An Examination of the Provision of Supplemental Educational Services in Nine Rural Schools

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Under the No Child Left Behind Act schools that fail to make progress in having students reach proficiency are designated in "need of improvement." If this continues, schools that receive federal Title I funds are required to offer their low income students supplemental educational services (SES) such as tutoring outside of school time. Across the nation the percent of eligible students who actually participate in these services has been quite low, at 20% or less. A prior study found an even lower percent (11%) in seven states in the High Plains and found that for rural schools the program was even less successful. This study used interview date from nine rural public schools in order to identify underlying issues with eligible student participation. Implementing the SES program successfully has proven difficult for eight of the nine rural schools in this study with student participation 5% or less in seven of the nine schools. Four variables were examined:1) the extent to which school and district personnel valued SES programs; 2) the relationships established with service providers; 3) outreach to parents, and; 4) barriers to service delivery including transportation problems, lack of Internet access, lack of trust in outsiders, and logistical barriers associated with serving remote rural areas. We also sought to identify what solutions to the barriers were found. The authors recommend additional funding to states to assist high poverty low achieving rural schools in implementing the program.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), schools are required to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), or incremental progress, toward 100% student proficiency in reading and mathematics by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. When Title I schools fail to make AYP for two consecutive years, the district is required to offer parents of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch the option of sending their child(ren) to another school with transportation costs paid by the district. If schools fail to make AYP for a third year, they are required to offer supplemental educational services (SES) outside of regular school time to these eligible students.

Supplemental educational services include individual or group tutoring either face-to-face or through an online program. Organizations interested in offering these services to districts required to provide them must apply to the state in which they choose to operate and be approved by the state in order to be a service provider. Approved providers may include for-profits such as Sylvan Learning, or non-profit

agencies such as educational service agencies. States are to monitor and evaluate the providers, removing providers from the list if the students they serve do not show progress within two years. Districts notify the parents of eligible students about the services, provide them materials about the providers, set aside up to 20% of the Title I funds for services and transportation, and manage and oversee provider contracts. The program is built on an assumption that parents will play a key role in selecting providers for their children and in ensuring that their children attend the sessions.

Previously, the authors interviewed staff at the state departments of education in the High Plains states about the supplemental educational services (SES) program in their states. These state contacts had reports from their rural districts of student participation rates in rural schools even lower than in urban and suburban schools. Four states reported local districts having difficulty in recruiting providers for rural schools. Providers told state contacts that they could not afford to offer services when there were too few students. Given the distance of most rural schools from centers of population, providers, for the most part non-local, found it difficult to offer face-to-face services and even

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difficult to afford online services if the online tutor can only work with students from one rural school. Lack of access to the Internet for online services compounded the problem requiring providers to be onsite to serve some remote rural schools.

Characteristics of Successful Implementation of Supplemental Educational Services

The Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) of the U.S. Department of Education (May 2004) studied the SES programs of five large urban districts and found that successful programs, those with improved student achievement, were characterized by districts that embrace the spirit of SES, build relationships with providers, reach out to inform parents, and set clear goals and track progress. Successful partnerships between schools, districts, parents, and providers may help to improve communication. In turn, communication assures better coordination of and more efficient service delivery. No similar study has been done for rural districts and no study has yet been done to distinguish which type of service is most effective, e.g. face-to-face tutoring, group tutoring, or online programs.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2006) surveyed a nationally representative sample of providers and reported that a lack of involvement of school principals can make it difficult for SES providers to coordinate with schools and encourage student participation. In the same report, school officials surveyed indicated that SES implementation is hindered when there is not a strong relationship with providers. In three of the four schools that were visited as part of the GAO study, districts were not aware of student targets set by providers and found that services were delayed or not delivered at all (GAO, 2006).

Further, district and provider communication with parents is a key factor in implementing SES effectively (U.S. Department of Education, May 2004). States, districts, and providers must clearly explain the various options to families, using a variety of methods if SES programs are to succeed. Successful communication can include letters from the district or school, parent-teacher conferences, websites, phone calls, posters and flyers, "open houses," and "provider fairs" (GAO, 2006). A federal study of nine school districts found that in schools in which principals and teachers were actively engaged in coordinating SES services and providing advice to parents, SES participation rates were higher. For example, principals said they sometimes called parents of students whom they believed could benefit from services or had their schools send personalized letters home to parents of eligible students. Moreover, in some districts, the SES program required that the principal be involved in the logistics of ensuring that space was available for

providers in their schools and that parents turned in the permission slips required for students to receive services. Additionally, it was reported that parents "relied heavily on their children's teachers and other school staff to choose among providers" (Anderson & Laguarda, 2005, p. 54).

In sum, research suggests three key characteristics of successful SES implementation: a positive approach from districts and school personnel, working closely with service providers, and informing and supporting parents in their roles.

Challenges to Implementing Supplemental Education Services

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2008), only 17% of eligible students participated in SES programs in 2004-2005, essentially the same as the prior year. The Center for Education Policy (2006) reported that the national average for students receiving supplemental services for the 2004-2005 report year was approximately 18% of eligible students. For the seven states in the high plains (2007) Barley and Wegner found a participation rate in 2004-2005 of only 11% (2007).

