

## Eldon R-1 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center Evaluation Summary

Afterschool programs are an evidence-based strategy for helping students meet challenging academic standards, improve attendance and graduation rates, and develop college and career readiness skills and behaviors. The federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program provides competitive grant funding to districts to implement before- and after-school and summer enrichment programs that support and enhance student outcomes. Eldon R-1 School District received a 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grant in 2016-17. The afterschool program operates three sites in South Elementary, Upper Elementary and Eldon Middle School serving 533 students.

Each year, 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grantees undergo an external evaluation process that reviews their progress related to three broad afterschool goals: 1) academic improvement and efficacy, 2) program quality, and 3) youth outcomes. During the 2019-20 school year, each site recorded attendance and grades data, received a Program Quality Assessment (PQA) observation, and completed a series of afterschool surveys with responses from 216 youth, 49 families, 26 program staff, and 4 school administrators. Due to the COVID-19 school closures starting during the survey window, many afterschool programs were not able to collect their usual number of surveys. A certified external evaluator met with the program administrator to review data and complete a Guided Reflection Document. Results from the annual external evaluation ensure grant compliance and influence continuous quality improvement efforts including modifying the program curricula and enrichment activities and planning professional development for staff.

### Goal 1: Academic Achievement and Efficacy

Afterschool programs provide a full range of academic support including homework help, tutoring, academic enrichment, and comprehensive integrated units directly tied to the state standards. They provide activities that complement rather than replicate the school day.

Eldon is a small, predominantly white, town in Central Missouri, north and east of Lake of the Ozarks. In 2019, its median age was 36, median household income was \$39,000 (up from \$27,000 in 2000) with 25.8% of residents living in poverty (city-data.com). The LEAP program and the 21CCLC Grant it is a recipient of are both academically driven entities and committed to serving low-income families. While both strive for continued learning and student advancement, the afterschool program is fortunate to be able to help students make these strides through a variety of means that may not be available during the regular school day due to available space, time constraints, class size, etc. Reading grades and advancement amongst LEAP students who have attended 30 or more days at South ES and Upper ES have shown their ability to maintain or improve their reading grades. The LEAP program has time built into its daily schedule for student reading. These students also admit to enjoying reading, consider themselves to be good readers and work hard at getting better. This is, however, still a struggle for students at the middle school level. They were unsuccessful at reaching the same success rates as their younger counterparts, and appear to not have the same level of confidence or interest in their abilities to read in regards to reading efficacy. Fortunately, all sites have reported students who have attended 30+ days did meet the threshold for maintaining or increasing their grades in Math and Science. Programming such as robotics, coding, STEM activities and other related clubs have been successful in keeping students interested and engaged in math and science related activities.

Although LEAP students have been doing well academically in these core areas, their sense of efficacy and personal ownership of their abilities still do not appear to reflect that, especially as they grow older. Middle School student scores for Efficacy in Math and Reading were all significantly lower than students at South Elementary and somewhat lower than those at Upper Elementary. Science efficacy scores were higher, but still on a downward trend.

LEAP staff and directors work closely with regular day school staff and teachers to make students have what they need to work on and be successful in both programs, from making sure homework and missing assignments get turned in to getting things ready for upcoming assignments. Spreadsheets are used to document this information so there can be no confusion as to what needs to be done. AmeriCorps staff are primarily the ones who handle this

portion of the program. There have been issues in the past between afterschool and regular day staff, but LEAP directors are always working to find good solutions. There is also a very low turnover rate at all three sites, which is always a positive aspect for any employer, especially when working with students.

The school buildings that host each of these programs have supportive administrators that understand and appreciate the extra time and effort that LEAP provides for their students to make them better overall people. As grades improve due to the return of quality and completed homework and the overall achievement of the entire school improves, appreciation tends to follow and students feel proud of what they can accomplish.

## Goal 2: Program Quality

Research shows that high quality afterschool programs help close the achievement gap and reduce the likelihood of youth participating in risk-taking behaviors. The 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grant recipients participate in an ongoing quality improvement process that includes the point-of-service experience of youth, school day linkages, offering a broad array of activities, and family engagement opportunities.

Data for the LEAP program indicates that their program contain many components needed to offer a high quality program, which would include, but not be limited to, high interest activities, youth selected and driven programming, opportunities for feedback, and a wide variety of activities. Based on Program Quality Assessments, all three sites show high ratings for having a safe and supportive environment for students which is also a large part of having a quality program. The Middle School also did well under the domains of Engagement and Interaction. LEAP staff feel that their programs and activities provide students with opportunities to form and develop positive relationships and new friendships with other students and believe that positive adult-youth relationships are another benefit of the program. Low staff turnover has also been something the LEAP program has experienced. Being able to maintain the same staff provides consistency for students and families, expectations remain clear, less time is needed for repetitive training, and job experience for that staff member cannot be replicated elsewhere.

Family engagement in after school programming can also add a great deal to the quality of that program. Having students prepare an activity or performance for their families to see can add a whole new level of excitement, preparation and work ethic into what they're doing. In the same way, parents like to see their students on display just as much as they like to be seen. Surveyed parents believe the LEAP program is helping their children be more successful in school, is cost effective and believe it has been a helpful link to regular day teachers and staff. Parents have also indicated that they are more productive at work knowing their child is in a safe and enriching program during after school hours.

The LEAP program also aligns well with the regular day programming and standards that have been established for appropriate and optimal learning. Lesson plans for academic enrichment tie in to state standards and core competencies, teachers share upcoming academic themes and plans, and some professional development opportunities are coordinated for both regular day and afterschool teachers to attend. LEAP makes it a priority to provide activities and other engaging opportunities that support teaching efforts during the regular day to reinforce the learning process. LEAP directors also make it a priority to keep teachers and building administrators updated and aware of any unusual or out of the ordinary plans they may have to keep any surprises to a minimum. It is important for the program to be consistent and continue to do what they originally agreed upon doing when the program began.

Youth are given multiple opportunities each day to choose from the many activities the program offers. This has a lot to do with why the program doesn't allow students to do homework for the entirety of the program (unless they're also receiving tutoring help) and why they have "No Homework Fridays". It is important to the growth of the student to have enriching activities where they can learn and expand beyond that of what is offered with homework. One thing I have addressed amongst my recommendations is somewhat related to student choices, but occurs at the front

end of the process during program planning and solicits ideas from students as to what other activities should be planned or offered for the program. It can tap into a whole new level of creativity.

### Goal 3: Youth Outcomes

Afterschool programs also offer non-academic benefits that support the student's development of life readiness skills including positive school behaviors (e.g., regular attendance), personal and social skills (e.g., time management, team work, critical thinking), and commitment to learning (e.g., initiative, homework completion, study skills).

LEAP attendance has slowly climbed over the duration of their current grant from below their proposed numbers the first year to well above the number they projected to serve in 2020. Directors believe as word of mouth traveled about the quality of the program, the help the students were getting, it's cost effectiveness, the extra activities they were involved in and the meals they were being served, parents couldn't help but notice and want their kids to be involved.

Students also scored well in regards to their personal and social skills, indicating they feel confident when working with others to solve problems, they can make and keep friends easily, and they can stand up for themselves without putting others down. The use of Social Emotional skills through various lessons and activities put in place by both the LEAP program and Eldon school district have appeared to help students make successful gains related to self-control, their attitude toward others, and the choices they make when responding to choices other people make. There has also been a large reduction in the number of LEAP students who have been placed in both in-school and out-of-school suspension. I would say that something is definitely working!

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