Inclusion

Teacher and Parent Perspectives on Extracurricular Activities for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
--Manuscript Draft--

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EXTRACURRICULAR PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

Extant literature suggests that participation in extracurricular activities is beneficial for all students, especially for those who receive segregated special education services. Although students with intellectual and developmental disabilities are legally entitled to participate, they are often excluded from these opportunities by either lack of access or support. This study investigated the experiences of eight teachers and six parents regarding the extracurricular participation of a sample of high school-aged students and children. The goal was to identify barriers and facilitators to participation, including the use of individualized education programs to guide accommodations. The two groups of participants agreed regarding the benefits of participation, barriers parents and students face, and potential solutions, but diverged in what they regarded was the teacher's role in facilitating participation and ways of providing needed support. Practice, policy, and research implications of these findings are discussed.

Teacher and Parent Perspectives on Extracurricular Activities for Students with

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Extracurricular activities (EAs) are generally defined as school-sponsored activities based on common student interests that take place outside school hours (e.g., Carter et al., 2010). These activities fall under three categories: arts (e.g. theatre, band), sports (e.g., teams, cheerleading), and special interest (e.g., chess, robotics), although students with intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) are more likely to participate in sports (e.g., Special Olympics) or social clubs (e.g., Best Buddies; Dymond et al., 2019). Participation in EAs is associated with increased belonging to the school community and mental health (O'Donnel et al., 2024), and increased academic performance (Anjum, 2021; Fredericks & Eccles, 2005). Despite these academic and social benefits and legislative guidelines to promote participation (Office for Civil Rights, 2013), students with IDD participate in these activities at much lower rates than typical students (Agran et al., 2017; Rimmer & Rowland, 2008). Data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 indicated that only 57% of students with intellectual disability participated in any EAs, compared to 73% of students with speech and language impairments and 66% of students with learning disability (Lipscomb et al., 2017). In contrast, 80% of all public-school seniors reported participating in EAs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). These statistics point to large discrepancies in participation for students with IDD compared to the general student population and other students with disabilities. The main facilitators to participation have been teachers who design and implement educational supports and accommodations and parents who orchestrate their children's after-school schedules. However, to our knowledge, there is limited research about how teachers and parents experience navigating extracurricular participation for

their students and children, particularly because these activities take place outside of school hours. Our study investigated these experiences to identify barriers and potential solutions.

Benefits of EA Participation for Students with IDD

Students with IDD who participate in EAs experince a range of benefits, including physical, emotional, and academic gains. EA involvement in sports may promote physical development of muscle strength, stamina, and motor patterns (Moran & Block, 2010; Taliaferro & Hammond, 2016) and help build functional life skills as participants practice planning, communicating, and/or problem solving (Agran et al., 2020; Bambara et al., 2016; Pence, 2016). Friendships, social bonds, and community relationships may strengthen when students participate in EA activities (Bambara et al., 2016; Pence, 2016). Additionally, EAs may expand participants' sense of belonging as well as their interests in academics and hobbies (Carter et al., 2010; Pence & Dymond, 2016; Simplican et al., 2015). Skills developed through EA engagement transfer to post-secondary education, employment (Bouck & Flanagan, 2010), and independent living (Cain et al., 2015). When participating in EAs, students with disabilities can observe models of positive social (e.g., prosocial behaviors) and emotional (e.g., self-regulation) behaviors exhibited by peers without disabilities (Guralnick, 2006; Odom et al., 2011). In a more general sense, EAs help develop students' social and personal identities (Abraczinskas et al., 2016) and directly promote social inclusion (Juvonen et al., 2019).

The meaningful benefits of EAs are substantial, and there are laws and regulations that support student participation in school-related EAs. Both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; 1990) and Section 504 (1973) require public spaces and some private entities to provide *reasonable accommodations* (34 C.F.R. § 104.4(a)). The ADA specifically mentions public entities that are associated with EA (i.e., schools, universities, parks, zoos, gymnasium, bowling

alley or other places of recreation). When schools fail to provide accommodations to EAs they can face court action (e.g., McFadden v Grasmick, 2007) or complaints can lead to an investigation from the United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2013). In addition, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) mandates that schools consider EA participation for individuals with individual education programs (IEPs), and when necessary, schools are required to provide supplementary aids and services to facilitate participation in EA (34 C.F.R. § 300.107). However, these mandates lack guidelines regarding what constitutes EAs and the ways in which schools should offer supports and accommodations that facilitate access, leading to disparities in district or school policies regarding how to determine necessary supports for EA participation.

