



***promising
afterschool practices***

*a showcase of innovative, creative and
successful afterschool programs*

Contents

- 1 Letter from Mark Valli,**
President & CEO of New Jersey After 3
- 2 Introduction**
 - Promising Practices:**
 - 4 Expressions Through Cartooning**
 - 6 Family Blossoms**
 - 8 Go Getters Mentoring Program**
 - 10 Nurturing Environmental Awareness: Green Club**
 - 12 Junior Leadership in Training**
 - 14 Kids to Kids International**
 - 16 Monarchs Rule!**
 - 18 Hands-on Learning with Sign Language**
- 20 Promising Practices Program Tips**
- 21 Notes**

Welcome to New Jersey After 3's Fourth Annual Promising Afterschool Practices Showcase.

The *Promising Practices* program is part of our overall Training and Technical Assistance Initiative, through which *New Jersey After 3* offers a combination of offsite and onsite training and professional development opportunities. We believe these efforts lead to high-quality afterschool programs that benefit children and families in four main areas:

- **Keep Kids Safe** *New Jersey After 3* programs create a safe, structured and supervised environment; which is a healthy alternative to drugs, alcohol and the influence of gangs during the most dangerous hours for juveniles, 3:00-6:00 p.m.
- **Improve Student Achievement** *New Jersey After 3* programs expand learning time through homework help, basic skills development and a variety of fun learning activities that prepare kids for success in school, college and the 21st century workforce.
- **Promote Positive Youth Development** *New Jersey After 3* programs immerse additional caring adult role models in the lives of students and provide experiences that support the development of the entire child; shaping healthier kids who will become the community leaders of tomorrow.
- **Support Working Families** *New Jersey After 3* programs support working families by offering affordable, safe and engaging environments afterschool; providing peace of mind for parents and guardians who know their kids are in great hands.

Through *Promising Practices*, *New Jersey After 3* is drawing upon knowledge amassed by forty-five community based organizations, one hundred and two public schools and countless individuals, who together, have an extraordinary amount of experience in managing high-quality, youth-enriching afterschool programs.

The goals of the *Promising Practices Competition and Showcase* are to promote sustainability in the field of afterschool and to develop high-quality afterschool programs. By sharing practices that have worked well across the *New Jersey After 3* network, *New Jersey After 3* is building a collection of successful strategies and activities that any afterschool program can adapt.

We hope you find the practices included here relevant to your work. We encourage you to call the Site Coordinators listed if you want to learn more details about a particular practice. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Mark Valli
President & CEO,
New Jersey After 3, Inc.

Introduction



Thomas E. Franklin

New Jersey After 3

New Jersey After 3 is a private, non-profit corporation dedicated to expanding and improving afterschool programming for New Jersey's kids. Its vision is to ensure that all New Jersey children will have the opportunity to participate in high-quality, comprehensive, structured, supervised and enriching afterschool activities. *New Jersey After 3* was formed as a public-private partnership to maximize the resources available to afterschool programs for New Jersey kids. *New Jersey After 3* funds an extensive network of over 40 non-profit-run, school-based afterschool programs state-wide. Currently those programs serve almost 14,000 children in more than 100 public schools throughout the state.

What is a Promising Practice?

A *Promising Practice* is a system, process, or activity in a program that works and leads to good results. It is something that would work in other programs, if only they were aware about it. *Promising Practices* capture some of the most innovative, creative and successful ways that programs serve youth.

This publication provides a selection of the strong, effective and replicable practices that are currently being utilized in *New Jersey After 3* afterschool programs. By sharing these practices, *New Jersey After 3* hopes to assist programs in incorporating approaches and strategies that have been already field tested and refined by their peers, leading to an expansion of quality services throughout the network. These services, in turn, should fulfill the needs of today's young people.



Thomas E. Franklin

How can Promising Practices help you?

