

# **A Collaborative Effort: Providing Out of School Time Programs in Philadelphia Public Schools**

Marleen Livingstone 18 June 2014

## **Introduction**

Methodist Services provides a wide range of high quality programs that support children and families across Philadelphia. One of our areas of expertise has long been providing educational programs: early childhood education, private kindergarten, summer camp and out of school time. Through a partnership with PHMC's (Public Health Management Corporation) 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) Grant and the City of Philadelphia's Department of Human Services' Out of School Time Project (DHS OST), Methodist Services has been able to enhance services offered in the community schools that house its state-licensed After School Care programs. The 21st CCLC grant supports out-of-school time (OST) programs designed to provide academic support for low-income youth who attend high-poverty, low-performing schools.

Methodist Services' OST programs focus on using visual art and dance activities to enhance the academic

experience. In addition to art, music and recreation, we offer career visioning, technical education, and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). This particular 21st CCLC funding relationship brought a new programmatic model to the OST sites aimed at integrating the arts with academic skills. Programming is exciting and fun and draws children and their families to return year after year.

With PHMC acting as an intermediary for Methodist Services, Methodist is providing OST programming at two 21st CCLC sites within Philadelphia public schools: John Welsh (K-8), in North Philadelphia, and Louis Farrell (K-8), in eastern North Philadelphia. As defined by the 21st CCLC Grant, these schools perform at low academic levels and serve low-income, high poverty youth. However, research suggests that OST programs can boost academic outcomes when properly implemented and coordinated with the schools they serve.

## **How Methodist Services is making an impact**

The poor performance of Philadelphia area schools is widely recognized as a chronic problem; but, within the John Welsh (Welsh) and Louis Farrell (Farrell) schools, Methodist Services has been a part of the solution. In addition to offering homework help, standard in most OST programs, arts-integrated Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a critical component of the work Methodist does in

these two schools. Children are engaged and enriched by their experience.

With PHMC acting as an intermediary, Methodist Services has been providing OST services at Welsh and Farrell since funding was awarded in January 2012, while focusing on an arts-based curriculum. Goals for this program include attendance improvement, increased academic achievement, improved social skills and the development of self-confidence.

Data collected so far has led us to be optimistic, but there is much more work to be done. Through a study published by Research for Action (RFA), a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization, outcomes for the 2012-13 year were summarized and have provided information that will allow Methodist to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the overall program, thereby advancing improvements.

Overall, the programming facilitated by Methodist Services met performance goal outcomes. These goals were that: 70% of regular program attendees (30+ days) who had an attendance issue in the previous school year will reduce their number of absences; 70% of regularly participating students will make achievement level gains or maintain a C or better in reading; and 70% of regularly participating students will make achievement level gains or maintain a C or better in math. Additionally, teachers reported improvements for a majority of OST participants

in overall academic performance, some academic behaviors, and social skills.

With these positive outcomes to build upon, Methodist will be working to integrate additional literacy skills into arts-oriented PBL projects in the upcoming year. Report data summaries show that OST participants were performing better in math than in literacy in 2012-13 and PSSA reading results did not meet established performance goals. This will be a focus for the 21st CCLC Methodist Services OST program in the coming school year.

## **It's not all about the numbers...**

Methodist Services' mission includes providing programs that enrich the lives of those we serve as they face the challenges of their everyday lives. This past year, our OST programs adopted the theme of social consciousness with subthemes of humanity, anti-bullying and environmental conservation. One of the projects completed in this vein was titled The Arts Saves! Broadway Dreams. This project introduced the students to the importance of being a humanitarian and how helping others can make an impact on those less fortunate and the world at large.

This project included the use of a teaching artist with a theater background, who helped the children in the program to produce a short performance piece focusing

on become more humane towards others, and the importance of being a humanitarian throughout the year and throughout one's lifetime. Ultimately, this innovative project-based learning activity brought together elements of art, Pennsylvania and Common Core math skills, and literacy standards. By infusing art and academics into a lesson of socio-emotional awareness, it is our hope that year three of our partnership with 21st CCLC will produce increased report card and standardized testing scores for the students involved, while enriching their lives and building their confidence.

## **What's next?**

Through our partnership with 21st CCLC we have continued the arts focused OST program at Welsh and Farrell. Partnerships with funders who are willing to make investments in our community make it possible to sustain this program. We look forward to continuing to provide high quality OST services through which we can offer low student to teacher ratios; provide homework and study time; make tutoring and guidance available; and provide special programs that include artistic and athletic activities.

## ***References***

***Research for Action (December 2013), 21st Century Community Learning Center Afterschool Program: Local Evaluation Report for Public Health***

**Management Corporation**

**Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance (June 25, 2013), *Advocacy Update: The Fight for PA Public Schools and Arts Education*, Alison Zeidman.**

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