Iowa 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Best Practices Site Visit Reporting

Completed by the Iowa Afterschool Alliance for the Iowa Department of Education

Grantee: Central Decatur School District

Cohort(s): VIII (2013-2016)

Site(s) Visited: North Elementary

Date(s) of Site Visit(s): July 31, 2014

Total # of 21CCLC Sites: 3

Total # of Students Served: Mormon Trail: 66 (2 of those summer only); North Elementary: 99 (11 of those summer only); South Elementary: 111 (all 111 summer only)

Total # of Staff (Full- and Part-Time): Mormon Trail: 9 school year, 8 summer; North Elementary: 7 school year, no data for summer; South Elementary: 17 school year, no data for summer. Outside of PPICS, it is estimated that up to 15 staff work during the summer program, in addition to two para professionals. During STEM week, 8 staff are present, and two para professionals.

Total # of Volunteers: 0

Grantee Profile

Objective: To increase the number of children in safe and enriching environments before and after school.

- Classification: Provide a Safe and Secure Environment

The Grantee Profile is not complete yet in PPICS.

Partnerships

This grant is a partnership between the Central Decatur and Mormon Trail school districts. In Central Decatur, both North and South Elementary are served. The elementary school free and reduced priced lunch rate is between 70 and 75 percent. This is the first year of programming, and so information has not been entered into PPICS yet for partnerships. During the site visit, Kerry Welch, Summer Program Coordinator, discussed current partnerships, which include the following:

- Local ISU Extension; programming support;
- Local Hy-Vee store; materials for STEM activities ;

- Leon Public Library; materials for student prizes;
- Fairgrounds; facilities for programming;
- Graceland University; programming support and facilities;
- Local Chiropractor; physical activity programming; and
- AmeriCorp; staffing.

Site Visit Summary

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance visited North Elementary to observe the summer program in Central Decatur on January 31, 2014. Kerry Welch, Summer Program Coordinator, provided the program summary during the site visit and Tricia Applegate, the Afterschool Program Coordinator, was also available for questions during the visit.

This week was the last week of programming, and the focus of the week was STEM. Prior to STEM week, the program ran the entire month of June, with a focus on reading and math. The overall summer attendance from both North and South Elementary Schools in the Central Decatur School District is about 90 students per day. The STEM Camp Week had an actual attendance of about 45 students. Attendance is open to all students in the district, and sign-up information is distributed and completed on a monthly basis; therefore, the attendance can vary month to month during the school year. Teachers identify at risk or low achieving students and they make phone calls to invite them; otherwise, attendance is also open and available to students who want to join or students whose parents want them to join. During the school year, grades 3 to 6 are served before and after school at North Elementary (averaging about 30 kids per day), and Grades K to 2 are served at South Elementary (averaging 60-70 kids per day).

In the summer, the day begins at 8:00 a.m. with breakfast; followed by activities between 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. During this time, students rotate every 30 minutes from the High School Commons area to the North Elementary School and complete activities in various Centers. Recess begins at 10:30 a.m., followed by lunch at 11, and students are picked up around 11:30 a.m. Transportation is provided to outlying towns, as there are four different towns from which the students feed into this program. The district is committed to hiring based on student need, and there is no cap on attendance. Each room has one certified teacher, as well as a para professional.

The program was observed during the entire morning portion. The curriculum used during this “STEM week” was “Engineering is Everywhere,” and various STEM activities were observed. One group, or “center,” was working on building structures and discussing different types of engineering. Their hands-on activity involved the use of cups in building structures, and various structures were observed. The tools are a mystery each day, and new goals are presented. For example, if a beanie baby can survive on the structure for 10 seconds, then the students get a prize. They also receive a minimum and maximum on height and other size requirements, but the students are left to explore the rest on their own. They used cups and marshmallows during this observation, and were encouraged to answer questions such as, why index cards are important in the structure of the building.

A second center had students working on the “Trash-built regatta,” which involved students bringing home “trash” from home, which also focused their attention on how much trash they generate in their own homes. Then, the students recycled that material, and built boats, using STEM concepts. At the end of the week, they will go to the local pool and race the boats. Students were excited and several brought their boats over to show.

Another group had been focusing on the brain and the science behind the brain, as well as the importance of helmets. In earlier activities in the week, they analyzed and discussed different types of helmets and built brains, also using recycled materials. Then, during the site visit, an activity was observed in which the students built “helmets” for the brains they had built. They utilized eggs, in place of the brains, because if an egg broke, that meant their helmet was not effective. Students were observed making the helmets and were all highly involved in the activity. At the conclusion of the activity, a facilitator dropped each “helmet” from a ladder, and the students guessed whether or not an egg would break, and why.

A group of students was also observed doing math activities on iPads. This involved the “Everyday Math” curriculum, which is also used during the school year, so the students have familiarity with the curriculum. By the end of the week, all students had gotten to participate in all of these activities.

For STEM Camp, the K-6 grade students do not split up into groups based on grade-level; rather, they are mixed up among grade levels. Kerry reflects that this has worked well, because they have found that the older students are eager to help the younger students, but the younger students are also able to help the older students in some activities. This exposes the younger students to more vocabulary among the older students, and the older students are also aided in some skills and activities where the younger students excel.

Parent support is necessary in the community because the town has only home daycare providers, and once the children turn 6, they do not have anywhere to go while their parents are at work. Because of this, the out-of-school time program has been crucial in providing the support needed. The program hosts a family night, with either a math or reading theme, once per month. The family receives a free book and math games are taught to the parents that their kids are playing, so that the parents understand and are able to engage their kids, as well. IPTV has also come to upload applications, which would otherwise be paid applications, onto parents’ electronic devices, so that they can engage in activities with their kids.

Best Practice	Key Points & Comments
STEM and Physical Literacy	Both STEM and physical literacy have been highlighted in this out-of-school time program and staff has been introduced to the importance of both. The program has also done a great job utilizing available resources; for example, using recycled materials for STEM activities.
Staff and School-Day Alignment	Staff is highly committed to out-of-school time programming and they revamp lessons each night, depending on student skills and interests. Additionally, alignment with the school day is emphasized, and the methodology and language from the school day carries over into the out-of-school time space. Many of the staff are also school-day teachers.
Support Needed	**Iowa Afterschool Alliance/Iowa Department of Education Next Steps**
Professional Development	It was expressed that professional development is needed for staff. A good curriculum is needed for STEM, as well as general orientation training for staff, especially para professionals. Bringing professional development in is difficult, as the district is isolated geographically, and resource-wise.