP are asked to rate each item with one of four options: rarely (0), sometimes (1), often (2), or almost always (3). The DAP produces three different types of scores: total score, asset category scores, and asset context scores. The total asset score is the sum of scores from the internal and external asset

Table 1

Student Demographics

Variable	Frequency	%
Age		
14	15	6.0
15	48	19.4
16	67	27.0
17	72	29.0
18	39	15.7
19	5	2.0
Not reported	2	0.8
Ethnicity		
African American	2	0.8
American Indian	1	0.4
Asian	33	13.3
Caucasian	10	4.0
Hispanic	177	71.4
Other	25	10.1
Grade		
9th	47	19.0
10th	52	21.0
11th	93	37.5
12th	53	21.4
Not reported	3	1.2

scales and has a range of 0 to 60. The interpretive ranges for total asset scores are as follows: *Low*, 0 to 29; *Fair*, 30 to 40; *Good*, 41 to 50; and *Excellent*, 51 to 60.

The eight asset categories are comprised of four external asset categories, which describe assets that are influenced by other people or systems in the child's life, such as caregivers, the school, and community; and four internal assets categories, which describe the strengths that the child has within him/herself. The eight asset categories are described below (Search Institute, 2014):

External Assets
1. Support—Measures whether children believe they have caring adults in their lives, such as parents, neighbors, or teachers.
2. Empowerment—Measures how safe children feel at school and home and their perception of feeling valued and appreciated by others.
3. Boundaries and Expectations—Measures how children feel about abiding by boundaries and expectations that are set at home, school, and community.
4. Constructive Use of Time—Measures whether children are involved in extracurricular activities.

Internal Assets
5. Commitment to Learning—Measures whether children care about school, completing homework, and learning new things.
6. Positive Values—Measures whether children value taking responsibility for their actions, being honest, helping others, and having respect for others and their community.
7. Social Competencies—Measures whether children are willing to express feelings, establish relationships with others, and find positive ways to deal with hardships.
8. Positive Identity—Measures children's self-worth.

The asset category scores range from 0 to 30.

The asset context scores provide an alternate way of interpreting the DAP according to five context areas: Personal, Social, Family, School, and Community. The Personal context scale is comprised of assets related to individual characteristics. The Social context scale represents assets related to relationships with others, such as peers and adults. The Family context scale is comprised of assets related to home and family. The School context scale reflects assets about the participant's attitude toward school, relationships with teachers, and the school environment. The Community context scale includes assets related to empowerment, positive use of time in the community, and community support. The asset context scores range from 0 to 30.

The Search Institute (2005) provided interpretive ranges for asset category and context scores. These interpretive ranges include: *Low*, 0 to 14, depleted level of assets; *Fair*, 15 to 20, borderline assets; *Good*, 21 to 25, moderate assets; and *Excellent*, 26 to 30, abundant assets. In the original DAP field test, internal consistencies were relatively high, averaging .81 for the eight asset categories, .95 for internal assets, .93 for external assets, and .97 for total assets. Test-retest reliability was moderate, averaging $r = .79$ for the eight asset categories, $r = .86$ for internal assets, $r = .84$ for external assets, and $r = .87$ for total assets.

XY-Zone qualitative survey. In order to answer research Question 5, a researcher-developed qualitative survey was used at the conclusion of the XY-Zone program to explore the participants' experiences in the XY-Zone program. The qualitative survey included:

1. Describe the XY-Zone program.
2. What did you like about the XY-Zone program?
3. What did you not like about the XY-Zone program?

4. What did you learn about yourself by being a part of the XY-Zone program?
5. What did you learn about your peers by being a part of the XY-Zone program?
6. What are your strengths?
7. Who provides you with support?
8. Do you think CIS should continue to provide XY-Zone services? If so, why?
9. What is something you think CIS should change about the XY-Zone program?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience in the XY-Zone program?

The purpose of the qualitative survey was to provide researchers with a richer description of the subjective experiences of XY-Zone participants that may not be captured on the DAP.