SES providers, which may be local, state, or national in scope, apply for approval to states in which they wish to offer services. A district may further edit the list of approved providers prior to making the list available to parents. Many providers do not operate in areas where market demand is not sufficient to make delivery of services viable and lucrative (Anderson & Laguarda, 2005; Barley & Wegner, 2007). In many instances a provider sets a minimum student enrollment ceiling in order to offer services. The Center on Educational Policy (2006) conducted case studies of five districts and found that in some instances providers reneged if a district had too few students enrolled in their services, or if schools were in remote locations. Half of the tutoring providers on the list in the state of Missouri refused to offer services in Kansas City because of low enrollment (Fusarelli, 2007). One rural state reported that some providers could not serve isolated districts even though they were on the state's approved list (Center on Educational Policy, 2006). A related access issue is the distance of the provider from the school. The Center on Educational Policy (2006) found that in 2004-2005, 65% of districts reported the location of the providers' facilities as a serious to moderate challenge to student participation. Additionally, providing transportation for eligible students to and from provider locations was rated as a serious to moderate challenge for 51% of the responding districts (Center on Educational Policy, 2006).

In some districts, there are separately funded local school or district tutoring options, which may compete with the SES programs offered by private providers under NCLB. As a result, parents may choose not to enroll their children in SES tutoring programs that may be unfamiliar or

[1]Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, and Wyoming.

less convenient than the school-based programs (Center on Educational Policy, 2006). Encouraging student attendance has also been a challenge, in part because students may participate in other after-school activities, such as sports or work (GAO, 2006).

Ensuring that providers have services to offer English language learners (ELL) and special education students is an additional challenge faced by many districts. The GAO report (2006) estimated that there were not enough providers to meet the needs of students with limited English proficiency in one-third of districts, and not enough providers to meet the needs of students with disabilities in one-quarter of districts. A study of SES in the High Plains states found that out of 97 providers surveyed, only 13% were prepared to offer services to ELL students in their native language or with the use of an interpreter. This same study found that only 37% of providers had services to offer special education students (Barley & Wegner, 2007).

Challenges to Implementing SES in Rural Areas

Rural schools may face unique challenges in providing supplemental educational services to their eligible students. Many of the challenges described above are magnified in rural school districts which are, on average, smaller than urban schools and which have less experienced staff (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). A 2004 GAO report estimates that no students received services in about 20% of the approximately 1,000 districts required to offer SES in 2004-2005. A majority of these districts were rural or had a total enrollment of fewer than 2,500 students. Barriers to implementing SES faced by rural schools are in large part a result of geographic location, including a lack of qualified tutors, inadequate transportation to and from service locations, inconsistent Internet access, and limited number of providers who actually offer services in these areas (GAO, 2004).

Rural district officials stated that traveling long distances to obtain services was not a viable option (GAO, 2004). Additionally, the use of online services can be difficult in small rural districts, especially those where severe weather conditions and physical features such as mountains make it difficult to establish and maintain Internet lines. Many of the rural school district superintendents who were interviewed, in states such as Montana, Alaska, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Maine noted that frequent power outages and poor transmissions interfered with the use of distance learning modalities. Other officials explained that even when Internet capabilities were established, it was difficult to recruit maintenance personnel to isolated rural areas (GAO, 2004).

In the northwestern states, including Alaska, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, nearly 50% of all schools are in rural locations. SES participation rates were found to be significantly lower in this region, as compared to the rest of the country (Saifer & Speth, 2007). The rural nature of the area, access to providers, logistics of transportation, and the lack of personnel and funds to support and monitor SES were all cited as major reasons for the low participation rates.

Additional Challenges for American Indians

When the sampling frame for this study was established, we realized that all but eight of the forty-five eligible rural schools had a majority of American Indian students. Participation in the educational system for these students and their parents who have an important role in SES participation, is further complicated by the history of American Indian education in the U.S. Some of the reasons for low parent involvement are rooted in parents' negative historical and personal experiences with the schools (Butterfield & Pepper, 1991; Cockrell, 1992, April). Substantial research suggests that the past's coercive assimilation policies have produced many of the barriers that currently exist between schools and American Indian parents (Butterfield & Pepper, 1991).

Both the Kennedy Report (U.S. Senate, 1969) and Indian Nations at Risk Task Force Report (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1991) called for more cultural content and tribal involvement in American Indian education to improve academic outcomes. Decades later, however, most American Indian students still receive very little cultural content in their classrooms (Moran & Rampey, 2008) and tribes remain the least active and recognized entities influencing American Indian education.