Barriers and Facilitators to Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Despite the legal mandates, few students with disabilities appear to participate (IDD in particular) in EAs (Abraczinskas et al, 2016; Agran et al. 2017; Dymond et al., 2020; Siperstein et al., 2019). Deterrents to participation have involved the following factors: participants may have preferences (or dislikes) related to noise; activities may have undesired behavior triggers, students may have pre-existing hobbies and interests that cannot be supported; or students may require extensive scaffolds or supports that would interfere with participation (Dymond et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2023). Organizational obstacles related to transportation, funding, or staff involvement have also prevented EA inclusion (Agran et al., 2017; Taliaferro & Hammond, 2016; Vinoski et al., 2016).

The extant literature highlights the importance of educators and parents as the main drivers of participation in EAs by designing IEPs, monitoring implementation, and ensuring accommodations are facilitating student access. However, IEPs are rarely used to promote

inclusion in EAs (Agran et al., 2017, 2020). Both Agran and colleagues (2017) and Dymond and colleagues (2020) found that educators expected parents to play a significant role in facilitating access to extracurricular activities for their children. Yet, there are typically few supports available for parents to do so (Pence, 2016). Moreover, parent engagement in all school affairs may decrease because of their inability to be successful in including their children in EAs (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Moran & Block, 2010).

Facilitators include parental and peer knowledge regarding pathways to support and assumption of participation and are associated with greater EA inclusion (Agran et al., 2017; Pence & Dymond, 2021; Siperstein et al., 2019). However, extant literature offers limited information regarding practices that could increase participation. Efforts to improve access to extracurricular activities for children with IDD must begin with a clear understanding of the opportunities for success as reported by key stakeholders. Input from both parents and educators may offer practical and research-based solutions that may improve access to extracurricular activities for students with IDD. However, few studies have sought insight from parents and educators with a specific focus on identifying practical solutions designed to improve access to extracurricular activities for students with IDD. Most of those that did used either a survey design (e.g., Agran et al., 2017; Siperstein et al., 2019; Dymond et al., 2020) or small single-case design (e.g., Pence & Dymond, 2021); surveys yield broad results, while single-case studies focus in very narrowly. We propose to expand the understanding of EA participation with a qualitative study across schools in multiple states, thus filling in the middle ground of a varied, but deeper perspective.

Purpose of the Present Study

Our intent was to better understand the perspectives of special educators and caregiver/parents of students with moderate/severe IDD regarding extracurricular activity participation, the barriers they face, and potential solutions to address these barriers. The study takes place across three states, in high schools with varied levels of supports for EA participation for students with IDD, and brings the perspective of educators and caregivers with various degrees of success in including their students in EA at their school. The focal research questions (RQs) guiding our investigation were:

1. What do educators and caregivers/parents regard as benefits to extracurricular participation?

2. What role do educators and caregivers/parents play in promoting participation in EAs?

3. What barriers and facilitators to participation did the participants identify?

Methods

This study received prior approval from a university Institutional Review Board and participating school districts' Research Review Departments. We followed the quality indicators recommended for qualitative studies in special education as guidelines (see Bratlinger et al., 2005) and leveraged the strength of qualitative methodologies to explicate the meaning, structure, and essence of a person's or group's lived experiences around a specific phenomenon (Bratlinger et al., 2005; Christensen et al., 2011). Specifically, the phenomenon of interest was the participation in extracurricular activities for students with IDD from the perspective of educators and parents who either worked with or parented high school students. This phenomenon has a solid base of previous research, so we began with a strong paradigmatic and methodological grounding of our concepts for codes (Saldana, 2021).

We note that these data were collected before the pandemic disrupted essential educational practices. Consequently, our findings should be regarded as representative of the norm in terms of planning and engagement before EAs were interrupted during school closures.

Participants

Participant characteristics, connections between participants, and recruitment pathways are presented in Table 1. All participants either worked in a high school or their child was currently in high school or had recently finished. We specifically chose the high school level because high schools typically offer more and highly varied EAs when compared to elementary or middle schools.

Educators. Eligibility criteria included being a special education teacher or a transition coordinator working with students with moderate to severe IDD. We purposefully chose these participants based on their direct experience with students and their knowledge of the students' participation in EAs. We invited staff that met these criteria from three school districts to attend, one each in Connecticut (CT), South Carolina (SC), and Virginia (VA) by following each district's research protocol for disseminating the invitation. Sixteen staff were invited to participate in the study; 10 responded and consented to participate and two withdrew due to scheduling conflicts. In the end, eight educators participated in the interviews.

Caregivers/parents. We recruited caregivers or parents because we were interested in the planning aspect of participation—a task students often were not involved in. We asked participating special educators to invite or refer a caregiver they worked with to participate in the study. Six out of the eight did, but three caregivers were unavailable to participate. To balance the number or educators and caregivers we reached out to a disability organization in VA to recruit more caregiver participants through an invitation posted on their listserv. Three

participants volunteered and enrolled in the study. All six participants identified as mothers of children with moderate to severe IDD, currently enrolled or who had recently finished high school. Since our caregiver recruitment yielded only participants who identified as parents, we will continue calling them parents throughout the study.