Procedures and Analyses

The study protocol and consent forms were approved by a university Institutional Review Board in early Fall 2015. XY-Zone Coordinators reviewed a consent/assent form, written in both English and Spanish, with each student referred to the XY-Zone program. Participants and their parents or guardians signed the consent/assent form prior to participation in the program or the study. Participants completed the DAP pretest measure in Fall 2015 at the beginning of XY-Zone services and then completed the DAP posttest measure, as well as the qualitative survey, at the conclusion of the XY-Zone program in Spring 2016. The participants completed the DAP measure on a computer in the CIS office, the school computer lab, or a quiet room in the school. The students took between 10–30 min to complete the DAP and the qualitative survey.

After the DAP pretest and posttest surveys were completed online by students at all 15 schools, the Search Institute scored the measures. The Search Institute provided a spreadsheet to the researcher, which included student ID, sex, age, grade, ethnicity, test date, and scores for each asset category, each asset context, and total asset score. CIS provided the researcher with a spreadsheet, which included student ID, improvement in academics, behavior, and attendance. The spreadsheets were uploaded to IBM SPSS Statistics for Macintosh, Version 22, for data analysis. For research Question 1, the researcher conducted a paired samples *t*-test to determine mean differences in DAP total scores. The researcher also ran a correlation analysis to determine the strength of the relationships between pretest and posttest scores. In order to evaluate research Questions 2 and 3, the researcher ran a paired samples *t*-test for each asset category and asset context. The researcher used the Bonferroni correction to reduce the probability of a Type I error in conducting multiple paired *t*-tests.

For research Question 4, the researcher conducted a frequencies analysis to evaluate improvement in academics, behavior, and attendance. This analysis was based on a subsample of 273 XY-Zone students for which CIS had available school-related data. Improvement in each of the three areas, academics, behavior, and attendance, was evaluated only for students who were assessed for that need. A student may have been referred for only one area, two areas, or all three areas. Academic referral reasons include students failing or being at risk of failing a class and/or classes and students failing a section of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam; behavior referral reasons include struggles with self-esteem, social skills, behavior referrals at school, maladaptive behavior at home, or behavior related to mental health, such as depression or anxiety; and attendance referral reasons include a number of tardies or absences in the first 60 days of school or in the previous school year. It is important to note that progress in one of these areas signifies that a student has improved such that grades have increased to passing, behavior referrals have decreased and adaptive behavior has increased based on classroom teacher reports, and tardies and absences have decreased.

Survey Monkey was used to collect data for the qualitative analysis. After all participants completed the qualitative survey, the researcher downloaded the data from Survey Monkey. The data were then uploaded to NVivo (QSR International, 2014), a qualitative data analysis program. A descriptive phenomenological method was used for qualitative data analysis. Giorgi's (2012) phenomenological method includes the following steps:

1. Read all the data to get a sense of the whole.
2. Reread the data and identify meaning units (i.e., coding data).
3. Transform the data into expressions that are relevant to the psychological import of the subjects (i.e., the development of subthemes).
4. Review expressions and begin to develop the essential structure of the experience (i.e., the clarification of subthemes).
5. Use the essential structure to clarify and interpret the raw data of the research (i.e., the development of overall themes).

The researcher followed this five-step process for each question. For Step 2, the researcher identified frequently used key words or phrases using the NVivo software. For Step 3, these words and phrases were reviewed and coded according to themes. Responses for each question were coded, even if they did not contain frequently used words or phrases. Some responses were coded with more than one theme. As an example for Question 7, "Who provides you with support?", the response "My family and my XY-Zone brothers provide me with support" would be coded as "family" and "XY-Zone peers." For Step 4 of the Giorgi method, the researcher used a standard of 10% of all 310 responses (i.e., 31 responses) to establish a subtheme for each question, meaning that themes with fewer responses did not comprise a theme. Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, and Snelgrove (2016) assert "the more the same code occurs in a text, the more likely it can be considered to be a theme, but the constitution of a theme through the frequency of repetitions has to be decided by researchers' judgment" p. 105). The 10% standard was used because the researcher

believed that a cluster of 31 or more responses about a similar code or unit constituted a meaningful expression of youth experience in the XY-Zone program. Subthemes were constructed and identified for each question. For Step 5, subthemes were grouped into overall themes for all 10 questions. The coded data, subthemes, and overall themes were reviewed by two trained investigators, who provided suggestions for coding changes of certain responses. The reviewers had recommendations for coding for eight individual responses, but did not recommend any changes to subthemes or overall themes.

