

# DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Structuring Extra Learning Opportunities for Students

Megan Beckett, Ph.D. • September 2009

Topic: Increased Learning Time: Beyond the Regular School Day

### Highlights

- The IES Practice Guide, Structuring Out-of-School Time to Promote Academic Achievement, targets those educators, administrators, and decision makers responsible for selecting, designing, or improving out-of-school, summer learning, and expanded learning time programs.
- The first recommendation of the Practice Guide deals with aligning the program with what is happening during the regular school day and state and local standards.
- The second recommendation has to do with ensuring that those students who can benefit the most from the program can enroll and attend consistently.
- The third and fourth recommendations focus on the instructional quality of the program: providing students with individualized and engaging instruction.
- The fifth recommendation targets administrators and educators who are responsible for evaluating the quality and effects of the increased learning time model.
- Recognizing the cost of high quality programs, educators and administrators can consider prioritizing accommodating students who would benefit the most from those intensive services.

## About the Interviewee

Megan Beckett is a RAND Sociologist (Ph.D., University of Michigan). She has worked on a range of topics related to out-of-school time, families, and children. Dr. Beckett chaired the panel producing *Structuring Out-of-School Time to Improve Academic Achievement: A Practice Guide*. She was lead author on *Accountability for After-School Care: Devising Standards and Measuring Adherence to Them*, which provided the first systematic synthesis of the literature on afterschool care practices in an effort to identify and devise measures for adherence to good afterschool care practices. She coauthored the first comprehensive, objective overview of the afterschool and out-of-school time field, *Making Out-of-School-Time Matter: Evidence for an Action Agenda*. She's been invited to speak with the Netherlands' Minister for Social Affairs and Employment and Secretary General for the Ministry of Social Affairs, California Congressional Delegation, California League of Women Voters, Child Policy Deputy for Los Angeles County, and Minnesota legislature members about out-of-school time issues. She has been interviewed by media outlets, including *Education Week*, *The Los Angeles Times*, CNN Headline News, Focus on the Family radio show, ABC News, and CBS News Radio, and has published several op-ed pieces on afterschool programs and supplementary education services. Dr. Beckett has published widely in peer-reviewed journals, including *Pediatrics*, *Journal of Human Resources*, *Social Science and Medicine*, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *Rural Sociology*, and *American Journal of Epidemiology*.

## Full Transcript

My name is Megan Beckett. I am a social scientist with RAND Corporation in Santa Monica.

One thing that the accountability movement has taught us is that too many of our students are not achieving academically at the level that they need to achieve in order to become productive working adults. Many parents are able to support their children, but many other parents are unable to. They are working, they are too exhausted, or they simply don't know how to adequately support their children at home. Therefore, one can look to other opportunities, such as out-of-school time and out-of-school-time programs.

Our audience for the practice guide consists of those educators and administrators and decision makers who are responsible for selecting highest-quality, or out-of-school-time programs that are likely to offer the highest-quality academic experiences to their students. It is intended to help them identify those characteristics of out-of-school-time programs that are most important for benefiting students academically. It is also intended for administrators and educators who are charged with designing or improving existing out-of-school-time programs to strengthen the academic component of these programs so that they can most benefit the students that are targeted.

Recommendation number one is critical to the subsequent recommendations. It has to do with aligning, making sure the out-of-school-time program and its mission are aligned with what is happening in the school day—that it is aligned with the state and local standards and that it is aligned with the school curriculum.

Recommendation number two has to do with identifying and ensuring that the students who are targeted by the out-of-school-time program—that is, the students who can benefit most from participating in the out-of-school-time program—have been identified and that they and their parents are encouraged to participate in the program and that they do so consistently once they enroll.

Recommendations three and four each have to do with the instructional content of the program.

Recommendation three is that the out-of-school-time program take advantage of the opportunity in out-of-school-time programs to provide individualized or small-group instruction, which teachers often are unable to do in the regular classroom and which have been shown in many situations to benefit students.

Recommendation four focuses on structuring the learning opportunity and experiences so that they are engaging. Students are coming into out-of-school-time programs often fatigued from the regular school day. They are tired after school. During the summer, they are tired from the full year of school and they will pay attention to something that is different, engaging, and interesting to them. Therefore we strongly recommend that out-of-school-time experiences be made as engaging as possible.

Recommendation five is targeted to the administrators and educators who are responsible for overseeing that the out-of-school-time program is best meeting the academic needs of their students. And it has to do with monitoring and evaluating the implementation and the outcomes of the program to make sure that it is doing what it is designed to do and that it is achieving the outcomes that it is intended to achieve.

Our recommendations apply to extended learning time programs in general, for instance, afterschool programs, summer learning programs. Some of the recommendations also apply to a subset of extended-learning-time programs such as extended day programs, which typically add or tack on two hours of instructional time to the regular classroom day, and it often involves the same teacher with the same group of students. Even in these circumstances, the two recommendations that have to do with the instructional content and the structure of the instructional experiences will pertain. In particular, this extended learning time, we recommend that it be structured so that teachers and students can take advantage of the opportunity to engage in small-group or one-on-one learning opportunities. This may involve bringing in volunteers or additional staff who aren't usually present in the regular classroom, and that the instructional experiences also be made engaging. The issue of student fatigue would still apply during this extra two hours, and teacher fatigue, and therefore it will be critical that these additional learning experiences be made as interesting and engaging and, in many cases, hands-on as possible.

As schools and school districts are well aware, providing a high-quality learning experience to students is expensive. It takes enormous resources. It takes expertise. It takes professional development. It takes books. It takes space. It takes time. It takes energy to make sure that students who can most benefit are there and present and participating regularly. Therefore, we recognize these costs and we strongly urge schools and districts to consider targeting the program and the services to those students who can benefit most, to the struggling students who need the extra and intensive services.