Promising Practices can help afterschool programs in two distinct ways. First, by examining its structure to see which activities could be considered *Promising Practices*, a program engages in a reflection process that can help it define its strengths and weaknesses and set program priorities. Once programs discover why something works, they can leverage that strength and channel it into other activities. Conversely, programs can see what does not work, and take steps to improve it. Second, by learning about other programs' *Promising Practices*, a program can adapt activities or processes that are proven to work, rather than create them entirely from scratch. Furthermore, sharing *Promising Practices* among programs promotes community-wide improvement and offers the opportunity for recognition.

New Jersey After 3's Selection Process

The practices included in this publication were submitted by *New Jersey After 3* Site Coordinators as part of a *Promising Practices Annual Competition* facilitated by *New Jersey After 3* and the National Institute on Out-of-School Time. A panel of reviewers read and discussed more than 20 submissions addressing a wide variety of program activities and strategies. Eight practices were selected for further review. This included a verification site visit from staff at the National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Finalists demonstrated their practice in action or some representation of their practice as part of the site visit. Each practice summary in this book contains a description of the practice and strategies for implementing the practice. We have also included four additional activities as Program Tips, which may also prove to be helpful to those seeking to develop high-quality afterschool programs.

Expressions Through Cartooning

K.E.E.P., Inc.
Cedar Mountain Primary School
Vernon, New Jersey

Program Content: Arts, Literacy, Math, Science

Partners

K.E.E.P., Inc. (Kids Educational Enrichment Program) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing affordable and quality childcare to meet families' needs. Having offered childcare services throughout Sussex County for over 85 years, K.E.E.P. provides structured and unstructured program activities for children between the ages of six weeks and 12 years. In addition to offering homework time, arts and crafts and special projects, K.E.E.P. provides a special conflict resolution program at all of its sites.

Cedar Mountain Primary School is one of three primary schools in the Vernon Township public school district. There are 419 children in grades 2–4 who are enrolled at the school. The curriculum emphasizes acquisition of basic skills through an integrated language arts approach in conjunction with enrichment activities. The goal of the school is to motivate, inspire and enlighten children who are beginning their educational journey.

Program Enrollment: 125 (Grades 2–4)

Practice Description

Children in Cedar Mountain's afterschool program express their thoughts through cartoon art. Every day, twelve children meet for forty-five minutes to work on their cartoons with a drawing instructor. They learn aspects of the art of cartooning such as creating characters and determining basic details, backgrounds, coloring and props. The instructor teaches cartooning in a sequence of simple steps, starting with showing children how to change a basic shape (circle, square, heart, or rectangle) into a face by erasing a few lines and adding others. The children work on this first step until they create a satisfactory face for their first character. Then

the instructor gives them examples of different eyes, noses and mouths to show them how to create expressions by changing facial features. The simple process of beginning with basic shapes, with which everyone is familiar, enables first-time cartoonists to create whatever lighthearted and lovable characters they might imagine.

The next step in the process is for children to learn how to depict a variety of personalities by changing just a few details. The idea is to take one cartoon character and transform it into many characters.

This step helps children understand how verbal and visual features combine to convey a specific message in a cartoon. Though some children demonstrate more advanced drawing skills than others, each child brings a special quality to the activity such as great story ideas or engaging dialogue. Children are encouraged to develop unique creations that are all their own.

Once children have developed their characters, they create a story. The instructor asks them to think of an event or a person in their lives as inspiration for their stories, or to let their imaginations take over. The children use words and images to create a cartoon of six to eight frames.

Students are enthusiastic about this activity which was added to the program curriculum at the beginning of the 2008 school year. They have shown growing confidence in their creative abilities. Cartooning has given them a means to express the ideas may be important to them or to reflect on what is going on in their lives. Staff find that cartooning has helped to boost student self-esteem, and has brought a new level of excitement to the program. Several of the children continue cartoon drawing at home and have brought library books about cartooning to school.





Cartooning can be a great tool for helping children who struggle with social issues by providing them with an outlet to express what they are thinking and feeling.

Rationale for the Practice

Cartooning was added to the program curriculum to fill the need for a new and exciting learning activity for program participants. The afterschool program was fortunate to find an afterschool program instructor with a passion to teach drawing. Since the inception of the activity, the children have shown confidence in their ability to be creative and to express themselves through art. Children demonstrate a sense of pride in their work. Cartooning can be a great tool for helping children who struggle with social issues by providing them with an outlet to express what they are thinking and feeling. In addition, cartooning is an inexpensive and accessible way to nurture children's imaginations and to give them the confidence to express the stories that matter to them.

