



Indicator: All staff conducting co-curricular programs fulfill the purposes of the programs including appropriate elements of the aligned curriculum and other cognitive competency activities. (C4)

Explanation: The evidence suggests that co-curricular program staff should also be knowledgeable about the Cognitive Competency and ways in which to implement it in their academic activities. Co-curricular programs can reinforce and expand on the habits and knowledge that students are learning in the school day. The more aligned the co-curricular program is to the school day, the more likely it is for students to fully master the content and practices of the Cognitive Competency.

Questions: How are co-curricular programs aligned to the curriculum of the school day? In what ways are co-curricular and school-day staff communicating to ensure that they are best collaborating for student success? How are co-curricular staff being trained on the Cognitive Competency?

What is the Cognitive Competency?

The Cognitive Competency refers to what teachers, families, and volunteers “need to know” to best help their students learn; this can include the standards, curricula, and the basics of both child and brain development that will help them encourage student mastery of the content that they are learning (Educator Competencies, 2015). This competency aims to connect what students are learning to their prior knowledge and previously mastered material to foster and assist in new learning. Vocabulary and writing tasks play a key role in the cognitive competency, as tools for connecting pieces of knowledge across content areas and domains (Redding, 2016).

In the era of the Common Core State Standards and comparable sets of state-level standards, expectations for what and how students will learn have risen. Focusing more on conceptual understanding than on rote learning and memorization, these sets of standards represent a different way of learning than many adults were exposed to during their own school experiences. This era of learning standards emphasizes interdisciplinary learning and demonstrating proficiency in context, across multiple content areas, such as teaching and assessing writing in a social studies course (Ryerse, Schneider, & Vander Ark, 2014). This shift in standards nicely fits into the Cognitive Competency, which emphasizes making connections between content, skills, and knowledge (Redding, 2016).

How Can the Staff of Co-Curricular Programs Work to Promote the Cognitive Competency?

The school day is not the only time that students are receiving academic instruction and interventions. Saturday academies, summer school, and extended school years, as well as traditional after-school time are all co-curricular opportunities for students to learn. During these times, opportunities can be made available to students who need enrichment, academic intervention, and social supports. In addition to schools, it is common to see these programs run by community centers, churches, and non-profit agencies (Closing the Gap, 2008).

Therefore, teachers and parents are not the only adults involved in children’s educational experiences and not the only ones who can help students continue to learn and grow. Through co-curricular programs and community activities, there are many other adults willing to help students however they can. These adults can provide additional

academic and emotional supports for students, but for them to be most effective, they need to be familiar with the goals, content, and strategies of the classroom. The onus is on the school to fully integrate these partners and treat them as equals and meaningful contributors in the task of educating children (Bayerl, 2014).

Beckett, et al. (2009) present a set of recommended strategies for maximizing the effect of educational activities outside of the classroom. Although these recommendations are primarily for programs serving elementary and middle school students in disadvantaged communities, the wider applicability of these recommendations can be helpful for high school programs as well. The most applicable suggestion for the Cognitive Competency is for schools and providers to ensure that the program is connected to what and how learning happens during the school day. This connection allows program staff to become familiar with the academic expectations and curriculum of the school and also gives students extra time and different ways to practice what they are learning during the day.

Little (2009) talks about the almost symbiotic relationships that schools and co-curricular programs can have. Programs provide opportunities that schools cannot afford, can review and reinforce material and habits that are taught during the school day. On the other hand, schools are able to help programs target the students most in need of services, allow programs access to facilities and materials, and help the program curricula align with that of the school day. By encouraging co-curricular program staff to also build and reinforce the practices of the Cognitive Competency within their program activities, students will even greater opportunities to turn their practices into learning habits.

References and resources

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