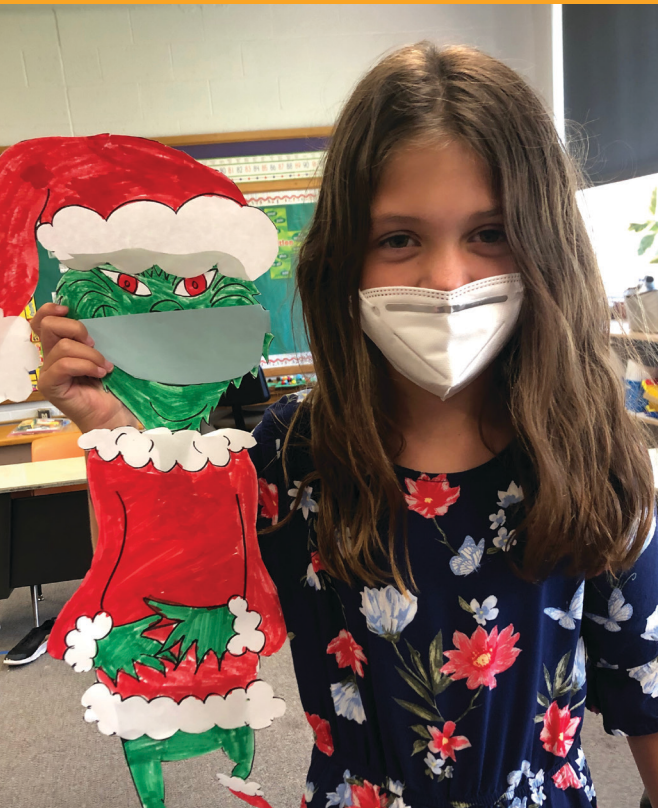


## LEARNING AND RECOVERY



## Valley Heights Community Education

Waterville, Kansas

70

Average number of students served during the school year

50\*

Average number of students served during COVID-19

\*virtually through personal videos

55%

Students from low-income families

### Main funding sources:

- ▶ 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers
- ▶ Kansas Afterschool Enhancement Grant

## Providing critical supports to underserved communities 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

**Valley Heights Community Education** is located in a rural town in Kansas, serving roughly 70 students in grades pre-K-6<sup>th</sup> grade. During a typical school year, students in Valley Heights Community Education take part in academic programming, college and career readiness activities, and robotics, however, in response to COVID-19, the program has transitioned to provide in-kind supports such as meal and material deliveries, home visits, and personal videos. This summer, they will operate in person with adapted programming, following the CDC guidelines.

### A typical day in response to COVID-19

In response to COVID-19, during the school year, Valley Heights adapted its programming to provide daily meals and deliver school work to their students and families, as well as conducted regular check-ins with families. This summer, programming will look different than usual. In implementing social distancing in its programming, Valley Heights is substituting its typical summer robotics offerings with outside learning, physical activity, and social interaction. Students in grades 4-6 will be using The Walking Classroom, a preloaded MP3 player with podcasts that cover subjects in language arts, social studies, and science, in addition to topics such as discrimination, health and wellness, and thoughtful

decision-making. Rather than the program's usual 50-minute rotations per activity, students will dive deeper into long-term projects in areas including community service and financial literacy. Students' health and safety is a priority for Valley Heights, with the program implementing CDC protocols, such as spacing desks six feet apart, keeping kids in their same classrooms, using water bottle filling stations instead of water fountains, regular disinfecting of bathrooms, classrooms, and other surfaces, and educating students on proper hygiene.

## Impacts

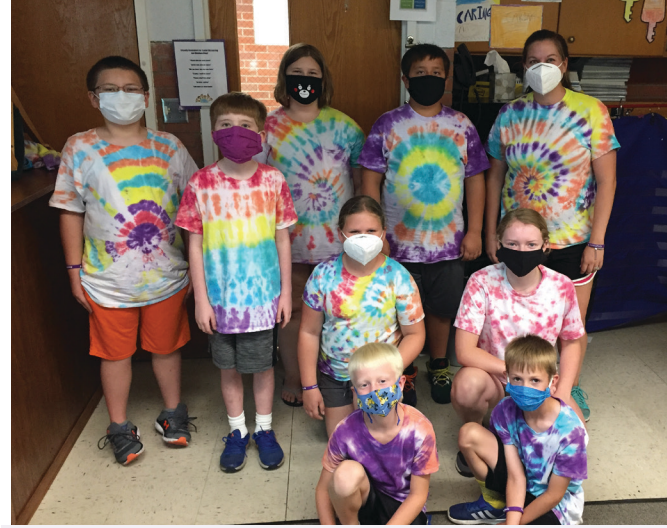
Since schools have closed in the state of Kansas, Valley Heights has served a greater number of meals than what they serve during a typical school year. As of early June, they served 16,662 breakfasts and 22,126 lunches, which averages to 357 lunches and 269 breakfasts a day to community members. Further, working with the school district, the program has helped the school counselor, along with the family advocate, conduct more than 300 home visits to students in the program, strengthening the relationships between families, the school, and Valley Heights Community Education.

