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Successful Strategies for Extended Learning Opportunities: A Literature Review of Academic Benefits and Beyond

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The purpose of this brief is to review the existing literature pertaining to extended learning time (ELT) programs offered outside the regularly scheduled school day during the school year. The literature points to benefits from both in- and out-of-school programs. The analysis presented here is a synthesis of the literature and incorporates important points made in another Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) report earlier this year (Doykos, 2015). This work was conducted by faculty from the University of Maine for MEPRI as requested by the Maine State Legislature. The literature review, as presented in this brief, accompanies other ongoing research efforts led by MEPRI to support the developmental needs of K-12 students throughout the State of Maine. As such, this brief is intended to provide a synopsis of literature detailing the need to provide ongoing support of extended learning opportunities to positively impact youth development.

Methods

We completed our systematic review of the literature by conducting an exhaustive search with ERIC EBSCO. Using the terms, "after school programs", "extended learning programs", "out-of-school time", and "positive youth development" until we did not find any additional relevant information, we were able to review a wide variety of literature. All of the literature reviewed in this brief was either published in peer-reviewed academic journals, by various governmental agencies such as the Institute of Education Sciences (i.e. subsidiaries of the U.S. Department of Education), or by third-party evaluators and research organizations (e.g. National Institute of Health, MetLife Foundation, Harvard Family Research Project, etc.). Articles were then selected based on generalizable information for informing and making policy decisions, use of research-based information to develop programmatic improvements, and meta-analyses of the existing literature. Articles pertaining to ELT programs during the school year (not summer) and programs that included academic and/or social emotional goals were selected. Some articles included other goals as well. The resulting articles identified in our systematic search (n=35) reinforce the notion that there is a lack of generalizable *research-based* information on extended learning programs.

Findings

As noted by Doykos (2015) in a previous MEPRI report, our findings confirm that there are a number of advantages to providing extended learning opportunities to students, including but not limited to the reduction of risky behavior after school, diminished crime, increased physical health, and decreased high school dropout rates. According to a meta-analysis of 69 programs (Durlak et al., 2010), programs which include <u>sequenced, active, focused, and explicit</u>

(SAFE) instructional components demonstrate far greater gains in both academic, social and emotional learning for students than programs which do not have these features.

Throughout this report, we use the SAFE criteria as a working definition of "high quality", effective ELT programs. It should be noted that generalizing from the small number of studies and the wide variety of programs reflected in this review is unadvisable and that the current state of the literature on ELT programming does not support definitive conclusions about the nature of the effects of ELT programming across various categories of student outcomes.

Academic outcomes: In our examination of the academic outcomes of ELT programs, we looked for evidence of positive effects on student achievement as measured by performance on statewide annual assessments in reading and math, and were particularly interested in understanding these effects for groups that have traditionally been poorly served in school, such as students from low-income households. We found that there is conflicting research evidence to support the idea that participation in ELT programs definitively improves student test scores across the board; however, there is some evidence to suggest that high quality ELT programs that include in-school curricular alignment, safe, focused, and explicit instructional environments, and encourage high rates of attendance may have a positive effect on participating students' in-school performance.

Social and emotional outcomes: Many ELT programs are developed in dialogue with developmental research that suggests that more opportunities for youth to connect with adults in supportive, caring environments are good for youth's social and emotional development. In fact, students themselves often participate in ELT or after-school programs to fulfill their own social goals. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that when youth participate in high quality ELT programming, there is evidence to suggest that this participation has a positive effect on their social and emotional skill development, including their self-efficacy, self-esteem, motivation, and civic efficacy. Similar to academic outcomes, these outcomes are supported and enhanced by participation in high quality ELT programming.

School engagement: School engagement encompasses a wide range of student behaviors; however, for the purposes of this study, we defined positive outcomes for school engagement as increased student attendance at school, decreased behavioral referrals during school, homework completion, and parental involvement in their children's education. While the research we examined did not find a relationship between participation in ELT programs and these behaviors, there is evidence to suggest that young people's attendance, behavior, and overall engagement in school is positively affected by attending ELT programs. Additionally, parental engagement is reported to increase as well in programs that specifically address bridging the gap between what occurs at school and at home.

