Using Research to Drive Policy and Practice in Rural Out-of-School Time Programs

Susan M. Sheridan
Jeff Cole
Jenifer Gager
What is R²Ed About?

- **Children** growing up in rural America, going to rural schools, and developing skills and competencies in the basic areas of reading, science and math
- **Rural schools, teachers, and families**, and the kinds of supports that they need to help advance the learning of rural students
- **Increased availability of and access** to cutting-edge, research-based educational/ instructional strategies
Why Study OST in Rural Schools?

- Generally speaking, rural schools in America are:
  - susceptible to isolation, staff turnover, limited availability to specialized resources, and diminished access to ongoing support and professional development
  - located in geographic settings with considerable distances between them.

- Disconnects between schools, & between schools and other community partners, often separate individuals from important resources, & from each other.

- Students in rural schools don’t always experience the same opportunities to access innovations and experiences that are available in urban and suburban schools.
Immediate Goals of $R^2$Ed

- **To improve** students’ academic achievement and skills by identifying research-based methods to help teachers systematically deliver evidence-based instruction in rural settings.

- **To identify, develop and validate** strategies for improving the quality of education in rural settings, including challenges faced by rural schools in providing professional development and advanced training and opportunities.

- **To provide** leadership to the field of rural education researchers to inform policy.
R²Ed Studies: What Works?

Studies conducted through R²Ed use systematic, rigorous research designs; carefully defined samples in rural settings; objective and reliable measures; specification of intervention/program components; and quantitative, experimental methods to answer questions about “what works” in rural settings.

Planned studies focus on identifying
- “best (evidence-based) practices” for supporting rural teachers in innovative educational approaches
- effective family-school partnership practices to address behaviors that interfere with learning
First Steps:
Comprehensive Literature Reviews

- Rural Teacher Professional Development
- Family-School Partnerships in Rural Settings
- Out-of-School Time/After-School Programs in Rural Settings
Review of Literature on Rural OST
(Sheridan, Semke & Witte)

**Purposes:**

- Summarize what is known and unknown about “what works” in rural OST programs based on available research literature.
- Explore together what can be concluded, and what information is still necessary to inform practice and policy.
Identification of Studies

- Search of research databases conducted (e.g., Academic Search Premier; PsychInfo) with the following keywords:
  - Rural, After school, Out of school, Extracurricular, Summer school
- Table of contents of select journals reviewed (1990 to present)
- Comprehensive reviews and reports of OST programs summarized
- Reviews of reference lists of primary sources

24 papers were found that described OST programs specific to rural settings.

** Of these, 12 met the criteria of “study” that purported to report meaningful outcomes for students, teachers, families, or communities.
What Did We Look For?

Program Features

- Length of program
- Structural components/Active ingredients
- Staffing

Study Features

- Location/Definition of “rural”
- Questions addressing uniqueness of OST in rural settings
- Participant (student) information
- Experimental design (experimental, quasi-experimental, correlational, descriptive)
- Outcomes/Findings
Results of Research Review
Where and How are Rural OST Programs Delivered??

Setting Characteristics
- No studies defined “rural” for their study
- No studies tested issues specific to OST in rural schools

Program Context
- Community-based
- School-linked programs
- School-based programs
42% Community based

25% School-based

33% School-linked

School Based
- School makes executive decisions regarding program implementation and curriculum
- Program/activities take place primarily on school grounds
- Funding may come from multiple sources and is controlled by school
- Program/activities linked to school day through curriculum

School Linked
- Organization/governing body outside of school runs program and holds executive decision making authority
- Program/activities may take place on or off school grounds depending on available resources
- Funding often comes from multiple sources and is not controlled by school
- Program/activities linked to school through academic assistance and progress monitoring

Community Based
- Organization or governing body holds all decision making authority
- Program/activities take place off school grounds
- Funding from multiple sources and controlled by community organization
- Link to school may be limited to homework assistance
What is Included in Rural OST Programs??

Active Ingredients/Components

- 75% instructional components
- 66% health awareness
- 58% community partnership
- 58% mentoring/tutoring
- 33% parent involvement
What about Other Program Features??

**Length**
- Length varies tremendously (6 wks – 2 years)
- Some “drop in” programs with no start/end; others have clearly defined length
- No systematic way of investigating how length affects outcomes

**Staffing**
- Only 25% reported on staff
- 67% used trained staff; 22% trained & untrained staff
- Vast differences in education and credentialing of staff; paid and voluntary roles
Who Participates??

- Samples range from fewer than 20 to more than 200

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten age</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary age</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix K/Elementary</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mix Middle/High</td>
<td>17%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Characteristics</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“At risk” sample</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnically diverse</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior problems</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic problems</td>
<td>25%</td>
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</tbody>
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What is the Purpose?

- 92% studies focus on child outcomes
  - 75% academic
  - 67% social-emotional
  - 25% job training
  - 17% behavior
  - 17% cultural
  - 17% health
  - 8% spirituality
- 17% studies focus on family outcomes
- 8% studies focus on relationships
Effects of Rural OST: How Will We Know??

- 67% peer reviewed
- One study met criteria as “experimental design”
- 58% pre-post design
- 17% quasi-experimental
- 17% correlational
- 17% qualitative
- 17% descriptive

Given so few designs testing effects of OST programs meeting criteria for rigorous experimental design, little can be concluded about “what works.”
What Did We Find??

- 100% studies report child findings
  - ✓ 75% academic
  - ✓ 67% social-emotional
  - ✓ 33% behavior
  - ✓ 8% cultural
  - ✓ 8% health
  - ✓ 8% job training
- 33% report staff findings
- 25% report relationship findings (school, family, community)
- 17% report family findings
What’s Difficult?

- Some studies reported barriers to implementation of OST programs in rural settings
  - Lack of consistent availability of staff members
  - Mentors have challenges with boundaries and cultural differences
  - Resource constraints
What Now?

What do these findings suggest to you?

What are some topics most important for your work in supporting rural OST programs?
For more information, please contact:
Dr. Susan Sheridan
Director, National Center for R²Ed
216 Mabel Lee Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588
ssheridan2@unl.edu