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## **CITIZEN SCHOOLS: EVIDENCE FROM TWO STUDENT COHORTS ON THE USE OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES TO PROMOTE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

### **Phase II Report of the Citizen Schools Evaluation**

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## Executive Summary

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Citizen Schools believes that by engaging students and their families in learning and by increasing their knowledge and investment in planning for the future, students will successfully complete high school, attend college, and participate in and contribute to the civic and economic life of their communities. Working toward this goal since 1995, Citizen Schools has delivered after-school and summer services intended to provide participants with skills and leadership abilities as well as access to opportunities and supportive community members. Its central strategy for achieving this ambitious goal is to provide participants with authentic, hands-on learning experiences, supportive relationships with adults, and positive youth development opportunities. The program consists of three to four afternoons per week of hands-on apprenticeships, explorations, homework help, and team-building activities. Apprenticeships are led by volunteers from the community, called “Citizen Teachers,” and by Citizen Schools teaching associates, who are primarily recent college graduates. The Citizen Schools program is based in public schools and includes regular communication with school-day teachers and with parents. In fall 2002, Citizen Schools launched a national expansion, with the addition of four new campuses in San Jose, CA, Houston, TX, and Worcester and Framingham, MA.

Over the course of the 2001-02 school year, Citizen Schools served approximately 900 students in grades three through eight at 12 Boston campuses, with fluctuations in enrollment throughout the year. In the 2002-03 school year, the unduplicated count of students served at the 12 Boston campuses grew to approximately 1000 students. In 2001-02, Citizen Schools launched its 8th Grade Academy program, which is designed to provide an enriched after-school program for eighth-graders who had begun participating in the program in a prior year. In addition to offering the Citizen Schools activities and services similar to those at other campuses, 8th Grade Academy is intended to help participants apply to and succeed in a competitive high school and to introduce them to the college application process. 8th Grade Academy includes experiential learning activities intended to build academic and life skills and to give participants access to coaches, technology, internships, and other educational programs that can help participants succeed in high school. 8th Grade Academy is offered to students citywide and draws students from multiple schools, especially from those in which Citizen Schools has a core school-year program serving sixth- and seventh-graders.

To assess the implementation and effectiveness of its services, Citizen Schools is sponsoring a comprehensive evaluation that, over five years, focuses on the program experiences and the psychosocial well-being and development of three cohorts of participants. The evaluation also analyzes the demographic and education-related characteristics of these participants and assesses participants’ school engagement and achievement using a quasi-experimental design that relies on a matched-comparison

group of similar Boston Public Schools (BPS) students not enrolled in Citizen Schools. Information on the comparison group is limited to their school-related performance and does not include information on their after-school experiences; however, since Boston is a relatively resource-rich city with a large number of after-school programs, it is possible that comparison group students participate in after-school activities other than Citizen Schools.

The Phase I evaluation report highlighted the progress and experiences of Cohort I students during their first year of participation (i.e., the 2001-02 school year). This report describes the characteristics and experiences of Cohorts I and II during the 2002-03 school year, which marks the beginning of Phase II of the evaluation, and it presents findings on how participants fare in comparison to matched nonparticipants with respect to two short-term outcomes—entrance into a college-preparatory high school and successful, on-schedule advancement to the tenth grade—and a set of outcome indicators, which include measures of school engagement, academic achievement, and psychosocial skills and well-being. In addition, this report presents a longitudinal analysis of Cohort I participants, who may have completed up to two full years of participation in Citizen Schools by the end of the 2002-03 school year.

### **What Were the Characteristics of Student Participants?**

Overall, and not unlike last year, participants as a group displayed many characteristics associated with educational risk and were more likely to be poor and more likely to be students of color than were BPS students overall. Participants were predominantly students of color (95 percent), and most qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (90 percent), indicating that their family income was near or below the federal poverty level. Among BPS students overall, 86 percent were students of color and 72 percent qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. As in Year 1, about one-quarter of Citizen Schools participants (23 percent) were enrolled in a special education program, a slightly higher percentage than was true among BPS students overall (19 percent). Participants were also generally from households in which parents worked (79 percent) and the highest level of education completed by parents was less than a college degree (68 percent). In addition, with low levels of academic achievement prior to enrolling in Citizen Schools, Cohort II evaluation students exhibited baseline characteristics similar to those of the Cohort I evaluation group. A significant number of Cohort II sixth-grade participants scored in the bottom two (of four) performance levels on their fourth-grade MCAS English Language Arts and Mathematics tests (87 percent and 95 percent, respectively). Cohort II 8th Grade Academy participants had fourth-grade MCAS scores (98 percent and 86 percent in ELA and math, respectively) that were similar to but slightly lower than the overall BPS student population (92 percent and 85 percent).

