

***Profiles of Extended Learning Programs:
Promising Practices in Tennessee's 21st Century
Community Learning Centers***

DECEMBER 2016

PREPARED FOR:

Tennessee Department of Education



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

SOCIAL WORK OFFICE OF
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BY

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For more than 20 years, children in Tennessee have had the opportunity to attend extended learning programs funded by the 21st CCLC federal initiative. Since 2001, the program has operated as a block grant administered by the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE). Local education agencies and faith- and community-based organizations are eligible to apply. The purpose of the programs is to support—but not replicate—in-school learning and healthy development. As programs continue to strive for improvement, much can be harvested from sharing peer experiences.

To facilitate that process for the state’s 21st CCLC program community, in January 2016 the TDOE identified a number of extended learning programs for University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Social Work Office of Research and Public Service (SWORPS) evaluators to visit later that Spring. The purpose of the visits was to identify “promising practices” extended learning programs use to create conditions the literature has identified as key—e.g., strategies programs use to develop and sustain effective partnerships that promote learning and community engagement; activities offered to engage youth in enrichment opportunities that complement school-day learning in terms of academics but also address safety, health, and nutrition issues; ways programs engage families in students’ learning and development; formal and informal methods programs use to continually assess and improve operations, etc. A “promising practice” is a method or technique that has been shown to work effectively and produce successful outcomes; supporting evidence can be subjective data (e.g., interviews and anecdotal reports from program administrators and staff involved in daily operations) and/or objective data (e.g., feedback from stakeholders like youth, families, or community partners gathered in a systematic manner, results of external audits). While practices described in this report are based primarily on subjective data gathered during field visits by evaluators, the selection of sites (as described below in detail) was based on more objective data guided primarily by information gathered in a systematic fashion by TDOE administrators during onsite program monitoring visits that focus on multiple elements of program quality issues. Aside from some evidence for effectiveness, a “promising practice” must have the potential for replication in other settings and that was a guiding factor for practices included in the report.

Evaluators requested a sampling of programs that were geographically diverse, served different grade levels, and were operated by a mix of CBOs and LEAs. TDOE administrators were able to provide a list of 20 grantees and recommended follow-up with individual grantee directors to select the program site that would be most appropriate for evaluators to visit. Telephone interviews were conducted in February 2016 with directors. For 2 cases, it turned out that visits would not be appropriate as there were large scale changes underway at the time; for instance, one grantee director reported that key staff heading operations at all sites had just been replaced. For the remaining 18 grantees, decisions for what site to visit (for those who operated more than one site) were guided primarily by the variety of activities a program offered, availability to accommodate a visit before the end of the school year, and longevity of the program staff so they would be able to reflect on past successes and lessons learned that have informed operations over time. At the end, 17 Extended Learning Programs (ELPs) met the requested criteria—providing a pool of programs that operated in different geographic settings, served a mix of different age groups, and operated by school districts and community/faith-based organizations.¹

¹ Eighteen sites were originally identified and visited however, at one program evaluators were unable to observe typical program activities and therefore that program is not included in the discussion.

6 Elementary School	6 Middle School	5 High school
9 CBO/FBO		8 LEA
9 Urban		8 Non-urban
6 East TN	6 Middle TN	5 West TN

The visits took place during the spring semester of the 2015-2016 school year. Evaluators visited programs in teams of two and interviewed the site coordinator, several activity leaders, feeder school principals, and other stakeholders, such as community partners involved in program offerings. Evaluators observed typical program operations for two days. Occasionally the observation coincided with special activities (e.g., parent nights or award ceremonies) which evaluators observed in addition.

In an effort to validate the selection of the 17 sites, after each visit, evaluators met and completed a Global Observation Guide which outlines several “best practices” previously identified in the literature. Evaluators came to consensus regarding program performance related to each indicator that was included in the guide. A summary of program ratings follows. What should be noted is that while there are several metrics with fewer than anticipated sites receiving a “yes” rating, evaluators frequently felt that the decision not to use the “best practice” was a deliberate one by the program’s leaders. For example, several programs operating for high schoolers did not offer “free time.” The students attended the program to participate in the offered activity. If students wanted free time, they left the program and went to their friends’ houses. Further, some sites did not offer “variety” because all of the students were selected for the program based on identified deficits which were aggressively targeted. Variety would have undermined this focus. Additionally, when looking at individual site data, only one site demonstrated fewer than 81% of these “best practices” during the observation, and that site was undergoing a significant transition and was housed in temporary quarters during the observation. On average, sites demonstrated 88% of the best practices included in the Guide with 2 sites demonstrating 100%. So, while the table below indicates many programs followed “best practices,” it also underscores that not every “best practice” is appropriate for every program.²

² Site are not identified by name as staff were given assurances of confidentiality during the site visits so they would be candid regarding successes and lessons learned. Contact TDOE or UT SWORPS for further information.

Supportive Environment	Proportion of sites rated “yes”
The physical environment is safe and free of health hazards (e.g., activity area not cluttered, no dangerous or broken materials, etc.)	16/17
Program space/furniture/equipment accommodate the activities offered (e.g., external distractions are minimized for both students and staff, there are enough resources for students to work with, materials are in good repair –e.g., sports equipment is functional, games have all pieces, computers work, etc.)	17/17
Students can access resources/materials with ease independently (e.g., computers, library/books, games, reference materials, etc.)	15/17
Staff provides a welcoming atmosphere (e.g., staff directly addresses students by name, staff listens to students, staff use a positive tone of voice, staff are relaxed and cheerful).	17/17
Session flow is well planned(e.g. staff conveys expectations/plans for the session, instructions are easily understandable and easy to follow, students understand instructions and what is expected of them, transitions are orderly and efficient/students do not need to wait a long time for an activity to start).	17/17
Schedule of planned activities allows for flexibility (i.e., provides routine without rigidity).	14/17
Students can choose from a variety of activities (e.g. student is presented with more than one option/choice of activity).	9/17
There is a good balance of academic, enrichment, and recreational activities for students to participate.	14/17
There is a good balance of structured and “free” time.	9/17
Activities are designed to engage students with different needs (e.g., ability level, learning style, interest).	15/17
Activities are designed to provide students with opportunities to practice new skills or master/refine existing skills (e.g., new skill is learned and built upon through perseverance and sustained attention –e.g., music lessons, karate, etc., not so easy that students finish quickly and become bored).	17/17
Activities are designed to engage youth in fun and interesting ways (e.g., youth are engaged in hands-on learning, use of “real world” experiences to teach, props/visual aids/concrete examples used to illustrate complex concepts or steps, etc.)	17/17
Students are supervised to maintain safety (e.g., staff know where the youth are and what they are doing, aware of all situations in the room).	17/17
Healthy food and drinks are provided.	11/17

Interactions (Staff/Student & Peer)	
Staff supports students in building new skills or refining existing skills (e.g., staff assists students without taking control; staff encourages students to think for themselves –ask students “why, how, what if” questions that require complex or extended responses (not only factual, rote or yes/no) or to explain their answers/respond to counter arguments and attempt to answer their own questions; staff verbally recognizes student efforts and accomplishments, including to students who are frustrated).	17/17
Staff relates to students in positive ways (e.g., staff communicates goals and expectations to students; staff pay attention and show interest in what students are doing or how they are working together; conversations with students are not limited to directions or other “necessary talk”; students appear comfortable interacting with staff; staff look at students when they are speaking; staff initiates conversations with students; staff responds to students’ initiation of dialogue or questions by showing interest and extending conversation/asking questions back).	17/17
Students have opportunities to practice leadership skills (e.g., staff encourages students to set goals/make plans, share ideas, opinions and concerns, take responsibilities, time to reflect, choose what or how they do something/help determine direction of an activity or team members/partners, lead peer activities/tutor peer).	10/17
Students interact with one another in positive ways (e.g., students assist one another, are friendly and relaxed with one another, socialize informally, consider each other’s viewpoints, work collaboratively, share well materials and space, help/accept help from each other).	17/17
Staff encourages the participation of all regardless of level of ability or other factors (e.g., staff try to engage a student who may be isolated or not paying attention during an activity; staff notice when students are having difficulty – provide encouragement and alternatives).	17/17
Staff encourages children to manage feelings and resolve conflicts appropriately (e.g., make compromises, jointly work out solutions rather than conflict escalating)/steps in only if needed and in an appropriate manner (e.g., intervenes constructively and calmly to address disruptive behavior by redirecting students and/or explaining why the behavior is unacceptable).	13/14 <small>(Only sites where conflicts were observed are scored on this practice)</small>
Staff listens attentively and/or observes students (e.g., respond verbally or non-verbally to communicate feedback, pay attention to students as they complete tasks/interested in what students are saying or doing).	17/17

During each visit, evaluators felt that overarching themes emerged that clearly directed or defined the programs. There were guiding philosophies or structures that steered all the decisions staff made for operations. While the decisions made in one program may or may not not have fit with the philosophy of another program, they were the right choice to meet the goals of that program. Those are the stories that this report highlights: the decisions and structures that these programs have in place and how collectively those pieces create the overarching program theme evaluators observed. The site profiles are in no way an exhaustive reporting of the myriad ways these sites serve their students. Such an accounting is not possible. The profiles are meant to describe programatic goals and visions as shared by program leaders and innovative ways observed they use to achieve them.

Building life habits for SUCCESS: A holistic approach to meeting student needs

9-12

GRADES



CBO



URBAN

67%

30+ DAYS

A program operating in a low income area aims to build life skills that help the youth break out of the cycle of poverty by teaching healthy habits. Starting with academics, the teachers develop lessons that impart skills applicable beyond the classroom. For example, the students used reasoning skills and practiced “thinking outside the box” in a creative writing exercise where they envisioned a piece of candy that didn’t want to be eaten. The teachers make sure to explain the larger skills they’re imparting: “You teach them and tell them what you taught them and then teach them again.” This method helps the students transfer the skills to other areas of their lives.