Health outcomes: While findings for health outcomes for youth as a result of participation in ELT programs are modest, they showcase a handful of innovative and promising practices that could be more widely applied. Health outcomes, for the purpose of this literature review, were defined as wellness education leading to healthier lifestyles and individual decision-making, or the provision of opportunities for physical activity (offered in conjunction with academic or social and emotional curriculum). Literature on extracurricular sports programs or programs focused solely on skill development in athletics were excluded from our analysis.

Conclusion

Overall, we conclude that while there is evidence to support positive outcomes for youth based on participation in ELT programming, the quality of the programming is the greatest factor in determining these outcomes. More effective ELT programs are characterized by having sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (SAFE) instructional components (Durlak et al., 2010). Based on our review of the limited number of rigorous studies of ELT programming, we provide three implications from the research that are meant to help contextualize these findings for Maine's schools and communities:

- *Implication #1: Support high-quality ELT programming in Maine's communities*: Programs that encourage attendance (by reducing barriers to participation such as cost, inconvenient hours, lack of transportation, or social stigma), involve parents, and provide safe, explicit, focused, in-school curricular alignment are effective at producing positive outcomes for youth. High quality programs also invest in hiring and training staff.

- *Implication #2: Support incentives for programs to create a bridge between home and school:* ELT programs provide new opportunities to connect with parents and involve them in their children's education, a practice which has been correlated with a host of positive outcomes for youth. Buy-in from parents and early advertising of programs is important to increase broad participation in ELT programs. Efforts to reduce barriers of social stigma, inconvenience to parents, or participant cost can improve program participation for sustainability.

- *Implication #3: More research on rural ELT program adaptations is needed to understand how programs address funding, staffing, participant recruitment, and transportation issues*: In order to address curricular and organizational innovation rural Maine, more research is needed to understand the flexibility and adaptations of rural programs to deliver high-quality programming. We will be producing a second report that examines exemplary after-school program practices within the context of both rural and non-rural Maine schools in March of 2016.

Introduction

The purpose of this brief is to review the existing literature pertaining to extended

learning time (ELT) programs offered outside the regularly scheduled school day during the

school year (not summer). Programs of this kind are referred to by many different names

including out-of-school time programming, after-school programming, or extended day

programming. The literature points to benefits of ELT programs for various student outcomes,

both those offered on school grounds, as well those offered in community-based settings. The

analysis presented here is a synthesis of the literature and incorporates important points made in

another Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) report earlier this year (Doykos,

2015). The literature review, as presented in this brief, accompanies other ongoing research

efforts led by MEPRI to support the developmental needs of K-12 students throughout the State

of Maine. As such, this brief is intended to provide a synopsis of literature detailing the need to

provide ongoing support of extended learning opportunities to positively impact youth

development. The scope of this brief will include extended learning opportunities occurring

during the school year in after-school hours, and excludes summer ELT programs which were

thoroughly reviewed in an earlier MEPRI report (Doykos, 2015).

Increasingly, policy makers, educators, and researchers are interested in understanding

how K-12 students spend their time outside of the scheduled school day (Parsad, & Lewis,

2009). Many studies suggest extended learning programs as an opportunity to increase student

academic achievement (Black, Somers, Doolittle, Unterman, & Grossman, 2009; Lauer, Akiba,

Wilkerson, Apthorp, & Martin-Glenn, 2006; Smith, Roderick, & Degener, 2005), particularly as

response efforts in light of increased accountability measures placed on school systems to

produce better results on standardized tests (Midkiff & Cohen-Vogel, 2015). However,

additional research suggests non-academic benefits of ELT programs, including, but not limited to, positive youth development of at-risk students, increased school engagement from both students and parents, and various physical and emotional health benefits for students (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010).

