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Promising Practices in Afterschool Programs

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Topics

- Outline recommendations made in the IES practice guide on practices supportive of student academic outcomes in afterschool programs
- Relate these practices to evidence gathered from the New Jersey 21st CCLC evaluation:
 - Connection between practices and outcomes
 - Promising practices identified from site visits conducted at 21st CCLC programs

Academics and Afterschool

- The current afterschool literature indicates:
 - An uneven level of effectiveness in supporting the achievement of positive academic outcomes.
 - Various paths to supporting student achievement are possible.
 - A need to define quality criteria and to intentionally support quality improvement efforts.

IES Practice Guide

- In 2009, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) released a guidebook entitled *Structuring out-of-school time to improve academic achievement: A practice guide*

IES Practice Guide Recommendation #1

- Align afterschool programs academically with the school day
 - Use program coordinators to maintain communication between school and program personnel
 - Designate a school staff person to coordinate communication with afterschool programs
 - Connect afterschool instruction to school instruction
 - Coordinate with the school to identify afterschool staff

Alignment - Lessons from 21st CCLC Evaluation

- Importance of *intentionality* in program design and delivery
 - The program is explicitly meant to promote skill building and mastery in relation to one or more state standards
 - The program is explicitly meant to address a specific developmental domain (e.g., cognitive, social, emotional, civic, physical)
 - The program is based on written plans for the session, assignments, and projects
 - The program is meant to build upon skills cultivated in a prior activity or session

Alignment – Promising Practices

- Involvement of school-day principal in identifying student needs and *mapping* needs to program offerings
- Completion of weekly *logs* provided by school-day teachers specifying where each child is struggling
- Administration of *pre-* and *post-survey* measures completed by school-day teaching staff to assess student growth and development

Alignment – Promising Practices

- Use of effective *school-day teachers* to staff the afterschool program
- Use of clubs and detailed curricula to establish instructional *continuity* and encourage ongoing student participation
- Use of *real-world* activities to reinforce concepts presented more abstractly or canonically earlier in a lesson

IES Practice Guide Recommendation #2

- Maximize student participation and attendance
 - Design program features to meet the needs and preferences of students and parents
 - Promote awareness of afterschool programs within schools and to parents
 - Use attendance data to identify students facing difficulties in attending the program

Participation - Lessons from 21st CCLC Evaluation

- Positive relationship found to exist between *days of attendance* and:
 - Student improvement in being attentive in class, behaving well, and improving homework completion and quality
 - Student performance on state assessment in mathematics

- Positive relationship found to exist between *continuous years of enrollment* and student performance on state assessment in mathematics and reading

Participation – Promising Practices

- Expand offerings through the use of strategic *partnerships*
- Use of showcases of student work to get parents in the door
- Monthly *partners meetings* for program managers, school personnel, and parent and student representatives to assess programming quality and drive more responsive offerings

IES Practice Guide Recommendation #3

- Adapt instruction to individual and small group needs
 - Use formal and informal assessment data to inform academic instruction
 - Use one-on-one tutoring if possible; otherwise, break students into small groups
 - Provide professional development and ongoing instructional support to all instructors

Instruction - Lessons from 21st CCLC Evaluation

- Positive relationship found to exist between the adoption of practices *supportive of academic skill-building (including receipt and use of achievement data)* and student improvement in being attentive in class, behaving well, and improving homework completion and quality
- Receipt and use of student achievement data indicated as one of the most *difficult* practices for afterschool staff to adopt

Instruction – Promising Practices

- Periodic examination of assessment and grades data during the programming period
- Surveying both school-day teachers and students to gather impressions of current program offerings
- Informal observations and engaging in conversations with classroom teachers, parents, and program participants
- Sponsoring of individual and group planning activities at the beginning (and/or end) of program cycles aligned to training topics

IES Practice Guide

Recommendation #4

- Provide engaging learning experiences
 - Make learning relevant by incorporating practical examples and connecting instruction to student interests and experience
 - Make learning active through opportunities for collaborative learning and hands-on academic activities
 - Build adult-student relationships among afterschool program participants

Engagement - Lessons from 21st CCLC Evaluation

- The simultaneous experience of *concentration, enjoyment,* and *interest* - Represents the optimal learning point (Shernoff & Vandell, 2007)
- Activities that achieve *Flow* - linked to *Learning, Talent Development,* and *Creativity* (Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Csikszentmihalyi et al. 1993)
- Experiences that combine both concentration in challenging activities and enjoyment in interesting ones
- A state of complete interest in an activity that there is no energy left for distractions (Shernoff & Vandell, 2007)

Engagement - Lessons from 21st CCLC Evaluation

- Group projects that take more than one day to complete can be supportive of many engagement elements:
 - Youth-driven topics
 - Ability to choose role in group
 - A need to engage in the planning and execution of tasks
 - Authentic choice in terms of both *content* and *process*
 - Opportunities to practice leadership skills and engage in cooperative learning
 - Culmination in a final product that can be publicly recognized and celebrated

Engagement – Promising Practices

- Student provided quality time with caring adults
- Students may select activities from among strong alternatives
- Programming options were designed with student preferences in the forefront of considerations
- Real-world activities both as the centerpiece of instruction and as a means of reinforcing instruction

Final Thoughts

- *Intentionality* in program design and delivery is key to quality programming
- Quality assessment and program improvement efforts need to be integrated in each facet of program operation, including staff hiring, orientation and induction, training, and performance appraisal
- Look to existing quality assessment tools and frameworks to guide and inform work in this area

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