Elements of Quality in After-School Programs: A Review of the Research Literature

Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools

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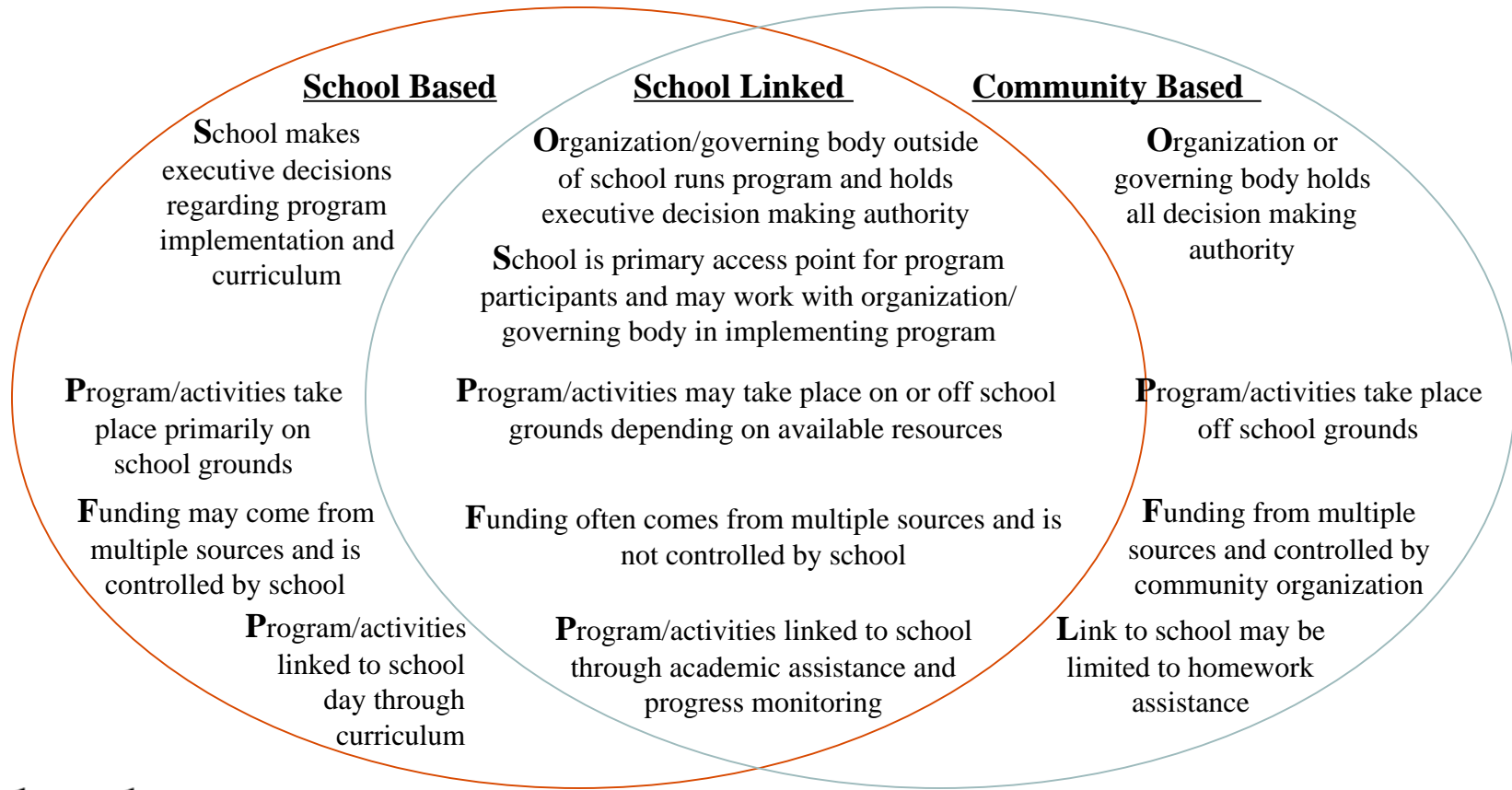
Purpose of the Literature Review

- Primary Purpose: Gain an understanding of key elements of quality in after school programming

- Secondary Purpose: Organize information in a way that could guide improvement of Nebraska's after school programs

Procedures for Conducting the Review

- 6 Prominent Articles
- Identification of Quality Indicators and Outcomes

- Literature Search
- Literature Review

- Approximately 150 Sources
- 81 Relevant, Unique Sources

Overview of Program Types

School Based

School makes executive decisions regarding program implementation and curriculum

Program/activities take place primarily on school grounds

Funding may come from multiple sources and is controlled by school

Program/activities linked to school day through curriculum

School Linked

Organization/governing body outside of school runs program and holds executive decision making authority

School is primary access point for program participants and may work with organization/ governing body in implementing program

Program/activities may take place on or off school grounds depending on available resources

Funding often comes from multiple sources and is not controlled by school

Program/activities linked to school through academic assistance and progress monitoring

Community Based

Organization or governing body holds all decision making authority

Program/activities take place off school grounds

Funding from multiple sources and controlled by community organization

Link to school may be limited to homework assistance

What is meant by "Quality"?