Academic enrichment is also geared to build healthy habits. Chess club is a required activity for all students because it helps teach the students that one quick decision can have long term consequences. The activity leader reported people that are afraid to play chess because of its reputation as being only for “smart people.” As the students play, they realize they have to overcome their fears to improve. This makes them more confident in all areas of their life. “Chess is like a stepladder to help them focus on what’s going on in their classrooms and helps with their classroom performance. Chess is about performing under pressure which helps [the students] in life and in the classroom.” In another confidence building activity, an activity leader gave students impromptu essay topics which develop communication skills and can help students in stressful situations like college interviews. Students also learn conflict resolution and relationship building through role playing. Staff strive to be role models and share processes or strategies they use in their lives and how those have helped them.

Staff are encouraged to look for ways to develop leadership skills with students. They ask students to “teach” their peers while standing at the white board or at the computer. The program further encourages leadership by selecting older students to mentor younger ones. The staff identify the mentors and tell them why they were chosen, what qualities they have exhibited, what is expected of them, and what mentoring is about. The mentors sign a contract outlining their roles and

responsibilities. Signing a formal agreement conveys to the student that being a mentor in the program is like a job. In training, staff talk to the mentors about what employers look for: dependability, accountability, team worker, ability to work independently. They gain valuable experience that translates to many facets of their lives, now and in the future.

The program also works with students on setting specific, measurable goals for

their future. The program staff want them to be successful in whatever they want to do and to know they can strive to do better. In career exploration sessions, the kids tell the activity leaders their career goals and the program finds someone in the community to come talk about what the students need to do now in order to accomplish that goal. Those career choices are often up brought in discussions and

Keys for GOAL DEVELOPMENT with students:

- 1 Provide a mechanism to track and review progress; app, excel sheet, paper journal
- 2 Connect achievements and negative experiences back to goals
- 3 Provide resources to help achieve goals
- 4 Involve families for continuing support and encouragement/accountability
- 5 Involve students in activity planning in the context of meeting their needs to achieve their goals

revisited often in program enrichment activities. For instance, students were asked to look up the average salary for the career they had chosen earlier in the year during a budgeting exercise and use that figure to project allocation for various expenses. The exercise generated some follow-up thoughts about career choice for some students.

You can only achieve your goals if you track your progress, so the program encourages students to track their own data to see their improvement. Students use journals to track the data and are asked to reflect on daily activities or events such as test grades or discipline issues. They answer the question “How does [the activity/event] contribute to the achievement of my goal?” They track multiple academic and health related goals. This promotes healthy competition among the students. If there is a 70% improvement for the entire group, the program has a celebration of their success. If they see individual students regressing, staff will talk to the student, find out what’s going on and create a plan to get back on track. Also, when a child is sent to the site coordinator for being disruptive, she first asks them what happened and lets them tell her in their own way. Then they talk about what the student could have done differently and how behaviors and current events tie to future goals. “We won’t be enablers of bad behavior or disrespect, but have to recognize the population we are working with.”

As these students live in a high poverty area, teaching basic money management has been a top priority for the program. An expert in personal finance in the community volunteers in the program, teaching students what it costs to go to college and how studying hard, focusing, and getting good grades will help pay for college. He teaches this to all the students so the ones going into a trade or vocation understand that these skills are just as important for them as for the ones who plan to go to college. Beyond saving for college, the personal finance expert feels that lack of money is the reason so many bad choices are made. He helps kids learn to save and to invest so they can make better choices.

The twin values of financial and nutritional health are reinforced in several activities. During the finance sessions, activity leaders factor in nutrition as well: teaching the value of nutrition and applying money management skills such as looking for deals and sales—where do I go to get better food? How can I buy healthy food? Other sessions teach eating right in a food desert, kitchen safety, food safety, and healthy cooking techniques. After students were taught how to prepare a healthy snack they were asked to estimate cost and then project how much they could sell this product for at an event they catered.

While staff encourage the students go home and teach their families the skills they learned, the program also offers similar sessions for the entire family—taking a multigenerational approach to making an impact on the youth’s life. The personal finance volunteer talks with the families about budgeting, saving, and Educational and Roth IRAs. The monthly parent meetings cover topics including relationship building, health and fitness (where they encouraged parents to wear pedometers along with their children, eat healthy, drink more water), and making healthy food substitutions while living in a food desert. To promote working together, families came together during a family night and worked as equal partners to create the family’s life story. “Everything we know, we want the parents to know so if parents are willing to participate, we help the parents be able to participate.”

“It is so important for the kids to know they have a voice and are understood and respected and loved.”

More carrot, less stick: Maximizing student participation with use of non-academic enrichment and fostering a sense of belonging



Kids in metropolitan areas have more choices about how to spend their time after school. A program operating in Nashville attracts middle school males by offering its own mini sports leagues. Three seasonal sports are offered, each complete with coaching, regular season and tournament games, and championships. All participants in the program can play on the teams if they choose, but games are only held after homework and academic enrichment sessions. Students who may want to sit out for one sport are encouraged to stay involved in other ways, offering additional opportunities for skill building. During the basketball championships, one student live streamed the game to a password protected site for families to watch while another student did play-by-play commentary. According to the grantee director, the program attracts students who don't have the skill level to play on their school's sports teams. They come to the ELP because they love to play sports, but they get the academic assistance they need.

As this is a program solely for boys, the program hires adult males to mentor the boys and coach the sports teams. The mentors are assigned a group of students and they stick with that group throughout the program's different activities. They sit with the students during snack time (which, by way of a partnership with Second Harvest, is actually a full, hot meal complete with entrée, sides, and dessert) and talk with them casually, addressing any topic the boys bring up. These conversations range from professional sports to family life to school problems and beyond. "They want and thrive on that

attachment." Each mentor follows his group to their academic sessions, ensuring appropriate behavior and addressing discipline issues when necessary. This relieves regular day teachers employed by the program of that responsibility, addressing a hiring barrier for community based programs. While this ELP does have some paid teaching staff drawn from the school system, they also have retired teachers volunteering in the program. Volunteers come in one night a week and work with the boys on homework in their specialty subject area.

Keys for ENTICING student participation:

- 1. **Select a specific, well defined target population**
- 2. **Determine what activities/services/supplies those students want but cannot find in their schools/communities**
- 3. **Assess underlying needs that contribute to students not obtaining the above**
- 4. **Develop a mechanism to provide those desired activities/services/supplies AFTER meeting underlying needs**
- 5. **Be adaptable to changing needs and desired activities, constantly re-assess**

The sports teams are chosen by draft, with each coach drafting his own team from all program participants each season. This allows the boys to have contact with more than one mentor over time. The coaches draft a new team for each sport making it possible for a child to develop relationships with multiple male mentors. The program busses kids home each night. These can be long rides as the program draws from all over the city. Each mentor drives a bus, which provides another opportunity to interact with a different group of boys. These were strategic decisions because, according to the site coordinator, about 95% of the boys in the program come from single parent, generally female headed

households. “Mothers are the backbone of this country but mothers love on boys.” The mentors provide a positive male role model.

While targeting middle schoolers, the program also has some high school students enrolled. They are “graduates” of the program and act as peer mentors in the program. During the academic portion of the program, they work on their own homework with a volunteer teacher. During the sports portion, the high schoolers are assistant coaches and referees. This allows the younger boys to have peer mentors and the older ones to gain service hours for scholarship requirements.

The program applies the same “carrot” mentality to family involvement. Mentors are expected to make home and school visits. This allows them to address issues that arise that the student may not bring up, however they can also be a resource for the family and model skills such as advocating for the child at the school. Additionally, the program offers occasional Mother’s Night Out events. Mothers of participants arrive at the program during the last hour of operations and have dinner provided by the ELP. They talk about challenges and successes and support one another. Program administrators have found that planning events in ways that keep guardians informed of their children’s ELP activities while at the same offering adult support is key to the success of their engagement activities.

**“If you love on them and they know you love them
they are gonna come around.”**

While the extended learning day ends with competitions in the form of the sports leagues, it starts with community. As the students arrive each day, they receive the hot meal mentioned earlier. The meal is prepared and served by members of the alumni association of the high school that used to be in the building that now houses the ELP. The high school no longer exists but the alumni have adopted the ELP and hold fund raisers and clothing drives for the program and the families it serves. The group also supplements the hot meals with fresh fruit, granola bars, and other healthy offerings. The boys in the program call the women who serve the meals “grandma” and their presence, along with mentors sitting with the boys for meals, add to a sense of family and belonging. Consistency in commitment from volunteers has been remarkable over time and they have a clear sense of how their work makes a difference but also they have a voice in continuous efforts to make the program stronger. For instance, one program “grandma,” who was a single parent, is now very involved in the preparation of daily meals, and was the one who approached the program director with the idea for Mother’s Night Out events. She attends every night out event and shares her experiences and love of the children with their families.





Moving beyond boundaries with student driven programming: Meeting student needs by facilitating youth-led learning experiences



Kids in rural communities can become isolated, never knowing what the world is like outside the borders of their comfort zone. An ELP in one rural community is breaking down those boundaries through student driven programming by allowing them to think beyond their local geographic borders, ask questions about the world, and reach out to faraway places.

High school programs have to give students a reason to attend. Older youth have other options when school ends, even in a rural community. By offering only student-requested activities, the program ensures it is engaging the students by giving them the opportunity to work on academic and enrichment activities they care about. If the ELP tries an activity that doesn't work or that kids aren't interested in, the activity is dropped. ELP staff are open to whatever the interest or needs of the students are. If students are interested in a particular activity, they find a teacher to offer/facilitate that activity. For example, some students wanted to learn line dancing before prom last year so they found a teacher to lead the group and met for a few weeks. If a teacher wants to create a particular club, they usually already have a following amongst the students so the ELP staff doesn't have to put energy toward drumming up attendance.

