Considerations When Planning a Virtual Program

Getting students to participate/login to virtual programming after school-day virtual learning is a significant challenge for all after-school programs. The following outlines key considerations when planning a virtual program to improve student participation.

1. **Schedule of Activities**

   Schedule a Few Activities Later in the Day/Early Evening.
   - ⯈ Consider providing a short break from the end of school-day virtual programming to the start of virtual after-school programming to allow students, particularly younger students, to grab a snack and decompress.
   - ⯈ Consider scheduling some virtual sessions later in the day/early evening, 1-2 times per week after 'other priorities', and when parents are home from work.

   Communicate and Make the Schedule Easy to Understand.
   - ⯈ Establish communication with Parents - Promoting the program and 'getting the word out' is critical – via flyers, email, Facebook, School/Classroom websites, etc.
   - ⯈ When developing the schedule to allow students to sign-up/enroll in an activity – keep it simple, provide examples of a sample schedule for ranges of grade levels.

   Provide Activities of Interest and Minimize Overlap.
   - ⯈ Provide fewer activity options - those of priority – 1 - academic enrichments and 2 - enrichments that will be of high interest to students and support program objectives.
   - ⯈ Likewise, avoid overlap of activity times when scheduling for a grade level group. Fewer activities and no overlap will make the schedule simpler to understand and less confusing.

2. **Technology/Logging In**
   - ⯈ Consider if the targeted population will experience issues with internet accessibility or if they will have access to a device. If logging in and lack of computer knowledge are challenges of the targeted population, offer training to parents and students in relevant technology platforms such as Google and Zoom (e.g., how-to login, mute, turn on the video, etc.).

3. **Activities/Programming**

   Synchronous Online Learning
   - ⯈ When planning virtual online activities incorporate the recommendations noted above – Schedule of Activities.
   - ⯈ Offer and choose activities of interest that will keep students focused and excited to participate.
   - ⯈ Make sure material presented is appropriate for the participating age groups.
   - ⯈ Link academic enrichments (e.g., book club) and tutoring to school-day curriculum. If participation drops for tutoring, consider adding 15 or 20 minutes of tutoring at the end of an enrichment activity or think of creative ways (incentives, challenges) for academic support and skill-building activities.

   Asynchronous Activities
   - ⯈ Activities that have yielded the highest participation with afterschool programs are the take-home kits/projects that students complete on their own time and then send in a document or picture showing that they completed the project. Examples include STEM Makerspace kits, art projects, community/home scavenger hunts, journal writing, research, access link to a video on their own time, academic/skill building challenges, and camp/adventure in a box.
   - ⯈ To track hours for asynchronous activities: 1) Student posts a comment, screenshot of the project, or submits completed work and 2) Use actual duration time if applicable, OR estimate how long activity should take, on average.
   - ⯈ For the take-home activities (kits, crafts, etc.), provide materials and supplies in an organized way and clear instructions.

   Parent Participation/Engagement
   - ⯈ Two areas that worked well related to parent engagement: a) parents participated in after-school enrichments alongside their child (i.e., nutrition/cooking, art projects, etc.) and b) family education programs (for parents or parent/child) held during the evening hours - after work. Specific examples of successful family engagement and literacy programs include Google Training, Financial Workshops, Trivia Nights, Energy Educations Workshops, Fire Prevention, Mask Sewing, Family Bingo/SEL, Family Scavenger Hunt, Nutrition and Mindfulness Family Fun Night, and Parent Book Club.