Tips for Adaptation

Brainstorming: Help children develop their creative side by having them share ideas with one another in the early stages of cartoon development.

Simplicity: Get children started with drawing by allowing them to doodle. Show them simple drawing techniques. A fun way to help them with facial expressions is to provide a mirror and have them make faces they can then copy.

Getting Started: All you need is paper, pencils, erasers and an enthusiastic staff member with drawing skills.

Resources: Many useful web resources review cartooning techniques and offer handouts and other resources, including:

- Elementary Themes: Cartooning,
www.cdli.ca/CITE/cartooning.htm
- AHC Arts and Crafts,
www.artistshelpingchildren.org/howtodraw.html
- Activity TV Cartooning,
www.activitytv.com/cartooning-for-kids
- Make Your Own Comic Book,
www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/books/comicbook/

Contact Information

K.E.E.P., Inc.
11 Park Lake Road
Sparta, New Jersey 07871
Phone: (973) 764-2900 x6529
Contact: Linda Nasarow, lnasarow@vtsd.com

Family Blossoms

**Educational Information and Resource Center (EIRC)
Cold Springs Elementary School
Gloucester City, New Jersey**

Program Content: *Family, School & Community Relationships*

Partners

The Educational Information & Resource Center (EIRC) is a public agency that provides education-related programs and services to parents, schools, communities, nonprofit organizations and private businesses in thirty-six states and eight countries outside of the U.S. EIRC offers many resources including programs in special education and for the gifted, academic support, childcare, child assault prevention and teacher in-service training.

Cold Springs Elementary School serves children in pre-K through grade 3, with an enrollment of approximately 800 children. Cold Springs Elementary is dedicated to helping children reach their full potential. The school follows the district's holistic approach to helping children develop as socially responsible citizens by emphasizing basic learning skills and mastery in all academic areas, and by providing a structure that encourages independent thinking in all grade levels.

Program Enrollment: 238 (Grades K–3)

Practice Description

Cold Springs Elementary School Afterschool program staff initiated a second-grade science club four years ago. That club recently expanded to include a gardening and learning activity called Family Blossoms. The club meets year-round for 20–30 minutes, two or three times a week. The yearlong Family Blossom curriculum includes the life cycle of plants, weather and the soil conditions needed for plant growth. Additionally, children learn about root systems and how plants receive their nourishment, which leads into lessons on human nutrition as well.

The Family Blossom activity begins in the fall. This is a great time not only to observe plant decomposition but also to remove dead flower heads and store them for spring planting. Once they have



planted the seeds in spring, the children nurture and observe the seedlings, monitor the temperatures for optimal growth and check moisture levels using a rain gauge. When plants fail to thrive, the children can dissect them to see if they can find what went wrong. Afterschool staff members show children how to re-purpose their lunch milk cartons as planters for the seedlings.

In late spring, the children plan when and where to start planting in the school courtyard garden. They calculate the dimensions of the garden and research what plants can grow together. Parents help with the design of the garden and the calculations. Cultivating the outdoor garden is a spring event in which staff, families and children work together to clear the garden of winter debris and prepare the soil for planting. The children continue nurturing and caring for the garden throughout the spring.

Go Getters Mentoring Program

The Children's Home Society of New Jersey
Grace A. Dunn Middle School
Trenton, New Jersey

Program Content: *Family, School & Community Relationships*

Partners:

Founded in 1894, **The Children's Home Society of New Jersey (CHS)** is a nonprofit organization that helps at-risk infants, children, youth and families achieve their potential. CHS protects abused or neglected infants and children, strengthens families and strives to create stable, permanent and loving homes. CHS provides many kinds of services including childcare, community and neighborhood-based services, foster care, pre and post-natal care, school-based youth services, child welfare and early childhood and parenting services.

