

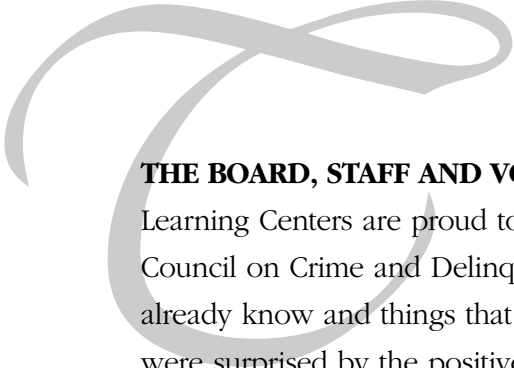
Summary of Findings

Released Time Bible Education:

A program that improves academic performance in public schools and builds a foundation for positive character development



A program evaluation of the Oakland California Released Time Bible Education Program conducted by The National Council on Crime and Delinquency



THE BOARD, STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS OF SCHOOL MINISTRIES and the Christian Learning Centers are proud to offer this copy of the study released by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. This study revealed to others and us what we already know and things that were exciting new benefits of our programs. None of us were surprised by the positive impact that Released Time Bible Education programs were having on the students both while they attended our programs, and also when they returned to their schools. We have heard this before from parents, teachers and principals. The exciting piece of new information is that the study shows across the board academic improvement by those that attend these programs.

What then does this mean for our local schools?:

- Released Time offers programs at no taxpayer cost to the schools.
- While students are attending this program, the school and its teachers are freed to work with other students thereby saving the school money and reducing class size.
- It reinforces positive character behavior in students.
- It improves academic performance!!
- It fosters communities and parents involvement in the schools.

This study has broken new ground, while we hope additional research that supports NCCD's findings will be done, we are excited by these initial results. We believe that with these benefits every school district should express an interest in the Released Time program. School Ministries and the Christian Learning Centers are committed to bringing Released Time Bible Education programs to schools across the nation. If you would like more information regarding these programs, please contact us at:

School Ministries
Attention: Kenneth Breivik, Executive Director
P.O. Box 952
Columbia, SC 29202
803-772-5224

Or visit our website at: www.bringinghopetoyouth.org

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Prepared by:

Monique W. Morris, M.S.
Barry Krisberg, Ph.D.
Sharan Dhanoa

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Executive Summary

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, MANY PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE TRYING TO IMPROVE the academic performance of their students and at the same time curb delinquent behavior that disrupts teaching and the overall academic climate of schools.

Released Time Religious Education is a program started in 1914 by a public school superintendent in Gary, Indiana. The program, which was approved by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1952, is primarily designed to teach religious education during the school day to public school students off campus with parental permission. A key by-product has been improved academic performance and the development of positive moral character among youth. While many incidents of improvement have been documented, there previously has been no major independent study of Released Time.

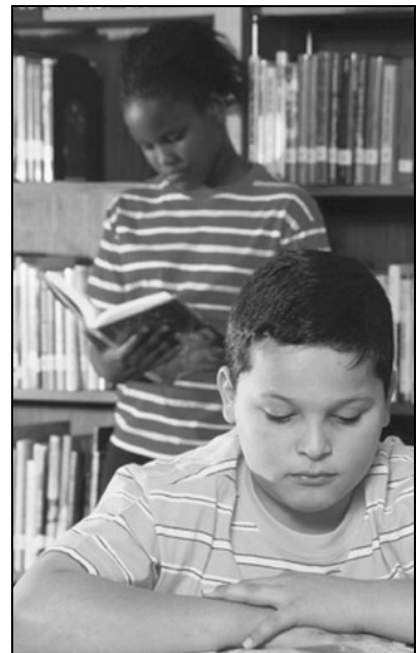
School Ministries, Inc., a nonprofit organization that has been encouraging the expansion of Released Time nationally, engaged the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) to do an independent program evaluation in cooperation with the Oakland, California, Released Time program.