Focus Study

For this study success is defined by whether eligible students are actually participating in the program. Success in obtaining student participation in the SES program is confounded by the lack of information for schools and parents about whether the services themselves contribute to student achievement in school and, therefore, whether students benefit by participation. We acknowledge that the SES program was not designed with conditions of rural settings in mind, which is especially troublesome for high poverty rural communities. If, as Corbett (2009) suggests, students in rural communities may be resistant to school and may understand failure in the formal education system as normal, then spending time in additional schooling would not be seen by these students or their parents as beneficial. This study takes place within the formal system of rural public schools where programs such as the SES program reside. It does not attempt to explore student and parent beliefs about schooling, but reports what school personnel perceive them to believe about the SES program.

Thus, the research questions for this study were:
1) Do national factors that influence SES program success, as measured by student participation, also influence success in these rural schools?

a) Have school personnel *believed in the value of SES?*

b) Have these schools *built close relations with providers?*

c) Have these schools *reached out to parents*?

2) What *barriers to success* have these rural schools experienced and how have schools attempted to overcome them?

Methodology

Sample and Design

The study examined the implementation of the SES program in nine rural public schools in the High Plains states. Criteria for inclusion of schools in the sample were: being a rural school in a rural district (verified by NCES urban-centric locale classification), and in the second year of offering SES. The initial sampling frame was obtained from the SES program contact at the state departments of education in each of the seven states. Kansas and Nebraska had no eligible rural schools and Colorado had only one. Forty-five schools in the remaining states were identified that met the criteria. Two schools used to pilot the interviews were removed from the list. School principals of the forty-three remaining schools were called to confirm the SES required status and asked if they would be willing to participate in the study.

The final sampling frame had forty schools in four states after excluding no longer eligible schools and those whose principals refused a site visit. Unexpectedly all but six of the forty schools had American Indian student populations exceeding 75% . Thus in the population of rural schools in four states that met the criteria, 85% were schools with a majority of American Indian students. We created a purposive sample. For convenience of data collection we eliminated the state that had only two eligible schools.

We created a matrix with the remaining thirty-eight schools by state and by level (elementary, middle, and high school) noting the number of participating students for each school. We sought a sample that would include three schools from each of the three states with one from each level and with varying percents of student participation including zero participation in order to observe both successful and non-successful schools. One state had only three schools willing to participate, an elementary and two middle schools. We began with elementary schools and selected that state's elementary (zero participation). Having one elementary school with zero participation, we eliminated elementary schools remaining on the list that had fewer than ten participating students. We selected the one elementary that

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[2]This criterion was based on national data that indicated that many schools were not able to implement the program until late in the first year that it was required.

[3]The sample was created based on lists provided by the states. None of these schools was a Bureau of Indian Education school.

remained in the second state (thirty participating students). In the third state we selected the elementary school with the highest participation (137 students).

For middle schools, from the first state we selected the first of the two listed schools (four students participating). From the second state we picked the only school with more than ten students and from the third state which had only two eligible middle schools we picked the one in a different district than the elementary school already selected. Finally for high schools (none in the first state), we selected the one from the second state with the highest number of participating students (twelve) and we selected both high schools from the third state (with zero and five students participating). Thus we selected nine schools from three states that had more than two eligible schools, three elementary, three middle and three high schools, with participation ranging from zero students to 137 students.

Procedures

A single researcher, the second author, visited each of the nine schools and interviewed the district superintendent (or designate) and the school principal. Interviews with a classroom teacher who had students in the program and a tutor for the program were conducted whenever possible. A protocol was developed based in part on the federal guidance for the program and in part on the findings from an earlier study (Barley & Wegner, 2007). It was piloted in two schools, revised and used in interviewing the district superintendent or designee based on who had the greatest involvement with the program. Based on the responses at the district level, the protocol was revised for use with the principal. Factual questions already answered were removed. The interview questions are matched to research questions in Appendix A. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an hour depending on the interest of the interviewee and the nature of the program at the school. The researcher took thorough notes and used a template to place responses next to the questions. Following each interview the researcher reviewed the notes and filled in any gaps. The templates were later sent to each interviewee to review and suggest additions or deletions.

Analysis

School level narratives were developed first by integrating notes and interview responses across interviewees at each school. A determination of whether each of the three primary factors (research subquestions a, b, and c) was present at each school was made by reviewing the narratives. The entire interview protocol was used for either the superintendent or the principal interview depending on where the locus of control of the program resided. The interviewee who was not asked all questions had an adapted version based on the details of the program but was asked all questions about beliefs and opinions. For *believed in the value* there were nine possible questions; for

Table 1

Characteristics of the Nine Study Schools in 2007-2008

School	Level[1]	Population[2]	Median Income	# All Students	% American Indian	% Free/ Reduced Price Lunch	# Eligible Students	Participation #	Participation %
Appletree	E	2,000	$20,000	442	0	85	380	0	0
Brookland	E	2,500	$18,000	650	91	76	494	127	26
Countryday	E	750	$28,000	195	81	85	165	22	13
Daleville	M	2,000	$20,000	359	5	67	242	4	2
Eagleville	M	300	$35,000	223	99	88	196	10	5
Fieldstone	M	900	$24,000	375	97	97	363	6	2
Greatland	H	2,500	$18,000	607	91	70	425	3	<1
Happydale	H	900	$24,000	469	97	72	331	1	<1
Ironwood	H	200	$11,000	60	99	100	60	0	0

[1] E = Elementary School, M = Middle School, H = High School

[2] Approximate population of town in which school is located

built close relations with providers there were eight possible questions; for *reached out to parents* there were three direct questions, and for *barriers and solutions* there were eleven questions, including general problems and problems with providers and parental issues.