The mission of **Grace A. Dunn Middle School** is to provide students with a high-quality instructional program that will equip them with the skills to make significant gains in academic performance. The school is also dedicated to improving the education of its students by placing emphasis on the diversity of the school community. It seeks to establish a strong partnership among the school, parents and the community. Dunn Middle School enrolls approximately 680 students in grades 6–8.

Program Enrollment: 200 (Grades 6–8)

Practice Description

High school students mentor younger students at the afterschool program at Dunn Middle School. The Go Getters, as the high school peer mentors are called, are alumni of Dunn Middle School and its afterschool program. A number of youth from the afterschool program, considered at-risk, are selected to be mentored.

Go Getters volunteer five days a week from 3:30–6:00 p.m. They have a snack with their mentee before moving on to help with homework and other activities.

Generally, Go Getters choose their mentees. For the first week of each trimester, mentors observe prospective mentees. The mentors then select the student with whom they would like to build a relationship. Although the program director has the final say in mentoring matches, Go Getters generally choose the students who are experiencing challenges similar to the ones they faced when they were in middle school. Since a Go Getter mentors a different student in each trimester, each Go Getter mentors three youth during the school year. In addition, a Go Getter has the opportunity to interact with other afterschool program youth through daily program activities and special events.

Go Getters are screened for appropriate behaviors and skill sets. They must maintain acceptable school attendance and keep their grades up. Before they begin mentoring, they receive training in peer-to-peer intervention. Each Go Getter mentor-mentee pair meets weekly with the program director to discuss the week's activities. In addition, Go Getters participate in the youth advisory board; they help choose new program offerings and suggest modifications to existing activities. Go Getters are not paid a stipend, but they do receive gift cards and can participate in the afterschool program's field trips. The program director sends a letter to the high school principal to acknowledge the community service of each Go Getter.

The program has had a positive impact on both the Go Getters and the youth they mentor. Mentees have demonstrated improved behaviors and a greater desire to succeed at school. Mentoring helps

The program has had a positive impact on both the Go Getters and the youth they mentor.



Go Getters develop commitment to and ownership of the school and the afterschool program. An unexpected positive outcome of volunteering in the program has been that some Go Getters participated in other service activities outside of the program, such as fundraising walks and book drives.

Rationale for the Practice

The Go Getter program fulfills a need for high school students who were looking to engage in an afterschool activity. The program director noticed that many graduates of Dunn Middle School and the afterschool program were returning to “hang out.” Low high school budgets reduced afterschool opportunities for students to competitive athletics and little else. The practice of using graduates of the school in the afterschool program as mentors and assistants has proven to be very successful.

Tips for Adaptation

Selection Process: A careful selection process is essential. Site coordinators should choose a diverse set of students who demonstrate respectful behavior and understand the mission of the afterschool

program. Consider including an interview with follow-up recommendations as part of the selection process.

Schedules: Help prospective mentors achieve success in their role by developing a detailed schedule specifying tasks and responsibilities.

On-the-Job Training: Mistakes are an expected part of authentic learning. Model the leadership skills you want volunteer mentors to learn by correcting mistakes in a positive way.

Appreciation: Let mentors know that you appreciate them and their time. Most importantly, thank them every day. Consider giving periodic incentives such as gift cards.

Contact Information

The Children’s Home Society of New Jersey
635 South Clinton Avenue
Trenton, New Jersey 08611
Phone: (609) 695-6274
Contact: Louise McCants-Shabazz, lshabazz@chsofnj.org

Nurturing Environmental Awareness: Green Club

Jewish Family Service of Bergen County
Cliffside Park School #4
Cliffside Park, New Jersey

Program Content: Arts, Literacy, Math, Science

Partners

The mission of **Jewish Family Service of Bergen County** is to strengthen and preserve the well-being of individuals and families and to help them meet the challenges and changes of life by providing quality human services and professional counseling. Jewish Family Service serves more than 3,000 people who live in Bergen County and northern Hudson County. Jewish Family Service enhances the welfare and healthy development of children through parent and child guidance and education, school outreach and consultation, a camp scholarship program and Club Ed, its afterschool enrichment program at Cliffside Park schools.