Data Collection and Handling Procedures

We employed a semi-structured interview format (see Table 2) to identify participants' experiences with including students with moderate/severe IDD in EAs. The semi-structured format allowed us to gather specific information while giving us the flexibility to ask detailed follow up questions (e.g., Maxwell, 2013; Weiss, 1995). Educators were asked to talk about their experience with EA participation for all their students with moderate/severe IDD, while parents discussed their experience with their child. The goal was to understand what participants regarded as challenges or facilitators to participation in EAs.

Interviews were performed by four of the study authors; at the time of the interviews, three were doctoral students and one was a faculty member. Interview times varied across the two groups of participants. Interviews conducted with educators were shorter than those with parents; educator interviews lasted between 11 and 30 minutes, with an average of 19 minutes, while parent interviews ranged between 20 to 37 minutes, with an average of 30 minutes. Out of 14 interviews, 13 took place over the phone and one in person, as was requested by participants. The interviewer was able to guide the interview using the predetermined questions following cues from participants and would probe further to get a full understanding of the participants' experience, including thoughts and feelings, along with descriptions of specific situations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Throughout the interviews, interviewers paraphrased their understanding of participants' answers to allow for members' checks and for

participants to clarify any misunderstandings. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim into digital text using *oTranscribe* (Bentley, 2016); the transcription was performed without the text being shared online. All transcripts were kept in encrypted files on local computers and on *Google Drive* for sharing analysis results between coders.

Data Treatment and Analysis

The first two authors, along with the fourth, coded and analyzed the data. Data were derived from transcripts of the interviews conducted, organized by statements, which were usually sentences, and each relevant statement was assigned a code (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During training the three coders practiced on an interview transcript, passage by passage, until they reached 100% reliability. Coders worked independently by reading over transcriptions first to get a clear understanding of what the data said, allowing for thoughtful reflection of participant responses before coding the data, then coding the entire transcript. Codes were aggregated using a common Google document for each transcript. Coders entered their individual codes and any discrepancies were discussed using the comments feature within the document and during online meetings, until consensus was reached on each code. This action minimized researcher bias (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

After coding all transcripts, coders organized codes into themes by discussing and commenting on each code in the shared document. Codes were descriptive and were named using participants' terminology (Saldana, 2021). We used both deductive and inductive strategies to code and organize into sub-themes (Bingham, 2023); the deductive codes were selected from our review of the literature, while the inductive codes emerged from our data. Codes and terminology used to support them were homogenous across data from various participants, so they could easily be classified into sub-themes. These themes and their inclusion and exclusion

criteria continued to be refined with each coded transcript. Emergent themes were established, compared, and integrated based on findings and organized to best answer the research questions. Researchers themselves are experienced special educators and higher education instructors in teacher preparation and used their expertise when interpreting meaning, after codes and themes emerged. This process is in line with the reflective interpretation of data proposed by Banks and collaborators (2023).

Three of the educator and parent participants represented dyads, as reported in Table 1. The data analysis indicated more similarities across participant groups than within dyads, so we decided to provide findings comparing participant groups, with a few notes regarding relevant connections within dyads.

Results

Parents and educators interviewed discussed their experiences regarding the involvement of students with IDD in extracurricular activities. Four themes emerged from the findings: (1) benefits of extracurricular activities, (2) role of participants, (3) barriers to participation, and (4) potential solutions. Each of these are discussed below. Participants are referred to using their designation in Table 1 as parent (P) or educator (E); the latter includes special education teachers and transition coordinators.

Benefits of Participation

All participating parents and educators recognized there are many benefits to participating in EAs, such as opportunities for students to practice essential social skills, engage in events/activities they enjoy doing, and participate in the school community. All parents and educators mentioned that participation in extracurricular activities promotes unstructured interactions and helps students to develop a sense of belonging and community. E5 emphasized

that participation engages all the school community to be inclusive. P3 noted: "I think the whole sense of belonging and just being active in the community and especially in school, after school activities, is very important…Building friendships, improving communication, just expanding on her social skills and just being able to have that sense of independence. Being around others her age." All educators recognized the long-term benefits of extracurricular activities, including developing lifelong health-related skills related to movement and exercise, and social skills such as teamwork and communication. Any EA can be used as an opportunity to increase or acquire the skills students need the most, as E5 stated: "In any academic and extracurricular activity, they all focus on getting those life skills that they struggle with and I think if done correctly, any type of activity you can spin to make sure they're getting something out of it." In addition to benefits for the students with IDD, inclusion also brought value to the rest of the school community, a belief held by E2, E3, E4, and E8. E8 added that "In high school, students are sheltered in our self-contained classes, and outside it's a big scary world for them. This engagement changes not only them, but also members of the general society who have the opportunity to learn how to interact with people with disabilities."