Cross site analysis was then used to provide answers to the research questions. Following an overview of all nine schools the findings are presented by school level, three elementary schools, three middle schools, and the three high schools.

Table 1 presents brief descriptive information about each of the nine schools and their communities. The confidentially of the schools has been kept by giving them pseudonyms. Table 1 includes approximate size and median income of the community, total school enrollment, percent American Indian students, percent on free and reduced price lunch, number of eligible students, and number and percent participating for each school. Data for how many of the participating students either completed the program or met individual student goals for the program were not available in most schools. The nine schools ranged in size from 60 to 650 students with 70 to 100% on FRL. The seven schools with a majority of American Indian students were on American Indian reservations but were not Bureau of Indian Education schools. All nine proved to be at least 100 miles from any sizeable town. The communities ranged

in size from 200 to 2500 people and had median incomes ranging from $11,000 to $35,000.

The primary data for the study are self-report data from the interviewees. There were no studies or evaluations of the program at each school either internally or from an external source to validate the opinions of these interviewees. Nonetheless their opinions, self reports about the program, are an indication of the nature of a program that is in part dependent on the communications and relationships among the stakeholders: the administrators, the providers, and the parents of the school's students.

Characteristics of Successful Rural Schools and Barriers to Success

In six studies from the literature three factors were indicated as successful in enabling student participation in the SES program: believing in the value of the program, (on the part of district and school personnel), building close relations with providers, and reaching out to parents to provide the support and information they needed in enrolling and monitoring their children. Table 2 indicates how each of the nine schools was assessed in this study on each of the three characteristics. We present the results first for elementary schools, then for middle schools, and then high schools, and draw conclusions across all nine schools. Table 2 also indicates which of four types of SES programs, local face-to-face (D-F-F), online at school (O-S),

Table 2

Presence of Successful Characteristics in Nine Schools

School	Level[1]	Type[2]	Believed In The Value	Built Strong Relations With Providers	Reached Out To Parents	Participation #	Participation %
Appletree	E	NA	NO	NO	1 letter parent night	0	0
Brookland	E	L-F-F	YES	Yes, local agency	3 letters, radio, personal contact	127	26
Countryday	E	O-S	YES	Yes, vita paid monitor	2 letters, personal contact	22	13
Daleville	M	D-F-F	NO	NO	2 letters, newspaper	4	2
Eagleville	M	O-S	NO	NO	1 letter, radio, newspaper	10	5
Fieldstone	M	O-H	NO	NO	1 letter, booth, newletter	6	2
Greatland	H	L-F-F	NO	Yes, local agency	3 letters, conferences, booth	0	0
Happydale	H	O-H	NO	NO	1 letter, conferences, newletter	1	<1
Ironwood	H	NA	NA	NA, no providers available	1 letter, parent night	0	0

[1]E = Elementary School, M = Middle School, H = High School

[2]L-F-F= locally offered face to face, D-F-F= distant face to face, O-S=online program offered at school, O-H= online program offered in home

or online at home (O-H) each school used.

The Elementary Schools

The elementary schools ranged in size from 195 students to 650 students. The number of students on FRL and therefore eligible to receive SES ranged from 165 to 494. Two of the three elementary schools had moderate levels of student participation; however the third had no participation in 2007-2008. The two more successful schools, Brookland and Countryday, had a majority of American Indian students and were located on Indian reservations. They had the highest levels of participation among all nine schools. Appletree, with no American Indian students, had no provider in 2007-2008 and had never had participating students. For Brookland, the largest of the schools, the superintendent encouraged a local organization to apply to be a provider of SES hiring retired and active teachers as tutors. Countryday had two providers both offering online programs delivered to the computer lab at the school. For both Brookland and Countryday the programs were held at school at the end of the school day.

Have school personnel believed in the value of SES? Not surprisingly, the two principals for the two schools with higher student participation (Brookland and Countryday) indicated strong commitment to the program. Both principals said they went the 'second mile' whenever it was necessary to support the program. The Brookland principal spoke of staying after school to monitor the program and insure the best teachers were active in it. The other, from Countryday, said "I've probably gone a mile and a half. I ask the teachers to give me names of children who could benefit from extra tutoring in reading. I then cross reference that list with the list of eligible children and either call those parents or ask the teachers to call them." A Countryday central office staff was less supportive saying "I need to have it proven that it works." But she is committed to the program because she "has no choice." In contrast the Brookland district administrator does see a positive impact from reports she receives and would like to see more services.

