

## LEARNING AND RECOVERY



## Breakthrough Miami

Miami, Florida

**1,300** Average number of students served during the school year

**130** Average number of Teaching Fellows

Average number of students served during COVID-19

**977** During the school year

**805** During the summer

**130** Teaching Fellows

**85%** Students from low-income families

### Main funding sources:

- ▶ The Children's Trust
- ▶ Miami-Dade County Grants
- ▶ Corporation for National and Community Service Americorps Funding
- ▶ Foundations, corporations, and individual donations

## Keeping kids engaged in learning 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

*Breakthrough Miami* (BTM) is a year-round program focused on creating equitable learning opportunities for underserved youth in the Miami area. BTM's unique students-teaching-students model prepares 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students for college through academic enrichment, experiential learning, social and emotional skills and competencies development, and guidance and supports regarding college access. Known as "Scholars," 85 percent of these students qualify for the free and reduced-price lunch program, and 50 percent are English-language learners. In response to COVID-19, BTM continues to offer rigorous academic programming to their Scholars, but transitioned to providing online classes on topics including core academics, electives such as arts and coding, and academic support through one-on-one and small group virtual academic tutoring sessions. The program also expanded its services to address the needs of student families; securing funds for technology for students without access to Wi-Fi or a computer or laptop; distributing fresh food and pantry bags; distributing activity kits to students; and hosting parent workshops on issues such as housing, finances, and navigating online learning platforms.

## A typical day in response to COVID-19

In response to social distancing measures enacted in March, Breakthrough Miami transitioned its programming to an online model. Monday through Friday, the program hosts virtual courses and academic support sessions, as well as community events to help keep spirit up among its Scholars and staff. This summer, BTM will continue its virtual programming model, holding day-long virtual summer programming comprised of virtual lessons, time to work individually on projects, one-on-one sessions with Teaching Fellows, and special events to bring Scholars together.

## Impact

Hearing families' concerns regarding job security, food insecurity, digital connectivity, and health care, Breakthrough Miami collected nearly \$20,000 in contributions to provide monetary and in-kind support to their families, including gift cards to purchase food and other basic necessities. The program helped to secure funds to provide Wi-Fi and laptops to their students with technology needs, and distributed 5,000 books to students through a partnership with Page by Page. Moreover, students received more than 800 bags of supplies before the summer began, full of materials for BTM's summer programming, including summer novels, a dry erase board, notebook, art supplies, and snacks. Subsequent supply distributions occurred during the summer with materials to complement the Teaching Fellows' activities, such as STEM projects and art electives.

## Program characteristics

At the outset of the pandemic, Breakthrough Miami immediately reached out to their families—through an online survey and individual outreach—to find out how the program could best support them in the face of school closures and social distancing orders. Families reported concerns for their children's learning, as well as worries about meeting their basic needs. Based on feedback, BTM determined to continue to provide academic support and layer on additional wraparound services. For instance, the program employed the licensed mental health provider it had on retainer to be an available resource for staff and families during the pandemic, holding weekly wellness chats with staff, offering one-on-one check-ins with staff, and providing referrals for families. Additionally, BTM increased the supports offered for parents, hosting a greater number of virtual workshops on topics raised by parents, including navigating the school system during COVID-19, available financial resources, renter rights, and more. In the circumstances created by the pandemic, BTM saw the need to be an advocate for their families and stepped in to help on issues ranging from finding alternative housing for a family to getting technology back in the hands of students when a school closed.

