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**Core Function:** High School/Opportunity to Learn

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**Effective Practice****Extend learning opportunities for students**

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**Overview:** Research demonstrates that students benefit from a wide array of opportunities to extend their learning beyond the classroom. Student participation in extracurricular activities (e.g., athletics, student council, arts, academic clubs) has been shown to positively impact academic performance, motivation, and engagement, and may be even more critical for low-income students who may lack resources to participate outside of school. Students also benefit from service- and work-based learning opportunities, provided they are tied to what is learned in the classroom and students are guided to reflect on their experiences. Dual enrollment and access to online courses can afford students a chance to take courses they might not otherwise have access to, thus personalizing their learning and increasing academic engagement and performance.

**Evaluate Your Practice:** How does your school require and/or encourage participation in extracurricular programs? Is there a broad array of activities available to students, and what is the level of participation at your school? Are there barriers to participation for certain activities, and if so, what steps can be taken to remove them? Who is or will be responsible for capturing and reporting data on extracurricular participation, and how will this data be used to improve programs? What processes will your school use to design, implement, and monitor student service learning projects, and how will teachers be equipped to facilitate these projects? Are service- and work-based learning experiences tied directly to classroom learning, and are students guided to reflect on their experiences? Would students at your school benefit from a career academy approach? What dual enrollment and online learning opportunities are available to students, and what is the participation level of different student subgroups (e.g., at-risk, high-performing)?

### *Introduction*

Building student engagement in high school both within and beyond the classroom can enhance the likelihood of academic success and persistence towards graduation. Educational research has clearly demonstrated that high schools should provide ample opportunities for students to extend their learning beyond the classroom in order to encourage this engagement. These opportunities include those directly connected to school curriculum and learning (e.g., service learning, dual college enrollment, etc.) as well as those that offer a chance for students to try out and refine their skills and interests (e.g., sports, performing and visual arts, clubs, etc.). Learning beyond the classroom can enhance student understanding of the larger community, help them build relationships with adults and find mentorship, grow peer networks, and learn about a particular trade and what the working world is like (Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Ort, 2002; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003). A discussion of the research that supports inclusion of these opportunities and how schools can promote student involvement follows.

### *How do students benefit from co-curricular programming, and how can schools encourage student participation?*

Extracurricular, or co-curricular, activities are voluntary student activities that occur beyond the realm of the normal academic curriculum; however, it is important to note that they are not a diversion, but an extension of good educational programming (National Federation of State High School Associations, n.d.). Student participation in extracurricular programming, which has been referred to as “extra-classroom energy in action” (Lawson & Lawson, 2013), has consistently been linked to positive developmental benefits, including higher grades, motivation, and school completion (Arcaira, Vile, & Reisner, 2010; Bohnert, Fredericks, & Randall, 2010; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005), as well as self-esteem (Kort-Butler & Hagewen, 2011) and civic involvement in terms of voting and volunteering beyond high school

(Hart & Donnelly, 2007). Athletic programs, for example, have been shown to reduce dropout rates by almost 40% (Holloway, 2002), and in-school arts participation and engagement are highly correlated with academic motivation and students' sense of well being (Martin et al., 2013). Students with disabilities who participate in high school extracurricular activities have been shown to be more likely to complete postsecondary degrees (Palmer, William, & Cheatham, 2016). Extracurricular programming may foster school connectedness and may be especially beneficial for low-income students who may lack resources for participation outside of school (Marchetti, Wilson, & Dunham, 2016; Massoni, 2011). These activities are likely to have adult supervision, so they often result in positive adult-student relationships that are less formal than those between teacher and student (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005).

The rate of student participation in school activities is related to their perception of school climate, as well as school size. In schools with larger student bodies and less positive climates, student participation may be lower (McNeal, 1999). This is partly due to an issue of access, with more students who may be vying for a fixed number of positions on sports teams or roles in a student governing body, thus allowing smaller percentages of students to participate. Schools must provide more opportunities and remove barriers to student engagement and participation, such as minimum GPA or prerequisite expertise (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). Making a diverse array of clubs and activities available to a wide range of students allows them the opportunity to embed their identities in multiple extracurricular contexts and foster multiple competencies, thus enhancing their adjustment and attachment to school (Barber et al., 2005, as cited in National Federation of State High School Associations, n.d.).