Cliffside Park School #4 is an elementary school with an enrollment of approximately 320 students in grades 1–6. Families of students attending School #4 have emigrated from more than twenty different countries. A large proportion of Cliffside Park's elementary-age special education students attend School #4. The school's academic program includes a balanced literacy approach that engages students in guided reading and in readers' and writers' workshops. In addition to the core academic program, students receive weekly instruction in computer skills, art, physical education, vocal music, library skills, band and Spanish.

Program Enrollment: 191 (Grades 1–6)

Practice Description

Green Club is an environmental awareness and action curriculum for children in grades 1–4. It was developed for use at Club Ed, the afterschool program at Cliffside Park School #4, by an AmeriCorps volunteer working at Club Ed through Jewish Family Service of Bergen County. Lessons in the Green Club curriculum, which has been in place at Club Ed since September 2008, utilize arts and crafts, computers and video presentations for instruction.

One afternoon a week for one hour following homework time, 15–20 children meet in a classroom for Green Club. The session begins with a recap of previous activities and an introduction to the activity topic of the day. Activity topics include school clean-up, pollution effects, creating a terrarium, junk picture frames and making recycled paper. Downloaded videos from the Planet Green show *Stuff Happens* (<http://planetgreen.discovery.com/tv/stuff-happens>) form part of the instructional content. Bill Nye the Science Guy, TV's science educator, hosts such episodes as "Stuff Happens: Garage" and "Stuff Happens: Backyard." Typically, each session ends with reflections on what children learned during the activity and by making connections to the environment and the sustainability of the planet. Some activities stretch over the course of several sessions.

Staff report that students participating in the Green Club have had a positive experience with the curriculum. They have become more aware of their surrounding environment and the importance of "going green." One student said, "Since we have been doing Green Club, every time my family goes somewhere, I make my mom stop because I want to pick up the trash that people didn't throw in the garbage can but left on the ground. We know how important earth is." Students also find connections between their Green Club activities and their classroom science work. For instance, one student made a link between class studies on the food chain and Green Club learning about the interdependence of populations.

Rationale for the Practice

Concerns about global warming, climate change, pollution, endangered animals and decreasing natural resources have prompted youth programs to engage youth in preserving the environment. Green Club gives children the opportunity to learn useful and easy ways to help save the environment. They also create artifacts to make their immediate environment more beautiful. Students learn about human effects on the environment and show off their creativity in "green" arts and action projects.



“Since we have been doing Green Club, every time my family goes somewhere, I make my mom stop because I want to pick up the trash that people didn’t throw in the garbage can but left on the ground. We know how important earth is.”

— Green Club Student

Tips for Adaptation

Web Resources: Many resources for “going green” are available on the web:

- Save the Rainforest, www.savetherainforest.org/savetherainforest_007.htm
- The Importance of the Rainforest, www.atozteacherstuff.com/pages/395.shtml
- You Can Help the Environment, <http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/action/way04.html>
- Kids’ Web Classroom: Environments, Habitats and Ecosystems, www.keystone.fi.edu/cc_ehe/ehkids.shtml
- Building Your Compost Pile, <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/homecompost/building.html>
- EPA Environmental Kids Club, www.epa.gov/kids/garbage.htm
- Learning about Rainforests, www.srl.caltech.edu/personnel/krubal/rainforest/Edit560s6/www/facts.html

Supplies: Items from nature or recycling coloring books make good resources for activities. Students enjoy including their hand-colored pictures in nature collages, and the pictures themselves are a nice “take home.”

Flexible Curriculum: Schedule activities based on the weather and access to materials. Also, you may want to coordinate activities with local or national events such as Earth Day, Arbor Day, school initiatives, or local recycling events. Plan to spend 20–30 minutes of prep time for each activity.

School Connection: Activities can be more meaningful when they connect to the school building. For example, trash pick-up at the school may help children take more responsibility for their school environment, promote personal stewardship and allow children to serve as peer role models.

