



Hornets of Character (Colcord Public Schools)

Colcord, Oklahoma

2,400

Average number of students served during the school year

78%

Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ 21st Century Community Learning Centers

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Programs reaching students most in need

By nature of the grant, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) supports some of our country's most vulnerable youth: providing academic help, social and emotional supports, and meals in a safe space after school. As 21st CCLC programs focus on whole-child development, many programs offer holistic supports and wrap-around services that include mental health services, nutrition and wellness education, parent education classes, and drug and violence prevention and counseling, as well as other social services to help youth thrive regardless of their circumstances.

Overview

The Hornets of Character program serves roughly 400 pre-K through middle school students throughout rural Colcord, Oklahoma. As the only afterschool program in the area located in the heart of Cherokee nation, Hornets of Character serves an important role in the community, providing academic supports, mentorship, substance abuse counseling, health and wellness classes, and other social services to support skill development and students' overall wellbeing. As a program with close to 50 percent of the students served identifying as Native American, the Hornets of Character offers curriculum and supports that are culturally aware and responsive to best meet the needs of their Native American students.

A typical day

At the elementary school level, students take part in daily rotations that consist of art or music, physical activity and health, and academic time, where kids can receive homework help, tutoring, and reading supports. Students in 2nd through 5th grade also have what the program refers to as a "character education rotation," where two days a week students participate in lessons around topics such as resiliency, honesty, bullying, conflict resolution, and civic responsibility. The other two days a week, 2nd through 5th grade students are able to choose a topic of choice, some of which have previously included learning about other countries and cultures around the world. On Fridays, all elementary students focus on STEM and building foundational skills in the field. At the secondary

level, students in 6th through 8th grade take part in similar rotations—physical activity and health, and academic help—but at this age, student suggestions and interests are a bigger component of the curriculum, incorporating activities such as working on the school newspaper, advanced art classes, robotics, and band.

Outcomes

Although a relatively new program, Hornets of Character has already seen its impact on students' academic and behavioral growth. Since the creation of the afterschool program, Colcord Elementary, the school that primarily feeds the afterschool program, has gone from an F-rated school to a B-rated school overall. The program feels that they have a huge influence on the academics at the school. In addition, the program notes that school climate has improved dramatically, with teachers reporting fewer discipline issues and increased homework completion, as well as improved reading levels.

Program characteristics

Central to the Hornets of Character program is supporting youth as they develop into responsible and productive members of the community. Located in a small rural town with limited resources available to youth and their families, the Hornets of Character program recognized the importance of providing a holistic set of supports for their students. They provide educational activities and academic help, mental health supports, substance abuse counseling, health and wellness classes, recreational and art programs, civic and character education, parenting activities, and other social services needed by their students and families. A key component of the program is positive adult mentorship and providing role models for youth to look up to, help guide them toward their post high school endeavors, and achieve their long-term goals and ambitions. Through mentorship, the program focuses primarily on developing leadership skills in hopes that one day their students will be able to give back to their community. For example, when a student in the program with diabetes expressed a desire to be able to share information about the disease with the community, the program worked



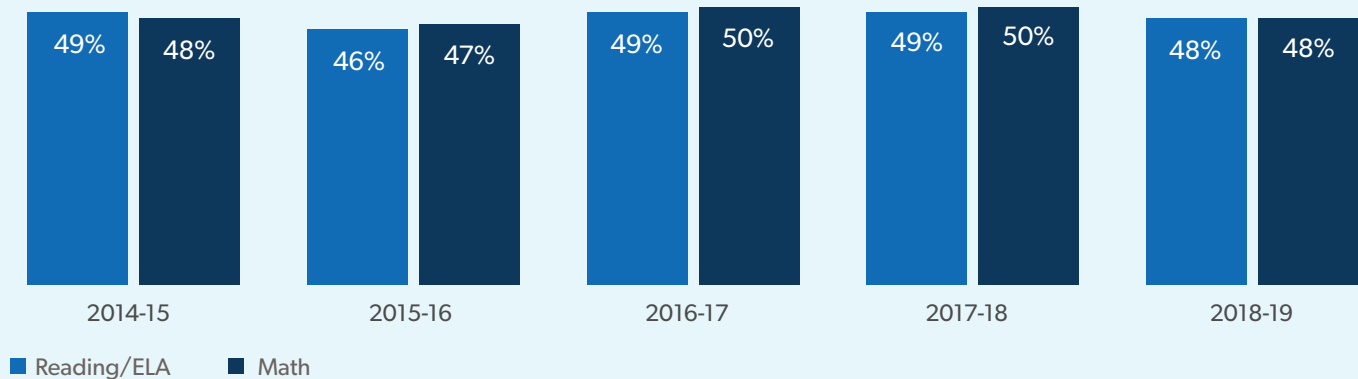
21st Century Community Learning Centers

21st CCLC is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to supporting local afterschool, before-school, and summer learning programs. Since its inception in 1994, the program has supported school and community based organization partnerships that provide a safe and supervised environment for youth, while inspiring students to learn through hands-on learning and other enrichment activities, find new areas of interest, and connect with positive adult mentors, as well as providing supports to their families. Today, 21st CCLC programs serve students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools.

Read [*Two Decades of 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Providing afterschool and summer opportunities to millions of young people and families*](#) to learn more.

Department of Education annual performance reports have shown students in 21st CCLC programs are making consistent gains in math and reading

% of regularly attending 21st CCLC students improving in their math or reading grades



with the student to gather facts about diabetes, distill the information into relevant and concise talking points, and practice speaking to others to bring awareness to the issue. The exercise instilled a sense of pride and leadership in the student and the program hopes that she will serve as a resource to the community on the issue.

One unique component of the Hornets of Character program is incorporating cultural classes and a culturally sensitive and responsive curriculum. Located in the heart of Cherokee Nation, half of the students who attend identify as Native American. As part of a push to maintain their culture and help students feel supported, the program has a Cherokee club that meets twice a week, where students can learn about the culture and language. Additionally, they have a Cherokee word of the day and Language Bowls to help students in learning and maintaining their native language. They also host a Native American cultural week, where different members of the Nation come in to teach students traditional Cherokee games, cultural practices, dances and songs, stories, and their history. Celebrating Native American culture is an important part of the program's efforts to support student's growth, development, and overall wellbeing.

Program history

The program started during the 2016-17 school year in response to significant education budget cuts in Oklahoma, which resulted in music and art programs eliminated in many schools and no place for kids to go after school. While Colcord previously had an afterschool program, it served largely as child care. To help address the low college graduation rates and the "brain drain" the community experiences, a high-quality afterschool program that intentionally focused on academic, behavioral, and social and emotional support was needed. In the last two years, the program has grown from serving 30 kids to roughly 400, and has recently taken a focus on student leadership, mentoring programs, and enrichment activities.

Recommendations

- ▶ Have goals that are both lofty and attainable, short term and long term, and have a plan to accomplish those goals.
- ▶ Make sure you're meeting the needs of the community and always be willing and able to adjust to best serve those needs.
- ▶ Utilize partners to help engage students and meet community needs with services such as mental health.