*What types of nontraditional opportunities can schools incorporate to extend learning opportunities for students?*

In addition to offering students a diverse array of extracurricular offerings as described above, high schools can incorporate educational approaches that are intrinsically tied to the curriculum and that offer students an opportunity to extend their learning within communities, colleges, and work settings. Service learning is a teaching strategy that integrates community service with instruction to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Service learning is not mere

volunteering; it requires the application of academic standards to a project. According to English and Moore (2010), service learning promotes learning through active participation in service experiences, provides structured time for students to reflect about their service experience, provides an opportunity for students to use skills and knowledge in real-life situations, extends learning beyond the classroom and into the community, and fosters a sense of caring for others.

Work-based learning (WBL) provides vocational or technical experience in work settings. About 72% of U.S. high schools provide WBL opportunities for students (NCES, 2011). Compared with other countries, high school students in the U.S. spend less time learning in a work setting (Hoffman, 2011), resulting in relatively few U.S. youth having the applied skills that employers seek (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). WBL has been found to help students apply and extend classroom learning, increase motivation and understanding, explore careers, and develop critical understanding of the work environment (Brown, 2003; Kenny, Walsh-Blair, Blustein, Bempechat, & Seltzer, 2010). WBL can facilitate work readiness (Halpern, 2006; Phillips, Blustein, Jobin-Davis, & White, 2002), increase job-related skills and knowledge (Halpern, 2006), and increase school attendance and reduce dropout (Hughes, Bailey, & Mechur, 2001). Further, high school students who participate in WBL activities achieve at the four-year postsecondary level as well as or better than students who do not participate in these activities (Swail & Kampits, 2004).

Service and work-based learning allow students to connect outside experiences to the classroom in ways that other activities cannot. They each provide different real-world experiences that can expand student understanding, connect students to possible career paths, and enhance future civic engagement (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2002; Scales, et al., 2006). Both service learning and internship/WBL approaches have been found to be most effective when there is classroom-based preparation prior to the real-world experience and guided reflection during and after the experience (Kemple & Snipes, 2000; Scales et al., 2006). Focusing on student processing of the experiences as much as the experiences themselves is critical for educators to maximize their students' experiences and reap potential benefits.

Career academies provide a systematic way to connect students with vocational knowledge and work experi-

ences. Career academies are typically “schools within schools,” where students work with a team of teachers around a common vocational theme (e.g., healthcare, technology occupations). The school forms partnerships with businesses and other organizations within the community who provide employees who work in these areas to serve as mentors, guest speakers, and internship providers (Stern, Dayton, & Raby, 2010). Coursework is designed to promote college readiness and ensure that students earn the credits they need to graduate and attend college, and academic rigor is equally important to the vocational experiences provided. Research has shown that career academy students had higher rates of on-time graduation, attendance, and engagement, as well as lower dropout rates, when compared with similar peers not in an academy (Kemple & Snipes, 2000; Stern, et al., 2010).

High schools can also extend learning opportunities to students by offering dual enrollment programs. Dual Enrollment programs allow high school students to take courses at a local community college and earn college credit. These programs provide students with more rigorous or discipline-focused course options that may not be available at their high schools, especially for those who are interested in vocational or technical programming (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002). Dual enrollment programs have been shown to be associated with positive outcomes such as high school graduation and college enrollment rates, college grade point averages, and progress toward college completion (Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2007). Similarly, online learning can allow students to take courses that they might not otherwise be able to access, either because of lack of in-person availability or time. Online courses can be accessed “anytime, anywhere,” allowing students to work at their own pace and from any location. These courses can provide personalized learning experiences for students and enhance their engagement and academic performance (Patrick, Kennedy, & Powell, 2013).

**Indicators to Support the Effective Practice**

The school expects all students to participate in activities to develop skills outside of the classroom (e.g., service learning, athletics, enrichment, internships).

**Indicators to Support the Effective Practice**

The school provides all students with opportunities to learn through nontraditional educational settings (e.g., virtual courses, dual enrollment, service learning, work-based internships).

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