

PROTECTIVE FACTORS



Learning Enriched Afterschool Program

Eldon, MO

350

Average number of students served during the school year

92%

Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- ▶ Eldon School District
- ▶ Carl Mosher Endowment
- ▶ Local community grants

Providing an environment that models and makes time to practice positive skill development

New research tells us that the adolescent years are a highly important developmental period for brain growth and “the second most critical period of development.” However, there are factors at both the individual and community levels that impact the development process. This includes risk factors that increase the likelihood that one will take part in unhealthy behaviors, as well as protective factors that spur healthy behaviors and development. Young people need a continuous system of support from birth through adolescence into young adulthood, creating the conditions that help them thrive and build the skills and attributes that will have a positive influence on their lives as they face thousands of decisions each day. Afterschool and summer learning programs are a part of this continuous system of support, providing services during a critical time of development for young people that will help children grow their strengths, cope with the complications of life, and lead healthful lives to become healthy adults.

Overview

The *Learning Enriched Afterschool Program (LEAP)* first opened its doors in 2011 to address the need for an afterschool program for underserved children in the area. Over the course of the organization’s eight-year history, it has evolved from primarily a drop-in club for elementary and middle school students to a comprehensive program that offers academic enrichment; lessons on health and wellness; team building and leadership opportunities; and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) activities, such as LEGO robotics and coding. LEAP leadership views the program’s staff as the cornerstone of a successful program, providing training for staff to support their roles in the organization, and continuously creating structures and supports to help form positive relationships between students in the program and staff.

A typical day for students

Four days a week after school, elementary and middle schoolers in LEAP start their afternoons with a healthy snack and time for homework help and mentoring before transitioning into their choice of activities that include—but are not limited to—STEM, chess, yoga, sewing, sign language, cooking, archery, and sports. The program also lets students shape the activities offered. For example, when

a student was interested in learning Spanish, staff found a curriculum to work with and formed a Spanish group. When another group of students wanted to learn more about animals, they formed an animal club and visited the local humane society, baked dog biscuits, and constructed chew toys from donated t-shirts. When the program ends at 6 p.m., LEAP provides buses that transport students home.

Program characteristics

Appreciating the critical role staff plays serving as mentors for students, modeling healthful behaviors and positives attitudes, and in creating a space where students feel safe and supported, LEAP regularly dedicates time to ensure that their team has the tools and resources needed to best support their students. Empathy, relationship skills, self-awareness, and reflection are a few of the skills LEAP works on with their employees. Another aspect of reflection that leadership emphasizes is to help team members look inward to make sure that they are also taking care of themselves. Leadership in LEAP understands the physical, mental, and emotional toll that working in the afterschool field can have on a workforce that put their energy into best caring for and about the kids in their program.

A regular mantra in the program is asking their employees to think about what they are doing for their mind, their body, their relationships, and their emotional health. Each month, there is a different topic of focus related to well-being, and at every staff meeting, there is a different social and emotional skill or competency reviewed. LEAP leadership works to develop strong bonds with and between staff members in the program to promote unity within the organization and create a culture of supportive relationships.

Outcomes

Program personnel report a sense of belonging and support within the program. When describing the organizational culture, a LEAP staff member said, “Our LEAP staff is like a big family. When our site coordinator and director does little special things like handwritten thank you notes and appreciation gifts like our LEAP cups, it really means a lot. That cup is a constant reminder of the difference I make each afternoon.” Another member said of the program, “We strive to work as a team—whether it is as a staff or when working with students.”

Program history

Since 2011, the Learning Enriched Afterschool Program has served kindergarten through eighth grade students in the Eldon School District. The program was first made possible when it was awarded to be a Missouri 21st Century Community Learning Center program. In its first year, the program served 150 students in four schools in the district. Today, the program reaches more than 350 students each day and more than 850 students throughout the year across three sites.



Challenges

The importance of the adolescent years: Science shows that, from birth through young adulthood, our brains are continuously developing: brain pathways grow stronger, information is processed more rapidly, and we build more complex connections that enable more complex thinking. A child’s adolescent years hold enormous potential to grow and develop the skills—from building relationships to learning self-control—that they will need in adulthood. It is also a time when adolescents are in a more vulnerable state and their surrounding environments and supports—particularly non-familial supports—play a significant role in their development.

The effect of our surroundings: Research has found that our surroundings at the community, family, and individual levels can have a positive or a harmful effect on our development. Poverty, community violence, conflict within the family, and parent or family members that struggle with alcohol or drug misuse are just a few of the risk factors that exist at the community and family levels.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): Close to half of children in the U.S. from zero through age 17 have experienced at least one ACE, an experience, such as being a victim of violence or having a parent or guardian who has passed away, that could have a negative and lasting effect on one’s health and well-being.

Individual risk factors: Depression, cigarette use, and substance use and misuse are also risk factors young people grapple with today. In 2017, 32 percent of high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless for persistent periods of time, 17 percent seriously considered attempting suicide, 14 percent reported misusing opioids, and e-cigarette use increased by 78 percent among high schoolers and 48 percent among middle schoolers from 2017 to 2018.

Read [Afterschool: Fostering Protective Factors that Can Last a Lifetime](#) to learn more.

Risk Factors and Protective Factors

Risk factors and protective factors are present at the individual, family, and community levels. Below are examples of risk and protective factors for adolescents at the various levels.



Individual



Family



Community



Risk Factors

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Low self-esteem ▶ Inability to communicate ▶ Substance use and misuse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Family conflict ▶ Parent substance use ▶ Unemployment ▶ Lack of adult supervision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Poverty ▶ Exposure to a community or school related traumatic event or violence ▶ Favorable community or peer group attitude toward alcohol and drug use |
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Protective Factors

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ High self-esteem ▶ Positive self-image ▶ Positive peer relationships ▶ Engagement in school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Supportive relationships ▶ Clear expectations for behavior ▶ Stability and consistency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Positive adult mentor ▶ Engagement in school or community activities ▶ Healthy peer groups |
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Adapted from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's "Risk and Protective Factors for Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Across the Life Cycle."

Recommendations

for providing an environment that models and makes time to practice positive skill development:

- ▶ Start a conversation with staff to better understand what matters to them and what can help them recharge and be the best version of themselves for their students.
- ▶ Lead by example. When team members observe program leadership and management modeling the practices and behaviors promoted in staff development, it helps demonstrate the value the organization places on those skills and competencies.
- ▶ Small acts can make a big difference to demonstrate to employees their value in the program. Find different ways to show your workforce that they are appreciated within the organization.



Afterschool Alliance

afterschoolalliance.org