As parents and community stakeholders become increasingly interested in the benefits extended learning programs can provide children, so, too, has grown the interest from policy makers and researchers. However, the conclusions regarding effectiveness are compounded by a number of variables, including frequency and duration of participation, quality of programing, and evaluation of extending learning programs (Little, Wimer & Weiss, 2007). This brief will review the literature on a variety of after-school activities that are classified as extended learning opportunities, with the goal of highlighting the broad continuum of extended learning programs offered and describing evidence of positive impacts for improved student attendance, parental engagement, and partnerships with existing community organizations. The report concludes with some broad implications drawn from the available research evidence.

An important aspect of this brief highlights financial constraints legislators should take into consideration when deciding how to support the implementation of extended learning programs. First, extended learning time programs often exacerbate or reinforce socioeconomic gaps, as schools that serve students from working-class communities often have fewer resources and less institutional capacity to provide quality programming than their middle-class community counterparts (Bennett, Lutz, & Jayaram, 2012). Additionally, rural communities often struggle to provide quality academic and social support that can be implemented in a sustainable manner, supporting the need to provide affordable, accessible programs that are staffed with trained educators (Harris, Malone, & Sunnanon, 2011; Martin, Hill & Lawrence,

2014; Zuman, Miller & Short, 2004). In this brief we provide a thorough review of the literature on ELT programs, particularly taking into account the unique and varying demographic, geographic, and social circumstances of Maine's population and the schools that serve the children of Maine. Specifically, this brief will examine the questions:

- ***What is the evidence for positive academic, social and emotional, health or school engagement impacts from extended learning opportunities?***
- ***What are the particular strengths of, and challenges to, developing, supporting, and sustaining, high quality extended learning opportunities in Maine?***

This brief is comprised of three sections. First, we provide a synopsis of the methods for the literature review, specifically how the scholarly literature informs both practitioners and researchers in the evaluation and development of extended learning opportunities. Second, we review the main themes that emerge from the literature that can inform the Maine State Legislature regarding funding opportunities for the support of extended learning programs throughout the State of Maine. We describe conditions which have been shown to be associated with gains in the different outcome areas, such as the characteristics of high quality, effective programs and dosage or participation time. The four main themes or areas of student outcomes are:

- Academic outcomes
- Social and emotional outcomes
- School engagement
- Health outcomes

The third section describes implications for the development and support of extended learning programs. Specifically, these implications take into consideration the wide range of demographics that exist in Maine, including but not limited to economic, geographic, and social variables, particularly as they relate to LD 1394 and the adequacy of funding through the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) Funding Model.

Methods

The authors of this MEPRI report conducted an extensive review of extended learning opportunities, specifically looking at before and after school extended learning programs. This work is an extension of a previous MEPRI brief that examined the impacts of summer school extended learning opportunities, as well as other extended learning opportunities, that focused solely on the academic impacts of these programs (Doykos, 2015). In this brief, the authors acknowledge the correlation between before and after school extended learning opportunities and increased academic outcomes, but just as importantly, analyze the research that suggests correlations to non-academic benefits, such as supporting the development of at-risk youth, increased student and parent engagement within school settings, as well as physical and emotional benefits. In the following sections, we provide a synopsis of the themes that emerged from the literature review and the possible social benefits provided to students as a result of extended learning programs.

Extended Learning Time Literature Review Sources

Our review of the literature on extended learning opportunities was greatly influenced by the increased focus of policy makers, researchers, K-12 educators, and community members, notably in the last 15 years as No Child Left Behind provided increasing pressure to determine how to close the achievement gap between various groups of children. We completed our systematic review of the literature by conducting an exhaustive search with ERIC EBSCO. Applying a Boolean search, the terms, "after school programs", "extended learning programs", "out-of-school time", and "positive youth development" were used until we did not find any additional relevant information, allowing us to review a wide variety of literature. The search yields using these literature review strategies are highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: Search Results

Search Term	Initial Results (Number of Articles)
After School Programs	1,178
Extended Learning Programs	20
Out-of-School Time	222
Positive Youth Development	273

