

EVIDENCE BEHIND THE OUR PLACE ELEMENTS

## Engagement and enrichment activities

# Executive Summary



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Engagement and enrichment activities outside of the formal and compulsory classes can be significant in the development and growth of children. A wide range of activities such as sport, recreation and creative art give children the opportunity to be part of a team or multi-age group, to develop new skills and capabilities, be healthy and active, to succeed at something they love, and try new experiences. Afterschool activities can be the bridge for children and youth experiencing disadvantage to not only stay connected to school but to develop the capabilities and skills to thrive in school and broader community life.

This paper outlines the evidence behind extracurricular activities to engage and develop children and young

people. It draws on the extensive evidence base on the benefits to health, wellbeing, and educational outcomes of extracurricular involvement including physical activity, music, art, and cultural experiences. It synthesises evidence on barriers and facilitators for participation and draws from a growing knowledge base on the design components and features of more effective programs.

The three chapters are:

1. Benefits for child and youth development
2. Children in disadvantaged families and communities face greater barriers to participation.
3. Effective programs and extracurricular activities.

# 1 Benefits for child and youth development

Organised sport, recreation and creative activities have a range of benefits for child development, all of which impact life outcomes given child health and wellbeing is a predictor of adult outcomes (Fox et al., 2015). Active and engaged children are more likely to carry habits of being physically active and involved in clubs and creative pursuits such as playing music or dance into adulthood (Clemens & Lincoln, 2018). These types of activities help to develop capabilities which contribute to young people's wellbeing and their ability to participate in class, in the workforce and in their community (Kautz et al., 2014; OECD 2015). They help young people to:

- **Stay engaged in learning**, have positive behaviour at school, build stronger relationships with peers and attend school and regularly (Jacobson & Blank 2011; NEA 2008; Redd et al., 2012).
- **Develop non-cognitive skills** such as perseverance, conscientiousness, self-control, trust, attentiveness, self-esteem, resilience, and empathy and build children's confidence, help them make friends and learn to get along with people (ABS, 2012; Tanner et al., 2016; The Smith Family, 2013) – including environments in which to practice, apply and develop these skills (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).





- **Build social networks and relationships**, including forming positive relationships with other adults and role models and extending peer relationships (Johnston et al., 2014).

Structured activities help lower student's anxiety; increase student's self-worth and peer and school connectedness (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Rose, Williams, Olsson & Allen 2018; Simoncini & Caltabiono 2012) and in turn, increase student engagement and academic performance (VicHealth 2014). Being involved in multiple and varied activities (such as sporting and non-sporting) has the most positive impacts on social inclusion, development and educational outcomes (European Commission, 2021).







# 2 Children in disadvantaged families and communities face greater barriers to participation

While children from families experiencing disadvantage have the most to gain from participation in extracurricular activities, children growing up in low-income households and neighbourhoods face barriers to participation and access, including limited low-cost, local options being available for sport, recreation and creative activities as well as family stresses and dynamics limiting engagement (ABS 2012; Motos 2016; Tanner et al., 2016; The Smith Family 2013). Australian data shows that at least half of the children living in the communities experiencing the most disadvantage participate in no after-school activities (The Smith Family 2013). Children are less likely to do extracurricular activities if they live in:

- Families with lower income.
- Single-mother households, with the mother not in paid employment.
- Jobless couple households (Rioseco, Baxter & Warren, 2018).



# 3 Effective programs and extracurricular activities

Schools are central to better access to engagement and enrichment opportunities. The greatest barriers to participation in extracurricular activities (ECAs) for children experiencing disadvantage are access – a lack of affordable, local activities where they feel they fit in. Barriers and concerns for safety and comfort can be lessened when activities are in the neighbourhoods where children and families live, when information is available in diverse languages, and activities are designed with the local cultures and community needs in mind.

Schools are a strong platform for opportunities for children, and for many the best and only way to participate in activities (European Commission, 2021). Actively cultivating positive relationships with families and understanding the

needs and interests of the broader community in which children live can inform the development of engaging activities for children, delivered in a trusted environment. These activities can also serve to bring children, families, and local organisations together, building networks and social capital to not only improve child development but to break cycles of disadvantage in communities.

Participation and engagement needs of children and young people change over the life course and consideration of age, stage and gender of participants is important for designing impactful programs. Developing habits of physical activity and interests in sports, music and creative activities during the early and primary school years creates a foundation for life-long participation.



Engagement in younger years is influenced by parents and family interests and circumstances and children's access to organised activities relies more on family support or involvement.

Barriers to participation in extracurricular activities emerge in the middle and early years of adolescence when children and youth look for greater independence, are influenced more by peers, and exercise greater control over how they socialise and spend free time. Programs need to adapt in design to consider changing levels of comfort and mastery and varying desires for competition, peer socialisation, and individual agency among middle years and adolescence. Engagement in risky behaviours increase at this time and extracurricular activities in the years leading up and including adolescence (i.e. primary school and high school years) are protective against adverse impacts of risky behaviours and support continued school engagement.

Key considerations for designing engaging, effective and sustainable activities include:

- **Organised and structured activities**, that are supported by adults and are purposeful in considering both the development needs and the interests of students:
  - Responsive to developmental needs and reflective of differences within student populations, ages and genders and diverse needs.
  - Providing a wide range of activities and flexibility to explore and try new things.
  - Engaging and giving voice to children and young people in the design and nature of activities.
  - Supporting transition into activities.
- **Breadth of activities**
  - Young people who participate in a mix of activities – sporting and non-sporting including for example arts and music – can achieve greater benefits for social and emotional learning and academic motivation and outcomes, compared to those in just one type of activity.
  - Experiences which link to real world contexts and provide hands on learning via activities that extend on school / provide something not delivered within school, impact a broader range of child and youth development domains.
- **Frequency and duration** ('dose') – greater frequency and longer durations have more impacts, and better outcomes are achieved from consistent participation.

- **Location and community involvement** – activities held in the community where children and young people live, reduce barriers to entry (transport cost etc) and yield benefits for community connectedness and belonging, including developing positive relationships with adults and peers.

Three significant features of higher quality programs are:

- **Quality of staffing** – Actively hiring staff from local neighbourhoods and investing in staff development and training to ensure a sustainable, local workforce, skilled in the nature of activities being delivered, and with understanding of the local culture and challenges to foster belonging among participants.
- **Student agency, leadership, and involvement** – Meaningfully involving students in the design of activities offered, and enabling students to lead extra-curricular activities, develops student's leadership skills and encourages multi-age connections across the school community.
- **Evaluation, monitoring and planning** – continuous improvement leads to more effective programs – Including evaluation processes, monitor trends and using these to inform planning, including identifying opportunities to test, pilot and refine activities (Fredricks et al., 2019).

# Our Place Elements



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info@ourplace.org.au  
ourplace.org.au

## Our Place sites

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| Bridgewood      | Morwell      |
| Carlton         | Northern Bay |
| Doveton         | Robinvale    |
| Frankston North | Seymour      |
| Mooroopna       | Westall      |