## Program characteristics

Valley Heights has supported its students and the community since schools closed in March, and will continue to do so this summer. While the program did not offer virtual programming during the remainder of the school year out of concerns about overwhelming families and internet constraints, they continued outreach to families to stay connected and provide needed supports. High school mentors and staff members sent out personal videos to students, and bus drivers delivered meals to families in need. To best serve their rural families, many of whom have limited internet access, Valley Heights provided the option for families to receive hard copies of school work and other information from the school to be delivered with their meals in order to ensure that all families received the necessary information, regardless of internet access.

One of the unique additions to the program has been including the school counselor and family advocate into their work. Through home "front porch" visits, the counselor and family advocate have been able to check in on students and their families, helping connect families to available resources, addressing mental health needs, and keeping them up-to-date on school-related information. Due to the positive response from families, Valley Heights is expanding this service through July. Additionally, since many families have been drastically impacted financially, they have partnered with the school family advocate to help provide necessary resources to students and their families, with everything from diapers to additional meals.

Looking to the summer, the program is fortunate enough to operate in-person. In response to both CDC guidelines and the transportation challenges that exist in rural communities, instead of operating in one central location, Valley Heights will open up buildings in neighboring towns. This shift in operations reduces the need for transportation and allows class sizes to be smaller to maintain social distancing.



## 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.

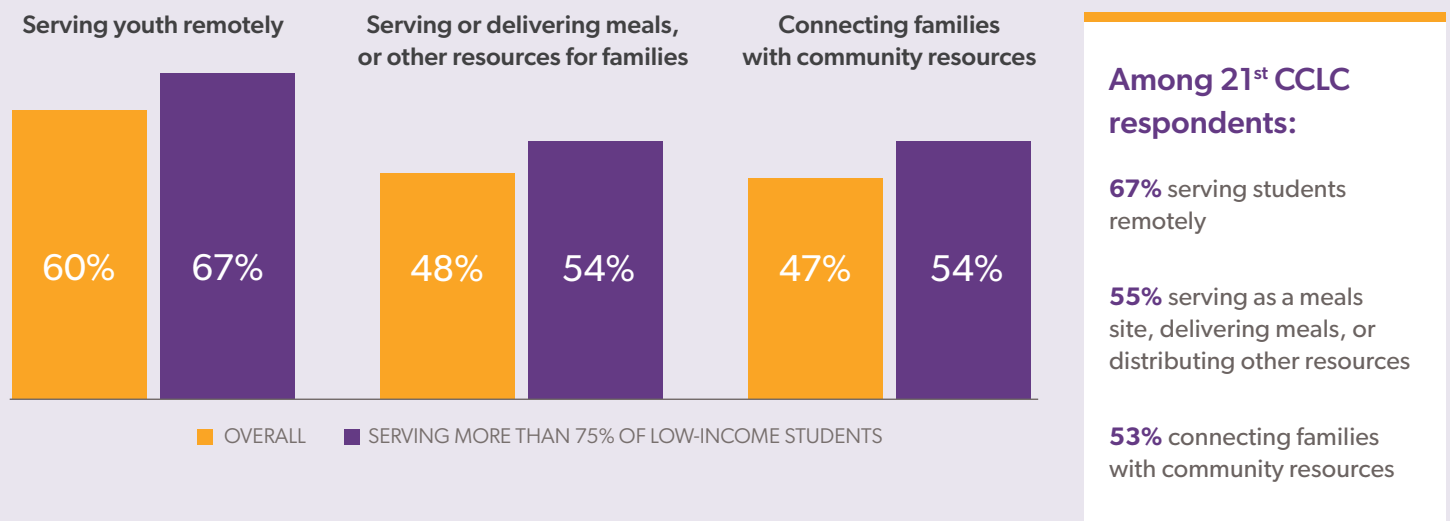
**A crisis of well-being.** A survey of youth ages 6 to 18 found that more than 1 in 5 reported that they were anxious (27 percent), stressed (23 percent), and unhappy (22 percent).

**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.

Additionally, the program is now operating two food distribution sites, which will enable them to serve more families in the community this summer. As the only program in the area distributing meals, having more than just the one site will allow better access, as the neighboring towns rely on these meals as well.

### Program history

The afterschool program started in the mid-1990s as a response to more households having both parents working outside the home. The original afterschool program was funded through the Kansas Afterschool Enhancement grant, and in the early 2000s, the program began receiving 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funding, which enabled them to begin a summer program. Over the years, the program has grown with the changing needs of the community, and recently has adopted a focus on robotics and college and career readiness.

### Recommendations

*for providing critical supports to underserved communities during COVID-19:*

- ▶ Remember that whatever type of programming you offer this summer won't work for everyone, and that's okay—you have to focus on what you can do as opposed to what you can't. Even if you are only able to reach 10 percent of students, 10 percent is better than nothing, and you should focus on what you can do for that 10 percent. At the end of the day, you're only capable of doing what you're allowed to do.
- ▶ Consider the students that are in the program. Students will have different personalities and interests. Remember to take their thoughts into account when you plan your activities! Ask what they like, what they want to get from the camp. Are there ways to give them the ability to lead some of their activities and teach their classmates? So many of these kids haven't seen their friends for so long because of COVID-19, so let them reflect themselves onto the program! And remember that they really want to have FUN!



**Afterschool Alliance**

[afterschoolalliance.org](https://afterschoolalliance.org)