All of the literature selected and reviewed in this brief was either published in peer-reviewed academic journals, by various governmental agencies such as the Institute of Education Sciences, or by third-party evaluators and research organizations (e.g., National Institute of Health, MetLife Foundation, Harvard Family Research Project). Articles were selected based on generalizable information for informing and making policy decisions, use of research-based information to develop programmatic improvements, and meta-analyses of the existing literature. For example, articles were not considered if they only examined the impact of after-school programs on one content area such as the impact on students' attitudes toward science. Additionally, articles that solely examined after-school programs without an academic or social-emotional component (e.g., sports-driven after-school programs), were in an international context, or that focused on summer programs rather than school year programs were also excluded from this analysis. A surprisingly large amount of literature was not considered generalizable. Thus, our analyses focus on 35 articles, which met all of our selection criteria. The searches we conducted using these literature review strategies gave the following results, highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2: Literature Reviewed

Search Term	Number of Articles Reviewed
After School Programs	12
Extended Learning Programs	9
Out-of-School Time	8
Positive Youth Development	6
Total Number of Articles	35

Extended Learning Time Literature Review Analysis

The small number of published articles identified in our systematic search (n=35) reinforces the notion that there is a lack of generalizable, *research-based* information on extended learning programs. Additionally, there is a plethora of *opinion-based* literature that lacks research as evidence to support claims made. Using the What Works Clearinghouse standard for rigorous studies, 11 articles were identified as experimental or quasi-experimental, and eight were identified as qualitative or case studies. Additionally, 12 were identified as either practice guides or literature reviews. Four of the selected pieces of literature were considered meta-analyses, each examining 35, 69, 35, and 27 extended learning time programs, respectively. None of the other articles in the search met these criteria. To reduce researcher subjectivity of our analysis, we coded the topics of the articles separately, and then cross-analyzed our analysis of each article using a member-checking protocol. Taking this information into account, there are four main themes that clearly emerge from the literature review, namely *academic outcomes, social and emotional outcomes*, *school engagement*, and *health outcomes*.

Table 3: Themes in the Literature

Main Themes	Number of Articles Addressing these Themes
Academic Outcomes	20
Social and Emotional Outcomes	20
School Engagement Outcomes	17
Health Outcomes	9

Findings

As noted by Doykos (2015) in a previous MEPRI report, there are a number of advantages to providing extended learning opportunities to students, including but not limited to the reduction of risky behavior after school, diminished crime, increased physical health, and decreased high school dropout rates. The results of our review confirm these previous findings, particularly for those students who come from a disadvantaged economic or isolated geographic demographic. In the following subsections we provide a detailed synopsis of each main theme, and provide an analysis of the strength of findings for each theme. However, it should be noted that generalizing from the small number of studies and the wide variety of programs reflected in this review is unadvisable and that the current state of the literature on ELT programming does not support forming definitive conclusions about the nature of the effects of ELT programming. However, it is possible to see some trends within the literature and the following sections interpret the existing evidence to suggest the practices and conditions that favor positive youth outcomes from participation in ELT programming.

Academic Outcomes

In our examination of the academic outcomes of ELT programs, we looked for evidence of positive effects on student achievement as measured by their performance on statewide annual assessments in reading and math, and were particularly interested in understanding these effects for groups that have traditionally been poorly served in school, such as students from low-income households. However, we found that there is conflicting research evidence supporting a strong relationship between participating in ELT programs and improved student test scores.

- Much of the variation found in the research literature on this issue points to weak or no gains in academic performance as a result of students attending ELT programs at the elementary or middle school level (Dynarski et al., 2004; Good et al 2014; James-Burdumy et al., 2005; McComb & Scott-Little, 2003; Munoz, Potter & Ross, 2008). In two large-scale quasi-experimental studies and one large scale mixed methods study of government sponsored ELT programs (Supplemental Education Services and 21st Century Learning Centers), no significant increases in test scores for elementary or middle school students were found.

- While gains have been reported for elementary-aged ELT participants, particularly in math and in reading *if* using a curriculum aligned with the in-school curriculum *and* when delivered through one on one tutoring (Harris & Little, 2003; Katzir, Goldberg, Aryeh, Donnelly, & Wolf, 2013; Lauer et al., 2006; Smith, Roderick & Degener, 2005), the consistency and potential replicability of these gains can be difficult to interpret as they are inconsistent between studies with some showing effects only in reading, others only in math, and with different student populations in different programs (McComb & Scott-Little, 2003).