During a study conducted in the Fall of 2002, NCCD concluded:

- A comparative review between the academic performance scores of Oakland Released Time students and all 4th and 5th graders in Released Time schools reveals that students in Oakland Released Time perform better than their classmates as a whole in almost every category.
- Oakland Released Time's curricula reinforce key literacy components such as spelling and reading comprehension, among others, and reflects positively on the relevancy of the instruction to the academic performance of children participating in the program.
- Overall, the scores of Oakland Released Time students improved after one year (between the academic year 2001-2002 and 2002-2003) in three categories of literacy skills: comprehension, spelling, and vocabulary.
- Oakland Released Time provides youth with strong adult mentorship and bonding.
- Oakland Released Time reinforces positive moral and character development that is antithetical to engaging in criminal or delinquent behavior.
- Oakland Released Time interacts with youth who experience many of the academic problems (poor performance, illiteracy, etc.) that are correlated with a history of delinquency.

Overall, Oakland Released Time contributes positively to improving Oakland public schools.

"In a legal and appropriate way, Released Time Religious Education speaks to a desire deeply felt by a very large proportion of the American people." – William J. Moloney, Colorado Commissioner of Education



Program Overview

Oakland Released Time serves elementary school children in grades 4 and 5 for one hour each week. The program utilizes two curricula to administer Christian instruction to youth in the program, "Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ" and "The Bible Curriculum." In addition to Biblical instruction, Oakland Released Time offers an awareness program among the churches and the Christian community in general. It includes a sleepover for the student participants, a tutorial program at one of the schools, and a graduation event for youth going on to junior high school. The composition of the program is overwhelmingly African American (46 percent) and Latino (31 percent). Eighty-five percent of the Oakland Released Time teachers are African American, and almost all grew up or live in Oakland, California. Instructors are almost exclusively female, and most (75 percent) are age 55 and over.



"Religious beliefs were the foundation for the first laws governing the behavior of wayward youths."

– Barry Krisberg, NCCD, 2002

Oakland Released Time's curriculum emphasizes themes that are consistent with positive moral and character development among youth that could set the foundation for future lifestyles that are free from criminal and delinquent behavior. Comparative data regarding violence was not available for Oakland Released Time schools, and little research has been conducted on the violent or delinquent behavior of youth aged 8 to 10 in Oakland. However, overall violence in the city has been a subject of great media and community concern, particularly in terms of how and where it has recently manifested among Oakland Middle and High Schools. In 2002, the Oakland Tribune reported in an article entitled "City Schools See Increase in Violence" that:

Oakland's public schools continued to rank among the most dangerous in the state last year, reporting increases in violence, drugs and weapons on campuses, according to state statistics released Thursday.

During the 2000-01 school year, Oakland schools reported 590 fights, 59 assaults with a deadly weapon and 45 sex offenses, the state Department of Education's annual Safe Schools Assessment Report showed.

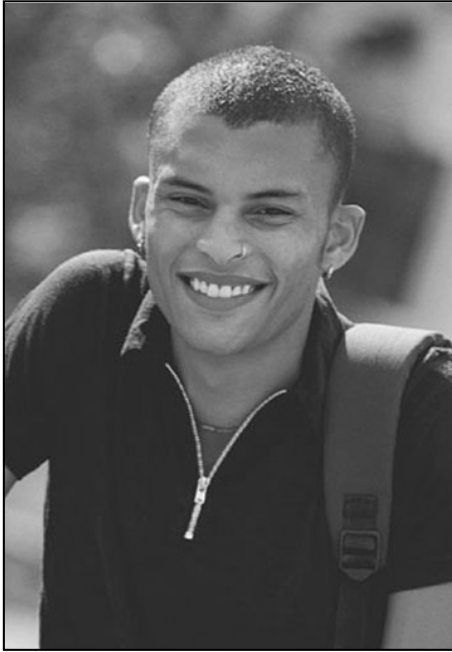
The numbers exceeded those during the previous school year, when the district reported 289 batteries, 49 assaults with a deadly weapon and 39 sex offenses.

But some school crimes dropped dramatically in Oakland last year. Incidents of robbery and extortion fell from 78 in 1999-00 to 27 in 2000-01, and reports of property crimes dropped from 415 to 211.

Superintendent Dennis Chaconas, who celebrated his two-year anniversary with the district this week, lists school safety as a top priority.

"If (students) are sitting there worried about someone taking their backpack, their radio or their belongings, it's pretty difficult to focus on learning," school board member Greg Hodge said. "If you look at the data, it seems like schools are a very contentious place to be."

– Oakland Tribune, March 1, 2002



Previous Research on Religion and Delinquency

There have been several national studies conducted to assess the value of religious instruction and/or religiosity in preventing juvenile delinquency, particularly among youth at high school age. Although research that examines the relationship of faith and delinquency or the successes of faith-based organizations is scant (especially in the way of quantitative research), there is evidence to suggest that religious groups have been among the first to promote rehabilitation over incarceration.

