A Model Curriculum

West Jupiter Community Center
West Jupiter, Fla.
(561) 745-0950
www.kindprogram.org

The Approach: The West Jupiter Community Center’s after-school program is based on the Champs program model of Palm Beach County, which is used at 38 after-school sites around the county. It focuses on academic enrichment, based on curriculums from Foundations Inc. that blends math and reading content into experiential, hands-on activities. It also focuses on enhancing performance on Florida’s Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and provides for a certified head teacher to be on site daily.

Networking and Resources

Cabrini Connection and Tutor/Mentor Connection
Chicago, Ill.
(312) 492-0614
www.tutormentorconnection.org

The Approach: Cabrini Connection is not a typical after-school program; it doesn’t even always happen right after school. Youth from middle school to high school go to the organization’s headquarters in the Cabrini Green area of Chicago on Wednesday or Thursday evenings to meet with their adult mentors—volunteers whose main task is to help youths graduate from high school, get jobs and set off on stable careers.

Cabrini Connection Executive Director Dan Bassill says the program offers mentoring first and tutoring second. “If we don’t focus on student aspiration, it’s not like the kids will be motivated by school,” he says. “We don’t pretend to be teachers. We help kids as help is needed.”

That being said, the Cabrini Connection is part of a larger program known as the Tutor/Mentor Connection: a massive database, clear-house and informational website devoted to linking would-be tutors and after-school providers with programs; helping parents, students and teachers find programs; and offering access to training and resources for professionals in after-school tutoring and mentoring.

History and Organization: Cabrini Connection started in 1965 as a volunteer program for employees of the Montgomery Ward department store headquarters in northern Chicago. Those employees offered after-school tutoring and mentoring to children at nearby schools. Bassill was a Montgomery Ward employee and eventually became head of the volunteer program.

In 1992, Cabrini Connection and Tutor/Mentor Connection were established as nonprofits. Cabrini continues to offer one-on-one tutoring and mentoring after school and in the evenings, while the connection networks with after-school service providers throughout the Chicago area. It links youth workers with one another as well as linking parents, youth and teachers with after-school programs.

Youth Served: Cabrini Connection provides tutoring/mentoring support to about 75 kids, from seventh through 12th grades, in poor neighborhoods of northern Chicago. Many kids ask to join, while others are referred by school staff. Bassill says it’s difficult to calculate how many youth benefit from the Tutor/Mentor Connection, but notes that 250 organizations are listed in the connection’s database.

Staff: Cabrini Connection and the Tutor/Mentor Connection are served by the same staff: three full-time employees and two part-timers. The adult mentors/mentors are all volunteers. Bassill notes how important it is to maintain staff from year to year to cement relationships with volunteers and kids.

Funding: The annual budget is $170,000. Bassill says funding is uncertain from year to year. A current city grant covers 25 percent of the budget, while the rest comes from corporate and individual donors, including Kraft Foods and a bank, HSBC.

Indicators of Success: Bassill has avoided the test-score emphasis on tutoring, but says that has eliminated some funding opportunities. As for measuring success, he says that 85 percent of the youth served by Cabrini Connection in any given year return the next year. “Kids and volunteers both vote with their feet,” he says.

Cabrini Connection and Tutor/Mentor Connection have been growing. The organization’s first conference drew 70 participants; today, its conferences draw more than 500. The connection’s website database of after-school programs continues to grow, with more than 500 after-school tutoring and mentoring programs listed. The connection reports that the website receives 4,000 unique visitors per month.

Honoring Native American culture was part of the lessons at West Jupiter, for which this fourth-grader created and wore a headdress.

The idea was to support at-risk kids in particular, many of whom were being raised by grandparents, single parents or parents who didn’t have the educational background to help their children academically.

Runner has been with the program since 1997, and has seen the emphasis on academics after school increase significantly with the establishment of FCAT.

Youth Served: About 90 youth, ages 6 to 18, from six schools. The community center targets low-income students who are on free and reduced-price lunch programs. “Kids are sometimes referred by schools,” Runner says. “They also hear about the program from other kids.”

Staff: The 10 employees include teachers, counselors and, in the summer, college students. The program also uses volunteer teachers and tutors, and high schoolers who help as part of their community service projects.

Runner pays the salaries of the certified teachers, while the West Jupiter Community Group, which runs the community center, pays salaries of other staff, including tutors. Some retired teachers help as volunteers.

“Most of the sites cannot afford to hire a certified teacher to coach and model best teaching practices for their after-school staff,” notes Runner. “We provide a certified teacher manager to help with curriculum, and our head teacher trains their staff.”

Funding: The annual budget is about $400,000. Runner says all funding comes from local sources, including the Children’s Service Council, the Palm Beach County Housing and Community Development Authority, and the Jupiter Children’s Foundation.

Indicators of Success: No funding sources require program evaluations. Runner says. She says teachers track and report the impacts of the program on students. She says Jupiter Middle School teachers note that youth in the program come to class better prepared than other students.

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