Results

In order to evaluate research Question 1, the researcher conducted a paired samples *t*-test to compare differences in DAP total scores in pretest to posttest conditions. There was a significant difference in total scores for pretest (*M* = 40.56, *SD* = 9.96) and posttest (*M* = 42.31, *SD* = 11.04) conditions; *t* (247) = -3.25, *p* = .001. The pretest and posttest scores were strongly and positively correlated (*r* = .68, *p* < .001). These results indicate that the XY-Zone program had a significant and positive influence on total DAP scores for participants.

In order to evaluate research Question 2, the evaluator ran a series of paired samples *t*-tests to explore differences in paired samples means for each asset category. To reduce the probability of a Type I error, the analyses were conducted using a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of .006 (.05/8). Table 2 presents the results.

Results revealed that there was a significant positive difference between pretest and posttest mean scores in two of the eight categories: Constructive Use of Time and Positive Values. Findings also indicated that five asset categories, Support, Empowerment, Boundaries, Positive Values, and Social Competencies, changed from the *Fair* interpretive range (15 to 20; borderline assets) to the *Good* interpretive range (21 to 25; moderate assets).

Another series of paired samples *t*-tests were run on the same sample to explore research Question 3, the influence of the XY-Zone program on the five asset contexts. To reduce the probability of a Type I error, the analyses were conducted using a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of .01 (.05/5). Table 3 presents the results of this analysis.

Results revealed there was a significant positive difference in pretest and posttest scores in two of the five asset contexts: Personal and Community. Findings also indicated that two asset contexts, Personal and Social, changed from the *Fair* interpretive range (15 to 20; borderline assets) to the *Good* interpretive range (21 to 25; moderate assets).

A frequency analysis was run to investigate research Question 4, improvement in academics, behavior, and attendance for XY-Zone participants. Table 4 presents the results of this analysis.

A descriptive phenomenological analysis was run to investigate research Question 5, the subjective experiences of 310 XY-Zone participants. Subthemes for each survey question are presented in Table 5.

Discussion
Quantitative Discussion

The quantitative analysis demonstrated positive outcomes of the XY-Zone program. The finding for research Question 1 indicated that there was a significant and positive difference in DAP total scores for pretest and posttest conditions with a strong linear correlation. This result indicates that the XY-Zone program had a significant influence on overall developmental asset scores for XY-Zone males. This global effect was then explored in terms of asset categories and asset contexts.

Research Question 2 results revealed that participants scored significantly higher on the DAP in two of the eight asset categories after participation in the XY-Zone program. These asset categories are Constructive Use of Time and Positive Values. The other six asset categories showed an increase in means but did not produce a statistically significant increase. This may indicate that the XY-Zone promoted improvement in these asset categories, but did not have a statistically significant influence on the categories. The results for significant asset categories were explored with a discussion of how the XY-Zone program components (i.e., groups, activities, and field trips) and the pillars of the program, the "5 Rs" (i.e., Respect, Responsibility, Relationships, Role Modeling, and Reaching Out) may have influenced participant scores.

