AfterOpp

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Tulsa, Oklahoma

800 Average number of students served during the school year

125* Average number of students served during COVID-19

with virtual programming, but they regularly communicated with all the families in the program

93% Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

▶ 21st Century Community Learning Centers

▶ Private foundations

▶ Local philanthropy

Supporting the well-being of children and families during COVID-19

On March 16, 2020, 25 states and the District of Columbia ordered schools to close and on March 19, California became the first state to issue a statewide stay-at-home order in response to COVID-19. By early April, more than 90 percent of people living in the U.S., including more than 55 million students, found their lives upended by the country's response to slow the spread of the coronavirus. At the time of the release of this issue brief, the U.S. alone has more than 4.2 million confirmed cases and lost more than 146,000 lives due to the virus.

Joining local efforts, afterschool programs across the country adjusted their operations to best address the urgent needs of the children and families in their community: delivering meals, providing care for children of essential workers, finding ways to keep students engaged in learning remotely, and remaining a source of support to students and families to help young people emerge from this crisis strong, resilient, and hopeful.

Overview

AfterOpp, part of The Opportunity Project, a citywide intermediary for expanded learning, is an afterschool and summer program that focuses exclusively on middle school students. Before COVID-19, students took part in a variety of enrichment activities such as sports, robotics, culinary arts, fashion design, theater, and coding, all while focusing on social and emotional development. In response to COVID-19, AfterOpp has continued to support the social, emotional, and overall wellness needs of the community through wellness checks, virtual programming, and social and emotional learning (SEL) activity bags. Although the program does not typically operate during the summer, because of the pandemic, they are offering virtual programming to their students through a text-based system where students receive daily activities, ranging from creative writing prompts to yoga moves, through their phones.

A typical day in response to COVID-19

When schools closed in Tulsa, Oklahoma, students in the AfterOpp program took part in daily online clubs, completed hands-on STEM projects and SEL reflection activities, and participated in various SEL activity videos. This

summer, AfterOpp is offering virtual programming through a text-based platform that is connected directly to students' phones. Kids can choose from a variety of online clubs including animation, yoga, creative writing, and photography, and every day they receive a text message with the activity and curriculum for that day. To ensure maximum engagement, students are able to choose the time of the day the text is sent, as well as provide feedback through quizzes and reflections after completing their activity. At the end of the summer, AfterOpp is planning a virtual showcase for their kids to present their work to friends, family, and the community.

Impacts

During the COVID-19 pandemic, AfterOpp served an incredibly important role in the community. They were able to contact all families in the program and help meet their basic needs, such as food insecurity and personal hygiene, in addition to reaching 125 students through virtual programming to help kids navigate the social and emotional toll of the pandemic.

Program characteristics

When the Tulsa Public Schools closed after spring break, AfterOpp immediately realized that there was a hierarchy of needs to be addressed as families faced economic hardships and learning no longer looked the same for children. They created a phone bank to contact families in the program at least twice a week for wellness checks, where they asked what resources were needed and how the program could help connect them with those resources. Finding that many families were without transportation, AfterOpp partnered with Hunger Free Oklahoma and other community organizations who had the ability to deliver food, personal hygiene products, and other immediate necessities directly to families.

Regarding academic enrichment, AfterOpp asked families what kinds of activities they wanted for their kids. Many families expressed an interest in having virtual programming, so AfterOpp worked with partners, such as Youth At Heart and Tulsa Debate League, to provide online clubs where small groups of students could participate in Zoom calls, check-ins, and reflections to ensure that they still receive one-on-one interaction with program staff, maintain positive relationships with one another, and monitor overall well-being. Topics included managing anxiety and emotions, relationships with family members, and navigating distance learning. From this, the program made the determination that they needed to get physical, project-based learning materials into the hands of the students to maximize engagement and steer them away from staring at a computer screen all day. In partnership with the Tulsa Regional STEM Alliance, an intermediary organization that connects students with STEM opportunities, they put together SEL activity bags that included hands-on STEM projects, reflection activities, arts and crafts, school supplies, hygiene products, and some stress-reducing gadgets to help children navigate the emotional toll of the pandemic. In particular, the reflection activities, which included a COVID-19

Challenges

In addition to a national health crisis, the effects of the pandemic have reached into all corners of life in the U.S:

An economic crisis. Between mid-March and June, more than 52 million people filed for unemployment. As a result of layoffs, furloughs, and reduced hours due to stay-at-home orders, individuals are struggling to meet basic needs, including food security and paying rent.