## **What Were the Participation Patterns and Program Experiences of Student Participants?**

Daily attendance, program exposure, and program retention were high in the Citizen Schools program in 2002-03, and this was especially true among 8th Grade Academy participants. The median number of days attended among 8th Grade Academy participants was 79, compared to a median number of 62 days for participants overall, out of 81 days that program services were offered on average. The level of exposure to Citizen Schools was high for students overall, with 67 percent of students participating in their campus program for at least 60 percent of the days it was offered. Program attendance was higher among students who participated in Citizen Schools in both the fall and spring semesters, with 83 percent of those students attending the program at least 60 percent of days the program was offered. 8th Grade Academy participants experienced the highest levels of program exposure, with 85 percent of them participating for at least 60 percent of the days 8th Grade Academy was offered. Full-year retention among 8th Grade Academy students was 91 percent; retention rates among sixth- and seventh-grade participants were 61 and 57 percent, respectively. Citizen Schools follows a semester model and provides the full complement of Citizen Schools activities to all participants, including those students who may have participated in the fall but not in the spring semester. Even though Citizen Schools' theory of change implies a preference for student participation in the program for the full academic year, many participants attend only for one semester. Possible explanations include family mobility, competing after-school activities offered by schools or youth or children centers, and family needs for older children to care for younger siblings after school.

Students who participated in the Citizen Schools program in the 2002-03 school year had access to staff who enjoyed their work with Citizen Schools, had a great deal of experience working with Citizens Schools and with youth between the ages of 9 and 14, and kept parents informed of their children's progress, according to staff and parent surveys. These findings paint a picture of an after-school environment in which students were likely to benefit from time to develop relationships with staff who enjoyed teaching and interacting with them and who encouraged parents to continue to provide support for the healthy development of these students in their homes. Student survey responses suggest that students were very satisfied with Citizen Schools and they felt a strong connection to the program. In addition, students generally felt positive about their relationships with Citizen Schools staff and the other student participants. Comparisons to last year's scale scores revealed consistency in programming and in student satisfaction from one year to the next.

## **How Did Students Fare on Measures of Psychosocial Skills and Well-Being?**

In general, Citizen Schools participants' scores on measures of psychosocial skills and well-being remained fairly stable from baseline to spring 2003 for both cohorts, with students continuing to feel very

positive about their futures and fairly positive about their self-efficacy, their ability to control their own futures, and their competencies related to social interactions. In addition, students reported that they continued to use positive strategies for dealing with interpersonal problems on a fairly regular basis and that they continued to engage in fairly frequent communication with parents and other adults. The biggest increase in scores from baseline to follow-up for both cohorts was in the area of self-confidence in oral presentation. Although this increase was only significant statistically for Cohort I students, these patterns suggest that, with continued participation in Citizen Schools, students can expect to see increases in their confidence level in this important skill area.

### **Did Students Improve on Educational Outcomes and Indicators?**

Early evidence suggests that Citizen Schools has had a positive impact on the short-term outcomes that it seeks for its participants, and in so doing, has moved a group of low-income, educationally at-risk participants toward a trajectory of successful high school completion and advancement on to college. Analyses indicate that 8th Grade Academy graduates from both Cohorts I and II selected better high schools than had they not participated in Citizen Schools (70 percent for Cohort I participants versus 12 percent for their matched comparisons and 70 percent for Cohort II students versus 46 percent for their matched comparisons). For both cohorts, differences were statistically significant. The evaluation also found that the percentage of Cohort I eighth-graders who were promoted to the tenth grade on schedule was 87 percent among 8th Grade Academy participants and 74 percent among matched nonparticipants. The difference between the two groups was statistically significant. Similar statistically significant differences in on-time promotion to tenth grade were observed between participants with high levels of program exposure and their matched nonparticipants (90 percent versus 73 percent, respectively).

In addition, participants' performance on the evaluation indicators suggests that students are on track to achieving the short-term outcomes that Citizen Schools desires for them. In Year 1, sixth-grade program participants overall performed better than their matched nonparticipants on three of six indicators (attendance, suspension rates, and grade promotion). The evaluation did not find evidence that Citizen Schools had a positive effect for participants on the remaining three indicators (MCAS math test, mathematics course grade, and English course grade). In two of these three areas (mathematics course grade and English course grade), the measured difference between the Citizen Schools participants and their matched nonparticipants was in the desired direction, although it was not statistically significant.