Educators also said participating in EAs gives students opportunities to practice choice-making, something that many times lacks in daily educational practices for students with IDD. E1 stated: "I think they are learning to navigate the world more independently. A lot of times during extracurricular activities, students do not always have an adult with them, so they're learning to be independent." These opportunities are teaching students self-determination skills and allows for genuine connection with their peers.

An additional benefit is promoting a sense of self-worth and increasing student self-esteem in students who often experience poor academic achievement. Educators believed this

would have implications for students' future endeavors too. E2 mentioned that "they have successes and even though they don't have successes with academics because of their ability levels they … participate in extracurricular activities and specials, like sports, clubs, drama, art, those kinds of things. I think that's extremely important." P3 echoes this belief, stating "I also feel like her being involved in those extracurricular activities helped to build self-esteem and confidence which are also really important for a young person."

Role of Participants

Special Educators' Role in Facilitating Participation

Three educators (E2, E6, E8) explained they did not regard involving students in EAs or facilitating their access as their role and provided two main reasons for this. First, EAs take place after school hours, and special educators feel already overwhelmed by job-related tasks to the point where they have no time to take on another responsibility. E6 noted that "events and activities outside of contract hours do not fall under my umbrella of responsibilities," "teachers are not being compensated for extra work," and their involvement with students ends at the end of their contractual hours. Unsurprisingly, E6 engaged in the shortest interview because she refused to acknowledge questions regarding planning for EA participation, communicating with families regarding EA options, or documenting any accommodations in the IEP for the reasons outlined above.

Two other educators (E3 and E7) saw EAs as voluntary work and not their mandated responsibility. As such, when an educator was the sponsor of an EA, she was more willing to get her students involved. Three educators (E1, E4, and E5) saw this as a part of their responsibility, since they are the ones who knew the students' interests and thus can align those with existing EAs at their school. If educators were not sponsors for EAs, they connected students with

coaches who may be more responsive to students with disabilities and provided lists of needs, accommodations, and guidance.

Parents did not specifically refer to the educators as a facilitators for EA participation, but in two of the interviews special educators were mentioned. In one of these instances, P3 reported being told that the educator cannot be contractually mandated to support students in EAs, since those take place after school hours. However, when comparing the opportunities for their child to that of another student receiving special education services, the parent noted inequities:

> "There is another teacher in the program, a student of hers is involved in a lot of stuff. So, I am not sure if it is teacher specific and what they do, when someone tells you contractually they cannot be there then you don't question it."

In the other instance, P5 noted that the special educator was the sponsor of an EA and attempted to get the student involved:

> "The woman who is the head of the special education department was also the cheerleader coach and she started a spirit team… the cheerleaders would support the students who are in the special ed program but who could attend with nominal supervision because they did not have support staff."

Parents' Role in Facilitating Participation

Parents regarded themselves as the engine that had to drive inclusion, and educators concurred it was the parent's responsibility to find and pursue EAs their children could be involved in. P1 stated that "it's very much my responsibility to seek out the extracurricular"; all other parents echoed this sentiment in their statements regarding their role. This theme was the only where all participants were in agreement regarding the role of the parent, along with noting

barriers that made access difficult for some families. These barriers will be discussed in the next section.

Barriers to Participation

While it was apparent that teachers and parents alike recognized the benefits of extracurricular activities, the access and support needed were often lacking. Barriers identified were related to negative attitudes of school staff towards inclusion, lack of transparency regarding options available, failure to find options that met students' interests, students' lack of skills to meet requirements to enroll, and lack of access to specialized transportation after the school day. Most strikingly, parents reported challenges at every step from enrollment to participation in EAs. A first challenge was finding out which extracurricular options were available, and parents reported struggling to find information about EAs – this was true for P2, P3, P4, P6. Part of the issue was that opportunities for EA participation were shared over the school intercom or directly with students, so in the case of students unable to communicate this information home it seldom reached parents (P3, P4); other times, the written lists parents had access to were outdated and the clubs mentioned had long been dismantled (P3, P4, P5, P6). Educators stated that students and families were expected to use the same information channels to learn about these opportunities and express an interest in participating, whether they have a disability or not (E2, E5, E7, E8). Therefore, with limited information, parents felt disconnected. P3 commented:

> "Trying to find out what is happening and how to get an individual involved is so difficult and then you have to then chase them down by email and then phone and parents work...I just do not understand why it's made so complicated."

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All parents except P1 reported running into issues with access to information regarding the process to enroll in EAs.

A second challenge was that of meeting qualification requirements to participate in an activity, as most schools have policies regarding skill thresholds. Only three schools reported having unified sports, where students did not have to meet prerequisite skills to participate. Educators reported that, generally, policy addressed equal access for all students in terms of knowing what is available, signing up for the available clubs at their schools, or trying out for sports (E2, E3, E4, E5). Yet, they acknowledged that equal access is not enough for some students with increased needs for support. E3 noted:

> "I can see maybe an issue for students that use special equipment, for example, a wheelchair, or maybe require physical assistance with toileting or anything like that. At school, during school hours they have an instructional assistant assigned or they have the support of the teacher, or I don't think, or I don't assume that is provided in the context of anything outside of school that's not required."