A crisis in education. It is estimated that students missed approximately 30 percent of in-person learning during the 2019-2020 school year and teachers have reported that 23 percent of students are not attending online classes. Research by NWEA projects that students may start the new school year having lost close to 30 percent of their learning gains in reading and 50 percent of their gains in math.
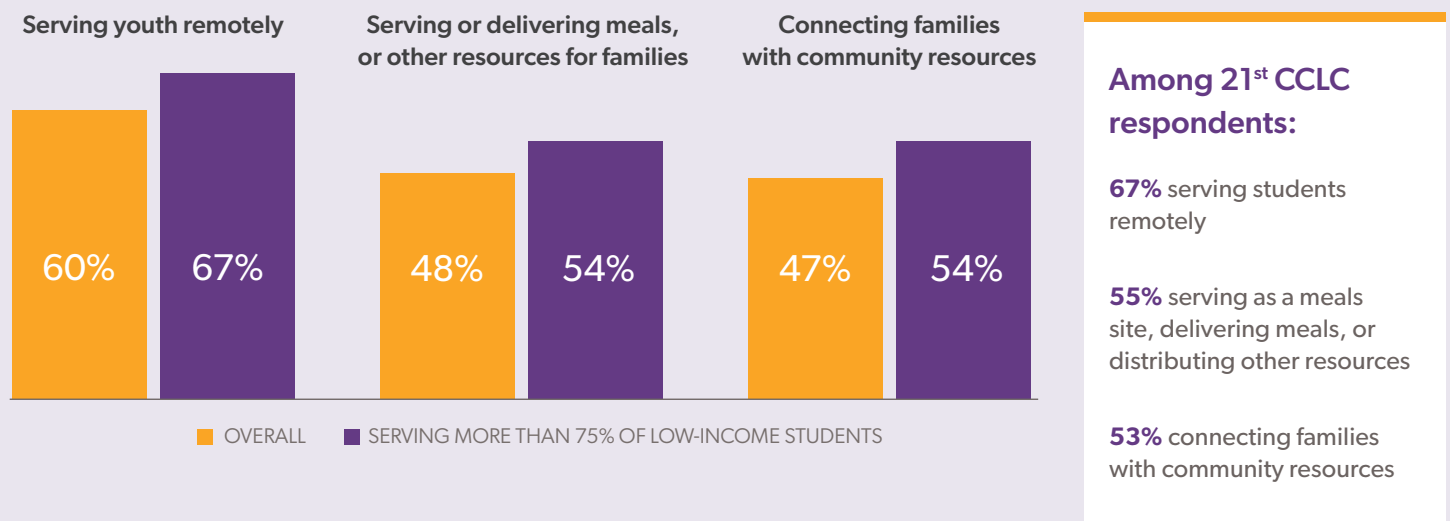
A crisis of well-being. A survey of youth ages 6 to 18 found that more than 1 in 5 reported that they were anxious (27 percent), stressed (23 percent), and unhappy (22 percent).

Exacerbating existing disparities. For instance, communities of color have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus, with death rates among Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx persons higher than that of white and Asian individuals. Regarding education, lower-income parents were much less likely than higher-income parents to report that their children had received some online instruction from their school since it closed (69 percent vs. 87 percent), and nine times more likely to say their child will not be able to complete their schoolwork because of lack of access to a computer at home (36 percent vs. 4 percent).

Read *How Afterschool is Supporting Learning and Recovery during COVID-19* to learn more.

Afterschool programs supporting learning and recovery during COVID-19

A survey of 914 afterschool program providers conducted May 28-June 30, found that afterschool programs continue to provide critical supports in their communities during the pandemic, with programs serving high-need students and families especially active. **Overall, 70 percent of respondents report serving students in some capacity.**

Serving youth remotely

Serving or delivering meals, or other resources for families

Connecting families with community resources

Serving youth remotely	Serving or delivering meals, or other resources for families	Connecting families with community resources
60% / 67%	48% / 54%	47% / 54%

■ OVERALL   ■ SERVING MORE THAN 75% OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

Among 21st CCLC respondents:

67% serving students remotely

55% serving as a meals site, delivering meals, or distributing other resources

53% connecting families with community resources

Source: Online survey conducted by Edge Research on behalf of the Afterschool Alliance.

time capsule and a reflection journal, encouraged kids to think about, capture, and reflect upon their feelings and to maintain a sense of optimism during this unprecedented time. Finally, AfterOpp produced a series of mindfulness videos that students could participate in.

This summer, AfterOpp is offering their virtual programming to students who were enrolled in the program during the school year, as well as students in Tulsa Public Schools to reach young people as many as possible and continue to support students' social and emotional development. AfterOpp is expanding activities offered, working closely with their partners, including Tulsa Regional STEM Alliance, Humble Warriors Collective (yoga), and Tulsa Debate League, to provide a greater selection of programming options for students. The goal of this engagement is to keep youth connected to learning, each other, and foster a sense of hope and optimism, which serves as a mediator to the trauma many are experiencing during this pandemic.

Program history

After The Opportunity Project started in 2017 as part of a research study focusing on social and emotional learning, they realized that there was a gap in opportunities for middle school students, and that this was a critical time for development. As an organization, they decided they needed to put their efforts toward middle school as well as elementary, and in the 2018-19 school year, AfterOpp began with a pilot at two sites. AfterOpp is now at four Tulsa Public School middle schools and has additional sites on a waiting list.

Recommendations

to support the well-being of children and families during COVID-19:

▶ The out-of-school time community is going to have to be innovators this summer—have an open mind and be willing to learn best practices from anywhere and everywhere.

▶ Maintain family outreach to ensure students know that you are still there for them, even if it seems like you aren't getting a good response.

▶ Lean into the community of partners you work with—this summer is about working together to share resources rather than being competitive over programming.

Afterschool Alliance

afterschoolalliance.org