

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



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

**College of Education and Human Sciences
University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

**Frances Chumney, BS; Mariel Sparr, BS;
Gina M. Kunz, PhD; Susan M. Sheridan, PhD**

Purpose of the Literature Review



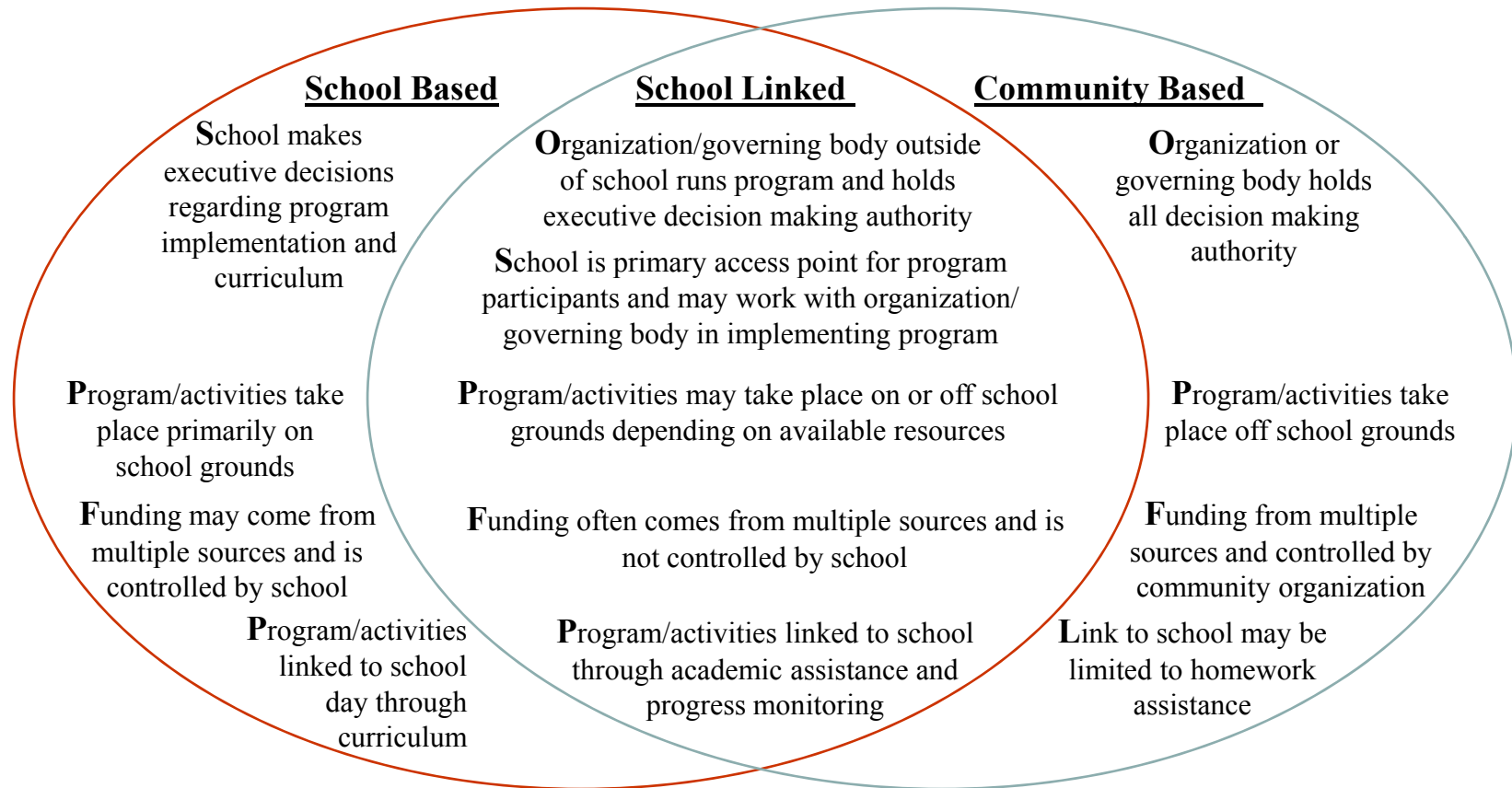
- Primary Purpose: Gain an understanding of key elements of quality in after school programming
- Secondary Purpose: Organize information in a way that could guide improvement of Nebraska's after school programs

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



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

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 (e.g., service learning programs)
 - 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

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

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

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

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

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
 - Clearly 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