Contact Information

Jewish Family Service of Bergen County
1485 Teaneck Road
Teaneck, New Jersey 07666
(201) 837-9090
Contact: Suad Gacham, suadg@jfsbergen.org

Junior Leadership in Training

**Vacamas Programs for Youth
McKinley Elementary School
Newark, New Jersey**

Program Content: Arts, Literacy, Math, Science

Partners

Vacamas Programs for Youth, a nonprofit organization founded in 1924, is committed to enabling children of low-income families in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area to enjoy positive experiences. Over 5,000 youngsters benefit each year from Vacamas services, including in-school and community-based interventions that are combined with life-changing experiential weekend trips.

McKinley Elementary School believes that every child possesses talents, abilities and the genius to excel. The entire school community is committed to ensuring that each child meets and exceeds his or her social, emotional and academic potential. With the help of enriching experiences, a nurturing and wholesome environment, and innovative instructional practices, all youth can learn.

Program Enrollment: 40 (Grades 5–8)

Practice Description

Select children in the sixth through eighth grades participate in Junior Leadership Training (JLT) sessions in McKinley's afterschool program. Each week, two groups of twenty youth participate for ninety minutes in an open discussion of current news and school events. In a town meeting format, the facilitator introduces a discussion topic and asks for feedback from the group. Children become skilled at problem-solving while developing their communication skills. Discussion topics have included alternatives to violence, effective leadership, substance use, media influences and domestic violence.

JLT participants are invited by program leaders, who distribute flyers explaining the program. Enrollment is voluntary but requires parental consent. Once enrolled, participants sign a contract and agree to uphold attendance and participation guidelines developed by the group.

Weekly meetings begin with a warm-up activity such as a name game, memory game, human knot or other movement game. Facilitators set the debate rules, keeping in mind that the group may take the topic to a new direction. Once the topic is introduced, youth actively participate in an open discussion/informal debate. Next, they break into small-group sessions, lasting 30–40 minutes, to discuss hypothetical scenarios. Each group keeps a written account of their discussion, including positive and negative speaking points, and chooses a representative to present their findings back to the larger group. Additionally, all students write a one-page summary in their diaries highlighting the things they learned.

Teachers, parents and school administrators describe positive changes in JLT participants' work ethic and attitudes toward school. They attribute improved grades and better attention to homework assignments to participation in JLT. Participating youth also give back to the school by completing a community service-learning project, such as mentoring children in the lower grades in reading.

JLT requires no special equipment or expertise beyond the facilitation skills most afterschool practitioners already possess, so it's an inexpensive program with a big impact. JLT educates and encourages youth to become leaders in their school, in their community and throughout their lives. JLT facilitators hope that through group discussion, community projects, guest speakers and academic reinforcement, participants will become positive thinkers and will make good choices for their future lives and careers.

Rationale for the Practice

The afterschool staff originally developed JLT in response to questions youth raised during the 2008 presidential primaries. The children were drawn in by the media's attention to the election, and its intersecting issues of leadership, race and gender. The program director took this opportunity to develop a forum where youth could explore these issues and practice academic skills. Additionally,



Thomas E. Franklin

the program director sought ways to engage older youth in the afterschool program and stimulate their thinking. Reduced funding meant that the afterschool program was limited in choices it could provide after homework.

Tips for Adaptation

Schedule and Curriculum: Design a current events/news topical curriculum that fosters a robust discussion. Include the completion of a community service-learning project as part of the curriculum. It is helpful if the facilitator has some experience in debate. See www.urbandebate.org for resources.

Flexibility: While having a schedule is great, some topics may take longer to complete as students find certain areas more interesting or challenging than others. Be prepared to allow additional time for group discussions when necessary.

Youth Ownership: Allow participants to be heard. As much as possible, let them lead discussions. Consider their developmental level and maturity when providing feedback. Think about how to strike a balance between open discussion and participants' sense of emotional safety.

Proper Space: The space in which meetings take place is essential to the success of the program. Provide a space that allows youth to move around so they can work together in small groups.