Most research indicates that religious adolescents will be more likely to abstain from delinquency than non-religious youth. Larson & Johnson (1997), through an evaluation of 40 articles from 1980-1997, found that the more reliable the measures of religiosity, the more likely the conclusions show that religiosity has an impact on reducing juvenile delinquency. Studies that examine the impact of organizational religiosity (for example, church attendance and structured religious activities) and subjective religiosity (for example, the importance of religion and private prayer) offer additional insight, suggesting the importance of measuring effects based upon multi-dimensional approaches; effects will vary based upon the different dimensions of religiosity.

Other support for the assertion that religiosity has an impact on preventing delinquency or delinquent acts is found in research conducted by Johnson, Larson, Li, & Jang (2000), which used data previously collected in 1979 and 1980 by the National Bureau of Economic Research. The participants were young African American males, ages 16 to 24, in Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia, cities that have at least 30% of families living below the poverty line. The researchers found church attendance had an impact on the at-risk youth, while salience (a measure of the importance of religion in an individual's life, determined by the individual) had no significant effect. Church attendance even had an effect when background factors, such as secular bonding, was considered and removed as a variable.

Research on this subject has also suggested the importance of including background factors in a youth's life in determining the effect of religious instruction. In 1995, Hardesty & Kirby surveyed the relationship between family religiosity and adolescent drug use and found that family and peers have an impact. In this study, which measured the religiosity of the family (as opposed to the youth), the authors found family religiosity to be a protective factor in keeping youth from delinquency. Religious families had strong family bonds and dealt well with conflict. They also found the influence of peers to be significant and that family plays a part in a youth's choice of peers. Although family cohesion and religiosity were assessed, the absence of a youth religiosity measurement is a limitation.

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In 1997, Larson & Johnson looked specifically at religiosity as a protective factor in preventing delinquency. In this concentrated study, limited in breadth and longevity, approximately 400 mostly Hispanic adult inmates in New York were categorized as Prison Fellowship members and non-members. The Prison Fellowship members attended Bible study and their participation was categorized into high, medium, and low. Delinquency was judged by the number of infractions while in prison as well as recidivism within the first year of release. These two behaviors were watched over the course of a year. Although there were mixed results depending on the level of participation, one finding was that Prison Fellowship members who participated once per month for 10 months before getting out were four

times less likely than non-members to offend in or outside of prison. In this study if the member attended twice per month, he did not go back to prison. Bible study served as a protective factor when taken in high doses.

Delinquency and Oakland Released Time

In the Oakland Released Time program, teachers and Teacher's Assistants volunteer their time and spirit to deliver Christian Biblical instruction to youth. Because they are not paid, they are motivated by other factors to teach youth in the program. For the majority of Oakland Released Time instructors, participating in the program was a very fulfilling experience. Eighty-three percent of the respondents to the teacher's survey, who had been teaching in the program for over one year, indicated that they were fulfilled by the experience. While some teachers who had been teaching in the program less than a year felt that it was too soon to know whether their teaching experience was truly fulfilling, 75 percent indicated that they were fulfilled by their participation to date. While many instructors indicate that their joy comes from sharing their Christian faith with youth, others indicated that they were fulfilled by their experience because the youth themselves have shared that they enjoy participating in the program. Among the many strengths of the Oakland Released Time program that were identified by teachers was that they notice a change in attitude and behavior among the youth who participate in the program.

Many of the elementary school principals whose schools participate in the program spoke highly of the program's ability to impact academic performance, but felt that instructors needed more "classroom management skills" to have any direct impact on rates of student violence and delinquency. Principals, particularly those that are Christian, were more likely to acknowledge the importance of the program in promoting moral character development that is antithetical to delinquency and violence. Stating that the program "improves the students' social skills" and that its instructors are "compassionate and patient," principals articulated their support of the initiative as well as some of the program's strengths.