Keys for STUDENT-DRIVEN programming:

-  Have multiple mechanisms for students to request activities; formally, word of mouth, suggestion boxes
-  Don't wait for an expert in the topic to facilitate a group to appear; find a teacher willing to learn along with the students
-  Allow for teacher suggestions, but respond to student interest
-  Look for opportunities to expose more students to the activity through natural pathways

Using this flexible structure, the students are free to pursue what they are passionate about, but students must also demonstrate some leadership and organizational skills. Some students realized they had career aspirations that required public speaking skills. They saw limited opportunities to practice those skills in their community so the students requested a public speaking club through the ELP. They found a teacher who would act as an advisor, but the students rotate through the role of leading the group. They also strive to create times to try out their public speaking skills, such as at church or school-wide events.

In Book club, students pick the book the group reads. Last year they voted on books the teacher had in the classroom. This year, a few students were going to Universal Studios on vacation. The teacher suggested they read Harry Potter in Book club so they could have a richer experience when they go to the theme park and the students agreed.

One club is called Character Development because "it gives the students an outlet." Those who aren't good at sports or who are shy have an opportunity to express themselves. This club organizes a flash mob during the year which gives them a chance to be in the spotlight. This club also stages a student led play every year. Students handle everything from production and costume design to casting and staging.

The ELP staff are present but students are responsible for decisions related to materials needed, they problem-solve on their own when obstacles arise, and those students with more experience help younger ones learn the process. It is also an opportunity for students to offer something to the larger community as the dress rehearsal is traditionally held at a nearby elementary school and the performances are open to the entire community.

The Knitting club was formed when a group of students chose knitting as a way to do something to support a teacher who had suffered a personal loss. Soon after, the group decided to knit hats for babies in other countries as a way to reach out, learn, and help others. Students who have been in the club for a while now teach new students how to knit. The teacher has even had kids who learn to do other types of knitting teach her the skill. Students come up with projects as a group and look for organizations all over the world to donate their products. During the program visit the group was furiously knitting hats that were to be used in the student play.

“The best part is it’s the students doing it. They get the choice and get to do what they want to do and make it their own and that helps them enjoy it so much.”

History club began when students asked a teacher to hear more of his lectures outside of classroom time. Much of the time, the club is led by what the students want to do or learn about. “It’s their time so let them take the lead.” During one club meeting, the teacher showed the students slides from his trip to Israel and talked with them about the cultural differences and similarities. He stressed that, while he felt their town was the best place in the world, there was nothing more important than traveling as much as possible to meet new people and experience what the world has to offer.

Creating a web of communication: adapting instruction to individual and small group needs based on continuous input



When asked what made this rural high school program successful, one of the teachers employed by the ELP had no hesitation. “Communication. Communication is very important [...] If we did not communicate, I don’t think that we could reach the kids as well.” Communication across every level of the program ensures everyone is on the same page, working toward the same goals with the same information.

While strong communication within a school-based program is not unique, this ELP is using multiple methods available to the fullest extent. For starters, the site coordinator is also the school guidance counselor. She has instant access to all student data and can contact teachers whenever she sees a student struggling to better understand their unique needs. Furthermore, since the program has proven itself over time, it is not just one-way communication as teachers now contact her about a student even before some of the information makes it into the grade books. “We have an open door policy. They can email me at any time and tell me what they [need] because I don’t want to interrupt their classes [...] Teachers will email me at any time and say, ‘Hey, I think you said so-and-so is one of your kids; he or she needs help with this.’” Teachers invest the time to initiate conversations about what students needs because they have come to learn that the ELP follows up on what is needed and that is a win-win for all.

The ELP hires regular day teachers and they purposefully create opportunities to speak informally with their colleagues about students in the program. They also use the school’s Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings to talk about student needs for those attending the ELP; staff use this time to conference with colleagues about specific kids and learn what engages them.

Keys for COMMUNICATING across boundaries:

- 1. If possible, hire a member of the feeder school who has access to student data and to teachers
- 2. Enshrine a staff member as conduit between regular day school and the ELP
- 3. Have a staff member be the liaison to the families
- 4. Develop age-appropriate mechanisms to get student input –beyond just types of activities to offer
- 5. Don’t limit or force sources of communication, support it where you see it working
- 6. Make time to come together as a staff and share ideas and feedback while information is fresh in everyone’s mind

Communication with students is also beyond standard. The staff ask for their feedback about programming, guest speakers, and even hiring decisions. The site coordinator has a list of teachers who have applied to work in the ELP and she first discusses them with the school principal. Her next step is to ask the students, informally, whether they like this teacher, if their lessons are interesting, would they want to see more of them. She does this because she has realized over time that if the students don’t like working with

particular teachers, they won’t come to the ELP. Key to the program’s philosophy is trust-building with students where they know the staff value their opinions because “you can’t pressure kids to do

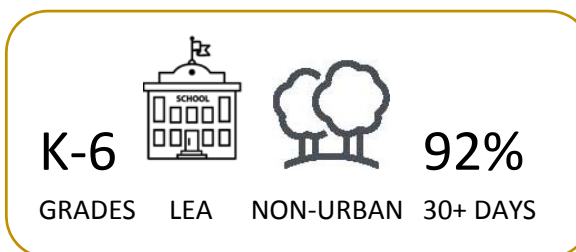
anything. You just have to build that relationship and hope that they show up.” The students then feel invested in the program and begin to take ownership of it. “If I have a student, a [...] kid who does very well or has already taken that course, a lot of times they’ll just take over and say ‘Okay [...], I can help with this so you can help the other student with geometry.’ So in that sense, it helps them to kind of take a leadership role and feel like they are really doing something.”

Parent communication is a challenge. The program has a monthly newsletter that is well received. They tried calling parents, but found that to be a complete failure due to the difficulty keeping current phone numbers. Repetition with the kids has been effective for ensuring that they share information with their families. Staff remind the kids to tell their parents about upcoming events every day for two weeks prior. The site coordinator’s position during the regular school day has also been a boon to parent communication. “We communicate a lot with parents. Very open door. ... We are a very walkable school, so parents can come at any time during the day and leave me a message or talk to me directly. Since I am the guidance counselor I have more fluidity to speak to a parent than most teachers so parents are able to come in at any time. They can call, they can email, they can drop by and say ‘Hey, I need help with this’, ‘Little Johnny isn’t doing so well here’, or ‘I have noticed something is going on with my child can you figure out what it is?’”

What truly sets the program’s communication apart is the practice of a daily staff meeting. Every evening, after all the students leave, all of the ELP staff meet for 20-30 minutes to talk about the day, what worked, what went well, what didn’t, what the plan is for tomorrow. “We meet in the afternoons [...] we collaborate on ideas and what we can do to improve the [program].” Every day, taking time to talk, to everyone, about successes and ways to improve.





“You know, anytime you teach, whatever it may be, you have got to know your kids... [have] that personal relationship with them. They have to feel comfortable. And I just feel like that’s part of what has made this successful. And then also just listening, just listening to those kids. ...We just care! We care about our kids.”

The Teachable Program: implementing, assessing, and adapting to help students achieve



Being able to recognize when something isn't working can be a challenge. Putting in place solutions that require big changes in the program's infrastructure is not easy. Making sense of data to inform program priorities and ensuring that all staff (including those coming into the ELP from outside the school) understands the data takes time too. This elementary school program uses data, observations, advice from peers in other ELPs, and lessons learned from past experiences to continuously reshape and improve what it offers students. The site coordinator is relatively new to the program's leadership and is a member of the school's administration. Community members had served as site coordinators before and over time a number of issues had emerged with regular day teachers losing interest in being involved in the ELP, student discipline issues due to lack of consistency with rules, and parents expressing discontent as the program was not attending to homework completion. The current site coordinator knows the school and district policies, has access to student assessment data, is involved in teacher evaluations and understands their teaching styles, knows what rooms and materials the ELP can use, and can apply discipline rules consistently during the regular school day and the ELP. With this new leadership, teachers have been reengaged to work with students in the ELP. The site coordinator, being familiar with teachers' personalities, has also been able to make better choices for classroom staff pairings when he hires tutors to assist teachers. Parents have been more satisfied as these tutors help students with homework, allowing the teachers to work with students individually or in small groups. This ensures that the ELP is not just a place for students to do homework but also build or strengthen skills. A key program philosophy is that the ELP should not be just an extension of the regular school day where students spend more time doing exactly what they do during the day, but an opportunity to "enrich" and "expand" what was taught during the day

Keys for DATA DRIVEN programming:

-  Stakeholder surveys allow for honest feedback from multiple parties and put mechanisms in place to ensure high response rate
-  Targeted student assessment data can inform program focus; need to train all staff to understand data (including ELP staff who may not work in the school system)
-  Regular staff meetings build trust and facilitate the search for creative solutions
-  Be willing to share challenges with peer programs who may have innovative solutions

The program is data driven. Parent, teacher and student surveys are distributed twice a year. They ask what the respondent likes and does not like about the ELP. To ensure high level of input from families, parents are encouraged by staff to complete a survey at pick up time rather than sending home with students. The ELP adjusts programming based on the feedback. They also hold monthly staff meetings where the group will try to find solutions to problems that arise. The site coordinator does not dictate solutions but rather facilitates the discussion. As a staff member put it, "we all

work together and aren't told what changes to make but get to make those changes together." When the input received runs contrary to a key program philosophy, leadership focuses on reinforcing the messages. For example, when concerns were raised about students not completing their homework in the ELP, leadership reminded those concerned that the mission of the ELP is to balance homework help

with enrichment activities and the program is not a “baby sitting service.” Those looking for other services are referred to a fee based extended care service offered elsewhere.

