

LEARNING AND RECOVERY



ourBRIDGE for KIDS

Charlotte, North Carolina

150

Average number of students served during the school year

Average number of students served during COVID-19

500

During the school year

500

During the summer

100%

Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- ▶ Foundations
- ▶ Individual Donations

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

Located in Charlotte, North Carolina, **ourBRIDGE for KIDS** (ourBRIDGE) is an afterschool program that works with immigrant and refugee students new to the United States. During a typical school year, the program—whose three core pillars are academic support, trauma-informed care, and cultural pride—serves approximately 150 K-8 students. Students in the program represent 22 different cultures; 100 percent qualify for federal free or reduced-price lunch and more than 80 percent are English language learners (ELL). In response to North Carolina's stay-at-home orders and school closures, as well as communications with their families, ourBRIDGE paused in-person service and turned its attention to delivering meals to families experiencing food insecurity, liaising between schools and families, and serving as an advocate for families facing challenges created by the pandemic.

A typical day in response to COVID-19

Prior to the pandemic, Monday through Friday, students attending ourBRIDGE were picked up from school and taken to the program where they would take part in a family-style meal, receive homework help and tutoring, take part in outdoor recreation, and engage in student-driven projects in subjects

including the arts, science, and technology. During the pandemic, ourBRIDGE adapted its programming to deliver breakfasts, lunches, and dinners to families in east Charlotte; bring art, science, math, and literacy supplies to their students; and check in daily virtually with students to help with school assignments and offer support for other concerns voiced by students.

Impacts

Reaching out to their families to determine how best to support them during the pandemic, ourBRIDGE identified challenges accessing meal distribution sites set up at their local schools, the need for the translation of informational materials provided by schools regarding COVID-19, and help connecting to available community supports. The program reached out to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district and was able to become a mobile feeding site, translated school materials for families, and regularly checked in with families to support them with issues they were experiencing. Between mid-March and July, ourBRIDGE distributed more than 100,000 meals and grocery bags to immigrant and refugee families in Charlotte's east side neighborhoods. Additionally, ourBRIDGE has assisted a family member to navigate the unemployment benefit system, informed their families of their rights as tenants, and regularly translated and disseminated COVID-19 related information for families in Amharic, Arabic, Burmese, Farsi, French, Hindi, Nepali, Spanish, and Swahili to make sure that all families have access to information on the resources available to them.

Program characteristics

While supporting the academic and social and emotional needs of students new to the country was a founding principle of ourBRIDGE, the program has recently become more intentional in applying a trauma-informed lens to all aspects of their programming. In practice, this translates to meeting students and families where they are, developing positive relationships to better understand their needs, and continuously working to provide a safe and supportive space for their students and families.

Before the coronavirus, ourBRIDGE prioritized involving families in its work, building trust and mutual respect. During the pandemic, ourBRIDGE took the same approach, reaching out to their families to see what they needed and determining out how they could best help. For example, the program responded to their families' needs by focusing their efforts on meal distribution when they learned that many of their families did not have a way to get to school sites that were serving grab-and-go meals. The program also picked up meals they received from local restaurants, many of which are immigrant-owned, and in recognizing appropriate mealtimes for the families they are serving—such as making a conscious effort to serve iftars (traditional meals served after sunset) during Ramadan.

The overall well-being of their students and families is another area of importance for the program. ourBRIDGE checks in daily with students and has both a licensed family therapist and a licensed professional counselor



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.

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

available to families. These staff members are currently working on starting mental and emotional wellness support groups for parents of students attending ourBRIDGE.

ourBRIDGE also continues to serve as a liaison between schools and families, connecting with students whom teachers have noticed were missing online sessions and translating materials for parents from the schools.

Program history

In 2010 through a federal grant, ourBRIDGE first opened as a tutoring center for refugee children. At the grant's conclusion, the program's executive director transformed the center into an afterschool program whose mission was to help ELL students new to the country. Most recently, ourBRIDGE has concentrated its efforts to place trauma-informed care at the center of its operations, which has led to staff trainings on trauma-informed care and providing ongoing support to volunteers and staff regarding implementing a trauma-informed approach.

Recommendations

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

- ▶ Listen to your students and families. Respect their point of view and recognize that they are an asset to your program. You can best support your students and families when you base your work on what they tell you they need and when you understand where they are coming from.
- ▶ To foster positive relationships and form authentic connections between staff, students, and families, programs must create a space where your kids and families feel safe, valued, and that they belong.



Afterschool Alliance

afterschoolalliance.org