Also, parents recognized that some extracurricular options were not accessible due to their child's disability. For example, P1 acknowledged not considering enrollment in EAs that required intensive concentration and strategy (e.g., chess). Overall, parents wished they had the option for their child to participate in an inclusive activity, potentially one that was aligned with their interest, just like the other students.

Parents and educators reported that schools do not typically include information regarding EA participation in the IEPs. P5 stated: "They would not do it [incorporate extracurricular goals into the IEP]. I've tried earlier. I think they would agree to put it in the present level as the parent would like - but there would not be a goal." All educators were also

hesitant to include this information that would make them legally liable for providing services outside of the school day but would be willing to include it in the present level of performance. In addition to knowing which options are available, the next step to consider was the appropriateness of supports. P1, who convinced the IEP team to include EA participation as a goal, noted that having a paraprofessional present deterred genuine interaction between students and discouraged building independence for her son, who would have preferred to attend without the support person:

> "How much support does he really need, and is his idea of participating acceptable?... [student] kind of is participating… he's sitting there and maybe he is not building [birdhouses] but he's kind of observing and watching and doing his own little thing but kind of on the fringes, you know, isn't that okay? I mean isn't that how he wants to participate?"

Educators noted several additional parent-related barriers to EA involvement. Such challenges included structural barriers such as time devoted to EAs for working parents, accessible transportation, funding for equipment, and/or attitudinal barriers, such as parents not valuing EAs and lack of interest in school activities on the part of parents or students. Parents agreed that transportation and motivating their children to engage in extracurriculars was something they sometimes had to contend with; P3 noted accessible transportation was essential but often lacking for their family: "usually the events were taking place right after school and then we have no way to go home."

Despite the roadblocks enumerated, the main reason parents might not actively pursue extracurricular participation was that inclusion was not part of the school culture or seemed to be a priority for school staff (P3, P4, P5). For example, P4 noted: "I tried when he was younger, I

tried, and hit so many roadblocks, and by the time he was 18, I was beat up [...] parents get beat

up pretty hard fighting for the kids to be more included." P5 added that the staff attitudes in

school lead her family to seek out EAs elsewhere:

> "It's much easier to find activities to suit our schedules in a friendly atmosphere [doing
>
> activities outside the school with the family]…we learned going outside of schools is
>
> where the activity was going to happen whether it was a drama class or sports team."

Facilitators to Participation and Potential Solutions

Two parents (P1, P5) and two educators (E1, E3) were in schools that offered

integrated/unified sports programs, where all children were welcome regardless of physical or

intellectual ability. However, not all schools offered this option. Educators in schools without a

unified sports option identified this as a potential solution to including students with disabilities,

and parents who did not already have this option agreed.

All parents and educators identified the need for a shift in attitudes and increased

communication. This included educating faculty, staff, and other students about the value of

inclusion and the best means to promote it. Similarly, both sets of participants discussed the need

for more effective communication between schools and parents, which would promote trust and

access to information. P5 mentioned that schools need to be inclusive starting from the

elementary school level for the practice to be widespread in later years: "It needs to start at the

elementary level, it needs to be a continuation of service." To that point, supports that were

available in elementary or middle school for clubs and EAs might not be available when students

reach high school and there are significantly more options available; P4 mentioned that "in

elementary school there was a lot of support and you get information and we knew a lot of kids

there", which was not the case once her child transitioned to high school and into a much larger community, with a wide variety of EA options.

Although schools might be wary of including goals on participation in EAs, two parents (P1, P6) were successful in convincing the school to include extracurricular participation as a goal in their children's IEPs. Similarly, two educators (E1, E3) mentioned they might include goals for extracurricular participation if the student needs the support to participate.

Discussion

The present qualitative study involved interviewing parents and educators of youth with IDD to compare their perspectives regarding facilitators and barriers to EA participation. As noted in the results, both groups recognized the benefit and importance of involving students with IDD in school-related extracurricular activities. The observations of the participants echo other research studies that suggested the numerous communication, health, and social benefits that participation provides for students with IDD (Agran et al., 2017; Brooks et al., 2015; Dymond et al., 2020). Further, the findings reported confirm what has previously been indicated in related research; that is, despite the acknowledged benefits mentioned above, a limited number of students actively participate in such activities.

As noted previously, both sets of participants concurred that extracurricular participation provides numerous benefits and that parents need to serve as the promoters of EAs, however, they disagreed regarding the extent of support schools should provide to ensure student access. It is also important to note that within the educator group there was no consensus regarding the role teachers play, pointing to an obvious disparity in approach to including students with IDD in EAs, both in terms of teacher training and school policy. At present, there are no clear guidelines

in respect to federal and district policy regarding what is considered an EA and the responsibilities of schools (and ultimately educators) to offer inclusive EA options.