Contact Information

Vacamas Programs for Youth
256 Macopin Road
West Milford, New Jersey 07480
Phone: (973) 838-1394
Contact: Kizzy Neat-Coley, campmckinley@campvacamas.org

The afterschool staff developed JLT in response to questions youth raised during the 2008 presidential primaries... The program director took this opportunity to develop a forum where youth could explore these issues and practice academic skills.



Kids to Kids International

**Jewish Family Service of Central New Jersey
Linden School #1, 4 and 5
Linden, New Jersey**

Program Content: Arts, Literacy, Math, Science

Partners

Jewish Family Service of Central New Jersey is a not-for-profit multipurpose social service agency that serves communities in central New Jersey. Programs include individual and family counseling, home healthcare services, afterschool programs and school-based counseling services. The mission of Jewish Family Service is to strengthen and preserve the well-being of individuals and families by offering quality social services and emergency assistance coupled with human compassion.

Linden Public School #1, 4 & 5 are committed to providing an excellent, diverse educational program in a supportive and nurturing environment. Approximately 360 students in grades K–5 are enrolled. These schools offer a broad variety of academic programs and services, as well as an expanding number of activities, service clubs, performance groups and athletic programs. Students are encouraged to develop an appreciation for learning, a healthy self-image and respect for self and others. All three schools strive to provide a developmentally rich program that serves as a bridge on the journey from elementary school to high school.

Program Enrollment: 120 (Grades K–5)

Practice Description

In the Kids to Kids International website (www.ktki.org), afterschool program staff at School #1 discovered a creative way to help program youth learn about another culture's customs, food and language. Kids to Kids International is a nonprofit educational program that sends student-created picture books and

educational supplies to war-torn countries, developing nations, disaster areas and refugee camps where children generally do not have access to books. Kids to Kids International provides an online manual that includes documents facilitators need to run the program: guidelines for picture book development, photo releases, participation requirements, and instructions for packing and mailing instructions. There is a \$100 participation fee per agency.



Children in the afterschool program participated in this project for five weekly one-hour sessions. In preparation for creating picture books to give to children in rural China, children learned about their target audience by studying China's geography, culture and traditions.

Students then worked in small groups to create their books. They wrote about a wide range of topics including farm animals, shapes, the alphabet and colors. They drew and colored pictures to illustrate their sentences. The back page of each book is the Authors' Page, where children introduced themselves to their readers by writing a few facts about their lives and interests. Personalizing the books helped the student creators connect with children who would receive their books. In the process of

developing their themes as a group, the children not only practiced their writing and artistic skills but also honed the "soft" skills of compromise and cooperation.

Throughout the process, staff edited text and helped with design and layout. Once completed, the books were laminated and sent to China along with photos of the children working on the books and some donated school supplies. A disposable camera was included so photos could be taken of the Chinese children receiving the books and supplies.



Image courtesy of www.ktki.org

A culminating event to celebrate the children's work was held during the week of the Chinese New Year. The students read stories about the Chinese New Year, created costumes and made lanterns out of construction paper to hang from the ceiling. The book-makers performed a Chinese New Year skit for other students in the afterschool program. Following the skit, the students enjoyed Chinese noodles and fortune cookies. Each student received a Chinese fan as a memento. The project generated enough enthusiasm and excitement to prompt program leaders to plan to repeat it next year.

Rationale for the Practice

Afterschool program staff found the Kids to Kids International activity to be an innovative way to help children learn the value of giving to others less fortunate than themselves. The activity raises awareness of different cultures and offers ways for children to reach out in friendship to children in other parts of the world. The children learned the importance of accepting cultures that are different from their own and experienced the intrinsic rewards of community service.

Tips for Adaptation

Follow Guidelines: Kids to Kids International accepts only picture books that have been developed according to their guidelines, so be sure to follow the organization's rules.

Work with Older Children: Although any age group can participate, children eight years and older seemed to be the most successful in creating the picture books. These older children needed less guidance and were able to benefit more fully from the service-learning component of the project.

Spelling and Grammar Count: Edit the children's work as you go along; you'll save time at the end. It's a good idea to have children do their initial work in pencil.

Smile for the Camera: Document the process by taking pictures of the children working on the books. The children who receive the books will have fun looking at the pictures of the authors and the book development process.

