

National 4-H School Enrichment Survey

Executive Summary

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Background and Purpose

Nationwide, school enrichment has become the most widely used delivery mode in providing educational experiences through the 4-H youth development program, with 3.7 million youth reached annually. Unfortunately, not much has been known about how 4-H school enrichment is offered throughout the country since it varies greatly in each state and locality. This study was sponsored by the CSREES National 4-H Experiential Learning Design Team (ELDT) to find out more about how school enrichment and other delivery modes are used and viewed by local Extension staff. Findings are also needed for nationwide strategic planning.

Methodology

This study employed descriptive survey and correlational research methods and was conducted from June through September 1999. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher and reviewed by members of ELDT, who served as a panel of experts. The survey was available for completion online via a special World Wide Web-based questionnaire hosted by National 4-H Council. Every county Extension agent or staff member who is most responsible for organizing and conducting, or coordinating 4-H school enrichment programs in each county, parish, or locality was invited to participate. In cases where school enrichment programs are not conducted in a particular county, only limited questions needed to be completed. The survey was promoted extensively through state 4-H leaders, NAE4-HA, and other means. A printed questionnaire was also made available. Email reminders were sent to maximize response. Even though this was a self-selected group, a broad representation of respondents from 50 states was achieved, allowing careful generalization beyond the respondents. 813 usable surveys were returned, 88 percent via the web site. Responses were treated confidentially.

Findings

School enrichment use

86 percent of respondents reported that school enrichment (SE) was conducted in their counties. Of reasons given for not offering it, 51 percent said it was because there was "limited time available" and 28 percent said there was "no demand from potential clientele." Percent of responding counties not using each delivery mode were: organized 4-H clubs (5.4% not using), special interest/short term programs (10.2%), overnight camping (22.2%), individual study (45.1%), school-aged child care education (60.3%), and instructional tv/video (71.4%). School enrichment programs (46%) and clubs (41%) were ranked the highest in youth reached by delivery modes in responding counties.

Staff opinions about delivery modes

When asked to rank the potential effectiveness of each delivery mode in having the most positive impact on youth involved, respondents ranked organized clubs the highest. Respondents also ranked 4-H clubs highest as the delivery mode they would be most interested in devoting time to conducting if all modes were equally easy to do, supported, and valued. Purposes for conducting school enrichment ranked highest were to reach youth not reached by other delivery modes (53 percent) and to promote 4-H, meet demand, and develop interest in longer-term delivery modes.

Topics offered, audiences, and marketing

School enrichment topics offered were based on requests of teachers or school administrators (33 percent), interest and expertise of staff/volunteers (25 percent), and curriculum standards or mandates of school systems (16 percent). The people teaching school enrichment in counties were equally distributed among Extension agents, Extension staff, and school teachers. 61 percent of respondents reported that they served an equal combination of schools that request SE programs and those targeted by Extension. One-fourth rely solely on schools who contact Extension. 73

percent of counties use targeted mailings sent to principals/teachers to promote SE programs, 42 percent gave presentations to parent-teacher organizations or teacher conferences, 24 percent used mass media, while 35 percent used no formal promotion of SE programs.

Curriculum, program delivery, and teaching methods

61 percent employed a balance of experiential learning and lecture/demonstration in teaching students, whereas 31 percent used experiential (hands-on) methods following the 4-H experiential learning model (do-reflect-apply) exclusively. Total time devoted to instruction for each SE unit ranged from "1-2.9 hours" (32 percent) to "more than five hours" (29 percent), with 21 percent devoting 3-5 hours. The most common methods of delivery were multiple classroom periods taught by teacher/school staff trained by Extension or using 4-H lesson materials (27 percent) or taught by Extension staff/volunteers and followed up with additional classroom periods taught by school staff (18 percent), and one classroom period taught by Extension staff or volunteers (15 percent). Typical sources of curriculum used were developed or adapted by 4-H at the state or national level (56 percent) or local level (38 percent).

Funding and fees

In regard to funding SE programs, two-thirds of counties responding stated that no fees are charged and costs are covered by 4-H. Furthermore, 35 percent said that equipment/curriculum is loaned free-of-charge. When fees were charged, fees were rarely (6 percent of cases) beyond consumable supplies, and three-fourths of the time, fees for consumables were paid by the school, not individual students.

Program evaluation

One-fifth of respondents reported only collecting data for enrollment statistics, with little or no evaluation of program quality or impact. The most common evaluation method used was informal observation or verbal feedback from teachers. Of formal methods used, respondents reported using a written evaluation form given to teachers for their assessment of student learning (48 percent), written evaluation form given directly to students (34 percent), and written testing of students (28 percent). Frequency of SE program evaluation ranged from every time a unit is taught (39 percent) to once per school year (32 percent). 29 percent evaluated periodically throughout the year.

Problems and benefits

Of benefits achieved through SE programs, respondents claimed the following were the most important: 4-H has earned credibility in view of the formal education community (92 percent), students have increased knowledge/skills (82 percent), and greater diversity of under-represented youth have been served (80 percent). The top problems encountered in the process included: traditional clientele view SE as something that diverts time and funds from traditional programs such as clubs (32 percent) and schools want free service without contributing their fair share of funds, supervision, supplies, etc. (27 percent).

Respondent demographics

79 percent of responding counties had one or more Full Time Equivalent (FTE's) dedicated to 4-H. Of the available FTE's, 31 percent dedicated "11 through 25 percent" of staff time to school enrichment, one-fifth dedicated "26 through 50 percent," and one-fourth dedicated less than 10 percent" of staff time to SE programs. 53 percent of respondents were county 4-H agents (100% 4-H responsibilities), while 30 percent were Extension agents with less than 100 percent 4-H responsibilities. The average number of years of experience was 12 years. Average age was 42, with 77 percent being female. 60 percent of respondents best described the counties in which they worked as "rural/farm and towns under 10,000." One-fourth stated their counties were "towns and cities with populations of 10-50K and their suburbs."

Conclusions and Implications

4-H school enrichment programs are widespread and have expanded to serve more youth than any other delivery mode. Such programs have helped develop links and credibility with community officials and formal education, while broadening representation of youth from a variety of backgrounds. Extension staff have had to make tough decisions affecting the balance of serving new audiences while not alienating "traditional" clientele and the traditional 4-H club delivery mode.

Clearly, Extension staff respect the value of organized clubs but choose to devote their time and efforts to school enrichment because of its efficiency in reaching diverse youth in large numbers. 4-H clubs have proven to be effective in helping youth develop life skills, primarily because of their long-term nature. If Extension wants school enrichment to make similar claims, evaluation efforts will need to improve to document such outcomes.

Since county Extension staff rely on curriculum developed at the state and national levels, quality materials need to be readily available and aimed for Extension staff and school teachers who use them to teach. Respondents provided suggestions for materials and topics needed.

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