The assistant principal of the third elementary school (Appletree) with no children participating in the program said they have done what was expected of them (to support the program). The assistant superintendent, who coordinates the program, felt it is a mandated law with no funding attached. He was not pleased with having to set aside 20% of Title I funds for SES even though they have not had participation to require the funds. He was not committed to having the SES program continue in its present form. The superintendent, not in the interview, caught up with the interviewer to express his feelings about the program. He said "providers (. . .) are like snake oil salesmen who are selling a sham. They come into the school without a definite plan knowing they do not have to be held accountable and simply see it as a way to make money." Thus, in this school, the program was not valued as reflected in the opinions of these administrators.

Have these schools built close relations with providers? Appletree, with no student participation, does not have regular communications with a provider. The assistant superintendent reported initial contacts in which the provider indicated a requirement of a minimum number of twenty-five participating students before willingness to deliver services. Appletree has never had that many parents ready to enroll their children. Countryday has two active providers; the district requires each one to hire a teacher to monitor the programs on site. The district provides an overall teacher-coordinator. A strong relationship exists between these three local teachers and the school, connecting the providers to the school.

Brookland supported the development and approval of a local provider agency and maintains a very strong relationship with the coordinator of the program. Since the provider hires 40 of the 100 teachers from the school, teachers also have a strong relationship to the provider. The assistant principal said about the provider "We email, phone, or she (the lead provider) stops by the office when she is here. We have an excellent relationship that was already established prior to her even starting the program."

Have these schools reached out to parents? For all three elementary schools in this study the parent role was at the heart of program participation. Even the more successful schools reported difficulty getting parents to enroll their children. While we did not interview parents, administrators and teachers reported a similar list of concerns they had heard from parents. These included the length of the school day for children who already had a long commute and would now be staying after school for another hour or so. They also included a belief on the part of interviewees that parents did not see that the program would have value, especially in lieu of time spent on homework. Administrators and teachers alike said they believe that parents did not trust their children to the care of outsiders, e.g. tutors that were not teachers in the school or community. One interviewee said

> "It is my personal feeling that there was some parent apathy in some areas and that the parents felt that the school was doing a pretty good job. It is an attitude that the kids are in school from 8:30 until 3:30 and that this should be enough."

Each of the three districts of the elementary schools followed the required procedure of sending out letters to parents of eligible students and making materials from providers available through parent nights or teacher-parent conferences. Brookland and Countryday also made individual phone calls to parents encouraging them to enroll their children. Both of these schools provided late buses to

take the children home. Both also involved local teachers. Brookland's provider hired them as tutors; Countryday had three local teachers as monitors of the online programs. In each case this might alleviate parent concern about an outsider caring for their children if that were an issue.

Attempts to Overcome Barriers to Success: Elementary Schools. The primary barriers to program success in these elementary schools as measured by student participation and reported by interviewees were with parents and the conditions that encouraged or discouraged them from enrolling their children. As indicated earlier, the length of the school day, a distrust of outsiders, and a preference for homework programs were all reported as barriers. No school had been able to solve the long school day. Related to this was transportation home for children who stayed late; many of these parents were reported to be unable financially or because of work demands to pick up their children. Brookland and Countryday provided late buses; Appletree did not provide late buses even for a non-SES after-school program that it offered. One interviewee noted that "on the forms they (parents) send in, however, they will say if the school does not provide transportation, their child cannot attend." Brookland and Countryday have involved local teachers in the programs in an attempt to alleviate the outsider issue. Both Appletree and Countryday had competing after-school programs focused on homework which were reported by interviewees to be more attractive to parents then the SES programs. Thus solutions to barriers were mixed with Appletree not having offered any while Brookland and Countryday made efforts to do so.

The Middle Schools

The three middle schools ranged in size from 223 students to 375 students. The number of eligible students ranged from 196 to 363 for middle schools. None of the schools had a higher participation rate than 5%. All three of the middle schools were located on American Indian reservations. The communities in which the schools are located ranged in size from 300 to 2000 in population and $20,000 to $35,000 in median income. One middle school, Daleville, had a provider in a town 30 miles away with services scheduled on Saturdays that only four students attended. At the time of the interviews it had closed. The other two schools used providers with online programs, Fieldstone offered parents computers to receive services at home, and Eagleview offered the online program at school and provided a late bus. For all of the schools the district maintained the primary relationship with providers.

Have school personnel believed in the value of SES? With the district maintaining control of the program, the role of principals, and even more so teachers, was diminished for these middle schools. For Daleville, the school counselor received calls from parents after they got the district letter. She explained the program and if they were interested, referred their names to the provider. Only eight parents expressed interest and ultimately only four enrolled their children. At the end of the first year the counselor checked the grades of these four students and found their grades had dropped. This diminished her support for the program. The principal was even stronger in his assessment, "this is a big time bloated federal project."

According to the assistant superintendent at Eagleview, the principal's role was to submit names of students to the superintendent who selected thirteen students (fewer than half) based on allocations per school the district had created. The provider charged $42.50 per hour per student according to the assistant superintendent and the total cost to the district was $72,000 for the student enrollees in the district's three eligible schools. The district also paid for a late bus for the ten participating students and paid parents to take the students to a distant town for pre and post testing. The middle school principal reported more of a role than the assistant superintendent described. She fielded calls from the parents and assigned a teacher to monitor the online after-school program to assist with any computer issues.

