

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS



ourBRIDGE for KIDS

Charlotte, NC

76 Average number of students served during the school year

83% ELL students

100% Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- ▶ Foundations
- ▶ Individual donations

Engaging the families of English language learners to promote literacy skills.

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

ourBRIDGE for KIDS (*ourBRIDGE*) is an afterschool program that serves 83 percent ELL students and 100 percent of its students are from low-income families. *ourBRIDGE* engages students' families to help students make academic and literacy-related gains. The program serves as a resource for ELL students' families, offering supportive services and facilitating family involvement in their children's education.

A typical day for students

Students are picked up from school and taken to the program where they meet staff and enjoy a family-style meal. Next, students head outside for recreation before returning for homework help and tutoring. The staff to student ratio is 1:2-3. After homework help, students gather as a full group to discuss upcoming events, including field trips and activities, with visuals to illustrate the information provided. During this time, students practice their listening and communication skills. Students then break out into smaller groups, working on student-driven projects focused on themes from astronomy to kindness. At the end of the program, *ourBRIDGE* transports students home.

Outcomes

During the 2015-2016 school year, 95 percent of teachers saw improvement in *ourBRIDGE* students' homework completion, class participation, motivation to learn and behavior. Students increased their Text Reading and Comprehension assessment results an average of seven levels.

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

Including parents in programming keeps them connected to their child’s academics and helps support children’s academic and social gains. ourBRIDGE involves parents in activities whenever possible. Their first step is ensuring that parents understand everything happening at school and in the program, which includes providing program information in eight different languages, translating notes sent home from school, hosting family nights, and performing home-visits before and during each student’s enrollment in the program. ourBRIDGE provides parents with translators for school staff and transportation to workshops offered by partners, such as the North Carolina Mental Health Association and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

A large part of the ourBRIDGE programming involves parents coming in and sharing parts of their culture. Every family night is a potluck where families bring food native to their country of origin. Parents love attending these events, which have an attendance rate greater than 80 percent. ourBRIDGE is also planning a future gardening project to encourage parents and students to research produce native to their countries of origin and try to grow them. As a result, ourBRIDGE staff are frequently invited to family events and are sometimes Facebook friends with parents. Parents feel as comfortable as their children at ourBRIDGE, asking for assistance when needed.

Program history

ourBRIDGE started in 2010 with a federal grant as a tutoring center for refugee children. At the conclusion of the grant, the program’s executive director transformed the center into an afterschool program with a mission to help ELL students new to the area. Within 22 days, ourBRIDGE received a new federal grant and two donated vans, allowing them to open their doors for a new school year completely transformed. ourBRIDGE has served more than 400 ELL students and their families and is currently working with 76 students representing 22 different cultures. In summer 2017, ourBRIDGE is moving to a new space and will grow to serve 130 students.

Recommendations

for serving ELL students and their families

- ▶ Look beyond students’ academic performance and grades. To help build students’ English fluency, programs should also build students’ self-confidence, which includes taking the time to get to know students as individuals.
- ▶ Find ways to make all families feel welcomed at your program—whether that is personally inviting parents to visit the program and meet with staff and other students, or inviting parents and students’ other siblings on field trips to take part in the fun.