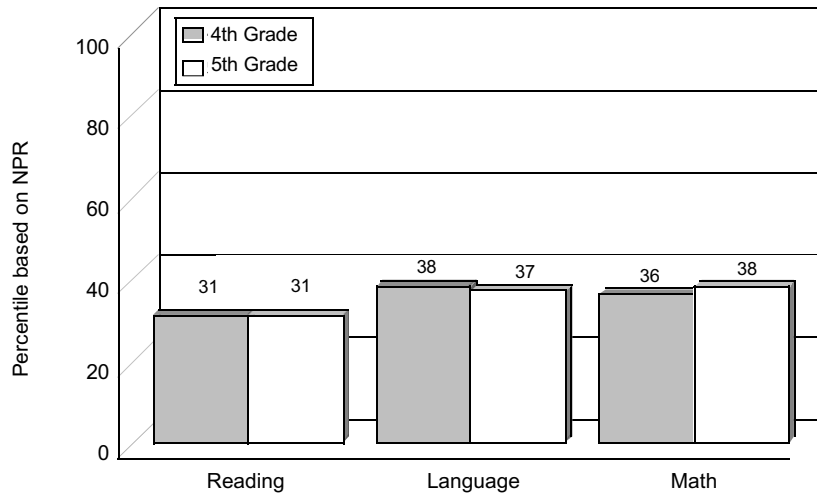
Many principals also expressed concern that students use the program to get out of class and that many parents use the program as a "last ditch" effort to control unruly youth. This is a cause for concern for many principals who feel that schools actually need adequate counseling services, not necessarily a better Bible study program.

Students who participate in the program enjoy learning about God, Jesus, and the Bible. For many students, getting a break from traditional school and receiving rewards (candy and token money) are viewed as positive incentives for participation in the program. Students who participate in the program use what they learn from the program in their everyday experiences, including manners, pledges, morals (i.e., staying away from drugs/alcohol and treating others well), as well as many of the 10 Commandments (i.e., thou shall honor thy mother/father, thou shall not steal, commit adultery, kill, etc.). Many of the youth who attend the program are encouraged by their parents and friends to attend. Few participants had peers who thought that the program might be "boring."

Report on Academic Performance

Oakland Released Time interacts with youth who experience many of the academic problems (poor performance, illiteracy, etc.) that are correlated with a history of delinquent behavior for pre-adolescent youth. Less than half of all 4th and 5th grade students in all of Oakland's Public Schools performed at or above the 50th National Percentile [Figure 1].

**Figure 1: SAT9 Percentiles in All Subjects
4th & 5th Graders At or Above the 50th Percentile in All OUSD Elementary Schools, 2002**

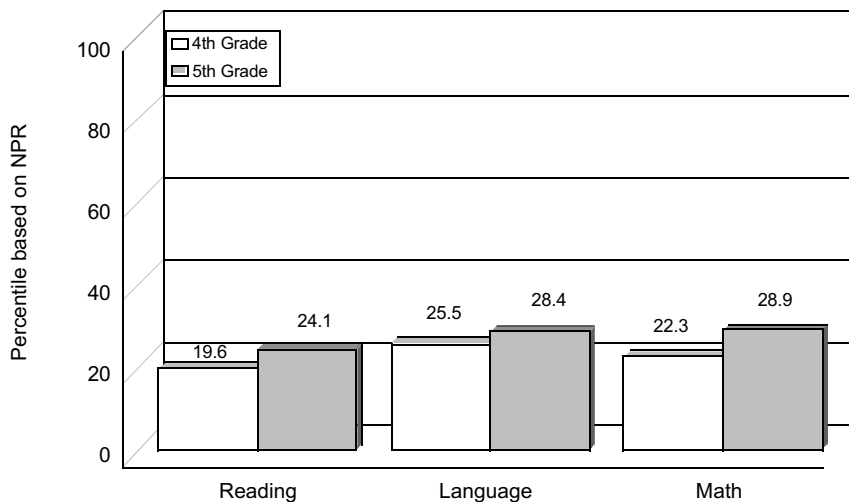


Source: Oakland Unified School District. www.grantoffice.ousd.k12.ca.us

“With education being one of the top concerns of our day, schools must begin to look at all methods of improving academic performance. This study clearly shows that Biblical education should be one of these methods.” – David Beasley, former SC Governor

In this same trend, students at Oakland Released Time Schools reflected a small number of 4th and 5th Grade students who were performing well in reading, language, and math. In theory, 50 percent of the students should be at the 50th National Percentile Rank; however, no group even reached 30 percent in any subject. Students in both grades performed worst in the reading category. Fifth graders, in general, were performing better than 4th graders in each subject [Figure 2], however, the scores for African American and Latino students in these scores were relatively low [Figure 3].