The Constructive Use of Time category measures whether children are involved in extracurricular activities. This asset category had the highest difference mean of 1.69. The XY-Zone program is an extracurricular activity because it is a program offered to students outside of classes. The XY-Zone program is comprised of groups, field trips, a boys' camp, and a service-learning project. Youth most likely scored significantly higher in this asset category due to their involvement in a variety of XY-Zone program activities. It is possible that some XY-Zone students were involved in other extracurricular activities, but generally students who were targeted for this program would not have been as likely to participate in other extracurricular activities due to the program referral reasons (i.e., academics, behavior, and attendance). The Positive Values category measures whether children value taking responsibility for their actions, helping others, and having respect for others. This category revealed a significant difference in pretest and posttest means, with a mean difference score of 1.27. The XY-Zone program promotes the elements of this asset category through three pillars of the 5 Rs: Respect, Responsibility, and Reaching Out. Demonstrating respect, responsibility, and helping others also emerged as overall themes in the qualitative analysis. The data indicate that the XY-Zone program made a significant impact on scores in this asset category.

Results for research Question 3 revealed there was a significant positive difference in mean scores in two of the five asset contexts: Personal and Community. As asset category results confirm, students scored higher in asset categories related to the Personal context (e.g., Positive Values) and Community context (e.g., Constructive Use

Table 2

Differences in Paired Samples Means for Asset Categories

Asset Categories	Pretest M	Posttest M	M Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Support	20.50	21.53	.65	1.97	247	.051
Empowerment	20.94	21.30	.37	1.13	247	.261
Boundaries	20.46	21.04	.58	1.71	247	.088
Constructive Use of Time	17.33	19.03	1.69	4.16	247	.000*
Commitment to Learning	19.45	20.37	.92	2.65	247	.008
Positive Values	20.82	22.09	1.27	4.00	247	.000*
Social Competencies	20.47	21.35	.88	2.71	247	.007
Positive Identity	21.28	21.98	.70	2.00	247	.047

*Indicates significance at .006.

Table 3

Differences in Paired Samples Means for Asset Contexts

Asset Contexts	Pretest M	Posttest M	M Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Personal	20.65	21.72	1.07	3.71	247	.000*
Social	20.75	21.50	.75	2.42	247	.016
Family	21.90	22.36	.47	1.45	247	.149
School	19.91	20.60	.69	2.13	247	.034
Community	18.48	19.74	1.25	3.78	247	.000*

*Indicates significance at .01.

Table 4

Improvement in Academics, Behavior, and Attendance

School-Related Variables	n	% Improvement	% No Improvement
Academics	213	84.0	16.0
Behavior	180	97.2	2.8
Attendance	77	88.3	11.7

Table 5

Qualitative Subthemes

Question and Subthemes	# Responses	% Responses	Student Quotes
Q1. Describe XY-Zone			"The XY-Zone program is where it helps students that are struggling in anything and also helps build character for them to carry out into society. It creates a feeling of brotherhood throughout all the activities that we do and helps us feel at home. When we need help we know that there is the program that can help us with it."
Helps students	100	32.3	
Fun	76	24.5	
Relationships, brotherhood	52	16.8	
Learn new things	47	15.2	
Q2. Like about XY-Zone			"They helped me achieve my goals this year and helped me with school work when I needed it. Keeps me busy and helps me a lot to stay out trouble."
Field trips	123	39.7	
Relationships, friendships	93	30.0	
Helping students and others	73	23.5	
Groups, activities	70	22.6	
Talk and interact with others	36	11.6	
Q3. Not like about XY-Zone			"There is honestly nothing about the one XY-Zone that I dislike. The experience for me is one I will never forget and would also love to continue to be a part of."
Nothing	184	59.4	
Miscellaneous feedback: more field trips and groups, more snacks, peers acting disrespectful	65	21.0	
Q4. Learn about self			"I learned that it's okay to open up to people because they are going to have my back and give me advice any time I need it. And also just to always remember where I came from and always give back or help the next one in line."
Self-esteem, capable	100	32.3	
How to work with others	49	15.8	
Leadership	43	13.9	
Making friends, social skills	39	12.6	
Q5. Learn about peers			"I've learned that there is a leader in every one of my peers. It just takes them coming out of their comfort zone for it to show."
Provide each other with support	66	21.3	
Positive attributes	64	20.6	
Similarities	53	17.1	
Differences	39	12.6	

Table 5 (Continued)