Surveys and staff meetings aside, observation and staff reflection inform continuous program improvement as well. For example, the program has a 3 strike policy for behavior problems but over time the site coordinator observed that the 5th grade teachers were hesitant to send the kids to the office, fearing they would be kicked out of a program they desperately needed. Rather than scrap the entire policy that seemed to work very well for all others, the ELP staff met and decided to break the 2 larger 5th grade groups into 3 smaller groups. Additionally, the site coordinator began monitoring their behavior on his own; stepping in to discipline the students, and when needed, pulling students to work in his office so their needs were met without causing disruption for the rest of the students. Absent the fear of being kicked out, the teachers became more willing call out offenses and, when they persist, to send students to the site coordinator. This two-pronged approach worked and now the students are better behaved.

Part of the site coordinator’s role during the day is to review assessment data for the school. Regular day teachers are purposefully matched with the same grade level in the ELP as they teach during the regular day so they are aware of and have access to their students’ data. The site coordinator, however, consistently takes time to share some of this data with the ELP staff coming in from outside the school. During staff orientation, some time is dedicated to teach these staff how to interpret assessment data,

“All of us work well together...it’s that trust that we have for each other...When they come to me, they talk to me and tell me this problem and we work together on it.”

pair students struggling with similar skills, and use results to guide individual instruction. The primary skills to address first are also identified during staff training so tutors know better how to meet student needs. The site coordinator is also strategic about “what” data to share so staff focus on skills the program has targeted for improvement. For instance, this year the focus of the school is improving reading scores; therefore, the site coordinator only shares the reading assessment data with the ELP tutors.

Observation and reflection for improvement go beyond classroom activities. The program also struggled with transition times, including snack. The site coordinator decided to try out an idea from a peer program where students can watch an educational program while they eat and then staff can follow up with discussion to keep loud conversations down. Another practice put in place allows for some social time. Students exit the cafeteria in line with a tutor and spend 10-15 minutes walking around a small garden on the school’s grounds. This also allows students to stretch and get some fresh air before going to their first ELP learning experience each afternoon.

The process never ends. During the observation the policy regarding field trips was under review. Any student with behavioral issues is not allowed to attend but otherwise field trips are open to everyone. The staff are debating having students earn field trips through attendance. At the end of the year, staff also revisit if the program should continue operating on Fridays—a day that is “light” with just clubs offered at present since there is no school the next day.

Fully integrated CBO: working with and within the school to meet everyone’s needs



Integrating with the school can be a challenge for community based organizations. Being founded and led by a current faculty member lessens the challenge, certainly, but that is not the only way this elementary school program supports and extends the school day. The program is housed in the feeder school and is staffed by current and former teachers from the school, much in the way of an LEA. “Everybody that leaves this school, that are excellent teachers, I try to grab them before they get out the door.” Retired teachers like the opportunity to continue working with the kids, but with less pressure and structure. However, having certified teachers in the program helps the students see it as an extension of the school day. “There is a lot of continuity from day to afternoon.” Getting the teachers to stay can be a challenge but this CBO does it by offering independence and support. “They’ve given the teachers a certain level of autonomy in our classroom groups in the afternoons, saying ‘You guys know these kids, this is what we need you to do. We need them to reach their benchmark goals, how do you see that happening? What is the best way for them to do it?’ So it’s not a matter of, ‘We are going to do this program, and this is the one thing that we are going to use.’ It’s not rigid like that. I feel like they have given us their faith. They believe in us, they prop us up” “Not only are we valued as employees and supplemental people, we are also given the flexibility to do what we know might work with the kids.” “I was kind of given the keys to proceed as I wanted. And I was given a voice, you can run it any way that you want to, just as long as you keep with the parameter [of focusing on the benchmarks].”

Another large part of the program’s success is the involvement of the school’s leadership. The principal will stay at the school in the front office until all of the children leave the building at the end of the day. She is available to help with discipline issues but mainly she greets the parents at pick up and talks with them about their children. She has sent letters home to the families at the beginning of the year, introducing and advertising the program. Additionally, the principal helps identify students to target for the program. “I actually get to see all of the scores of the children at the school and if I see a decline, then I am automatically going to ask for a conference with those parents and say ‘Okay I see that we have a major decline here. What’s going on at home? What can we do to help?’ So they feel comfortable with us.” She even enters the program’s attendance sheets each day into the computer system.

Keys for INTEGRATING the CBO:

- 🔑 Realize this doesn’t happen overnight; create a long-term action plan
- 🔑 Build trust through results; share data and successes
- 🔑 Have a mechanism to accept feedback, criticisms, and suggestions
- 🔑 Look for allies within the feeder school
- 🔑 Look for opportunities to serve the school and the students

While they are allowed flexibility, teachers are also able to use the tools they love from the regular school day in the extended learning program as well. “If some of them [students] do finish their work early, then [...] I can just get on [STAR] and say ‘Well you know what? On your last STAR test...’ I’ll see which one they are struggling the most in and of course we have percentiles and so if they are below where they need to be in reading, then when that kids finishes their work, we focus mostly on reading skills whereas the other kids, they may be [struggling with] math so

we focus more on math skills and then if we have kids who are low in both which typically a lot of our

kids are, then we always stick with the rule that reading trumps math. And so we will focus more on that.” Even the teachers who are not a part of the regular day school keep up with what the students are working on during the day: “[It’s] not quite as formalized as a classroom teacher but [...] I’m keeping track of their learning targets every week and I see, Okay this week in math they’re learning geometry so I need to come up with some activities and some things to do.” In the older grades, the teachers implemented 10 minutes of quiet reading during snack. This helps help the kids meet the 20 minutes of reading per day goal set by the school.

“Another huge part of this program and why it works so well is because we have a great relationship with the principal and she plays such a key role in supporting [the ELP]”

The integration is working. “For the past 4 years, our kids have averaged over a year in growth from the STAR test. Every year. This year in the April benchmark, in reading, our kids made, on average, one year and 2 months of growth. And then I went back and looked at all the kids we would have targeted academically [but who did not enroll in the program] and compared it, and those children only made 7 months of growth. And our kids made a year and two months of growth.” These proven results reinforce the value of the program to school leadership and encourage continued collaboration and investment of resources from the school into the program.

Strategic design: extend the school day without repetition

K-5

GRADES



CBO



NON-URBAN






37%

30+ DAYS

An elementary school based program purposefully designed their ELP to be a seamless extension of the school day. Small details build upon each other to create consistency between regular day and extended learning time. All teachers in the ELP work with their own students from the regular day or at a minimum they have students from the same grade level. This allows the teachers to more easily notice if the students stop coming to the after school program. The teachers also make the recommendations for students to participate in the ELP based on their observations and test data from the classroom, so they are identifying the students they want to spend more time working with. This also benefits the students who don't attend the ELP. Teachers know they will have extra time to follow up with the students in the ELP so they can focus attention during the day on the other students in their classrooms.

The staffing changes each year based on the needs of students participating. If there are enough students from a grade level to necessitate two ELP groups for that grade level, the students are grouped by their homeroom so they all have the same homework and the ELP teacher doesn't have to try to coordinate with another teacher. The program feels that these groupings also benefit the students since they already have a relationship with regular day teachers. The program caps each grade-group at 10 students: "Small ratio is key. Ten kids is low enough to really be effective, if there were 20 or more kids, this program wouldn't be as effective. Even 12-15 kids would be too big. We can use math manipulatives more than regular classrooms are able to use." Thus, while the program is an extension of the school day, it is designed to allow for use of different learning strategies.

Keys for EXTENDING THE SCHOOL DAY:

-  **Staff the ELP based on the students' needs including adjusting number of groups mid-course**
-  **Teachers stay with the same grade, working alternate or half days if necessary**
-  **Integrate non-school ELP staff into the school day communications, schedules**
-  **Keep ratios low so teachers can use new manipulatives, teaching strategies**
-  **Look for creative partnerships to provide diverse activities that still build on the regular day**

ELP teacher assignments make it easier to recruit regular day staff to stay as they don't have to plan for the afternoons because the ELP "is pretty much an extension of the day so for [ELP students] there may be extra activities to do that support the regular day learning." The teachers use assessment data from the regular day to identify students to pull out in the ELP for small groups or one on one attention. The staff even use the behavior charts from the regular day to maintain consistency with rules. Teachers are also

allowed to work half days in the ELP, adding a level of flexibility and reducing burnout. In these cases, teachers from the same grade level share duties for ELP coverage.

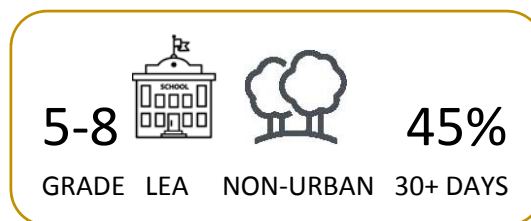
The program does employ two non-regular day teachers, however there are practices in place to ensure their integration is seamless. These staff are invited to attend the regular day teachers' PLC meetings at the school to stay informed of their students' needs and plan for their afterschool activities. These staff also use the school district's pacing guides to prepare lessons and activities for the ELP. At the end of the regular school day, as ELP students have snack, teachers will stop by the cafeteria on their way out and informally update staff who have just arrived to work that afternoon.

The schedule is designed to meet the needs of the children and their families. Every morning as students arrive for the before school program, they check in and receive a “pass” to attend their choice of activities such as fitness, open library, chess, keyboarding, or computer lab. On Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday afternoons, the program only offers homework help/tutoring. On Wednesdays, the district dismisses early so the ELP students have enrichment for an hour or, because of a partnership, students can attend another program operated by a community organization for free until the normal pick up time so families are not affected. To facilitate this partnership, the ELP pays for a tutor to go to the community organization to work with all of the students. This type of partnership also exists with a fee-based extended care program that also operates at the school. The ELP ends at 5pm on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays but the fee-based program ends at 6pm. ELP kids can go to the fee-based program from 5-6pm and the ELP pays for high school students, alumni of the ELP, to do STEM activities or provide homework help in the fee-based program.

