Sustainable Extracurricular Programs

Active Schools in Action #4

Introduction

Looking at your school calendar through the eyes of many students what stands out the most to you? If you responded "NAPLAN", whoops try again. If you said – swimming sports, athletics, school production, or the Great Victorian Bike Ride, go to the head of the class! We would like to think our students keep coming back to school for the reading and writing. While many students really like the academics, as they should, it is the extracurricular activities that have them salivating for more and can be the point of difference in their school experience.

What are Extracurricular Programs?

Within the context of the DET Active Schools initiative, extracurricular programs provide opportunities for students to be active before, during or after school (during non-curriculum time). Programs should focus on enabling students to explore their abilities and be provided opportunities in less traditional sports, recreational and physical activity programs they may not have been exposed to previously. Schools are encouraged to utilise the school environment and make clear and sustainable links to the wider local community.

Considerations in developing your Extracurricular Program

Developing sustainable extracurricular programs should be framed around the four key areas as outlined below. It is vital each of these areas is considered to build capacity, understanding and wide support for the programs. In considering these areas, it is vital to consider the unique characteristics and capacities of the school and community context in which the program will be developed and delivered.

1.   Policy and Leadership

Sustainable programs are valued, prioritised, planned for and supported in your school. Teachers engaging on building extracurricular programs need to engage school leadership in the planning process. Supportive leadership can ensure the program becomes a core component of the school and not a "nice to add on". This can be demonstrated through capacity building of staff enabling them to develop the qualifications and competencies required to deliver and maintain programs. Development of policies supporting the resourcing of extracurricular programs and policies (eg: uniform and physical activity policies) that encourage physical activity across the school day are examples of how leadership can support sustainable programs.

2.   Teaching and Learning

The inclusion of physical education (PE) content aligned to extracurricular activities and non-traditional sports can build student competency, knowledge and confidence in these activities. Although, by the DET definition, extracurricular activities occur across the day in non-curriculum time, using PE time to expose students to these activities can increase engagement of students. Use of student voice to identify, plan and facilitate activities of interest to students is a great way to involve students. A particular focus could be on identifying activities and non-traditional sports available in the local community.

3. Community Engagement

Linking what occurs at school to what is available in the community can lead to a smooth transition into the community, building towards lifelong activity involvement. At school this could include celebrating and supporting active recreation initiatives, for example, walk/ride to school days. Using quality local providers and facilities for school incursions and excursions introduces students to programs in the community that are more likely to support long term engagement. Students and families are more likely to engage with various community groups when a connection has been formed with members from those groups.

4. Environment

The school and wider community needs to provide a supportive social environment where all students, staff, parents and the community are encouraged to be physically active. Provision of a diverse range of culturally safe activities where students and others can find a sense of enjoyment and achievement. Consider running activities on the school grounds before expecting students to engage in similar activities in the community. Also link in with the school community to find out what students, staff and parents want to engage in to have greater success and engagement from all in the extracurricular activities you implement.

Tips for implementing Extracurricular Programs

Address the need in your school

Although our schools share many similarities, they're also unique. Take for example a school located near the beach compared to a school situated in the inner city or a remote country town. It is vital to plan your extracurricular opportunities with this in mind. Here are some time saving tips as you implement your extracurricular program.

Engage with others

Reach out to the local sporting and recreational clubs and organisations within your community. Not sure who to talk to? You can save yourself some time by contacting your Local Government or Regional Sports Assemblies. Representatives from either of these organisations will help direct you to: clubs in your area, coaches and activity leaders who can support you, and even provide information about grants that can help launch your extracurricular program and pave the way for successful partnerships and ongoing participation in physical activity.

Listen

What is it that you hear? 'I loved it when we tried breakdancing (SSV Play) it was so much fun.' Or, 'we want better fitness equipment at school and access to it so that we can work out.' Or, 'I wish we had something to do at lunchtime.' Comments like these are music to the ears of physical educators and recreation leaders (these words mean "we've got "em"). Listen to your students and harness their enthusiasm and momentum. You will need to complete a quality control of all external providers e.g. working with children's check, covid vaccination certificate and activity specific qualifications.

Look:

Are most students 'involved' in some form of physical activity at recess or lunch? If not, why not? Is the environment conducive to play? It might be time to introduce some new opportunities. As highlighted above engage students in this process.

Examples of Extracurricular Programs in Schools

The below examples provide some snapshots of different types of Extracurricular Programs being implemented in DET schools, supported by our Expert Support Service. Please head to the **Active Schools Online Community** to see the Case Study on Ararat College to learn about their initiative in more detail.

Ararat College: This school "kicked a goal" with students and staff when they converted an unused shed into a functioning gymnasium and supportive activity space. Students and staff access the gym before school, during break times and after school. The students love this flexibility, with students and several staff members found "sweating it out in the gym" at the same time. The PE program is also assisting students to understand how to use this space safely and how to develop their personal fitness.

Drouin Secondary College: Lunchtime volleyball has become a hit with the students with a retired PE teacher sharing his passion once per week with students interested in playing. The former teacher promotes the local volleyball association (of which he is a life member) and this has seen several students (& staff) joining local teams and participating in SSV competition.

Somerville College: The Outreach Program provides students a chance to connect and build a rapport with their local youth workers in a fun "hang out" space where students can connect, relax or play games. It is also a great opportunity to find out what youth-based activities Somerville and surrounds have to offer.

Bayswater College: The range of programs offered included incursions with external organisations across all year levels. Student activity levels have increased during the activities, and student behaviour has risen as access to the activities was used a motivational tool.

The next *Active Schools in Action* issue will explore **"Active Travel"**.

If you are interested in finding out more about Active Schools, please go to the **Active Schools Toolkit**, the *Active Schools Online Community* or email activeschools@achper.vic.edu.au