- Overall, research suggests that the variation in the evidence for improved test scores is due to the high degree of variation in program delivery that makes comparing outcomes across ELT programs rather difficult (Good et al, 2014; McComb & Scott-Little, 2003).

- The absence of negative effects on student test-scores after participating in ELT programs suggests that more research on the relationship between academic outcomes and ELT participation is needed to account for variations between program structure, delivery and dosage (i.e. how often a child attends the program) (Durlak et al., 2010; Patall, Cooper & Allen, 2010).

Given that some, albeit mixed, evidence exists for positive academic outcomes, we next examined the conditions which have been shown to be associated with gains in these areas. These conditions are outlined in the sections below and emphasize that the location of the program (school-based vs. community-based programming, for example) matters less than the quality of the academic programming being delivered.

The importance of high quality ELT programming in- and out-of-school based settings: Researchers examining gains in academic achievement as a result of participation in ELT programs almost universally acknowledge that one of the greatest difficulties in measuring academic outcomes as a result of ELT programs is the variation in the quality, scope, and structure of the programming that is included under the ELT banner (Durlak et al., 2010; Mahoney et al., 2005; Vandell, Reisner & Pierce, 2007). Durlak and colleagues (2010), for example, found that amongst evaluations of 69 programs in the literature, programs that were characterized by "sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (SAFE)" instructional components (p. 298), showed statistically significant gains in academic achievement as compared to those that did not meet these criteria. In other words, programs that have clearly laid out objectives and target skills for students to acquire, use active learning procedures, have a component devoted to personal or social skill development, and targets the development of those skills specifically are more successful at promoting academic gains than programs without these features (These findings will be discussed in more depth in the section on social and emotional outcomes which follows).

Little advantage to school-based programming: Although it might seem that school-based programs are better at achieving alignment with existing curriculum or program attendance (dosage), there is little evidence suggesting that the program location matters in achieving

academic outcomes. However, school-based programs were more likely to offer programs that provided targeted academic assistance (Durlak et al., 2010) as compared to community-based programs. This difference is likely due to the funding for Supplemental Educational Services (SES) that became available as a result of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001 as No Child Left Behind. Both private and public providers of out-of-school time programming were eligible to receive SES funds as long as they were providing academic assistance to low-income youth in elementary, middle, or high school (Good et al., 2014). Unfortunately, there is little evidence to support gains in academic achievement as a result of youth taking advantage of SES services and usage of these services was found to be uneven, with fewer secondary school youth taking part in academically oriented programs. In fact, Barley and Wegner (2010) suggest that in rural areas SES programs were greatly underutilized, with few students taking advantage of the opportunity for these services.

Social and Emotional Learning Outcomes

Many ELT programs are developed based on developmental research that suggests that more opportunities for youth to connect with adults in supportive, caring environments are good for youth's social and emotional development. In fact, students themselves often participate in ELT or after-school programs to fulfill their own social goals (Fredricks et al., 2002). This may be especially true for older youth, particularly those of middle and high school age who are more drawn to programs that provide opportunities for social interaction and relationship building with peers (Miller, 2003; Vasudevan et al., 2014). For many youth, socializing during supervised, structured time within the presence of supportive adults feels safer than the unsupervised, unstructured time that they might find outside these environments (Fredricks et al., 2002; James-Burdumy et al., 2005; Vasudevan et al., 2014). Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that when

youth participate in <u>high quality</u> ELT programming, there is evidence to suggest that this

participation has a positive effect on their social and emotional skill development.

- Youth who participate in high quality programs that include a safe environment, focused activities, and explicit communication of values and goals, exhibit statistically significant gains in self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation, and self-efficacy versus those who participate in low quality programs (Durlak et al., 2010; Zarrett et al., 2009).

- Youth who participate in ELT programs may also demonstrate increased civic efficacy (the belief that they can make a social difference) and civic engagement (take action to make a social difference) (Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams, 2003).