“One of the things that makes our after school program so strong is that we are linked to the school day. It’s here in our building, it’s our teachers. It all works together. A continuation of the school day.”

Another partnership with a local community college allows teaching majors to come gain experience by volunteering in the ELP. The college students will teach a lesson to ELP students and their professors will observe them. The site coordinator will let the professor know the material the students are working on so the lessons will coordinate with the regular day lessons. Additionally, the college students will come up with ideas for math night activities and bring in their own resources. This relationship is an added bonus for the college students who need to gain teaching experience, but often work during the day and are not available during traditional school hours.






Culture of Learning: youth, peers, and adults continuously learning and growing



This ELP creates a culture of learning that permeates the program. The staff model lifelong learning in both large and small ways. The staff are quick to admit if there is something they don’t know, and readily acknowledge it when they learn something from a student. When students are done with homework or other planned activities, they are encouraged to look up information in encyclopedias and teach the staff something. “They [students] have to know that the teachers make mistakes too and don’t know everything. You have to be honest with the kids. Let them talk to you and don’t try to be the teacher who knows it all.” The staff also participate in the enrichment activities such as learning French when a teacher from the high school comes in to lead a session or diagraming parts of a story along with students as part of an art enrichment activity. Several staff are enrolled in graduate school which the program encourages by celebrating their accomplishments with the students and allowing them to work flexible schedules.

When the site coordinator hires for the program, she looks for regular day teachers from the feeder school who are enthusiastic, motivational, have a “love for learning,” are excited about doing afterschool, and have a good knowledge of content. Enrichment leaders are often teachers from the high school where most of the ELP students will eventually attend. This is purposeful to help the middle schoolers get familiar with high school faculty so it is a smoother transition to that environment.

Keys to PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING:

-  Allow for gaps in knowledge, from everyone, and provide resources to fill those gaps
-  Normalize the struggle that can come with learning
-  Provide opportunities for learning from all directions; peer to peer, top down, and bottom up
-  Provide flexibility for staff wishing to take advantage of educational opportunities
-  Celebrate achievements

Staff see working in the ELP as an experience that helps them be better teachers during the regular day as they can experiment or try out something new in the ELP setting. A teacher reflected that she previously did more “teaching by the book” but now she tries to have more fun with students and she uses more technology in her classes or talks with students about current events in small groups. Since starting in the ELP, she has begun taking

her students outside because she has learned to trust them to do peer-to-peer learning. There’s still structure but it’s more informal and relaxed.

Just as staff articulate goals for their own growth, students have a clear sense of where they are in terms of proficiency in different subject areas and have specific goals for where they want to be by the next assessment period. For instance, as students practice math for the end of the 9-week period assessment and they score their practice tests, they reflect on how close that score is to their goal. The program uses the school achievement scores to determine the focus of activities. For example, the focus for 2015-16 was English/Language Arts because the feeder school’s scores were lower in that area. Aggregate grade level and de-identified individual achievement data for each subject is posted on the corridor and classroom walls so as to maintain a consistent focus on goals.

The teacher:student ELP ratio is kept low (1:7-1:10) to allow for smaller groups with more focus on the individual students and their needs. Staff is familiar with individual student needs and they spend small chunks of time with different pairs of students on different days, giving individual attention to each student even if both in the pair are struggling with the same assignment. This way staff have the opportunity to hear each student’s thought process as they work out a problem. Then the staff might let the pair work independently for a few minutes, trying out a similar problem on their own while the staff member works with another student who may be practicing reading fluency. The program tries to meet the individual needs of all students, not just those who are below level, even though the majority of those enrolled struggle in at least one subject. “They [the ELP] will help the students who are struggling but will also take kids who are higher performing. Even gifted kids get something out of the ELP, whether it is socially or academically. Students in RTI are already getting extra help. Not all kids get what they need in the regular classroom so they will come to [ELP] for something else, whether academically

“The ... culture is an environment that fosters learning. We celebrate successes and birthdays and incentives for honor roll and attendance and include everyone.”

or socially.” This mix allows for peer learning opportunities. During the observation, a group of older students worked together to solve a homework problem. Afterwards they split up to work with younger students who may respond better to a peer than to a teacher. “Teachers will get the kids to ‘teach it’ so it will ‘stick better’,” as an activity leader put it.

However peer learning is not always an older youth teaching younger ones. There was also an instance when an older student was struggling to figure out the difference between mean and median and a younger student sitting nearby helped explain. The older student did not seem at all taken aback since learning from each other—including staff learning from students—is such a strong element of the program’s culture. The program also utilizes technology to facilitate independent learning as students use iPads to practice skills they need. In that instance, students are left to set their own

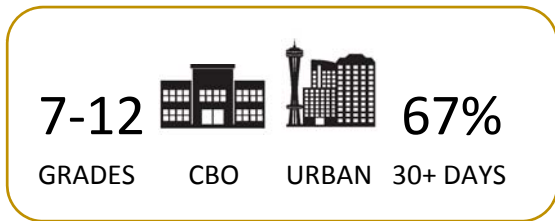
goals. For instance, when working on IXL they are told they can move to another skill if they hit 70% proficiency or if they get tired and want to switch to another subject they need also to work on. “The kids kind of drive it [learning] themselves and know who to talk to for help.”

Academics aren’t the only area the program targets. The ELP also helps students learn life skills, and they try to do a lot of that using board games. “Board games help foster their thinking and teach patience and relationships and following directions in specific order. Board games can also be strategic, and foster a different type of learning.” Such opportunities for group play also fit well with the program’s philosophy for a casual atmosphere that allows for some peer-to-peer and adult-student social interactions.

The morning “tunnel” ritual also reflects the culture of supporting students to grow. Every day as the students finish their morning activities they gather in the school’s gym. As they are released, they leave through a single corridor and they walk through a gauntlet of teachers and staff. Music is blasting and the teachers give the students high fives and motivational pep talks. Staff feel this quick ritual gets the students excited about learning and confident for the day.

Egoless but invaluable:







Aligning with the school day,
Developing partnerships to
maximize student benefits



This CBO focuses on the impact it is making on the children, the families, the schools, and the community. To find out what makes the largest impact, a lot of trial and error is necessary. As one staff member reported, “If it doesn’t work, something else will. This attitude takes time because change is hard but the ultimate goal is whether we’re helping the kids.” The program is willing to try new ideas, but can also recognize when those ideas just aren’t working. Everyone is willing to step back and evaluate the effectiveness of the program and its components and no one is criticized if an idea or strategy isn’t creating the impact they wanted. Originally, the classroom facilitators planned their own activities for their groups. However, as the program grew, the director wanted to address the same achievement gaps the school system identified, namely students not reading on grade level by 3rd grade and falling behind in math by 5th grade. The program hired a curriculum specialist who now plans the academic activities for all the groups. Even in this, however, the program doesn’t rest on its laurels. The curriculum specialist holds weekly coaching sessions with the classroom facilitators where she introduces the new lesson, provides instructional tips and also debriefs the previous activities. She solicits feedback from facilitators about how the activity went: “2 stars and a wish” (two positives and one thing they think could be improved). The facilitators also feel they can provide honest feedback: “Honesty, trust, reliability... If the project isn’t meeting the needs of the kids, be able to come to the table to figure out something different to do.”

The program tried a variety of ways to engage the families. None were universally effective but staff realized that would likely always be the case and the best approach may be to reach out in different ways to fill different family needs. So the program staff went after grants and partnerships in the community that allowed them to provide a wide range of services and engagement opportunities for

Keys for FORMALIZING PARTNERSHIPS:

-  Know your own programs assets; people, space, equipment, knowledge, experience, relationships, reputation
-  Have a clear goal for the outcomes of the partnership in mind
-  Be honest and forthright about that goal, and listen to the goals of the potential partner
-  Formalize the partnership in writing so expectations are clear
-  Revisit the agreements to ensure they still meet everyone’s needs
-  Be willing to walk away if the timing isn’t right

families. One of the program’s sites is located next door to the apartment complex most families reside in. The program received a grant to create a “Starbucks-like” space in this location where family members can come in, have a cup of coffee, use the free Wi-Fi, and let their younger children play in the Lego area. This allows the program staff to begin building the relationships with the families of students attending the ELP. Other grants have allowed the program to hire licensed counselors who can conduct individual counseling sessions with adult family members and community liaisons to

provide links to other community services. These staff members also lead groups for moms and dads separately. Additionally, the staff are experimenting with offering free exercise classes to the community three times a week. To date those haven’t been very popular, so the staff is discussing ways to improve or change the offering.

“Everything goes back to the child...[Our] success is based on the success of the students, the children.”




The program may be egoless in its design that is driven by “if it doesn’t work, something else will”, but at the same time it has also a very strong sense of the value of the service it provides for the community. Initially, the grant director was just grateful for any community support. “The relationship was more paternalistic” and partnerships were informal. Now the program has a written and signed Memorandum of Understanding with each partner. It is a document that spells out what the program’s gifts and assets are and what the potential partner’s gifts and assets are. This allows both sides to see “what is our multiplier, so that when we come together its more than 1+1.” “[We] have to look for a commonality. The partner has something valuable for society and something that will strengthen what we do. We look at the leadership of the organization and cohesiveness, a willingness to be transparent and honest about what we give and what they’re going to give in exchange.” “We all agree on our mission, why we are interested in coming together and after that agreement we can move forward...sometimes we can’t move forward but most times we can formalize a partnership that is beneficial to the community – to fill in the opportunity gap that kids in the challenged socioeconomic community don’t get to experience.” For example, the program partnered with a local caterer who was just starting her business. She leads cooking and nutrition enrichment sessions with the students and in exchange she is able to use the “Starbucks-like” space to meet with potential catering clients. This has an added bonus for the program of spreading the word about the program and its facilities.

