

LEARNING AND RECOVERY



Boys & Girls Club of Parkersburg

Parkersburg, West Virginia

1,000

Average number of students served during the school year

250

Average number of students served during COVID-19

100%

Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ Local donors
- ▶ 21st Century Community Learning Centers

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

The *Boys & Girls Club of Parkersburg* typically offers afterschool and summer programs where kids can participate in a range of activities of their choosing, such as receiving academic help, playing basketball, or STEAM activities such as 3D printing. Due to COVID-19, the program was forced to close its facilities and instead provided support through meal deliveries, regular check-ins with students and families, and virtual programming. This summer, the program is re-opening its doors, offering in-person activities that are designed to ensure social distancing among students and staff.

A typical day in response to COVID-19

From March 16 and through mid-June, the Boys & Girls Club of Parkersburg transitioned to virtual programming, offering a mix of activities through the day for students. Mornings started with words of encouragement from staff, moving into arts and crafts, STEM, and other enrichment activities. Students had the opportunity to participate in daily challenges and quizzes, as well as follow along with instructional videos on topics such as art, cooking, and fitness. The program also offered Zoom meetings that focused on mental health and gave kids a chance to socialize with their peers. This summer, they

are offering a highly structured program where kids can join a morning session from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. or an afternoon session from 1 to 5 p.m. Kids will be placed in teams, with whom they will rotate through activities that focus on five components throughout the day: character development, academics, sports and fitness, STEM, and general recreation, with a different theme each week, such as TikTok week, which will include video production, developing time management skills, and online safety. All students will receive either breakfast and lunch, or lunch and snack, depending on the time of day they attend.

Impacts

The Boys & Girls Club of Parkersburg has provided critical supports in many areas directly impacting family members. They reached 230 students and family members through phone call check-ins, provided gift cards to families of 75 youth for food and groceries, and delivered meals to roughly 60 kids each week who were without transportation. In addition, Makerspace staff used the Club's laser cutter to produce more than 3,000 face shields that were donated to frontline workers in the community.

Program characteristics

When schools and businesses began to close in March, the Boys and Girls Club of Parkersburg immediately began thinking about how to best continue to be a safe haven for their students and provide supports to their families. The program contacted families weekly to check in on them and ask about their immediate needs and connect them with resources where possible.

Located in the seventh most impoverished area in West Virginia and serving the children who relied on breakfasts and lunches provided by schools and were left without meals during school closures, the program knew that food insecurity was an immediate concern of many families. The Club provided food to families to take home on the day the afterschool programs were closed to ensure families would have food. In response to finding out that many families were struggling to pay for groceries, the program partnered with their community foundation and a local grocery store to provide them with gift cards to bridge gaps in unemployment. Additionally, although their school system opened meal distribution sites, the Boys & Girls Club of Parkersburg worked to pick up and deliver those meals to families who were without transportation.

Maintaining relationships with their students also remained a priority for the program. In addition to providing daily virtual programming and kits that included items like chalk, jump ropes, and crafts to help keep kids active and engaged in hands-on learning, the Boys & Girls Club of Parkersburg hosted Zoom meeting chats focused on mental health. These chats offered space for students to see their friends and stay connected to one another, as well as allow staff to monitor the overall safety and well-being of their students. As a part of looking out for their students' physical and mental health, staff are trained to identify signs of abuse and neglect and the program provides contact information and office hours for families and kids to address concerns regarding mental health, abuse, or neglect.



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.

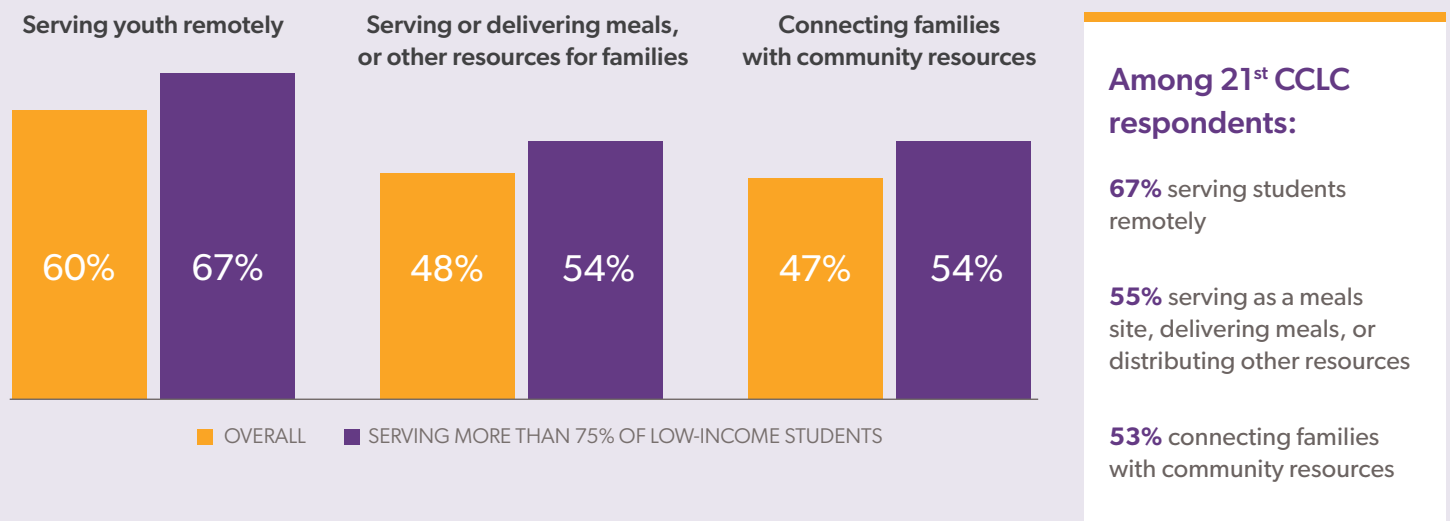
A crisis of well-being. A survey of youth ages 6 to 18 found that more than 1 in 5 reported that they were anxious (27 percent), stressed (23 percent), and unhappy (22 percent).

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.**



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

This summer, the Boys & Girls Club of Parkersburg has restructured their program model to follow CDC guidelines, including small groupings of students spaced at least six feet apart, lowered staff-to-child ratios, and social distancing practices. In order to reach as many students as possible, the program is offering two half-day schedules, enabling them to reach as many as 160 kids a day.

Program history

The Boys & Girls Club of Parkersburg started in 1964 to provide more opportunities for at-risk boys in the community, and offered programming in trade skills such as electronics, auto shop, and carpentry. In the 1990s, the program formally became co-ed. Over the years, the programming has evolved to develop more intentionally structured programs aimed at building their students' academic, social, and emotional skills and competencies. Most recently, the program has incorporated technology as a centerpiece of its work, adding technology labs and an advanced Makerspace with laser cutting, 3D printing, CNC milling and more.

Recommendations

for supporting the well-being of children and families during COVID-19:

- ▶ Talk to your families and listen to what they are telling you. Find out what their needs are and use that information to guide your work. As programs are oftentimes the only advocates their families have, we should all do what we can to meet their needs to the best of our ability.
- ▶ Your program doesn't need to be alone in this work. Look for partners in your community who can help you find answers and resources, and other forms of support that your families might need.



Afterschool Alliance

afterschoolalliance.org