

### The Opportunity

The Berkshires in Massachusetts is a rural place that sometimes isn't the most fun for kids. A lack of opportunities and support can lead kids further into drug use, teen pregnancy, and mental health challenges. Berkshire Hills Regional School District is at the forefront of supporting the holistic wellness and success of kids in Berkshire County by providing afterschool and summer programming through the Community Learning & Enrichment Opportunities (CLEO) out-of-school time program.

### In Practice

CLEO runs afterschool and summer programs at three schools, serving elementary through high school students. Their goal is to support the growth of the whole student by providing active learning opportunities, including project-based academic enrichment or interventions, recreational opportunities, and community-based experiences. The afterschool programs run for at least two hours per day, four days per week, during the school year. Academic interventions include tutoring and homework help, and recreation activities include physical activity, the arts, and STEM, or focus on topics such as nature. There are also leadership opportunities for high school youth who develop recreational activities for elementary students or work as paid interns at all three program sites.

A typical summer program day runs from 8 am to 3 pm five days a week for a couple of weeks. During the summer of 2023, the program focused on driverless technology and its impact on the world. Kids went on field trips to the local automotive museum to learn a brief history of cars, including the Ford Model T, James Bond's cars, and multiple F1 cars throughout history. Towards the end of the program, youth explored the future of cars, coding their own self-driving robots, experiencing driverless taxis firsthand, and creating a presentation delivered to a local representative about transportation in the Berkshires and what could be done to make it better.



### YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

James Tonetti

Community Learning & Enrichment Opportunities, Stockbridge, MA

"I signed up for CLEO to open my eyes to things I didn't normally do, and to start high school with some new friends and new experiences. Before I made the journey from middle school to high school, I was in our program before CLEO called Project Connection. I was a very active member going on field trips to my local wildlife preserve, learning about how to tie different knots and how to track our local animals, making good connections with my family by making food for group potlucks, and even learning the fundamentals of ceramics. I started my ceramics journey at Flying Cloud, a local summer camp that works closely with CLEO now. This love for ceramics started when I was very young making pinch pots. When I was looking at the course list for CLEO you can imagine my excitement when I saw that ceramics would be offered afterschool. This helped me practice what I already know in ceramics and allowed me to keep my love for that art into high school."



## The Challenge

While 88% of Massachusetts parents favor public funding for afterschool programs—and 80% of voters nationwide want federal, state, and local leaders to provide more funding for afterschool programs—nearly half a million children in our state are missing out. For every Massachusetts child in a program, 3 are waiting to get in. Nationwide, nearly 25 million children are not in an afterschool program but want to be. Greater investment in afterschool and summer programs is needed to make sure that all young people have the same opportunities as the young people in the Community Learning & Enrichment Opportunities program.

## James' Tips

For ways to help a program:

- ▶ Good employer/employee relationships are really important for building good connections with kids, especially the younger kids. Most of the people who work with the kids in the program are young people themselves from our district. When they feel like they don't want to be there, it brings down the energy of the group and limits how much fun the kids could have in an afterschool program!
- ▶ Having better enrollment in the programs would be extremely beneficial. By having looser grant requirements, CLEO would have more freedom and could devote funding to programming that kids in our district really want to participate in, leading to better enrollment.