

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING



McKinley Afterschool Program

Bronx, New York

83

Average number of students served during the school year

100%

Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ New York City Department of Youth and Community Development

Providing relevant and engaging project-based opportunities

Ensuring all children and youth thrive as they move through school and into their adult lives requires that they have the opportunity to develop the skills and competencies that will help them land their first job, navigate and overcome the challenges they will face, keep positive relationships, and make good decisions. While families are central to this effort, others who interact with students can and should play a supporting role. Afterschool and summer learning programs, which have long been a place for positive youth development, are helping students develop these skills and competencies. Programs are providing caring and supportive mentors, creating safe spaces where students can explore new interest areas and develop confidence in their abilities, showing students how to reach consensus and work collaboratively, and providing meaningful ways for students to engage in the program.

Overview

The *McKinley Afterschool Program (McKinley)*, a part of the Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Center in New York, aims to support the successful transition from middle school to high school for their 5th through 8th grade students. In addition to educational games that complement their school day lessons, students in the McKinley Afterschool Program can take part in a wide variety of activities and clubs, with past choices including cinematography, band, photography, step dancing, and a leadership club.

A typical day for students

When students first arrive at McKinley Monday through Thursday, they have time to work on their homework and receive help from staff. Students are then served a meal before breaking out into smaller groups for enrichment opportunities. Students have a range of activities they can participate in, including the cinema club, where they work on producing a documentary on a topic of their choice; or the band program, in which students write music, develop choreography, and put on performances for the community. Fridays at the program are intended to help students unwind from the week, so activities include cooking lessons, board games, and other fun and social activities.

Outcomes

Parents of students in the McKinley Afterschool Program voice great appreciation for the program. Parent testimonials about the program express gratitude for the caring and supportive staff, the safe environment with homework help and exposure to enriching learning opportunities, and their child's overall enjoyment of the program. One parent testimonial reads, "Thank you for creating a safe place for my child. I appreciate you making certain my child finishes his homework and is learning music. Putting him in your program was a good decision!" Another parent writes, "... my son has been with [McKinley Afterschool Program] for two years and has... changed at home. Thank you for listening, caring, and having an amazing [program]."

Program characteristics

The foundation of the McKinley Afterschool Program is to create a safe and positive learning environment for students in order to support their success in school, work, and life goals. To encourage student engagement and buy-in, McKinley incorporates student choice into its programming in several ways. For example, students who participate in the step team get the chance to create a campaign around an issue they care about in their community.



Challenges

Academics alone are not enough for students' future success. Employers are looking for employees who possess applied academic skills, as well as employees who are able to communicate effectively, work well in teams, and apply other social and emotional skills and competencies. A Business Roundtable survey found that companies reported that an applicant's basic reading, writing, and math skills were just as relevant to their company as an applicant's communication and teamwork skills.

Schools recognize the importance of social and emotional learning, but barriers to implementation exist. Although teachers and principals are strong proponents of social and emotional learning for their students, schools struggle with the implementation of SEL practices during the school day, which include lack of sufficient time focused on building social and emotional skills, training for teachers and administrators, and integration of SEL into educational practices.

Too many children and youth today have faced a traumatic experience, placing them at higher risk for negative outcomes. Protective factors, such as social and emotional skills and competencies, help children and youth manage stressful and traumatic experiences in their life. However, close to half of children in the U.S. have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience, experiences that could have negative and lasting effects on their health and wellbeing, including depression, drug use, and poor physical health.

Read [An Ideal Opportunity: The Role of Afterschool in Social and Emotional Learning](#) to learn more.





The step team decided on educating their community about gun violence and has since held community performances to raise awareness of gun violence, created an anti-gun violence campaign documentary, and led a virtual town hall with students from across the U.S. to discuss the prevalence of gun violence and solutions to stop it.

Another example is the program's community service projects. As a part of the 1,000 hours of volunteer and leadership activities students in the program are required to participate in, students develop and organize community service activities. Activities have included packing food and delivering it to the homeless in the community and a walkathon to promote healthy living called, "Walk a Mile in My Shoes."

Through these experiences, students could address issues they cared about, develop relationships with their peers, learn to work as a team, and engage with their community. The environment McKinley creates has also improved communication between students in the program and staff. Students have become more willing to share their achievements in school, and to talk about the peer pressure and challenges they face day-to-day. The program reports that its students' self-awareness and self-worth has grown, helping them to become more proactive and responsible decision makers.

Program history

The McKinley Afterschool Program opened its doors in 2002 in response to a community need for more openly available afterschool programming. Operating out of the South East Bronx Neighborhood Center, McKinley has become a safe haven for students in the community. Currently serving middle school students, the program hopes to expand services to 9th and 10th graders to better support the middle to high school transition.

Recommendations

for providing relevant and engaging project-based opportunities:

- ▶ Find a way for your students to showcase what they are learning in your program in a culminating event. Performances for family, friends, and the community are a great way to get them excited about what they are doing.
- ▶ There are many simple and straightforward ways to engage students in your program. For instance, McKinley created a Kudos Corner, where staff acknowledge students' accomplishments, large and small, to establish that the program is a community that notices and cares about them.



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