The main barrier that teachers and parents have identified revolved around the need to have clear pathways to access information and supports needed for EA participation. The lack of parental access to information regarding extracurricular activities had previously been identified as a major barrier to participation (Pence & Dymond, 2016), and our findings confirmed that this continues to be a major obstacle. Similarly, Pence (2016) noted that the lack of support for teachers (e.g., uncertainty about their role) has also been identified as a major hurdle. Proposed solutions include changes in staff attitudes regarding inclusion and development of policies concerning a process to implement supports in after-school programs.

There has been consensus among participants regarding the need to use IEPs to ensure support and compliance. As Agran et al. (2020) reported, participation in extracurricular activities has been included in relatively few IEPs, thus compromising school accountability. One critical piece of this may consider at what times do IEP services start and end? If it is a school sponsored activity, administrators and teachers need to consider the after school supports and what is deemed an appropriate accommodation for participation in such activities. For argument's sake, schools fully support typical students' participation in sporting events that occur after school so why shouldn't extracurricular activity for students with IDD not be supported. Therefore, if additional supports are required outside of the school day for school-sponsored activities, additional compensation should be considered for staff who may need to provide those supports. That said, one point that should be made is that this issue is not only financial but involves a valorization of EA participation for students with IDD and an enhanced awareness that such participation can serve a vital role in a student's education and development.

A point to note was that in schools that offered unified/integrated EA options, educators were more likely to include goals regarding EA in the student's IEP. Perhaps knowing the students are guaranteed access without skills-based thresholds encourages the IEP team normalizes the concept of EAs as a regular aspect of school instead of an exceptional occurrence that only some students are expected to attend. We have no previous literature findings to inform our understanding, but this issue is something that should be investigated in future studies.

Both educators and parents identified attitudinal barriers as the greatest impediment to student participation. Previous literature identified negative teacher and parent attitudes as obstacles to adequate access and participation in extracurricular activities (Agran et al., 2017; Carter et al., 2010; Taliaferro & Hammond, 2016), however, when attitudes were supportive of inclusion, teachers found ways to facilitate participation, even if they did not provide direct support to students. Examples included finding EA sponsors and coaches who are knowledgeable and willing to work with students with disabilities in inclusive activities, or advocating for unified programs where students can participate regardless of skill level. When there is willingness to plan for EAs and include participation as an IEP goal, both parents and teachers reported successes in access and participation. Concurrently, previous studies suggested that participation in leisure is often determined by contextual rather than personal factors (e.g., lack of district policy and extracurricular activities for students with disabilities, uninformed teachers; Badia et al., 2013).

Interestingly, respondents in the present study did not refer to EAs as a means for students to access, practice, or generalize academic skills. Previous literature suggests that involvement in EAs can provide students with a rich and rewarding situation in which they can practice and generalize a variety of academic skills (e.g., counting, measurement, sight reading)

(Agran et al., 2020). For example, clubs can be designed to allow students to practice relevant academic skills (e.g., Rodriguez, 2016a & 2016b) and in doing so be supported by peers. The fact that related research has indicated that EAs are largely unmentioned in IEPs suggests that both educators and parents may not consider EA participation to represent meaningful IEP goals that need to be systematically taught and measured like an academic skill. In many IEP forms, teachers are just required to check if a student participates in EAs or if opportunities are presented for the student to participate. Although teachers are not required to provide descriptive information about the activities that their students may participate in, IEP teams should be encouraged to provide as much relevant information about extracurricular activities as is appropriate. Having conversations about supports needed for EA participation during regular IEP meetings might have identified simple solutions that did not require extra support personnel provided by the school or more work for the parents to provide these supports

Implications for Practice

As indicated previously, among the benefits of student participation in extracurricular activity is that such activity can promote a student's self-determination as well as access to the general curriculum. Interventions designed to promote a student's self-determination hold promise as an intervention, and the process of teaching a student's choice and decision-making falls well within the special educators' domain of experience, responsibility, and time allotment. Depending on what individual goals students are working on, specific EAs might help reinforce these goals and offer opportunities for practicing needed skills. This can be a part of the IEP team discussion, where the team can efficiently match student interest and opportunities for practice to natural supports and already existing EAs. Resulting information can become a part of the IEP document, ensuring continuity in the approach and supports offered.