- Evidence from a longitudinal study of the 4-H program, a national ELT program with arguably the largest reach in the country, demonstrates positive effects for youth social and emotional skill development versus those that do not participate in these programs (Mueller et al., 2011).

- High quality programs that target marginalized populations, such as low-income Latino youth, found that when students attended the program regularly, their social competence (defined as being friendly, being able to calm down when excited, and controlling one's temper) increased (Riggs, 2006).

There is no evidence that shows any negative outcomes for youth social and emotional

skill development because of participation in ELT programs. However, the strength of the

evidence demonstrating positive youth development outcomes as a result of participating in these

programs varies according to program quality and, additionally, student attendance, or dosage, of

the program. As a result, extended learning programs that are promoted to students and parents

as providing development that goes beyond academic benefits can address important components

of adolescent development. Unfortunately, it is difficult to develop concrete recommendations

based on this information because of no clear threshold above which we can definitively say that

these benefits will occur. More research is needed to understand the degree and consistency with

which these conditions must exist in order to achieve these outcomes.

The importance of high quality ELT programming for positive youth development:
High quality programming focuses on youth engagement, high quality content, and a positive environment that facilitates supportive peer interaction (Baldwin, et al., 2009). Similar to the findings for academic outcomes, programs focusing on social and emotional outcomes have far greater gains when they include sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (SAFE) instructional components (Durlak et al, 2010) than programs which do not have these features.

The importance of dosage: How often students attend their ELT program, or dosage, is an important factor in measuring the strength of student outcomes in ELT programs. Riggs (2006) demonstrates that Latino youth who regularly attended their program increased their social competence as compared to their peers who did not regularly attend the program and their peers who did not attend the program at all. This evidence, in addition to other research, which suggests that attendance is an important mitigating factor for a wider range of student outcomes from ELT programs (Patall, Cooper & Allen, 2010), points to the importance of programs maintaining a record of student attendance data in order to better understand their own impact.

Is there a self-selection bias?: One common question in examining social and emotional outcomes for young people as a result of specific interventions is whether youth who already have more advanced social and emotional skills are more likely to participate in ELT programs. However, Mueller and colleagues (2011) suggest that while young people may come to ELT programs with higher levels of social and emotional skill development, evidence from their longitudinal study of 4-H programs nationally suggests that participation in these programs further develops and builds these skills.

School Engagement Outcomes

School engagement encompasses a wide range of student behaviors; however, for the purposes of this study, we defined positive outcomes for school engagement as increased student

attendance at school, decreased behavioral referrals during school, homework completion, and

increased parental involvement in their children's education. While there is little evidence that

academic behaviors, such as homework completion, are affected by ELT program attendance,

there is evidence to suggest that young people's attendance, behavior, and overall engagement in

school, is positively affected by attending ELT programs.

- There were no differences in homework completion between those participating in ELT programs and those that did not (Dynarski et al., 2003; Schurch, 2003).

- ELT opportunities that value, celebrate, and reinforced attendance can lead to increased student engagement, particularly if parents are involved in the engagement effort (Cid, 2014).

- A meta-analysis of afterschool programs that incorporate evidence-based practices found significant increases in regular school day attendance (Durlak et al., 2010).

- ELT programs can help target the reduction of behavioral problems in school due to academic difficulties and struggles by providing additional time and support to understand classroom materials (Schuch, 2003). Additionally, when ELT programs utilize systems of consequences and rewards that are consistent with those used by parents, teachers, and administrators, it helps to reinforce prosocial behavior throughout the student's day (Jones & Deutsch, 2011; Russell & Woods, 2012).

- ELT programs can serve to provide students with tools to respond to anti-social behaviors, such as bullying, in a manner that helps improve school climate and culture (Bhukhanwala, 2014). Additionally, ELT programs can provide students the opportunity to express their voices in non-traditional manners, which can be particularly useful for students who have displayed past behavior issues but are able to find meaning in their learning (Vasudevan et al., 2014).

- Parental involvement can be correlated with participation in ELT programs, particularly those that offer after-school programs that specifically focus on developing relationships between parents, teachers, and administrators (Lumsden, 2003).