Unique to BTM is its near-peer mentoring model, where their Teaching Fellows, ages 17-25, serve as teachers and mentors to BTM Scholars. Each year, approximately 130 Teaching Fellows work closely with Scholars, leading instruction of core academics and electives; helping Scholars develop



## 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.

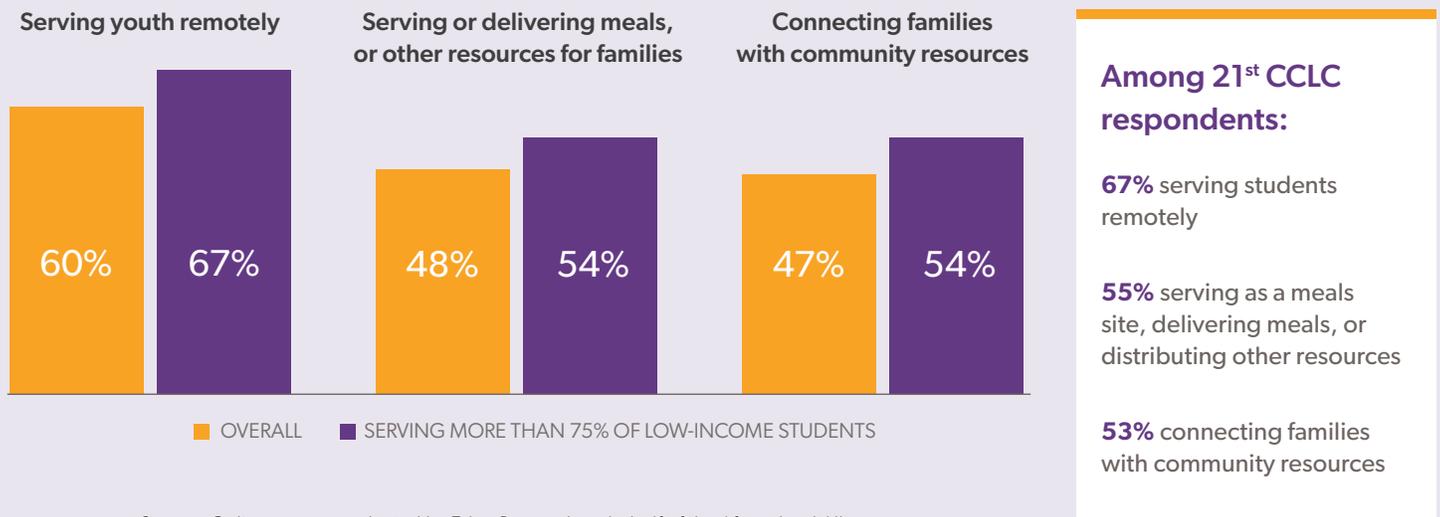
**A crisis of well-being.** A survey of youth ages 6 to 18 found that more than 1 in 5 reported that they were anxious (27 percent), stressed (23 percent), and unhappy (22 percent).

**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.

Scholar Success Plans, with short- and long-term academic goals and benchmarks to stay on track through middle and high school graduation; and meeting one-on-one and in small groups to support academic and social and emotional growth. In addition to leading classes and group sessions, BTM's Teaching Fellows continue to maintain personalized relationships with Scholars, holding one-on-one 30- to 45-minute check-ins each week with every Scholar to see how they are doing academically, physically, and emotionally.

### Program history

Breakthrough Miami was first established in 1991 as a summer bridge program to support middle school students' transition to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Since then, the program has expanded its services and broadened its reach, growing from an inaugural class of 40 middle school students to now serving 1,300 middle and high school students. BTM scholars are recruited in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and attend the program through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, taking part in a year-round, eight-year academic and social enrichment program. BTM has placed an emphasis on a holistic approach to learning, embedding a social and emotional learning approach throughout its programming.

### Recommendations

*to keep kids engaged in learning during COVID-19:*

- ▶ Stay focused on your mission. Think about what your program does best to meet the needs of your community and adapt those services to rise to these challenging times.
- ▶ Leverage the existing resources in your community. Reach out into your community and find partners who you can work with to expand services and offerings to the kids and families in your program. Museums, parks and recreation departments, libraries, local artists, and local businesses are a sampling of the potential partners that can help you offer additional programming or provide additional supports.



**Afterschool Alliance**

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