Building a Sense of Responsibility: Preparing Students for the Real World

9-12

GRADES



LEA



URBAN

12%

30+ DAYS




This program based in a vocational high school strives to get students prepared for life after graduation, be it college or career. It gives students tools and opportunities to try new things, but also holds them accountable. Each teacher sets their own schedule for the afterschool program. Students who need tutoring or to make up work in a specific class must find out when that teacher will stay after school and arrange to attend the ELP that day. The program does try to work with the teachers so all those teaching the same grade don't stay after on the same day, enabling students to receive assistance in multiple subjects if necessary. The students are responsible for their own work. "Students are usually self-paced since they're mostly seniors. There might be one-on-one for kids who may have an assignment they need help with."

The non-academic teachers have the same philosophy with the students. The art teacher reported that she and the student "may look at the student's portfolio and decide together to do something where they are weak. I do a lot of individual work with the student and we decide what they need in the portfolio." Additionally, she will stage an end of year show with her students where they are responsible not only for creating the art, but also preparing the work for display, arranging the works in the show, and organizing the show itself. "I used to do it all but I realized that they need to know how to do it all so when they go to college they will know what they are supposed to do."

The school also has a large agriculture program where students learn not only how to grow plants outside and in greenhouses, but also how to farm fish. The school program sells its crops to school cafeterias and it sells its fish across the state.

The afterschool program builds on these activities. Students who are not in the agriculture program can attend the ELP and learn the basics, while students in the program during the day can delve deeper. For example, the instructor is working with some students on industry certifications. Students learn both the technical and business sides of farming.

Keys for STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY:

-  **Resources are provided, but students decide what they need and whether or not to take advantage of what is offered**
-  **Scheduling ensures required subjects don't overlap, setting students up for failure**
-  **Session match needs, but allow for exploration and discovery**

The JROTC ELP sessions also build on the school day activities. They offer a fitness and whole wellness program to address mental, social, spiritual, and physical health. During the observation, part of this whole wellness program involved community service. The students repainted the lines in the parking lot. "We try to make it real for them and tell them what the real world is like and how they can be a better citizen and make a difference in this world."

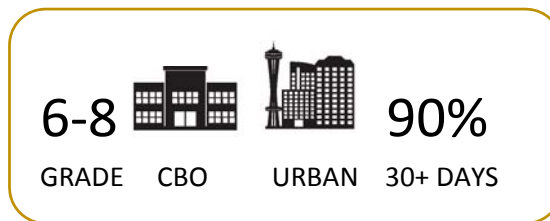
Most importantly, the staff of the ELP wants the students to understand that they have support in pursuing their passions, but success requires effort. "[I want them to] have that sense of belonging. Just because you're involved in the arts doesn't mean you're on the outside. Giving them that sense of

belonging and giving them that place where they excel. But also help them continue to have that appreciation of the arts.”

“[I want them] to know that somebody is there for them and that we can help them and that they can succeed in whatever they want to do but they have to work for it—we can’t just hand it to them—that they can accomplish anything with hard work.”

Information is powerful:

use of data for continuous improvement



This middle school program harnesses data and continuous communication to push students to achieve positive outcomes. The first thing you notice while observing this program is the staff greeting all the students and asking them specific, detailed questions: How did your math test go? Are you finished with the book you were reading? Did you take the AR test? This information sharing is imbedded in the program’s daily sessions. The school secretary is on the ELP staff. During the afternoon sessions, she calls students up to her desk and goes through the school system’s grade database with them. She points out missing assignments and works with the student to complete them. She sends the student to get the necessary materials or calls the teacher to find out what the student needs to do in order to complete the work. Even late assignments, if accepted by the teacher, are worth more points than missing assignments and can only benefit the student’s grade. She also calls up students to recognize achievements. She pointed out one higher than usual grade to a student and applauded her efforts. Additionally, she takes on communication about ELP students or programs with the other teachers in the building, using the school email server to ensure the message gets to its intended target and isn’t filtered into a spam folder as so often happens with email from outside a school system’s domain.

The secretary also runs the school’s attendance, so she knows which students are absent during the regular day and can convey that information to the site coordinator. Additionally, she works with the school’s vice principal for attendance. Families of students who are truant receive a phone call. The secretary has added ELP students who have not met the 30-day ELP attendance mark to that call list, encouraging their participation.

Keys for using the SCHOOL DATA SYSTEM:

- 🔑 Track attendance closely so students skipping the ELP are quickly identified
- 🔑 Celebrate exceeding expectations in test scores and other grades
- 🔑 Bring in ELP staff person who knows how to utilize school system for continuous monitoring; look for opportunities to improve grades; missing assignments and tests;
- 🔑 Identify classes students are struggling in and bring them together for peer support

As she is in the school throughout day, unlike the site coordinator who is available, but not housed in the school, the secretary also acts as the liaison between the ELP and the school and between the ELP and the families. Teachers will tell her if a child needs to work on a specific task during the ELP. Also, when parents come to the school to discuss a struggling student, the principal will call in the secretary to discuss the ELP and sign up the child. This ease of access and smooth communication, along with a successful track record, has turned

the principal from a skeptic to a believer. “It’s a win-win because ... it extends school day 2.5 hours a day which is great.”

While the site coordinator is from outside of the school system, the staff are not. The majority are teachers from the building, so they’re aware of the pacing and testing schedule. They report this information to the site coordinator but he also watches the school’s website for upcoming tests or academic themes. He prepares materials and work for the students that pertain to those tests or themes to study after they finish their homework. The second half of the afternoon is enrichment which

the site coordinator plans to also tie into those themes. He leads the enrichment activities and the teachers stay and help facilitate. Notably, during the observation, the enrichment activity dealt with individual perceptions and barriers to communication differences in perception can create—furthering the focus on the importance of communication. The site coordinator practices what he preaches as well.

“We are doing what we can. [When they get to] high school they will sink or swim and we are giving them floaters.”

More than once a student who was having a behavioral issue was taken into the hallway for a private conversation. These talks were effective because the students all returned and the behavior ceased.

The communication extends to the families as well. This area has had an influx of Spanish speaking families and the district has opened an international school for the English Language Learner (ELL) students to receive language immersion. A staff member of the program is also an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and is fluent in Spanish. She makes sure to attend every family activity so she can be a resource for Spanish speaking families. There is also an informal communication that happens between the program staff and the families. A student won an academic improvement award from the school. He brought it to the ELP and one of the staff members took his picture and texted it to his mother. That depth of communication forges strong bonds and pushes the students to achieve.





Servants to the School: building relationships and demonstrating outcomes



Two years ago this ELP could no longer use their offsite space due to safety concerns. The feeder school principal allowed the program to operate on school grounds on a “trial basis.” While the arrangement has been successful, the CBO still has a sense that they “are just renters.” “We don’t pay rent or custodial fees so we try to leave it better than we found it so there won’t be hard feelings or resentment of our program using their building. If something is damaged, we ask the teachers to let us know immediately and the [CBO] will take care of it.”

To maintain this relationship, the program conforms to the wishes of the school as voiced by the principal. The grantee director feels strongly that she needs to be personally involved with the program’s foundation so she meets with the principal two or three times before the start of the school year to plan and ensure everyone is on the same page. This may require flexibility from the program since their philosophy is that for the ELP to be successful it needs to keep an open mind and really listen to the needs of the school as expressed by its leadership. “The key thing is to come in like you are a guest and be humble.” “[You] have to come in and be very limited with your opinions of how they are, where they are until you get into what’s in their head. I always approach it as ‘what would you like to see happen in your school and how can I help make that happen?’ Because my whole vision could be very different than what they want. And if it is, then we have a problem. And the person that has the problem is me. And I either need to change my vision or find a way to convince her [school principal] that my way will work and you can’t do that by coming in acting like you got it all together.”

Keys for demonstrating SHARED COMMITMENT:

-  Ask for and incorporate school goals
-  Accept feedback on targets: students, subjects, tests
-  Solicit staffing recommendations
-  Look for ways to reciprocate: providing supplies, covering trainings, sharing staff

During these meetings before the program starts each year, the principal also recommends teachers for the program to hire for academic assistance and rooms to use for programming. The principal also looks over student applications to the program and makes recommendations based on need and behavior.

The school’s leadership also influences various aspects of program design. Initially the ELP served grades 1-5 all year long. The principal asked that they include kindergartners and split the grades served so the ELP provides more focused, intensive services to different groups of students each semester. Now the program works with K-2 in the fall and 3-5 in the spring, so “tested” grades get more intensive services leading up to the testing window. As the program matches teachers to the grades they work with during the regular day, this split in populations served allows teachers to only work one semester and avoid burn out. Additionally, it allows the program to tailor its academic focus to the different student needs each semester. One year, the younger students were behind in reading so the program planned both academic and enrichment activities in reading throughout the fall semester. In the spring, the older students focused on math, as that was where they were struggling. Another design element implemented to meet the needs of the school is the program offering one day solely of enrichment activities so the teachers (who only lead academic activities and not enrichment) can attend school meetings. An additional support the ELP provides to the school’s teachers is covering expenses for some

professional development opportunities that that the district would not be able to fund. In an interview following a class observation, a teacher involved with the ELP shared that some of the specific strategies she used to engage students like using erasable markers and privacy folders to write math answers on their desks was something she learned in an academy that she had attended recently which was paid for by the ELP.

“It doesn’t matter what vision the ELP has if the principal has a different vision. You have to build a relationship and earn trust. Until they believe that you’re really there to help them, you can’t have a partnership.”

