

## Academic Achievement of Youth in the 4-H Program

*Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LINK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.*

*In this issue, we examined the academic outcomes of youth who participated in the Minnesota 4-H program, as well as how parent engagement and duration of 4-H participation affects youth achievement and attendance trajectories over five years. In particular, we examined whether youth who participate in 4-H outperform their non-4-H peers in school attendance, math and reading achievement, and graduation, and whether parent engagement influences youth outcomes. Overall, findings indicated that youth who participated in 4-H had consistently higher attendance and better math and reading scores than their non-4-H peers. Parent involvement in 4-H was associated with increased math scores, but not with increased reading scores or school attendance. 4-H youth with more extensive involvement over time had higher attendance and better reading and math scores than other 4-H youth.*

### Discussion on Practice Implications

1. Youth development programs, such as Minnesota's 4-H, offer a multitude of learning opportunities and activities for children in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Recent research has found that youth participating in 4-H had significantly better grades, college aspirations, and less problem behaviors than their peers. What do you believe are some of the core elements or factors that make 4-H programs effective in promoting academic success? Are there programs in your area that have these elements? In your role, do you connect youth to 4-H or other youth development programs?
2. In this study, the majority of 4-H participating youth were White (97%). What are some of the barriers children and families of color have accessing 4-H programs? What are some ways to promote the inclusion of children of color in such programs?

### Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. In the era of accountability, youth who participated in 4-H demonstrated higher standardized scores on math and reading during the observed 5-year period than their peers. This suggests that participating in enjoyable activities closely aligned to youth's interests may promote both reading and math proficiency. In what ways can schools and community agencies collaborate to support "fun learning" and the academic achievement of children?
2. Participating in youth development programs requires resources in the form of time and money. Are youth development program participation resources available in your county? What barriers exist to connecting child protection-involved youth to programs like 4-H? How can the system be changed to reduce or eliminate those barriers?