There are numerous practical interventions that research has shown support for. First, the educator may choose to use a Circle of Friends model where the teacher and student with IDD look for natural peer connections using a model described by Forest and Pearpoint (1992). More directly, the teacher could implement a peer matching or support model where peers without disabilities from other clubs, teams, or activities would be matched to students with disabilities to provide communications related to activities, meetings, or tryouts. Second, special educators could develop activities that teach individuals with disabilities to use existing school media streams (i.e., announcements, school television or radio stations, bulletin boards, social media postings, guest speakers, assemblies, or websites) to recognize the school-related sports, clubs, and activities they may want to participate in. After gathering information, the special educator could promote activities to help the student choose areas of interest or to prioritize interests and needs. The approach naturally aligns with functional skills instruction (e.g., listening, choosing, prioritizing), and if the special educator included a daily journaling activity for the student with a disability, an extracurricular intervention could provide an opportunity for practicing writing. Another aspect that should be considered in promoting meaningful EA engagement is allowing students to decide how they want to participate and what supports they require. One of the parents noted that the expectations for participation were similar to those in performing academic tasks, even if the student only wished to be socially included. Participation in EAs provide students with a potentially reinforcing situation in which they can engage in a variety of self-determination skills.

Implications for Policy

The IDEA requires IEP teams to consider involvement and supports within EAs; however, the regulations do not mandate participation. Results from this study suggested schools

were willing to provide support for students with disabilities after support was explicitly requested by the family. However, parents may not have the information they need to explicitly request that participation. In essence, student participation in extracurricular activities depends primarily on advocacy from parents, with subsequent support from special educators. Our findings point to the need for consistent policies regarding supports available for students to participate in extracurricular activities across districts, and more stringent regulations requiring these supports at the federal level.

Although special educators may be in the best position to advocate for extracurricular participation and to gather the needed information to decide whether participation in a specific activity would be a good fit for an individual student, their responses indicated that their contract hours and their understanding of their roles and responsibilities have resulted in many of them taking a hands-off approach. One possible solution would be to encourage schools to offer dedicated planning time that could be used by teachers to identify potential EAs, design effective supports, and communicate with families and EA leaders about ways to provide access to these activities. An alternative is to offer extra pay for teachers who are willing to spend time after hours designing supports for students, even if they are not the ones directly implementing them during EA times. Additionally, schools could develop and fund a support person who is automatically part of EAs (e.g., assistant coach, craft assistant) whose task would be to work with all the students needing extra support to participate, including those with IDD. This approach may remove the stigma associated with having a personal assistant or paraprofessional and serve more students who could benefit from this support.

Although teachers in our study described meeting the standards of compliance of IDEA, we did hear about a breakdown in communication between the school and parents. The

communication issue may stem from a team focus on compliance instead of outcomes. At present, federal policies do not require districts to gather information or report the percentage of students with disabilities who participate in extracurricular activities. It is possible that focusing on the outcome of extracurricular inclusion may help to change the focus of IEP teams. Focusing on participation in extracurricular activities will help teams to address non-academic outcomes (e.g. social skills, communication skills, self-management). Although our study indicated that teachers and parents recognized the social and communication benefits of extracurricular activities, neither group viewed extracurricular activities as a tool to help the individual with disabilities learn or generalize IEP-defined skills. Rodriguez (2016a) noted that clubs can be used to teach, practice, and apply mathematics in the real world; however, neither group viewed extracurricular activities as a location to apply academic skills such as reading, writing, or mathematics. More surprising, neither special educators nor parents viewed extracurricular activities as an opportunity to instruct students with disabilities in life skills. Extracurricular activities, understood as after school activities, provide teams with time to deliver non-academic instruction (Agran et al., 2017).

Another result of schools not being required to report on inclusion of students with IDD in EAs is that schools are not mandated to develop explicit policy regarding student participation. As such, there are obvious inconsistencies in access and opportunities created for students across schools and districts, identified by Agran and collaborators (2017) and confirmed by our study. Moreover, these inconsistencies are present even at the school level across teachers, as evidenced in the E6-P3 dyad, where E6 insisted that teachers should not be engaged in planning for EAs, while P3 noted that some teachers at the school facilitated student participation. This points to the need of clear district-wide, or at least school-wide, guidelines

regarding the teacher's role in facilitating participation, along with professional development for teachers as they begin charting pathways to connect students to EAs in their school and planning for ways to facilitate engagement in the various activities. We found no evidence that teacher preparation programs broach the subject of supporting students to take part in EAs. Given the many benefits EAs have for students, this might be a topic to incorporate in teacher training, along with training administrators to incorporate time teachers can use to plan for student participation during a regular work week. Whiteley and Richard (2012) found that teachers typically did not engage with EAs unless they had a planning period that allowed them to plan for these activities.

Implications for Research

The implementation of practices designed to improve EA participation needs further research. Intervention research could focus on ways to improve support for parents with increased communication about school related extracurricular activities. These types of interventions may build on state operated parent-to-parent support programs or parent advocacy supports; however, the authors encourage caution related to this line of interventions because they could lead to blaming of parents for the lack of participation and leading to interventions that deemphasize the school's responsibility for promoting individual advocacy.