Question and Subthemes	# Responses	% Responses	Student Quotes
Q6. Strengths			"I believe that my strengths are that I am a leader, in some ways, that I'm a loving person and a caring one as well. Also that I'm a brother type person, if you need me I will be there and if you are hurt or need a friend to talk to, that I will be there through it all."
Academics—classes, grades	64	20.6	
Communication skills	60	19.4	
Leadership skills	40	12.9	
Helping others	38	12.3	
Sports	34	11.0	
Q7. Who provides support			"The staff from Community In Schools has offered the support I've been long waiting for. It's a place I can call home, and feel comfortable."
Family—parents, siblings, other family	203	65.5	
Friends, peers, XY-Zone brothers	101	32.6	
XY-Zone coordinators	93	30.0	
Teachers/XY-Zone teachers	47	15.2	
Q8. Should XY-Zone continue			"I know for a fact that Communities In School should continue to give to XY-Zone because I have seen bad kids that had a bad reputation go in to XY-Zone, and it turns their life around. I have experienced this program so much that I can say that XY-Zone is a program that will help all those who are willing to be a part of something great."
Yes	298	96.1	
Q9. What should change			"Meeting more often and having more fun field trips because as boys who often might not have a good home life we need something positive and fun to remember."
Nothing	168	54.2	
More groups and activities	31	10.0	
Q10. Anything else to add			"I can say that it is unforgettable, and that I hope it will never stop because it is one of the programs that are keeping students from quitting high school. This program was really fun for me because we had done activities that helped in school, and I can relate to my own life. Also, I had enjoyed camp for all four years, and that is one of the reasons why I enjoy XY-Zone because everyone from all 15 schools come to one place, and have a great time."
XY-Zone was a positive experience	64	20.6	
How program has helped	38	12.3	

of Time, Positive Values). Many qualitative subthemes, presented in Table 5, also relate to Personal and Community asset contexts, such as subthemes about positive personal qualities, leadership, and helping others. The Family asset context showed the lowest change in means: .47 (p = .147). Qualitative results shed light on this finding. In response to qualitative survey Question 7 (i.e., "Who provides support?"), students reported that they were supported by family in 203 responses, which makes up 65% of the responses. This indicates that students felt sufficient support from their family members, and thus the scores did not increase significantly in this context.

The positive findings for the total scores, asset categories, and asset contexts are consistent with studies that have found that youth who participate in extracurricular activities experience more positive outcomes (Denault & Poulin, 2009; Rose-Krasnor, Busseri, Willoughby, & Chalmers, 2006). Forneris, Camiré, and Williamson (2015) emphasize that involvement in extracurricular activities can provide youth with "greater exposure to challenging activities, more opportunities to learn life skills, and enhance their social capital because these activities facilitate the development of relationships with peers and supportive adults" (p. 6). These findings were also consistent with Norton and Watt's (2014) findings, in which youth facing multiple risk factors reported significantly higher developmental assets after participation in a wilderness-based youth development program. The commonalities in these programs and the XY-Zone program include the emphasis on positive youth development, extracurricular involvement, and relationship-building with peers and caring adults.

According to Neild, Balfanz, and Herzog (2007), the strongest student indicators of dropping out of school are attendance, behavior, and course failure, or the ABCs. Results for research Question 4 demonstrate improvement in all three of these academic markers. Findings revealed improvement in grades or standardized academic achievement tests, meaning that students passed classes and achievement tests they had previously failed and had higher grades, as a result of participation in the program. This fits with qualitative subthemes listed in Table 5 related to having a strength in academics, enjoying the process of learning new things, and having support and academic check-ins from XY-Zone Coordinators. This finding is similar to research by Scales, Benson, Roehlkepartain, Sesma, and Dulmen (2006), who found that increases in developmental assets were associated with increases in GPA.

Results also indicated a high percentage of improvement in behavior, meaning that the number of behavior referrals decreased and adaptive classroom behavior reported by teachers increased. This finding may be explained by the significant increase in the Constructive Use of Time and the Positive Values asset categories, which allowed students to be involved in an extracurricular program, develop relationships with peers, and build social skills with peers and adults. Findings also indicated improvement in attendance, meaning that tardies and absences decreased. Student engagement in the program and feeling more connected to peers, XY-Zone Coordinators, and the school may have influenced this outcome. Overall the outcomes for XY-Zone students in the areas of academics, behavior, and attendance show positive improvement in these school-related variables.

