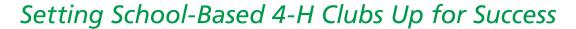# SCHOOL-BASED 4-H PROGRAMMING SERIES

Setting School-Based 4-H Clubs Up for Success

Florida 4-H utilizes Positive Youth Development (PYD) in order to develop skills for youth to grow into responsible young adults and citizens. According to Youth.gov (2019), Positive Youth Development is "an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths." Positive Youth Development (PYD) in 4-H utilizes *Essential Elements (EE)* (Kress, 2003) to target life skills development.

Four core essential elements encompassing eight more in-depth elements are outlined in Table 1.

Core Components of a Club Meeting

The core components of a 4-H meeting allow youth to experience PYD and the EE in an intentional manner. These core components include:

- Business Meeting (DeCubellis, 2014): In this portion of the club meeting, youth learn and practice parliamentary procedure and Robert's Rules of Order, elect officers, and uphold structure while demonstrating citizenship skills.
- Educational Component: Youth gain knowledge and learn a skill through hands-on experiential methods, including lectures, seminars, field trips, demonstrations, skill-a-thons, and other educational methods.
- Recreational Component: Youth engage with one another and have the opportunity to be social with peers through snacks, games, and informal team-building experiences.

Table 1. For more information on PYD and the EE, refer to Samuel & Rose (2011).

Belonging (acceptance as a member of a group)	Mastery (comprehensive knowledge or skill in a subject or accomplishment)
1. Positive relationship with a caring adult	4. Engagement in learning
2. Safe emotional and physical environment	5. Opportunity for mastery
3. Inclusive environment	
Independence (the quality or state of being independent; not relying on someone else, self-governing, self-reliant)	**Generosity (the quality of being generous; noble or kindly spirit)**
6. Opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future	8. Opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future
7. Opportunity for self-determination	

While some of the components to a 4-H club meeting may not be possible to include each time the club meets, the more often they are, the more youth will feel a connection to 4-H on a larger scale. These core components that occur during a club meeting should not be lost or disregarded when trying to establish a school-based program. They enhance life skill development and foster an awareness in youth. These components may not run as smoothly, may be harder to implement, and may seem pointless for a school-based club, but 4-H is one of the only youth-development programs that promotes these practices.

What are some commonly expressed challenges and how can they be addressed?

Challenges	Solutions
Club members are too young to run a meeting without adult supervision.	When members are too young to implement parliamentary procedure or Robert's Rules of Order and/or to elect officers, an adult should lead the meeting. Providing opportunities for youth to participate and begin to learn what the roles are and how a meeting is run can be done by rotating positions, providing a script for the youth, and role-playing.
There isn't enough time to complete all the core components of a 4-H club meeting.	Depending on how often a club meets, it may be possible to split up the meetings so there is only one business meeting a month or every other month. Depending on the site, youth may have ample time for recreation so that may be excluded from the club meeting. Combining education and recreation can also be done. An educational game is a great way to teach and have fun.
Youth are coming and going during the club meeting.	Create a system in the club where youth can have a "buddy" that can fill them in on what they have may missed. Provide clear instructions so any youth member walking in knows what to look for and what to do. Provide abbreviated or take-home activities for youth so they can continue to complete the activity they didn't have time to finish during the club meeting.

For more information and ideas on running club meetings for school-based clubs, refer to resources provided on SPIN clubs at http://florida4h.org/programs_/special-programs/SPIN-Clubs/.

Promoting the Essential Elements in School-Based Settings

Preparation and intentionality in incorporating the EE into meetings are important. Offering a menu of options, thinking about events ahead of time, and incorporating lessons that are ready to go for volunteers with the EE lined out will help prepare school-based clubs in meeting the needs of PYD. Below are some ideas on incorporating the EE so youth are able to feel a sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity.

- *Provide an enrollment packet to members and their families (Belonging)*: Provide a packet to new and returning youth upon joining the 4-H program. Include items such as a parent/family handbook, resources about 4-H, contact information, community-wide activities, invitations to connect with the county program, social media links, and county newsletters.

- *Maintain traditional club customs (Belonging)*: Teach and say the 4-H pledge before each meeting, explain what the clover represents, maintain a club calendar, and follow the best practices for a successful club meeting (include the three components to a meeting: business, education, recreation). Traditions allow youth to feel a connection to something that is bigger than themselves and encourage group participation.

- *Create a club identity (Belonging, Independence)*: Allow members to design a club logo or t-shirt, choose their name, or enact any other practice that fosters ownership in the club. Youth will have more of an

interest in what happens with the club they have joined if they feel like they made some of the decisions about it.

- *Distribute items with the 4-H emblem to members of the club (Belonging)*: Membership pins, shirts, stickers, pencils, magnets, membership cards, and similar items will make the club members recognize one another and feel like they belong to the group.

- *Maintain consistency for club meetings (Belonging)*: Hold regular meetings on a standard day and time. The repetition helps foster familiarity and belonging.

- *Provide information and invitations to events outside the school-based club setting (Belonging)*: Make the effort to include your school-based program members in what happens at the county level. This includes creating and providing a county newsletter, sending home fliers about upcoming events, and talking to parents and caregivers about 4-H. Don't rely on only one form of communication. Ask the partner site if they are able to assist in communicating about 4-H through text messages, automated phone messages, school-based emails, fliers, bulletin boards, and/or social media.

- *Assign project work (Mastery)*: Have youth complete a program sheet, report, or book. This allows youth to document their growth in learning about a new subject or project and shows development in that area. Some of these items may need to be adapted for the site. Be flexible in finding ways for youth to participate and consider ways in which they can document their projects. Further completion of project reports or books can be encouraged if youth have an additional project at home they can work on independently. Journaling may work best for programs where youth come and go. Having early elementary–age youth draw about their experiences may be more appropriate in other settings.

- *Bring county events to the school site (Belonging, Mastery, Independence)*: A school-based club member may not be able to attend an event off site, so bringing those events to the site will help foster mastery of skills. This can be done with 4-H competitive events such as demonstrations, public speaking, skill-a-thons, fashion revue, Tropicana, and Share the Fun.

Noncompetitive 4-H activities can also be done this way, such as by bringing National Youth Science Day or the Virtual March 4-Health 5K to the site.

- *Assist youth to participate in countywide events and competitions (Belonging, Mastery, Independence)*: Some countywide contests, such as poster and/or photography competitions and other possible fair-related competitions, can be done at the site and brought to the event to be judged. This will require advanced planning as the volunteer or agent will have to make the commitment to pick up the materials to bring to the competition and return them to the site upon conclusion.

- *Provide opportunities for recognition and awards (Belonging, Mastery, Independence)*: Recognition and awards provide a standard youth can strive for and look forward to achieving. Recognizing youth for their accomplishments helps them to feel included in the program. Examples include participation certificates, club awards, standards of excellence awards, and any other opportunities that can be made available.

- *Encourage community service Family Night/Project-Share Night (Generosity, Independence)*: While youth may not be able to go off site for community service or service-learning projects, their site can be the beneficiary from community service or a service-learning project. Youth can determine what their site needs, and the club can work towards addressing that need. Examples include food drives, trash pickups, and recycling initiatives at the site.

Success at school-based sites to form 4-H clubs and programs will depend on utilizing the developmental practices of PYD and incorporating the essential elements. Youth benefit from feeling like they belong, mastering a skill, gaining independence, and exhibiting generosity. The 4-H club atmosphere provides a setting for youth to achieve lifelong skills as long as they are given the opportunity to participate.

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