- **Indicators** refer to elements/components of quality program design, curriculum, implementation, and administration

- **Outcomes** refer to the positive impacts of quality after-school programs on students, families, and schools

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Ten Key Elements of Quality
Program Indicators in Two Arenas

Programmatic

- Instructional Activities
- Recreational Activities
- Program Development
- Family Involvement & Accessibility
- Community Partnerships & Mentoring
- Health Awareness & Opportunity
- Active Participation

Administrative

- Safe
- Self-Reflective
- Well-Administered

Note on Administrative Indicators:

- Necessary but not sufficient.
- Not emphasized in the literature on quality after school programs *per se* because they are assumed as necessary for any environment where children are provided care.

Program Indicator: Instructional Activities

- Aspects of Instructional Activities
  - Sequential
  - Active
  - Explicit
  - Focused on Specific Goals
- Two Primary Content Areas
  - Academic Content
    - Reading, math, writing
  - Pro-Social Behaviors
    - Positive peer interactions & relationships
    - Positive peer-adult interactions & relationships

Program Indicator: Recreational Activities

- **Aspects of Recreational Activities**
  - Small *and* large group settings
- **Content: Exposure to...**
  - Physical opportunities
  - Cognitively stimulating opportunities
  - Creative opportunities
    - Arts & crafts
    - Music
    - Drama/theatrical opportunities

Program Indicator: Program Development

- Program Environment (supportive, welcoming, establish sense of community / belongingness)
- Program Design
  - Program intentionality
  - Parent and student contributions
- Professional Development / Staff Characteristics
  - Highly educated (e.g., advanced degrees); low staff ratio (e.g., 10:1); younger staff; diversity, as representative of population served
  - Pre-service, in-service, and on-going training in youth development

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Program Indicator:
Family Involvement & Accessibility

- Families are welcomed
- Families are actively involved with planning and execution of day-to-day activities and program goals
  - Planning Committee
  - Volunteers
- Convenient times and locations for meetings and activities

Program Indicator:
Community Partnerships and Mentorship

- Community partners provide opportunities for programmatic activities

- Community partners provide mentorship to the children and youth

- Older adolescents provide mentorship to younger children

Program Indicator:
Health Awareness & Opportunity

- Healthy food choices are available and encouraged

- Opportunities for physical exercise are available and encouraged

- Education on effects of risk-taking behaviors (e.g., substance use, sexual activity) is provided

Program Indicator: Active Participation

- Structured Environment of Choices
- Participating Children Contribute in Planning, Execution, and Evaluation
- Participation is Developmentally Appropriate
  - Middle School
    - Planning Activities
    - Mentoring Elementary Students
  - High School
    - Community Service
    - Education & Advocacy Initiatives
    - Younger Kids' Programming

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Administrative Program Indicators

- ## Safe
  - Physical environment, personnel, and procedures provide for physical and emotional safety for participants

- ## Self-Reflective
  - Approach to program development, monitoring, and on-going improvement

- ## Well-Administered
  - Long-term and short-term program operations, including administration of staff and funds, seeking and securing additional and continued funding; documentation; reporting on operations and outcomes

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Five Key Quality Program Outcomes

- Academic Performance
- Positive School Behaviors
- Social Behaviors
- Emotional Well-Being
- Health & Wellness

Program Outcome: Academic Performance

- School Grades
- GPA (grade point average)
- Proficiency in core academic content areas
  - Reading
  - Math
  - Writing
- Academic Achievement
  - Standardized test scores
  - State- and district- wide assessments

Program Outcome: Positive School Behaviors

- School Attendance
  - Times tardy
  - Absences
- Completion of In-Class Assignments
- Homework Completion
- General Work Habits and Study Skills

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Program Outcome: Social Behaviors

- ## Social Skills
  - Positive peer interactions and relationships
  - Positive peer-adult interactions and relationships
  - Positive conflict resolution skills
  - Positive emotion regulation skills
- ## Reduced Problem and Risk-Taking Behaviors
  - Substance use
  - Sexual activity

Program Outcome: Emotional Well-Being

- **Attitudes and Beliefs**
  - Self
    - Self-worth
    - Self-efficacy
    - Sense of belonging
    - Self as a learner
    - Self as a student
  - Connection with the community
  - Sense of safety
  - Self related to peers and adults
  - Mental health
    - Reduced depression and anxiety

Program Outcome: Health & Wellness

- Ability to Identify and Make Healthy Choices

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Quality After-School Programming: In a Nutshell

- Clear & Appropriate Approach to Programming
  - Identify community needs and needs of intended recipients
  - Clearly articulate program goals specific to the intended recipients
  - Cleary articulate intended program outcomes
  - Quality program indicators associated with intended outcomes are present
  - Structures are in place to support goals
  - Good measurement plan of indicators and outcomes
  - Clear articulation of funding sources

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