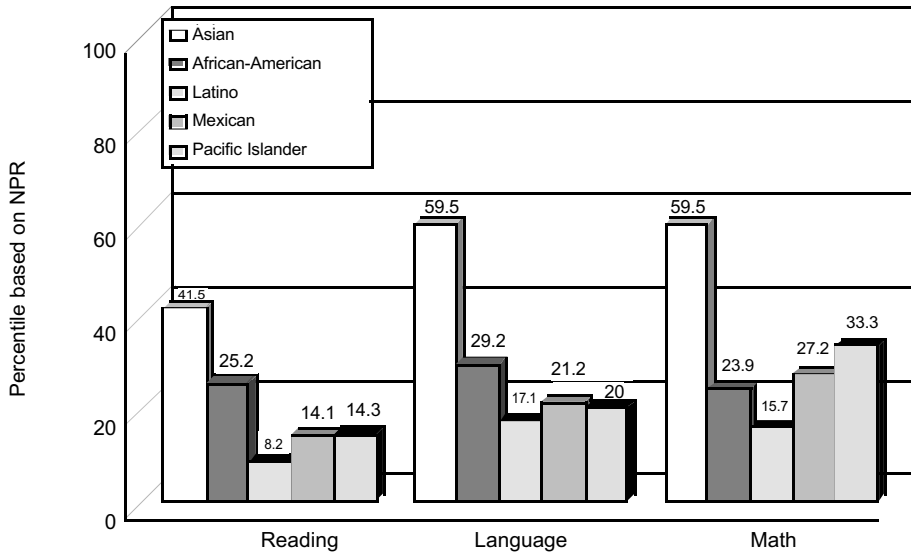
**Figure 2: SAT9 Percentiles in All Subjects
4th & 5th Graders At or Above the 50th Percentile at Oakland Released Time Schools, 2002**



NPR = National Percentile Rank

Source: Oakland Unified School District. www.grantoffice.ousd.k12.ca.us

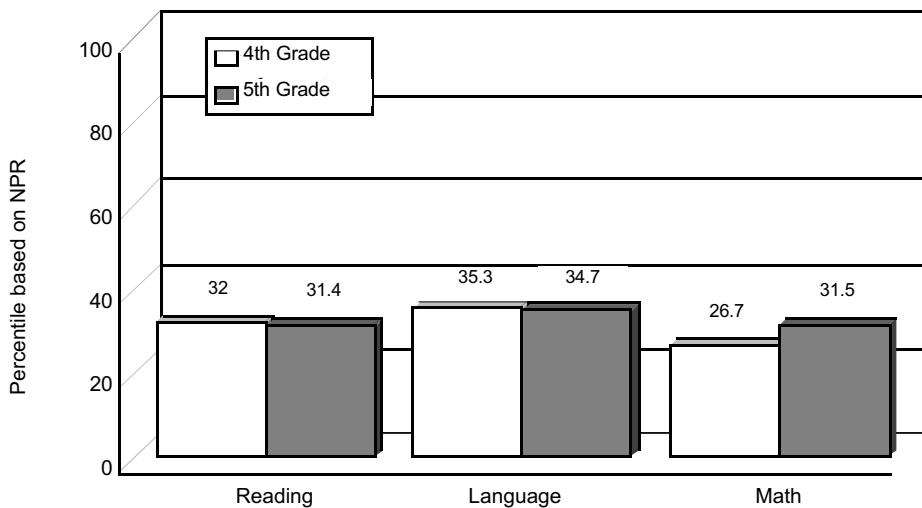
**Figure 3: SAT 9 Percentiles in All Subjects
4th & 5th Graders At or Above the 50th Percentile Students in Oakland Released Time Schools
by Ethnicity, 2002**



Source: Oakland Unified School District. www.grantoffice.ousd.k12.ca.us

A comparative review between the performance scores of Oakland Released Time students and all 4th and 5th graders in Released Time schools reveals that, while still under the 50th percentile, students in Oakland Released Time perform better than their classmates (as a whole) in every category, particularly in the language category. In fact, there was a 10 percent difference in language scores, and a 12 percent difference in reading scores, between 4th graders in Released Time and their classmates [Figure 4].

