

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS



The Bridge Project

Denver, CO

300 Average number of students served during the school year

80% ELL students

100% Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ Federal government
- ▶ State government
- ▶ Local government
- ▶ Businesses
- ▶ Foundations

Supporting English language learners by fostering community and school partnerships.

More than 4 million English language learners (ELL)—students who receive language assistance, such as bilingual education and High Intensity Language Training—attend public schools nationwide. This growing and diverse population faces myriad challenges and needs a coordinated system of support to help them build literacy skills and thrive. Afterschool programs are uniquely positioned to serve both ELL students and their families.

Overview

The Bridge Project (Bridge), an afterschool program serving 80 percent ELL and 100 percent students from low-income families, was created as a partnership between the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver, the Denver Housing Authority (DHA), and community representatives. Located within DHA's public housing—to help facilitate students' participation—Bridge builds students' reading and writing skills, works closely with school day staff, and encourages family engagement.

A typical day for students

Students are greeted by name and immediately dive into their homework, with one-on-one tutoring available. Students then rotate between social and emotional, literacy, technology, and enrichment sessions. Reading, writing, and critical thinking are embedded within each session. Activities include journaling and story writing, robotics, painting murals, and service learning. The program grows with students, focusing on new sets of skills specific to students' ages. For example, in the Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning program, middle school students use a project-based curriculum to explore ways to create change in their community. Students in the program also provide input for activities and projects, helping every day at Bridge look a little different.

Outcomes

Bridge collaborates with the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver, which conducts the program's evaluations. In fall 2014, 23 percent of students were reading at or above grade level. By spring 2015, this increased to 69 percent of students. Bridge has also had tremendous success with high school students: 100 percent of its students graduated high school and enrolled in post-secondary education. Bridge is currently planning to track their students through college.

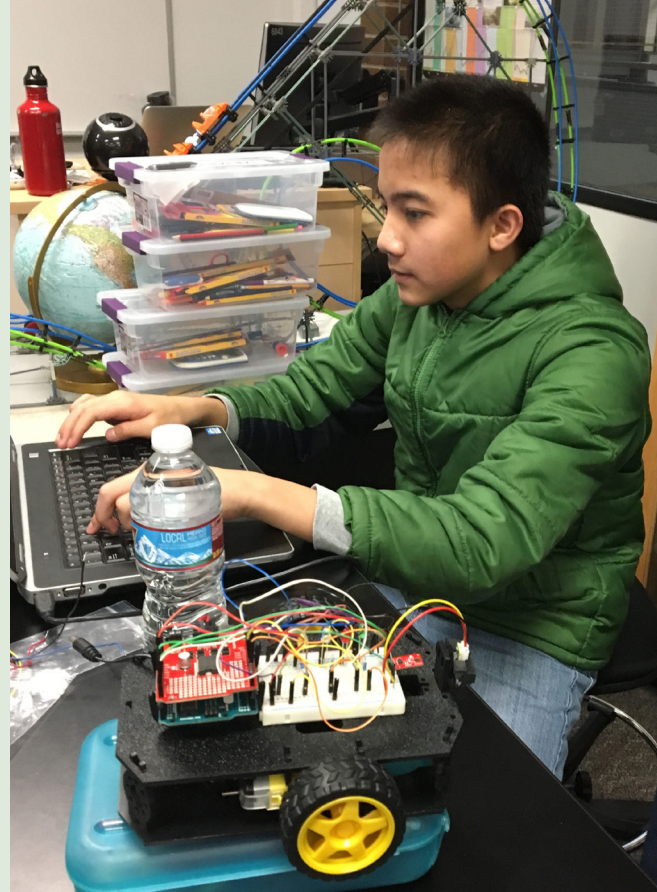
Challenges

ELL students face many hurdles in school. ELL students must develop fluency in a new language, understand new content through a language they have limited proficiency in, and navigate a new school with an unfamiliar culture. ELL students are also more likely to live in low-income families and attend under-resourced schools.

ELL students are struggling academically. ELL students are between 2.5 and 3.5 times more likely to score below basic in reading than their English-fluent peers. The dropout rate for students who “spoke a language other than English at home and spoke English less than very well” is more than 3.5 times as high as the national average and ELL students’ graduation rate is almost 20 percentage points lower than the national average.

ELL students are a growing and diverse population. During the 2013-14 school year, approximately 4.5 million ELL students attended public school, an increase of almost a quarter of a million students over the past decade. ELL students comprise a diverse group of more than a dozen racial and ethnic populations speaking more than 30 languages.

Read [Afterschool Providing Key Literacy Supports to English Language Learner Students](#) to learn more.



Program characteristics

Bridge works to support students through extensive relationships with local schools, community organizations, and students’ families. Partnership with the DHA and an accessible location within the housing authority has made it easier for students and families to participate in the program.

Close ties to families has also helped the program support its students’ academic success. Bridge hosts family orientations at the beginning and end of the school year, employs licensed social workers to conduct home visits, and maintains ongoing communication with parents. Bridge also established a Community Advisory Board, inviting parents to take a leadership role in the program and have a greater say in the supports their children receive.

To offer literacy support that complements in-school lessons, Bridge prioritizes consistent communication and strong partnerships with school staff. Program staff collaborate with classroom teachers, reading interventionists, and other school day staff, and each group attends the other’s events.

Program history

Serving students in grades K-12 whose families live significantly below the poverty line, Bridge was founded in 1991 in response to the high dropout rate of students in Denver’s public housing communities. After the success of the first program in the Lincoln Park neighborhood, Bridge expanded its programming to three additional communities.

Recommendations

for serving ELL students and their families

- ▶ Establishing a wide range of partnerships from many sectors is a key to success.
- ▶ Look at each student holistically. Addressing the full cultural context students are coming from can help programs provide more effective support.



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