The results among sixth-grade participants with high levels of program exposure (i.e., participants who attended 80 percent or more of the days offered at their program) were even more positive, with this group outperforming their matched nonparticipants on five of six indicators (attendance, suspension rates,

mathematics course grade, English course grade, and promotion). The evaluation did not find evidence of positive benefits for these participants on the sixth indicator (MCAS math test).

Among eighth-grade participants in Citizen Schools’ 8th Grade Academy program the results were more mixed. Eighth-grade participants overall performed better than their matched nonparticipants on one of six indicators (attendance). On five indicators (suspension rates, MCAS Math, mathematics course grade, English course grade, and grade promotion), however, the evaluation did not find evidence of participants outperforming their matched nonparticipants. Citizen Schools notes that 8th Grade Academy is a citywide program and is not located in a particular school, and therefore, unlike the typical Citizen Schools program, does not coordinate academic support activities with a host school and does not put as high a priority on homework help.

The performance changes on the short-term indicators described here are summarized below:

**Performance on Short-Term Indicators by Citizen Schools Participants  
in Their First Year of Participation, Compared with Matched Nonparticipants**

	Cohort I		Cohort II		Overall	
	Sixth-grade	Eighth-grade	Sixth-grade	Eighth-grade	Sixth-grade	Eighth-grade
<b>Indicators</b>						
Attendance	● ▲		● ▲	● ▲	● ▲	● ▲
Suspension	● ▲		▲		● ▲	
MCAS Math						
MCAS ELA*	● ▲	N/A	N/A	N/A	● ▲	N/A
Mathematics grade		▲				▲
English grade	● ▲					▲
Promotion	● ▲				● ▲	

\* Performance on MCAS ELA is for Cohort I sixth-graders and their matched nonparticipants who took the exam as seventh-graders in Year 2.

N/A The indicator was not applicable to those grade levels.

● Participants overall outperformed their matched nonparticipants at a statistically significant level.

▲ Participants with high levels of program exposure outperformed their matched nonparticipants at a statistically significant level.

Finally, while not conclusive, a look at Year 2 data for Citizen Schools participants in Cohort I indicates that at this stage several of the short-term benefits of Citizen Schools appear to have emerged or persisted as the former sixth-grade participants moved on to the seventh grade and the eighth-graders moved on to ninth grade. Seventh-graders who were part of the first Citizen Schools evaluation cohort outperformed their matched nonparticipants on three of six indicators (suspension rates, MCAS ELA test,

and mathematics course grade). In addition, while the measured difference in attendance and English course grade was not statistically significant, it was in the desired direction. On the remaining indicator, grade promotion, the evaluation did not find evidence of participants outperforming their matched nonparticipants. In their ninth-grade year, Cohort I 8th Grade Academy graduates did not outperform their matched nonparticipants on any of the evaluation's indicators. Although not statistically significant, a pattern of differences in the desired direction did emerge. For example, the 8th Grade Academy graduates (1) attended school 92 percent of the time in their ninth-grade year while their matched nonparticipants attended 87 percent of the time, (2) earned a 2.26 in their English grade while their matched nonparticipants earned a 1.97, and (3) were suspended at a rate of 8 percent compared to a rate of 11 percent among nonparticipants.

While student participants fared better than matched nonparticipants on the program's two short-term outcomes, and in several cases, on the various outcome indicators, it is important to note that student achievement in mathematics and English remained low following students' participation in Citizen Schools. Even with the improvements they have experienced while participating in Citizen Schools, participating students continue to be at risk educationally.

### **What Can We Conclude from The Evaluation Findings from Phases I and II?**

Citizen Schools is equipping student participants with a set of academic, personal, and interpersonal skills and positive experiences that they can take with them as they enter high school. These skills and experiences are likely to help students deal successfully with the academic and social challenges ahead of them. Student participants are also performing better on numerous educational outcomes and indicators than had they not participated in the program. Overall, Citizen Schools is succeeding in moving a group of low-income, educationally at-risk participants towards its desired outcomes of successful high school completion, advancement to college, and full participation in the civic and economic life of their communities. To keep students on a path toward success, however, Citizen Schools may need to provide additional academic support for 8th Grade Academy graduates and more intense academic support for current participants. This is especially important, since even with the improvements they have made, student participants continue to achieve at low academic levels.