**Figure 4: SAT9 Percentiles in All Subjects
4th & 5th Graders At or Above the 50th Percentile; Released Time Students, 2002**



NPR = National Percentile Rank

Source: Oakland Unified School District. www.grantoffice.ousd.k12.ca.us

Open Court tests are administered by the Oakland Unified School District to measure language and reading skills of students, particularly in the areas of fluency, comprehension, checking skills, spelling, and vocabulary. NCCD conducted a similar comparison between Oakland Released Time students and the performance of all 4th and 5th graders in Released Time schools to determine if there were differences in performance on the Open Court tests. Among 4th graders, Oakland Released Time students scored higher than their classmates only in the area of spelling. In the areas of fluency, comprehension, and checking skills, Oakland Released Time students scored slightly lower than the performance of all students in these schools. In the area testing vocabulary, Oakland Released Time students performed at the same level as their classmates as a whole [Tables 1-2].

**Table 1: Open Court Mid-Year 4th Grade Scores by Subject
Oakland Released Time Elementary Schools, 2001-2002**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Fluency	562	0	2	.91
Comprehension	579	0	2	.94
Checking Skills	576	0	2	1.29
Spelling	573	0	2	1.03
Vocabulary	571	0	2	.88
<i>Total Ave Per Subject</i>				<i>1.01</i>

Source: Oakland Unified School District. www.grantoffice.ousd.k12.ca.us

**Table 2: Open Court Mid-Year 4th Grade Scores by Subject
Oakland Released Time Students, 2001-2002**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Fluency	75	0	2	.68
Comprehension	75	0	2	.80
Checking Skills	75	0	2	1.28
Spelling	73	0	2	1.07
Vocabulary	73	0	2	.88

Source: Oakland Unified School District. www.grantoffice.ousd.k12.ca.us

Among 5th graders, the Oakland Released Time students performed better than their classmates as a whole on the Open Court tests in every category with the exception of vocabulary [Tables 3-4]. While there is no evidence to suggest that Oakland Released Time is solely responsible for this improvement, the fact that Oakland Released Time's curricula reinforce key literacy components such as spelling and reading comprehension, among others, reflects positively on the relevancy of the instruction to the academic performance of children participating in the program.

**Table 3: Open Court Mid-Year 5th Grade Scores by Subject
Oakland Released Time Elementary Schools 2001-2002**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Fluency	500	0	2	.91
Comprehension	493	0	2	1.35
Checking Skills	493	0	2	1.50
Spelling	492	0	2	1.12
Vocabulary	491	0	2	1.18
<i>Total Ave Per Subject</i>				<i>1.17</i>

Source: Oakland Unified School District. www.grantoffice.ousd.k12.ca.us

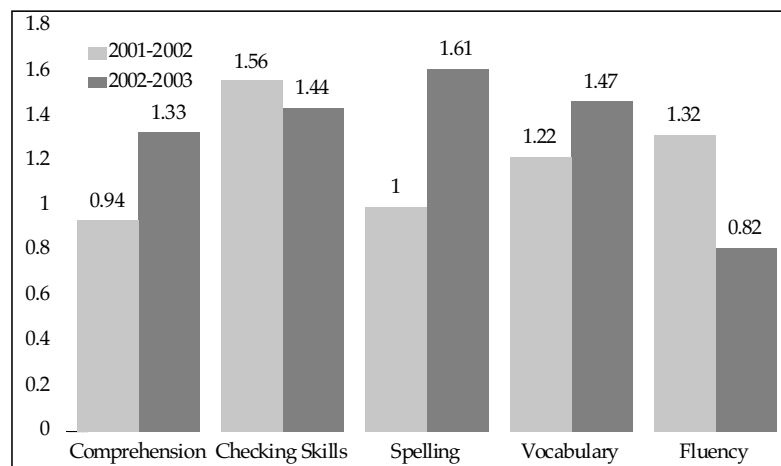
**Table 4: Open Court Mid-Year 5th Grade Scores by Subject
Oakland Released Time Students, 2001-2002**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Fluency	22	0	2	.95
Comprehension	22	0	2	1.45
Checking Skills	22	1	2	1.55
Spelling	22	0	2	1.32
Vocabulary	22	0	2	1.14

Source: Oakland Unified School District. www.grantoffice.ousd.k12.ca.us

Overall, the scores for Oakland Released Time students improved after one year (between the academic year 2001-2002 and 2002-2003) in three categories of literacy skills: comprehension, spelling, and vocabulary [Figure 5]. In the areas of checking skills and fluency, returning Oakland Release Time students performed did not perform better than they did in the 2002-2003 academic year.