The Fieldstone superintendent delegated the program management to her administrative assistant who worked very hard to make the logistics of the program successful. Three providers offered in-home computer programs. The principal reported having been supportive in the first two years saying she was "always on the phone and even paid extra to get technology support to parents." But she had become disillusioned, had reported problems to the state but had seen no changes.

Have these schools built close relations with providers? None of these schools reported a close relationship with the providers. In general providers were hard to reach and not responsive to phone calls. The very nature of online programs created a distance between school and tutor. Two principals reported hoping to establish connections between provider and teachers but they were not successful. The principal at Fieldstone lamented the lack of any physical presence by the provider at the school.

Have these schools reached out to parents? As indicated in Table 2, the three districts initially contacted parents through letters, news media, and radio or a booth at parent night. Daleville created a position of Parent Involvement Coordinator to encourage parent involvement in all programs not just the SES program. Given the difficult requirements of participation in the SES program, focus more naturally fell on the school's afterschool program with ten teachers hired, one for every three students. For this program there was a waiting list. The Eagleview principal said she advocated for the program in home meetings but she also said "education is not stressed strongly in this community. . . Parents are afraid that their kids might move away if they get too much education."

The Fieldstone parents were described similarly by the principal: "there is not a value or a commitment to education on the part of the parents. They are intimidated by any work that comes home (. . .) because more than likely they cannot help their child. They do wish that their children could do better than them." But the superintendent also said "we have to consider that many of our middle and high school students are not under parent control of their lives (. . .) – they are on their own. Some live in the dorm and their parents aren't with them during the school week. (. . .) there is a waiting list for the dorm." The dormitory is in the town where the school is located and houses over 100 students. This arrangement was unique among the schools we visited.

Attempts to Overcome Barriers to Success: Middle Schools. For program success at the middle school level, transportation continued to be a barrier for Daleville's program offered a distance away from the school's location. The computer program offered at Eagleview had more success with a teacher to help with technical problems and a regular schedule to keep students on task. Placing computers in homes (Fieldstone) bogged down in technical problems not easily resolved with the provider not nearby. Daleville had a more successful local after-school non-SES program with their own teachers serving as tutors (not allowed under SES regulations). Eagleview eagerly anticipated a new local cooperative coming into being that would be locally based. And Fieldstone had many more parents signing up for the SES program in 2008-2009, which the assistant superintendent attributed in part to the fact that the dormitory had signed up all of the students who stayed there to participate. Thus these schools sought solutions that provided for a local connection either through a local setting or through a local monitor.

The High Schools

The three high schools ranged in size from 60 to 607 students with 60 to 425 eligible for supplemental educational services. All three were on Indian reservations and located at least 100 miles from any town of size. (Of the eight high schools in the sample only one was not on an Indian reservation.) The communities in which they were located ranged in size from 200 to 2500 in population with the median income ranging from $11,000 to $24,000. None of the three has had a successful SES program. Greatland has not had any students participating; Happydale has had one student enrolled in an online program; and Ironwood was not able to locate a provider in 2007-2008.

At the high school level, according to the interviewees, the student him/herself plays a role in deciding to participate. The Greatland principal reported that his students would not participate in the services offered by the local provider because the tutors were their own teachers. The other principals reported students seemed to like the idea of working on computers, but parents were averse to online rather than face-to-face tutoring. A teacher said "giving the parents a free laptop won't really help the situation because the students still have to want to do it and they are not motivated to do it either."

Have school personnel believed in the value of SES? In all three high schools the district had maintained the management of the program, but not necessarily the superintendent himself. The Greatland superintendent had asked the business manager to head up the SES program; at Happydale coordination was assigned to an administrative assistant. The Ironwood superintendent reported that the district had applied to be its own provider for 2008-2009 after being unable to obtain a provider for several years. With the new program the elementary principal was assigned the coordination role. Thus, these three superintendents did not see themselves in a lead role in the SES program.

These three schools presented very different narratives about embracing the SES program. Looking to 2008-2009, the Ironwood superintendent was optimistic as they set up the district based program. Prior to that, the lack of success in finding a provider willing to serve the school had been discouraging. At Greatland, a community-developed program served elementary students, but according to the assistant high school principal, high school students declined to participate. The Happydale principal faulted himself for doing nothing and took "full responsibility for the fact that the school had not utilized the services."

Have these schools built close relations with providers? Given the absence of a viable program for any of the three high schools in 2007-2008, there were no strong provider relationships. While Greatland's district had a local provider agency, there was no high school participation. Happydale had one student participate in an online program accessed from the student's home. Ironwood was unable to find a provider in that year.

Have these schools reached out to parents? As mentioned earlier, at the high school level students are perceived by the interviewees as being as much the deciding factor as parents. While each school sent letters to parents and notified them about the SES program at school meetings, little parent interest resulted. Ironwood had some parents interested but the providers required a minimum of ten enrolled students, and that number was not reached.