Regardless of the challenges faced when seeking to promote the participation of students with IDD in EAs, many of the parents in the present study reported that their sons or daughters would consider participating in such activities if they were encouraged. Future research could seek to determine how widespread such desire is and what supports are needed to improve participation and mitigate barriers to participation. It would be especially useful to gain the perspective of students themselves and gauge their interest in extracurricular activities available

in their schools. In addition, a review of local and state policies related to EAs could provide insight into the degree to which barriers to participation demonstrate a lack of policy support versus a cultural attitude in individual schools; specifically, lack of knowledge about the benefits of extracurricular participation and the continued belief that students would gain little from such participation.

Additionally, input about students' participation in EAs in the present and other studies has been secured from stakeholders who have information about their students' or child's involvement. However, no studies about EAs have secured input from the students themselves. It is more than obvious that students with IDD can provide rich insight about their participation in EAs; specifically, emotions they felt, difficulties they may have experienced, and who provided support, among other variables. Research that focuses on the impressions and perceptions of students with IDD is clearly warranted. Likewise, research is needed on the perceptions of peer buddies or teammates regarding their classmates' participation. Such students would have firsthand information on the experiences of the students they are supporting and the values they place on having classmates with IDD fully participating in EAs.

Limitations

The data gathered from the study should be viewed within the context of the study's limitations. This qualitative study used one-on-one interviews as the data collection method, so this information consists of self-reports that may not accurately reflect the practices of each of these participants. Participants were recruited voluntarily, so they may not reflect the range of perspectives of special education teachers or parents of students with disabilities the way that a randomly selected population would. Persons who voluntarily participate may be those who had a very good or a very bad experience relative to the participation of students with IDD in

extracurricular activities. Moreover, parents and educators did not all come from the same school, school division, or state. Local policies regarding special educator roles and responsibilities can differ widely, particularly for something such as access and participation in EAs, which are not specifically mandated by federal law.

Second, we did not collect any background information on participants' race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or years of experience for educators. This was done to promote a sense of anonymity in participants, who might have been worried about legal implications or their districts' liability if they identified policy being a barrier to student participation. While background information would have allowed for deeper comparisons of how experience, for example, might play into attitudes around inclusion in EAs, we considered the tradeoff to be valuable in ensuring more honest responses.

Third, there were discrepancies regarding the duration of interviews, especially that of one educator, that only lasted 11 minutes. We explained the reason in the results section, but we consider this duration to be indicative of the educator's mindset regarding their role in facilitating EAs; the parent within this dyad also confirmed the educator's beliefs that planning for EAs was not and should not be part of their job.

Last, the study did not examine the specific EAs students with IDD were encouraged to join or, for that matter, dissuaded not to participate in, what roles (or positions) the students had, and if the students' participation was acknowledged in the school or community. Research that examined these issues would be of value.

Conclusion

While the benefits of participating in EAs have been well-documented, the reality is that many students with IDD are not taking advantage of this potential benefit of their education. This

reflects a missed opportunity to enable this group of students to be more included in their school

communities, allowing them to practice academic and functional skills, and learning to cooperate

with others as part of a group. Educators and parents need to work with local, state, and national

policymakers to find solutions so that students with IDD can fully participate in their school

communities and, most importantly, have fun in a meaningful and age-appropriate manner.

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EXTRACURRICULAR PARTICIPATION

Table 1

Participant Characteristics, Connection, and Recruitment Method

State	Educator	Gender	Position[a]	Recruitment	Parent	Gender	Recruitment[b]
CT	E1	F	Teacher	District	P1	F	Referred by Educator
SC	E2	F	Teacher	District			
	E3	F	Teacher	District			
	E4	M	Coordinator	District	P2	F	Referred by Educator
	E5	F	Teacher	District			
VA	E6	F	Coordinator	District	P3	F	Referred by Educator
	E7	F	Teacher	District			
	E8	F	Teacher	District			
					P4	F	Organization
					P5	F	Organization
					P6	F	Organization

[a] Teacher denotes special education teacher for students with moderate IDD and coordinator is

the transition coordinator

[b] Organization denotes a state-level disability organization

EXTRACURRICULAR PARTICIPATION

Table 2

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Questions

1. In your opinion, how important are extracurricular activities for your students/child?

2. What are the benefits of extracurricular participation?

3. Are extracurricular activities more or less important than academic or social priorities?

4. Describe your school's policy toward your students'/child's participation in extracurricular activities.

5. What extracurricular options do your students have? How do the options compare to other students' options?

6. Can you tell us about some successes/challenges you have had when getting your students/child involved in extracurricular activities?

7. Are there supports available at the school/district level to promote extracurricular participation?

8. What made the supports work/not work?

9. Is the IEP being used as a tool to help your students in accessing extracurricular services?

10. Ideally, what extra-curricular activities do you wish your students/child could participate in?

11. What would need to occur to make that happen?