

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS



## Raider's ARK

Arcadia, WI

**120** Average number of students served during the school year

**80%** ELL students

**88%** Students from low-income families

### Main funding sources:

- ▶ 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers
- ▶ Businesses
- ▶ Program fees

## Using a mix of learning approaches to build English language learners' 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

Small group activities, peer-to-peer learning, using visuals to help explain concepts, and weaving literacy into a variety of activities are a few of the practices Raider's ARK (Academics Reinforcing Knowledge) Afterschool Program uses to support its ELL students. The program's activities are aligned with the school day, but are intentionally designed to look unlike school. Activities integrate literacy in creative ways by leveraging art projects, games, and group sharing exercises.

### A typical day for students

Students arrive at the program, grab a snack, and sit down as "families" at tables, participating in activities including arts and crafts, or a tournament card game. Family groups intentionally place students with different levels of English acquisition together, allowing students to learn from one another. Students then have time for physical activity or community service. Next, students break out into small groups. Younger students work with a lead teacher and a high school mentor on academic subjects where they need assistance. The program ends with students sharing the highlight of their day—their "daily joy"—with someone because many students' parents work a second- or third-shift job and may be at work or asleep when students get home. At the end of the day, the program transports all students home.

### Outcomes

Among regularly attending students, 83 percent increased their homework completion and 72 percent increased their classroom participation. Students in the program also showed above average growth on STAR reading and math scores.

## 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

Raider’s ARK works with students most in need of support, many of whom are performing below grade level. To reach ELL students, the program sends informational materials in English and Spanish and connects with parents by sending bilingual staff members to attend school events.

The program focuses on the whole child, providing targeted academic assistance, recreational activities, and community service opportunities. Raider’s ARK creates a safe and supportive environment where students feel comfortable participating in activities, without fear of failure or judgement.

Program curricula and activities are intentionally developed to look different from school. While literacy activities are based on Common Core State Standards, students build fluency and comprehension through learning games, the arts, and mentor relationships.

Fostering an interest in learning is also important to Raider’s ARK. Community members are invited to “You Choose Wednesday” and students can participate in workshops like a photography class offered by a local business and a crime scene investigation workshop offered by the University of Wisconsin extension program.

## Program history

Through the support of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers grant, Raider’s ARK opened in 2011 in response to the community’s growing ELL and low-income population. Serving elementary and middle schoolers, the program was restructured in 2015 and morphed from a program focused on homework help to one emphasizing a whole-child approach.

### Recommendations

*for serving ELL students and their families*

- ▶ Students thrive when you address their social and emotional needs, as well as their academic needs. Show students that you care and that they are more than their grades and test scores.
- ▶ Create a safe and welcoming environment where all students can come to learn without fear of judgement or failure.



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