Attempts to Overcome Barriers to Success: High Schools. For these high poverty high schools one barrier was the students themselves. For Happydale this was reported as the greatest barrier. The principal described a history of violence and bomb threats so severe that this rural school is now surrounded by a security fence and hires security guards. He said he had "a significant number of 3rd, 4th, and 5th year freshmen." He said "some students are 21 years of age." He also said he had a large population of

students who were on their own not answering to a parent. While for Happydale the student role in participation was complicated by these student demographics, Greatland also had student choice as a barrier to SES participation. Students rejected the local SES program reportedly because their own teachers were the tutors. Both schools also offered tutoring in competing after-school or during the day programs, another form of barrier since these programs connected directly to homework and classroom teachers.

Besides the student role in SES program participation having served as a barrier, lack of high speed Internet access in homes, long days and/or lack of transportation for after school programs, and parent understanding were also reported as barriers. The Greatland assistant principal said "parents still just don't understand what 'supplemental' means. We need to educate them better. It isn't a place to go finish their homework and this is a reason that many won't sign up."

The only district personnel that believed they were overcoming barriers were from Ironwood. They had solved the lack of providers by being approved as a provider themselves. They will pay two of their own teachers to tutor students after school four days a week. The teachers "know the students strengths and weaknesses" reported the principal. She also looks up student data to let the teachers know areas of focus for each student and uses the data to inform students and parents that the student is being enrolled. She also "calls the parents and tells them what is going on. They are very supportive if it will help their child," she reported. Forty out of sixty high school students at Ironwood were enrolled in the program for 2008-2009.

Summary

Across a set of nine rural Title I schools selected from the 45 schools in four High Plains states that were in their second year of offering supplemental educational services, success with the program as measured by eligible student participation was not great. Three schools had no participation; four more had 5% or less. One had 13% eligible student participation, less than the national average of 18%. Only one exceeded that average having 26% of their eligible students participate. Four SES program delivery modalities were used in 2007-2008 across the seven schools that had providers. Two schools offered online programs delivered to students at home. Two schools offered online programs at school. One school selected a face to face program offered in a distant town, and two offered locally-based face to face tutorial programs.

Three factors determined to be related to success in several studies were examined in interviews in each of the schools. Based on these interviews, only two schools, Brookland and Countryday, could be said to believe in the value of the program. School personnel who were interviewed in the seven other schools expressed frustration with the program constraints, with the diversion of their Title I dollars from current programs to the SES program and with the imposition of the program on their school/district. The same two schools reported having built a strong relationship with the SES provider. Only one of the remaining seven schools had such a relationship. All of the schools followed program guidelines to reach out to parents.

Each of the rural schools faced barriers to implementing the program in the form of distance to a provider's service delivery location or lack of high speed access to the Internet in homes for online service delivery. While parents were not interviewed, school personnel reported barriers to student participation in that parents did not understand the value of supplemental services that were not homework focused, and parents expressed to the interviewees being uncomfortable with persons (tutors) unknown to them teaching their children. These reported barriers were overcome in the two schools with higher participation rates, one by encouraging the development of a local provider which alleviated parent discomfort and which did not use an online program. The other used an online program but located the services in the school's computer lab with local teachers as monitors. These schools were both elementary schools. What role school level might play in student participation is beyond the scope of this study. However, the principals of the three high schools all noted that high school students themselves, not just parents, played a negative role in determining participation in their schools.

Discussion

The Supplemental Educational Services Program is an important policy initiative within the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Getting extra help to students who are failing is one way to approach the goal of having all children be proficient. Implementing any educational program requires adapting it to local conditions. Thus programs mandated at the national level must of necessity be specified such that implementation can be adapted for differing conditions of states, districts, or schools. For supplemental educational services a document titled Non-Regulatory Guidance (U.S. Department of Education, 2005) was developed to provide program guidance. Within the guidelines a number of constraints were applied. These constraints included that service providers would be selected from a list approved by the state and would not include SES eligible schools delivering their own services (nor could their districts in cases where the district was in a 'needs improvement'

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[4]In a letter to chief state school officers dated April 1, 2009, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan indicated his intent to "amend or repeal a regulatory provision that was issued in December of 2002 prohibiting a State from approving districts and schools identified for improvement to be supplemental educational services (SES) providers."

status). The district could also not impose requirements on providers or refuse to engage them on the basis that the district disagreed with the provider's program design.

These constraints were initially followed closely by the nine rural schools in the study. Only after lack of success in obtaining student participation did Brookland, Greatland, and Ironwood seek approval for a local provider. No conclusions can be drawn from this study as to whether a local provider would increase student participation. It is an area for further study. Perhaps equally interesting would be a study comparing the delivery modalities in rural schools. Access, whether to high speed Internet or in distance to a tutor could play a confounding role in such a study.