Another way the ELP serves the school is by providing funding for a part time parent coordinator. She is an ELP employee but she fills the entire school’s need for parent engagement, scheduling parent nights and workshops and special events like Donut with Dad/Muffins with Mom. She also puts out a newsletter for the entire school which includes highlights from the ELP. As described during the site visit, the school does not have a PTA, so bringing someone on board who can focus on re-energizing parent involvement has been seen as something very positive from the school leadership side. The school principal was involved in the hiring and early on she met with the new parent coordinator to come up with some possible activities which they quickly got on the school calendar.

ELP enrichment activities are also geared to support regular school day learning. For example, while health and nutrition concepts are the focus of the program’s Garden club, the facilitator will go a step further, addressing a student’s grammar when discussing planting or revisiting the difference between “fact” and “opinion” when comparing “healthy” snack options. African Dance and Drumming is also done in a way that helps students connect with information they have learned about different cultures during the regular school day. Finally, ELP enrichment activities provide an opportunity for the school guidance counselor to spend more time with students on conflict resolution, anger management strategies, and anti-bullying. Whereas topics covered may be the same as the school day, the counselor feels the ELP setting allows her the opportunity to work with students in smaller groups and use more hands-on strategies.

Safe spaces: allowing students to struggle and normalizing the learning process



Key to this middle school ELP’s philosophy is the belief that behavior issues are most often merely a coping mechanism for students who struggle academically. As such, the ELP setting with its small groups and individualized attention allows opportunities for staff to work with students who need safe spaces to ask the questions they don’t know the answer to or to struggle without fear of peer criticism. They have found that once kids’ skill and confidence increases, behavior issues tend to resolve. The feeder school of this ELP program has a huge English Language Learner (ELL) population—1/3 of the total student body—which is a group that may find a safe environment critical for their growth. The program’s offerings at the end of the day allow teachers to do more hands on activities with all students and provides ELL students the opportunity to take risks and practice more of their verbal skills. As explained by an ELL teacher who also works in the ELP, often times ELL students will be shy in the larger class setting and not ask questions. By the end of the school day they are also exhausted from being in a class where they don’t understand what is happening. The ELL teacher’s goal is to make ELP time “fun learning.” She involves them in games to help them practice vocabulary, gives them praise, and tries to increase their self-confidence. The site coordinator will also ask an ELL student to repeat an afternoon announcement in their native language. This is not just to ensure all kids understand what was said, but to help those students who may be quieter during the day, as they see the ELP as a safe space to practice.

The emphasis the program puts on creating a safe learning environment for growth is a philosophy that is interwoven through all staff interactions with all students, not just for those with behavioral issues or

Keys for CREATING SAFE SPACES:

-  **Normalize the struggle that comes with learning something new**
-  **Acknowledge challenges**
-  **Create communities of students working on the same objectives**
-  **Build opportunities to practice skills in daily routines/low stakes**

language barriers. The teachers remind students that they are in a “safe space” by coaching larger groups about how to be supportive of their peers’ efforts and by being upfront and acknowledging challenges so that there is no shame in a student’s struggle to overcome them.

During the observation, when one student struggled during a reading group, rather than just correcting the student, the teachers pointed out that the word was a

hard one so the student reading aloud would not feel bad. This also stopped any of his peers making fun of him. Another teacher led a group in a game with multiplication flash cards, and gently reminded students to be quiet and considerate while a peer was pondering an answer, normalizing the process of thinking over an answer. On another occasion, just before group debriefing a writing exercise, the teacher reminded everyone that one of their peers had been absent for the previous session when the skill was first introduced. Taking a moment to purposefully acknowledge and empathize with the student made the rest of the group choose their words more carefully as they shared feedback.

The program uses assessment data to reach out to students but there is also a strong belief that ultimately attendance is the students’ choice—staff do not “strong arm” students to attend and the site coordinator feels that this also alleviates students being there just for “baby sitting” service. However,

the program does make a concerted effort to make all students feel at ease and know they are always welcome to come back. Attendance often picks up after report cards go out and students choose to come back. When a student does return to the ELP, staff will recognize that with the larger group at snack time. For instance, during the observation, as attendance was taken for the day, staff stopped to say “I am so glad you are back with us tonight. Thank you for coming back. [Student name] is back with us.” To ensure that the ELP program continues to provide an environment for learning that appeals to students, the principal regularly asks ELP students about program experience. She shared that she gets “most of her information” from stopping students and asking them in the hallway about what they like, what they want to change, what they want to see done differently. She also drops in on ELP tutoring classes at least once a week for first-hand experience.

“Laughing together... I think it’s good for them [students] to see an adult can be silly but still tell the difference around how do we know when we’re supposed to be formal or informal now.”

Whereas ELP program activities are intentionally designed to address academic deficits identified by school assessment data, the ELP program purposefully does not administer more assessments because “students are already assessed to death.” Staff are encouraged to “work at little pieces at a time to make a difference” and be able to see progress. Students are allowed to work at their own pace and at times even switch to different activities of their choice. A student in a Language Arts tutoring session was enjoying writing a longer essay in response to a prompt. She was given extra time to continue on that activity when the rest of the group moved on. A student who needed to work on a presentation was allowed to stay in the library to do that when the rest of her group moved to a different room for math tutoring. When a pair of students in the library finished working on an online AP physical science course, they decided to move on to social studies and set their own priorities.

The program targets students who are academically struggling but it allows students who play sports to stay after practice and work on homework or read and then ride the ELP’s bus home. This allows for relationships to form between groups of students who might otherwise not interact and breaks down barriers between cliques, which is particularly important in a school with a lot of diversity and a large number of students “coming and going” during the course of the school year.

The program’s design intentionally supports relationship building between students and teachers. As an ELP teacher stated, “I like that we end [the day] together and have that homework time together so I can be available to more than one student. This is important because ‘It takes a village to raise a child’... Also, it gives me a chance to start to get to know the 5th and 6th graders before they come to my classroom.” And that sense of belonging and relationships matter to students: “the kids really pick up on that and they know that this is a place you can go and really get help.”

What's gonna work? Team work! Aligning with partners and providing engaging experiences



This ELP strives to integrate the goals of stakeholders into their programming to create a seamless partnership that wraps around the child and creates a supportive team to encourage him or her. The clearest evidence of this is the presence of the school system’s superintendent on the grantee’s Advisory Board. This allows for top level information sharing and goal setting. For example, the school system is focusing on “Seven Keys to College and Career Readiness.” The ELP has aligned their goals to match these keys. Additionally, the ELP has access to the school district’s student information tracking system so ELP staff can look up how the kids are doing individually.

The ELP offers academic case management to students who staff identify in the system as struggling. The tutors, who are current or retired teachers from the system, set academic goals with the students at the beginning of each term and then review these goals periodically to assess progress. The tutors ask students to bring what they’re doing in class or what topic they’re starting the following week to tutoring so the tutors can help the student. Tutors will help students go into the student information system to figure out assignments. If students don’t have assignments, they can work on the ELP’s online academic computer game. What makes this “academic case management” is the expectation that the tutors spend 30 minutes a week communicating with parents, teachers, or any other involved parties. Tutors contact teachers at the beginning of the year, introduce themselves, and ask for any information

Keys for CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS:

- 🔑 **Bring partners onto the Leadership Team or Board of Directors**
- 🔑 **Develop relationships with a wide band of stakeholders**
- 🔑 **Remind people that EVERYONE is a stakeholder when it comes to educating youth**
- 🔑 **Look for ways to expand targeted partnerships so they benefit larger sections of students**

that will help them work with the student, both academically and behaviorally. They also access the student information tracking system to see behavior issues and absences. Tutors also communicate issues to the parents, preparing them for a bad grade or behavior report. Tutors sometimes go to the parent-teacher conferences or IEP meetings either in place of parents who aren’t able to attend or with parents to model advocating for the student.

Families are brought into the larger program through monthly meetings which are always held on the same day and time. The site coordinator talks about what happened the previous month, what activities occurred, or what field trips they went on, and what activities are coming up in the next month. They sometimes have guest speakers.

Community service is a component of the program that meets the needs of a wide range of the students. Kids need community service hours for scholarship requirements or college applications but the program also receives referrals from the juvenile court. Those kids don’t stand out as having to do community service because everyone has to. “This is very important with the relationship with Juvenile Court so those kids who are ‘sentenced’ can come in and complete their community service hours. The kids come in and think they’re being sentenced to cleaning toilets but they actually get to participate in

the [ELP].” And “community service” has a wide range of meanings. For example, a child had career aspirations to work with cars but didn’t think he could get hired due to lack of experience. The ELP partnered with a mechanic who wanted to get involved with the program and that student goes to work with him but it’s considered service learning with the court.

The ELP also tries to collect feedback from the participants regularly. As the site coordinator said, “the number one thing is to ask the kids what they like to do and how to fit that into their programs.” For example, the teen center is being renovated and the grantee brought in a third party to survey the students about what they wanted to see in the new facility. The ELP was able to incorporate some of their ideas: they could not put in a full basketball court but they did put in a music room. Also during this renovation, the ELP partnered with the parks service to use the recreation center for programming while the building is under construction. The ELP helps maintain the facility and strengthens the partnership which may benefit everyone again in the future.

“If we’re not on the same page and not communicating then nothing is going to go well”

Sneaking in the Vegetables: creatively adding academic content to enrichment activities

7-12  **35%**





GRADES CBO URBAN 30+ DAYS



The picture to the left is a comfortable nook in the open ELP main room. The couches face in, away from the larger room and the high school kids in the program can sit quietly and text or talk to friends or pick up one of the brochures about healthy eating, the dangers of vaping, teen suicide or other topics that are always displayed. If they sit in the area for any period of time, the program’s mental health counselor comes to check in. They don’t have to talk about deep issues but he is available and will take them to an office upstairs if they need to talk privately. The rest of the afternoon, he talks casually with students and plays games of ping pong with them, all the while building rapport and trust. “We facilitate a natural conversation about life. So this is the counseling piece. They don’t necessarily know that we are doing counseling.”