Qualitative Discussion

The findings from research Question 5, the qualitative analysis, revealed overall positive responses about the XY-Zone program. Based on the subthemes presented in Table 5, the researcher identified four overall themes from qualitative responses. These overall themes were comprised of subthemes that accounted for 10% of all responses. The four themes include the value of the XY-Zone program, social competencies, support from caring adults, and positive values. The value of the XY-Zone program theme, which accounted for 25% of all student responses on the qualitative questionnaire, was comprised of responses about how the program helped students, the affirmation to continue the XY-Zone program, and students not wanting to change anything about the program. The second theme, social competencies, made up of 22% of student responses, included responses about creating friendships, "brotherhood," getting support from peers, noticing strengths in peers, and communicating with peers. Since building relationships was one of the goals of the XY-Zone program, this theme supports that program goal. The third theme, support from caring adults, was represented by 15% of student responses. The support theme encompassed responses about support students received from caring adults, such as family members, teachers, and XY-Zone Coordinators. Finally, the fourth overall theme, positive values, was comprised of responses about leadership, respect, responsibility, and helping others, and was represented by 10% of student responses. This theme is related to the Positive Values asset category, which was a significant asset category in the quantitative analysis.

While qualitative responses were primarily positive, qualitative survey Question 3 (i.e., "Not like about the XY-Zone") produced some constructive feedback from students. Students reported that they would have liked to participate in more field trips and groups and to have had more snacks. Students also noted that they did not appreciate certain students in the program acting "immature" or "disrespectful" at times in the program. These issues point to some limitations in community-based youth leadership programs, such as funding for field trips and snacks and the potential negative academic consequences of taking students out of class for more groups and field trips. The issue of peers acting disrespectful at times can be a typical issue for adolescents who are still developing social skills. This feedback from XY-Zone participants provides the local CIS affiliate, and other community-based youth development programs, with more insight into what youth like and do not like about the XY-Zone program.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the investigation of mainly positive markers using the DAP, the limited sample, and the time frame. The DAP was chosen to measure the influence of the XY-Zone program on developmental asset scores. It is possible that other measures, such as the Beck Youth Inventories, Second Edition (BYI-2; Beck, Beck, Jolly, & Steer, 2005), which measures emotional and social impairment, would explore the influence of the XY-Zone program on mental health measures. Using the BYI-2 as an additional measure might give a more comprehensive assessment of the influence of the XY-Zone program on at-risk youth. Future research could also use multivariate analyses to explore asset categories and asset contexts with covariates, such as dropout risk level, attendance, behavior referrals, grades, grade level, and number of years in the XY-Zone program. Additional analyses could provide new insights into what variables are the strongest predictors of total asset scores.

The sample for this study was limited to youth in schools served by the local CIS affiliate in the southwestern United States. Evaluating the XY-Zone program in agencies that implement the program with fidelity across the United States could provide more generalizable results. Finally, the time frame for this study was during the fall and spring of one academic school year. Collecting results over a longer period of time, such as over two or more years, could demonstrate the potential long-term impact of the XY-Zone program.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of the XY-Zone program on the developmental assets and academic markers of at-risk male youth. The quantitative findings indicate that the XY-Zone program increases DAP total scores, certain asset categories and contexts, and academic variables. Qualitative results revealed subthemes and overall themes related to the value of the XY-Zone program: social competencies, support from caring adults, and positive values. Future research using additional measures, multivariate analyses, a sample from a larger demographic area, and a longer time frame could provide additional information regarding the influence of the XY-Zone program on at-risk youth. The results of this study offer promising evidence of how the XY-Zone program can contribute to building developmental assets and promoting academic achievement in male youth. The XY-Zone program thus merits consideration as a youth development program that agencies can use to positively affect youth assets and achievement.

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