Reducing stigma to ELT attendance a key best practice: Similar to findings for other

types of positive youth outcomes, the quality of the program in affecting these outcomes matters

(Durlak et al., 2010). Programs that use high-quality, evidence-based practices (i.e., the SAFE

criteria described earlier), have better gains around student engagement, particularly attendance,

than programs that do not use these practices (Durlak et al., 2010). However, in their review of after-school programs, Midkiff and Cohen-Vogel (2015) found that ELT programs seeking to increase student attendance during the regularly scheduled school day must also reduce social stigmas of attending after-school programs, as well as provide necessary transportation options that are clearly communicated to both parents and students. Reducing social stigma can be as simple as opening the program to all students, rather than select students.

Opportunities for additional behavioral support: One clear finding is that innovative and creative ELT programs with good in-school alignment of practices, such as consistent behavior management systems or climate/cultural elements of in-school settings, can support youth skill development around social competence (Riggs, 2006) – i.e. the moderation of their own behavior – as well as reinforcing the behavior management systems and supports provided by administrators, teachers, and parents in-school (Jones & Deutsch, 2011; Russell & Woods, 2012). This continuity, which will exist in high-quality ELT programs, allows for greater student skill development in these areas in ways that may positively affect their in-school engagement and thus their willingness to attend school.

Parental engagement a key factor and outcome of participation in ELT programs: Parental engagement in their child's education can be an impetus, beyond custodial reasons, for children to participate in ELT programming. However, extended learning programs can also successfully encourage increased parental involvement by increasing communication regarding after-school activities (Jones & Deutsch, 2011). Schools that receive federal funding for school improvement plans, particularly plans that target extended learning programs, often include activities that focus on improving school-home relationships, as well as using parental feedback via surveys to inform decision-making (Kochanek et al., 2011). Therefore, parental engagement

can be seen as both an important pre-cursor, but also important outcome of, student involvement in ELT programming.

Health Outcomes

While findings for health outcomes for youth as a result of participation in ELT programs are modest, they showcase a handful of innovative and promising practices that could be more widely applied. Health outcomes, for the purpose of this literature review, were defined as wellness education leading to healthier lifestyles and individual decision-making, or the provision of opportunities for physical activity (offered in conjunction with academic or social and emotional curriculum). Literature on extracurricular sports programs or programs focused solely on skill development in athletics were excluded from our analysis.

- If appropriately funded, extended learning programs can help educate students on making good nutritional choices that reduce high-caloric intake and replace with healthier alternatives, which can reduce obesity (Afterschool Alliance, 2014b; Hatcher, FitzSimons, & Turley, 2014). Such findings are enhanced when ELT programs created partnerships with local food growers.

- While most schools are not financially able to provide extended learning opportunities that address health and social needs of all students, before and after school programs can provide healthy meals that would not otherwise be afforded to children (Harris & Princiotta, 2009).

- ELT programs can help connect students and parents to medical and mental health professionals to provide additional health and wellness information (Afterschool Alliance, 2014a).

- Extended learning programs that offer physical activities that help meet the daily goal of 45-60 minutes of movement for elementary school children can help all children's physical health, but the gains may be greater for obese children from disadvantaged economic backgrounds according to one study (Schuna et al., 2013).

- Students that partake in after-school physical activity programs show a greater sense of self-efficacy as well as peer support than their peers who do not participate (Huang et. al., 2012).

One limitation of this analysis is the exclusion of programs that were purely comprised of extracurricular athletics or programs that did not include an explicit social and emotional or academic component in their curriculum. It is possible that additional health benefits for youth would be revealed if sports-based programs or others of this type were included.

Conclusion

Overall, there is some evidence to support linking a variety of positive outcomes for youth to their participation in ELT programming, including social and emotional, school engagement and health outcomes. Findings were more mixed regarding a clear link between strong academic outcomes and participating in ELT programs, although this seems to be due to the wide variety in the structure of and populations served by the evaluated programs. In fact, the clearest message from the extant literature is that the *quality* of the program and youth attendance make an important difference in strength of these outcomes for youth (Durlak et al., 2010; Fashola, 2013; Granger, 2008; Halpern, 2002; McComb, & Scott-Little, 2003). More effective ELT programs are characterized by having <u>sequenced, active, focused, and explicit</u> (SAFE) instructional components (Durlak et al., 2010). In this section, we consider the implications of these findings for Maine's unique educational and social contexts and suggest several implications based on the existing research literature for supporting high quality ELT programming for Maine's youth.