This style of providing the service but not forcing participation has been successful with the urban population the program serves. Very few of the activities are mandatory. “I would say the focus is providing a safe space in creating meaningful relationships for students within the community so that they have other option than, honestly, the streets.” Those relationships are paramount. “I think when you work with young people, they have to know that you care about their well-being and that you want them to succeed but you have to listen to them first before you can tell them anything.”

Keys for BLENDED PROGRAMMING:

-  Cooking classes that work in math skills and nutrition facts
-  Activities held in open spaces rather than in “classrooms” so it does not feel like “more school”
-  “Workshops” that are open to all students and occur in a common area are more popular than “classes”
-  Staff intentionally use casual conversations as opportunities for relationship building and learning

The main draw for many students in the program is the connection to the music industry. The program itself operates in a space that doubles as a concert venue. Students are able to see the work that goes into staging the shows. They also have a recording studio for the afterschool program and have hired a professional musician on staff. His relationships in the music community allow him to reach out to other professionals and bring them in to work with students. However, he recognizes how this enrichment can be an incentive: “Some of them want to get in

the studio and I ask do you have any homework. And I say ‘no you have to do your homework first. What are your grades looking like?’” This staff member also arraigned for some of his colleagues in the industry to have a panel discussion with students about careers in the industry and listen to some of their original music and provide feedback. Prior to the panel, the staff member had some of the

professionals in to discuss with the students the best ways to present themselves and get the most out of the panel discussion. They discussed ways to receive criticism, what types of questions to ask and what types to avoid, and appropriate appearance. This message was well received because rather than a general lesson on professionalism, the students were hearing from people they respected regarding a special event to which they were looking forward.

Additionally, the program has tutoring for students, but it is not mandatory. Some students are strongly encouraged to attend, but the staff realizes that the students will drop out of the program if they force the issue. Instead, they use those enticements to sneak in the academics. “So we’re still hitting that 21st century rubric, just in a way that the kids don’t even realize that they’re necessarily in a class. That’s why we call them workshops so that the kids don’t think they’re in class. And we are no longer in the classrooms, we’re [in the open room], because the kids don’t think they are in class. They think that they are learning about [cooking] pizza and they don’t realize they are in a nutrition class.”

Another way the program sneaks in the vegetables is through the family dinner. Every Thursday, families are invited to come to the program to share a meal and attend a workshop. The program served Thai food to expose the families to a potentially new cuisine, but they tied it to a workshop on migration and immigration presented by a student from a local college. However, to provide balance to this academically oriented event, the next night the program hosted a dodgeball tournament with a live DJ.

“So the sneaky thing we are doing is we are getting plugged into just some fun stuff and they don’t even realize it’s an afterschool program. And that’s the brilliance of it.”

Same goals, different style: differentiating ELP from the regular day to keep kids engaged

K-8 GRADES LEA NON-URBAN 85% 30+ DAYS

Extended learning programs can make for a long day. While some programs strive to seamlessly blend the regular day and afterschool, this program chooses to differentiate. The guiding principle is to make the “ELP look less like a regular school day but still [have it be] learning and engaging and working on school stuff but not as rigid as the regular classroom—they [students] will be on the floor or working with a partner working on stuff—less like a school day but still with the same goals.” The ELP has invested over time in resources like manipulatives that compliment language arts, math, science, and social studies classroom learning for different grade levels. Depending on what skills teachers are focusing on in class each week for each grade level, the site coordinator puts together a crate for each ELP student group that includes board games, flash cards, blocks or tiles, puzzles, coins, etc. Each afternoon, every student has an opportunity to spend at least one time block during the hour allocated to academic enrichment working on his or her own with these materials to develop a deeper understanding of something that was taught in the larger class setting during the regular day. Students, however, see using materials from the crate as “play time.” The activity also often has an active role for the ELP teacher and interaction with peers so students can also develop communication skills, social skills, and critical thinking. During the site visit, a younger student who had an upcoming social studies test on the 50 states practiced working on a floor puzzle. A group of students played a trivia game from the crate that focused on skills they were working on in class such as plural forms of different nouns, identification of pronouns and adverbs, etc. Students were really engaged and eager to keep playing, saying “Do we have time for another round?”

The school and the ELP both focus their work on students’ deficiencies: “[We are] starting to see that no matter how good or smart a kid is, they have a deficit that needs to be worked on.” ELP staff also bring in materials they can use to engage students to practice basic skills in fun ways. For instance, rather than having students always reading out loud to staff to improve fluency, a teacher brought in a script from a play so students can choose a character and take turns reading scenes as a group.

Keys for SEPARATING the school day from ELP:

- 1. Tools to make learning feel like “play time” rather than “school time”
- 2. Use of different kinds of materials that target the same skills, like plays or comic books
- 3. Use pieces of technology that the school doesn’t use
- 4. Incorporate movement anywhere possible

Another illustration of the school’s and the ELP’s focus on the same goals relates to the use of iReady. The school district uses iReady for benchmark assessments. The ELP has invested in an additional component of iReady that is not used in class but provides a student with an opportunity to work on the same skills that he or she did not perform well on in the assessment. The results of the assessment are used to break students into groups in the ELP: those who are below grade level in language arts, those who are below grade level in math, and those who struggle with both subjects. Each student is issued a colored badge. Those with a color code for math work on math, those with a color code for language arts work on language arts, and those who have a color that corresponds to deficiencies in both subjects are told what to focus on by the teacher (staff keeps a record so these students rotate each day

practicing a subject). From the student’s perspective skills practice using iReady does not feel like continuing to do the same thing they were doing during regular day since the school system uses only the assessment component for benchmarking. The system also has an “emergency brake” to prevent students from simply clicking through the assignments. If a student fails a section several times, the system locks them out. An ELP staff member is alerted and will work one on one with the student on the material. The students are not allowed back into the system until they complete this tutorial. The use of this system has allowed the ELP to move away from constantly asking the classroom teachers for assignments or supplementary work for the students; before it was introduced, regular day teachers were required to prepare a weekly packet for each ELP student that addressed individual needs. Now everyone is on the same page without placing an undue burden on anyone.

“We make the
activities a race
and anything that
is a race, they
like.”

It takes a village, so build a village: Engaging the child, family and community

K-9 GRADES CBO NON-URBAN 30+ DAYS 88%

This CBO took the adage and ran with it. They built the village around the child, but they also built up the village. The village started more than 20 years ago with the site coordinator operating an afterschool program out of an apartment to provide the community with a safe space for kids at the end of the school day. It is only a couple of years now since the CBO was able to secure funding for the program to move in its own space—still a short distance from feeder schools it serves and in the heart of the neighborhood where most of its students live in.

The ELP has a number of partnerships so it can leverage its limited resources more efficiently. For instance, the two feeder schools provide bus transportation to the program so the ELP pays for transportation only when students go on field trips. A small part of the operating budget is covered by a partnership with the Health Department which offers a nutrition program to students and families. Go Girl Go is a curriculum based on the stories of female athletes who have struggled to overcome barriers and includes a physical activity component, with the goal of building self-esteem. The boys’ program focuses on bicycle safety and also incorporates physical activity via a weekly walk in the community. Another program offered by a community partner, Girl Talk, is an interactive program for mothers and daughters and helps overall communication, specifically with regard to body development.

Keys for BUILDING A VILLAGE:

- Involve the schools so students build relationships with the next level of their education, reduce anxiety**
- Create opportunities for older and younger students but also staff and students to “play together” and celebrate together**
- Use pick up time and other informal opportunities intentionally to share student successes**
- Encourage students to be responsible citizens in their small community with consistent reminders for expected behavior**

The schools are also partners in the village beyond merely covering transportation costs. Many of the teachers in the ELP work in the school system and the rest have recently retired but still work as substitutes so they can all act as liaisons for report cards, behavior reports, and other communications. Additionally, the program operates over the summer and they have the middle school principal come speak to the rising middle schoolers, telling them what to expect and building a relationship as students transition. Another principal cleaned out their school and donated all the books and electronics to the ELP.

Students’ families are also part of the village and as such, the program supports them. The site coordinator will do home visits if necessary and will talk with the families about issues from student behavior to food scarcity to medical concerns. The program also provides workshops for the families. They’ve offered resume writing, computer job search skills, and budgeting. They even partnered with a bank to provide micro loans so families could get out of the “payday loan trap.” Since the ELP space is at the heart of the community it serves, it allows community members to use the building in exchange for donating supplies such as paper towels, providing a meal for the students, or committing to provide a service such as an exercise class. Finally, instead of parent “meetings” the program offers “trainings” so

parents can support students’ learning. “Trainings” focus on strategies that parents can use to help students with reading or ways to practice basic math skills at home with shopping or cooking.

The program works to teach the children to be respectful, responsible, and joyful members of the village. They do this first by focusing on behavior. “We don’t yell at them so they don’t yell at us.” The staff stresses responsibility, not only for their possessions, such as homework and supplies, but also for actions. The site coordinator holds the children accountable for their behavior by canceling field trips or removing students from activities if their behavior does not warrant the privilege. If a teacher notices inappropriate behavior during an activity, they will stop the lesson and address the behavior immediately.

“You can be bigger than that and go farther than that.”

Staff also remind the children they are welcome and wanted in the program. The site coordinator and teachers wait by the door as the bus arrives, greet students as they enter the building, and talk to them in positive, welcoming voices. Teachers use snack time purposefully as an opportunity to learn about the students’ school day and to reinforce good behavior habits by reflecting on incidents. When students go outside, staff are involved in the play and praise students consistently for “playing like a pro” or telling a family member at pick up about their child’s successes. The system appears to be working. During the observation, older students went into the younger students’ classrooms to give teachers hugs or bring a piece of artwork they wanted to share. At the end of the day, the entire community of students, staff, and anyone else present gather in the gym to close the program, a practice that younger students especially find exciting as they have an opportunity to interact with the older students in their village.