The SES program is an unfunded mandate - at both the state and district level funding for SES must come from the existing Title I allotment and thus other Title I funded programs compete with it for funding. States may only use 1% of the Title I state allocation for administration of all Title I programs. State responsibilities for the SES program include approving SES providers and monitoring and evaluating them as well as supporting districts and monitoring their implementation of the program. The evaluation is to be based on student achievement. The guidance requires SES provider programs to increase student achievement and to be aligned with the district's standards and instructional program. As data become available to examine student achievement in rural schools it will also be important to study the alignment as an assumption of the guidance. At the district level the guidelines specify that 20% of their Title I monies must be set aside for school choice and/or SES and spending any of the 20% on other Title I programs is only allowable if the district can demonstrate that all of the needs based on parent requests for these two programs have been met. For providers, the assumption is that they can deliver services that parents will choose and that will be cost effective.

In a previous study (Barley & Wegner, 2007) state contacts reported low rural school student participation. This study sought to verify that report and to learn more about the implementation of the SES program in rural schools. We had predicted there would be small numbers of eligible students in these rural schools and that might present a problem for cost effectiveness for providers. We found that there were ample numbers of eligible students; even the smallest school had 60 eligible students.

In all cases the logistics of the program for these rural schools were difficult to arrange. Transportation problems, either in travelling to distant service locations or to homes at a later time than the usual bus time, were exacerbated in these schools by lack of parent resources to assume this responsibility. Solutions to resolve these issues included offering services at the school with buses provided to take children home after the program, or alternatively offering online in-home programs. But for these, lack of high speed access to services and technical computer problems had to be resolved. Not all providers were willing or able to provide services that could alleviate these online conditions.

Brookland Elementary, the school with the highest participation rate, worked with a local agency to encourage it to become a state approved provider. That may have eased problems of parent trust. A second school, Ironwood, currently with no participating students, pursued state approval for the district to be an SES provider in 2008-2009 and reported an initial student participation rate of 78%. In these cases strong principal commitment to the program was an important element in adapting the SES program to meet the local situation. Two other principals were quite negative about the program and the burden it imposed in trying to make it work in a high poverty rural school. The threat it presented to other Title I programs in competing for funds with programs they believed were working well was also an issue. The schools that were not successful in realizing a high level of student participation were not able or did not press to adapt the program to meet the particular conditions of rural schools.

In the guidance for the SES program there is opportunity to adapt the program for a variety of school conditions. Knowing that the program targets high poverty low achieving schools already struggling to support and improve their educational programs, program enactors might have realized that these schools, and especially rural schools, would need additional assistance in adapting the program. Based on our earlier study (Barley & Wegner, 2007) funding to the states to provide this assistance, rather than requiring states to use existing funds, at least for these schools might have increased rural school student participation. State contacts reported that if they had more time available to help individual rural schools negotiate the complexities of the federal guidance they believed adaptations could have been made to increase program participation.

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Appendix A

Cross Walk of Research Questions and Selected Interview Questions[5]

Research Question 1: Do national factors that influence SES program success, as measured by student participation also influence success in these rural schools?

a) Have school personnel believed in the value of SES?

> Interview questions:
> How have you encouraged attendance in the SES program?
> How do your principals feel about the SES program?
> Do they think it helps?
> How are principals involved in the SES program?
> What has been your role as superintendent in the SES process?
> How do you feel about the SES program?
> Have you done extra things to support the program?
> How committed are you to seeing this program continue?
> How do parents feel about the program?
> Is there anything else we haven't discussed regarding commitment that either promotes or interferes with student participation in the SES program?

b) Have these schools built close relations with providers?

> Interview questions:
> Describe communications between you, as the superintendent, and the providers.
> Between the provider/tutor and the District;
> Between the provider /tutor and the School;
> Between the provider /tutor and classroom teachers;
> Between classroom teachers and the provider/tutor;
> How would you categorize your communication with the provider and their communication with you?
> How satisfied have you been with the provider(s) in your school?
> How are principals and teachers kept informed about how their students are doing in the program?

> Do the classroom teachers have input into what students are doing?

c) Have these schools reached out to parents?

> Interview questions:
> How did your district notify parents and (in what ways) of the opportunity for SES services?
> How did the school (principal) communicate with parents?

Research Question 2: What barriers to success have these rural schools experienced and how have schools attempted to overcome them?

> Interview questions:
> What else should I know about communications as they influence the participation and attendance of students in the SES tutoring program?
> Have you had problems with provider refusal to serve the school because there were too few students eligible?
> Have you had problems with distances for students to obtain service?
> Have you had problems with computer/internet access?
> Have you had problems with other academic after-school programs that compete with the SES services?
> Have you had problems with non-academic programs that compete with the SES services?
> Have you had problems obtaining services to ESL and Special Education students?
> What were the two most significant problems that you had with provider accessibility?
> What else should I know about accessibility to providers for your school that has either promoted or interfered with student participation?
> What has enabled parents to get their student involved?
> What has hindered them in getting their student involved?

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[5] Not all interview questions are listed. Those listed are not in the order they were asked.