**Figure 5: Open Court Score Comparison of Released Time Students
From 2001-2002 to 2002-2003**



Open Court Scoring Ranges from 0-2*

Source: Oakland Unified School District. www.grantoffice.ousd.k12.ca.us

Observations/Findings

Overall, Oakland Released Time provides youth with strong adult mentorship and bonding. Social development theory suggests that the strongest protective factor in the lives of youth is bonding with a parent and/or a positive adult influence. Released Time instructors provide positive adult role models



and influences in the lives of youth. Oakland Released Time reinforces positive moral development that is antithetical to engaging in criminal or delinquent behavior. The religious basis of the Released Time curriculum teaches moral behavior that discourages involvement in criminal activity (i.e., theft, violence, etc.), and instead emphasizes themes that support positive character development that can lay a strong foundation for healthy and moral behavior through adolescence and adulthood.

Oakland Released Time also reinforces education, particularly in the area of literacy among its participants. The use of curricula that drill students in spelling, and that reinforce comprehension by reading aloud, role play, and art, are all promising strategies for addressing the literacy problems experienced by students in the program. The academic thrust of Released Time's curricula is a powerful tool for promoting academic achievement.

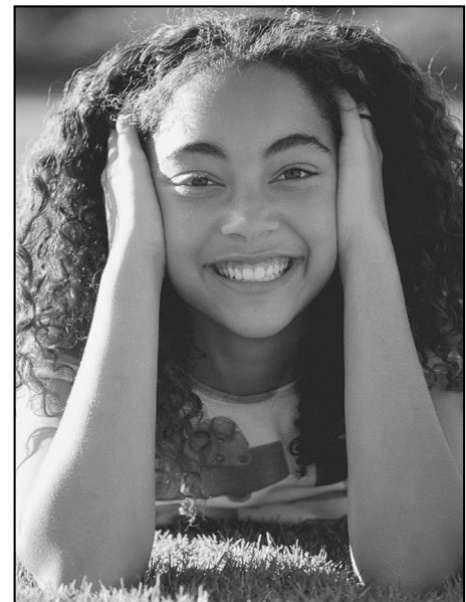
"The Oakland Release Time program is another example in a growing list of effective faith-based solutions to serious social problems. The success of the program documented in this report should encourage religious organizations to roll up their sleeves and get involved and should encourage government to see those religious organizations for the invaluable partners that they are." – Chuck Colson, Chairman, Prison Fellowship Ministries

Data Collection for the Study

The methods used to collect data for this study included activities designed to gather information that would provide a theoretical foundation for the program, as well as the activities and processes of the Oakland Released Time program. These activities included the following:

Literature Review: A comprehensive literature review was conducted to analyze the findings of previous research conducted on religiosity and faith-based interventions. This review also included a review of research conducted on the causes of juvenile delinquency, so that a summary of risk factors for children at the 4th and 5th grade level could be included in this analysis.

Interviews/Meetings: Regular meetings and interviews were held with the Oakland Released Time executive director and other staff, as available, to document their insight regarding program operations and informal procedures relative to the administration of the



program. Additionally, NCCD conducted phone interviews with several principals at Oakland Released Time schools, and held focus groups with over 30 youth participants in the program to receive their input.

Oakland Released Time Administrative Records: NCCD reviewed compiled Oakland Released Time administrative records to determine the basic demographic data of students and faculty involved in the program. These records included enrollment forms, sign-up sheets, and other forms documenting student demographic data.

Oakland Unified School District Academic Performance Records: NCCD collected SAT9 scores, which determine standardized testing scores in literacy and mathematics, for the 4th and 5th grade levels in schools participating Oakland Released Time students. SAT9 scores were also collected for the OUSD 4th and 5th grade levels for the purpose of comparison.

Oakland Released Time Teacher Survey: NCCD administered a survey to Oakland Released Time instruction. This survey was designed to collect teacher input on the administration and program design of Oakland Released Time, as well as to document their thoughts regarding the program's strengths and weaknesses. Prior to and during the period in which the survey was administered, NCCD attended instructor meetings to answer questions regarding the goals and processes of the program evaluation.

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School Ministries
P.O. Box 952
Columbia, SC 29202
803-772-5224
www.bringinghopetoyouth.org



National Council on Crime and Delinquency
1970 Broadway, Suite 500
Oakland, California 94612
510-208-0500 Fax: 510-208-0511