

## Raider's ARK

### Arcadia, Wisconsin

66

Average number of students served during the school year

99%

Students from low-income families

#### Main funding sources:

- ▶ 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers
- ▶ USDA Snack Program

## Raider's ARK (Academics Reinforcing Knowledge)

### Programs reaching students most in need

By nature of the grant, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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

Because Raider's ARK (Academics Reinforcing Knowledge) predominantly serves a population of low-income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners (ELL) in grades K-5, a social and emotional learning (SEL) approach is embedded within the program's design. From "family" table set-ups to daily check-ins, the program fosters a sense of safety and belonging by emphasizing relationships among students, mentors, and staff. Each young person in the program is told from day one that they are part of the Raider's ARK family. This support system empowers vulnerable students, in particular the ELL population, to grow and thrive both in and out of school.

### A typical day

Students arrive at the program around 3:15 p.m., grab a snack, and do a "temperature check" so staff can note which students need additional supports and attention that day. After this, students sit down as "families"—mixed grade groups of six to eight students—to participate in collaborative activities, where the older students serve as mentors to the younger students. Following "family" time, students have structured recreation activities, and then break out into groups (K-2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade) with a lead teacher, support teacher, and additional high school assistants, depending on the needs of the students, and take part in math, STEM, and reading activities. The program ends with final student check-ins and "daily joys," where teachers, mentors, and students gather in a circle and share the highlight of their day. Because many of the students

have parents who work multiple jobs and might not be around when they get home from the program, Raider's ARK wants every student to know that they have someone to share their day with.

## Outcomes

Raider's ARK's approach has largely been successful, with 85 percent of teachers reporting an improvement in student behavior and 70 percent of teachers reporting an improvement in homework completion and class participation. Additionally, the program notes that the SEL-focused approach has been especially helpful for their ELL students, allowing them to feel more comfortable practicing their English. As a result, the program reports that they have seen improved confidence, social skills, and gains in English skills and language acquisition among their ELL students.

## Program characteristics

Raider's ARK serves students most in need of supports, with 80 percent English language learners and 14 percent students identified with disabilities. In response to a large majority of Raider's ARK students having experienced trauma and other adverse experiences, a social and emotional learning approach is central to all their programming. While the program does provide academic supports, it is intentionally designed to look and feel different than the school day. Making the program distinct from the school day has been key to the success of the program. Raider's ARK organizes students into "families" of kids in different grades and different language levels. These families serve as a safe place for them to practice their English with one another, meet students in different grades, and give older students leadership opportunities to mentor the younger students. The families change every six weeks so students can meet different people and build relationships across the program. The mixing of these families allows for the modeling of activities and expectations, building vocabulary and increasing self-esteem. Raider's ARK provides a safe environment so students can take risks and grow, maintaining a consistent routine so students know that the extra support they offer mirrors their classroom activities.



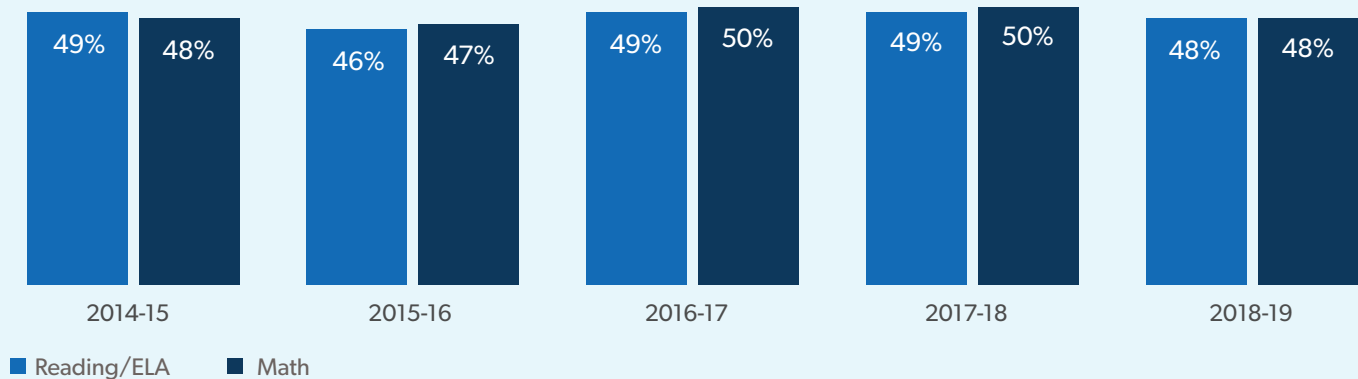
## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers

21<sup>st</sup> 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, 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs serve students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools.

Read [\*Two Decades of 21<sup>st</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs are making consistent gains in math and reading

*% of regularly attending 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC students improving in their math or reading grades*



Another key component in supporting students and fostering a sense of belonging is incorporating student choice and allowing students to feel heard throughout their time in the program. Students have multiple opportunities to choose enrichment activities and student interests are incorporated into the curriculum. Working with the UW Extension STEM, UW Extension Nutrition, 4H, Ashley STEM Lab and several other programs, various community members come in to lead activities with students. For example, a high school physics teacher who previously worked for NASA donates her time to work with middle school girls conducting science experiments. Several parents come in to teach cultural classes, including cooking, and the program partners with reading specialists to sponsor family reading nights.

Finally, Raider's ARK engages family members and the community through various supports and parent programming, including free-of-charge English classes. All program materials are provided in native languages and emphasize that the program has as much to learn from families as they can learn from the program. Raider's ARK is very tied to their community as the only afterschool program serving local families.

### Program history

Raider's ARK began in the 2012-13 school year as a safe place for students to go after school to avoid going home to an empty house or having to care for younger siblings. As the first afterschool program in the community, it initially operated as a babysitting service, however, it quickly became an academic focused program. In 2015, with a change in staff and leadership, the program adapted to become a whole-child focused approach. Today, with such a large population of English language learners and at-risk students, social and emotional learning is central to the Raider's ARK program.

### Recommendations

- ▶ Trauma informed care should always be in the back of teachers' minds, regardless of if the focus of your program is SEL.
- ▶ Professional development, training in de-escalation, and self-monitoring techniques are important for all staff.
- ▶ Programs should be designed with student needs in mind. All programs should always start and end the day with student check-ins.