Implication #1: Support high-quality ELT programming informed by best practices in the field. It is clear from the literature that the programs with the greatest returns for youth development are those which have well-trained staff members delivering programming that is:

 a. aligned with in-school curricular programming;

b. follows many in-school pedagogical best practices, such as providing active learning opportunities aligned to clear learning objectives; and,

c. provides engaging programming to youth that includes both opportunities to engage in social and academic components.

These programs need not be school-based; in fact, there is a little evidence suggesting that school-based programs are more successful in delivering these components than community-based programs. While in-school alignment and adherence to pedagogical best practices may be harder to achieve from a community-based setting, the existence of high-quality, community based programs, suggests that such organizational partnerships between schools and community organizations are both possible and desirable. What can be further examined, however, is the importance of alignment of curriculum and instruction between the extended learning program and the school district the program is serving.

Implication #2: Provide incentives to both school and community-based ELT programs that find creative ways to bridge the gap between home and school. Given that both school-based and community-based programs tend to perform similarly with regard to positive outcomes for youth (with most variation due to program quality), the next most important factor in distinguishing quality ELT programs are those that are able to effectively bridge the gap between home and school through engaging parents. Parental engagement in their children's education has been linked to many positive outcomes for youth, including increased school attendance, increased motivation, increased academic outcomes, and decreased behavioral referrals (Jones & Deutsch, 2011). ELT programs provide new and exciting territory for engaging parents in their child's education. With greater curricular flexibility, ELT programs often provide new opportunities for youth to shine or demonstrate skills or competencies that they do not get to show in school, giving ELT staff new points of connection with parents (Kochanek et al., 2011). School-based ELT programs can provide continuations of in-school

behavioral and academic supports for students with parent support, and ELT programs at local community centers may provide needed wraparound social services for youth's families (Kochanek et al., 2011).

Related to parent engagement is the challenge of maintaining sufficient program participation to sustain ELT programming. Efforts to reduce the potential for students to experience social stigmas related to their participation in ELT programs can improve student participation. One way some schools have done this is by making the programs open to all students rather than targeting only certain student groups. Other factors related to gaining parent buy-in and maintaining participation rates include making the program schedule and location convenient for parents, and reducing barriers related to participation cost.

Implication #3: Need for greater innovation in rural ELT programming. As observed by Doykos (2015) and Harris and colleagues (2011), ELT programs located in rural areas require a number of unique solutions to complex problems of program delivery, including recruitment from small student populations, recruitment of trained staff, and transportation outside of the normal school bussing schedule with few public transportation options (Midkiff & Cohen-Vogel, 2015). As a result, ELT programs in rural areas require support that will allow them to develop and maintain innovative strategies for addressing these unique needs. More research is needed to understand how Maine's rural ELT programs address these challenges, which is a social equity issue for geographically isolated and economically impoverished students.

This literature review, like all research endeavors, has several limitations. First, it has been limited by the quality of the existing data on ELT programming found in the literature. Many ELT programs do not have the capacity to collect high quality data on a regular basis to reflect on their own practices and therefore, high quality data is not available for evaluating their

impact. We have attempted to focus our review on rigorous, high-quality studies of single programs or meta-analyses of many programs in order to avoid the issue of low quality data or evaluations that rely mainly on the perception of program organizers. Secondly, our emphasis throughout has been on the difference high quality, well-sequenced, and well-aligned curriculum make to cultivating positive developmental outcomes for youth. However, we have little data supporting how widely or often these practices are used, making it difficult to suggest the frequency or strength of these findings in Maine's existing ELT programming, in particular. Further study is needed of high quality ELT programs, as well as ELT programming in the rural context, to support broader conclusions and development of recommendations.

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