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FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Strategies to Maximize Attendance in Out-of-School Programs

Jessica Taylor • September 2009

Topic: Increased Learning Time: Beyond the Regular School Day
Practice: Maximize Attendance

Highlights

- Districts and programs can encourage participation by identifying families' needs and interests through surveys and conversations with students.
- Districts and schools can organize fairs in which extended learning time providers can provide information to families about their programs.
- School staff should be able to answer at least basic questions about an extended learning time program to address parents' questions.
- Attendance monitoring can also facilitate the identification of reasons for absenteeism.
- The Florida Department of Education has monitored attendance in extended learning time programs and identified best practices for recruiting students. Those best practices were communicated back to districts and program providers in a format that they can use.

About the Interviewee

Jessica Taylor, M.S. Ed., is the former program director at the Bureau of School

Jessica Taylor

Improvement at the Florida Department of Education (FDOE), where she oversaw a U.S. Department of Education pilot program for differentiated accountability in school improvement. Ms. Taylor worked extensively with implementing SES in Florida, which provides services to more than 70,000 students statewide.

Ms. Taylor has created several FDOE publications regarding parent outreach and program monitoring and has provided training to more than 270 SES providers. Additional work at FDOE includes overseeing parental involvement, public school choice, and magnet schools. Ms. Taylor holds an M.S. in science education from Florida State University. Prior to joining FDOE, Ms. Taylor worked in various K-12, nonformal science education programs.

Full Transcript

Hi, my name is Jessica Taylor, and I am a program director at Florida Department of Education.

I was asked to be a part of the expert panel on Structuring Out-of-School Time to Improve Academic Achievement.

Identifying Families' Needs

District schools and providers can help meet the needs of families by identifying what their needs are early on. One of the recommendations we gave in the practice guide for out-of-school time is to maybe survey families. You might want to survey families to identify the times that are most convenient to these families, the days that are most convenient for families, the location of services, as well as what subjects areas are of most interest to them.

Engaging Students

Another way that schools and districts can encourage participation in afterschool programs and learn more about what the interests of students are, is really to talk directly to students. And the persons with the most direct access to them are their teachers. So it's important for teachers to be aware of the programs that are available and start talking to students, find out what their interests are. If a student is really interested in basketball, perhaps the program that would meet their needs best and encourage them to continue to go to an afterschool program is to find a program that has basketball interrelated or incorporated into the afterschool program itself.

Publicizing the Program

It is difficult to encourage participation if a family doesn't know who you are, what your organization does, and what services you can provide. One way that schools have really been able to encourage families to participate is to have what is called Provider Fairs. Sometimes this happens at a school level, sometimes this

happens at a district level. And schools and districts organize this, and they can invite providers to come. Each provider would have a booth and be able to talk to parents about what their program has to offer, what subjects they might provide tutoring in, their setup in general—do they provide snacks, do they provide time for homework assistance—where their location is, if they provide services at the school site, and even if they provide transportation. So that’s really a great partnership to have between the school and district to provide this venue for families to come and really learn more about the programs that are available to them.

Communicating with the School and District

Another thing that’s really important for school and district staff to do to talk about what the programs are with eligible families is to make sure school and district staff know about these programs. It sounds like an easy thing to do, but it really requires that everyone in the school is at least familiar enough with the program to answer some basic questions. The basic questions might be about what the program is, what it has to offer, where these programs are located, who the parents should contact if they have further questions, and how they sign up.

Monitoring Attendance

Attendance monitoring can be particularly important for a provider to help identify some areas that they need to become better in because maybe there is an area that they are deficient in, so that’s why students are not coming back. But it also is helpful to identify maybe some basic reasons why a student is not attending, and that may be just because the times of the services aren’t convenient. Providers should monitor attendance daily, not just once a week, but every day attendance, to find out if a child is missing. One thing that they can do pretty easily is to find out from the school staff was the student in attendance during the school day. This is step one to be able to decide whether or not the student was not there because they were sick or because they couldn’t attend after school.

If a child can’t attend services after school it may be for variety of reasons. One reason that a child may not be able to attend is simply because of the convenience. They may not have transportation to be able to get back to their home, or it may be in a location that’s not easy for them to get to. The sooner a provider identifies these issues, the sooner the provider, the school, and the parents can work together to find an alternate location or even an alternate program that would better meet the needs of the family.

State departments of education have a strong role in recruiting and retaining students in out-of-school-time programs. One way that they can do this is by providing schools and districts themselves with templates, templates that talk about the out-of-school-time programs, as well as brochures or other marketing materials that may be appropriate for those schools. In Florida we monitor several districts and providers on an annual basis.

State Departments of Education Role

Through this monitoring process we are able to identify some of the best practices that we see districts are using and implementing to recruit students as well as what providers are doing to recruit students to participate. What the state has done is take these best practices back to the state and provide them to all the districts and all the providers in a format that they can use. Sometimes we provide these best practices in conference calls, or we may send out e-mails to a Listserv to let providers and districts know of a best practice that's occurring in the state.