Celebrate: Learn about the country to which you are sending the books. When the books are completed, adapt celebration practices from that culture.

Contact Information

Jewish Family Service of Central New Jersey
655 Westfield Avenue
Elizabeth, New Jersey 07208
Phone: (908) 925-0846
Contact: Robert Platt, rplatt@linden.k12.nj.us

Monarchs Rule!

**Boys and Girls Club of Gloucester County
Billingsport Elementary School
Paulsboro, New Jersey**

Program Content: Arts, Literacy, Math, Science



Partners

The mission of the **Boys and Girls Club of Gloucester County** is to enable all young people to reach their full potential as productive, responsible and caring citizens. The Boys and Girls Club offers activities and programs that enhance self-esteem, instill good character traits, develop positive relationships, encourage education and career exploration and promote healthy living.

Billingsport Elementary School is a pre-kindergarten through second grade elementary school with an enrollment of approximately 365 students. The school's mission is to provide all students with the educational opportunities necessary to assist them in attaining their full potential. The school offers a responsive community-based school experience that fosters respect among all people. The expectation of the school is that all students will achieve the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards at every grade level.

Program Enrollment: 120 (Grade K–3)

Practice Description

In September and early October 2008, children at the Billingsport afterschool program participated in a six-week program of observing and nurturing the metamorphosis of monarch butterflies. Meeting for one hour each week, the children learned to feed, handle and release the butterflies. They studied migration patterns and seasonal habitats through readings, activities, journal writing and observation. Following the geographic path of the butterflies from Canada through the United States to Mexico, the children learned about these cultures, lands and peoples.

The curriculum offers opportunities for poetry writing, arts and crafts activities and drama; for instance, children acted out the “dance of the butterfly.” The children also learned about the interconnectedness of all life and the delicate balance by which our planet sustains every living thing.



Staff training to facilitate the program is offered through EIRC Technology Services. EIRC (*Educational Information and Resource Center*) hosts the Monarch Teacher Network (www.monarchteachernetwork.org), a growing network of pre-K–12 teachers who have been trained to use monarch butterflies to teach a variety of concepts and skills. The training session takes place over three days and costs approximately \$100. Staff training includes instruction on collecting eggs and monarch larva from milkweed found along roadsides and fields. The training fee includes seeds, curriculum, videos and two netted cages.

Handling and caring for the butterflies fostered a cooperative spirit, confidence and competence among the children. The director noted that many of the children who were initially afraid of insects overcame their fear so that they could touch the larvae and allow the butterflies to land on their faces and hands. Because butterflies are delicate creatures, children learned to be gentle and patient with the butterflies, but also with each other. Many children became adept at handling and feeding the butterflies. They can carry this positive attitude toward their own competencies beyond the afterschool program and the school, into all aspects of their daily lives.



The program is a wonderful learning tool that can improve classroom/team behavior. The program director found that working together for a common goal helped foster trust among the children and staff.

Rationale for the Practice

The Site Director was looking for an activity that aligns with the Boys and Girls Club philosophy:

- Belonging: *everything is interrelated and belongs to a group*
- Usefulness: *everything depends on something*
- Influence: *everything is influenced by what we say or do*
- Competence: *overcoming challenges to achieve success*

The monarch butterfly program presented an opportunity to expose children to many of today's social issues that include going green, pollution, deforestation and extinction, and to teach students about peoples, cultures and the land. The children could touch, feel and see that the ecosystem is delicate, learning that everything on earth has a place and a purpose.

Curriculum learning outcomes drawn from the New Jersey Core Content Standards include: 1) keeping records that describe observations; 2) explaining how organisms interact with other components of an ecosystem; 3) using maps, charts and the basic tools of geography; 4) engaging in activities that employ questioning and authentic activities; and 5) experimenting with the use of voice and movement in creative drama and storytelling.

Tips for Adaptation

Program Size: For the first experience, start with a small group of children. Follow the training manual. As you gain knowledge, you can expand the program.

Staff Training: A designated staff member must participate in the formal monarch butterfly training workshop. These programs fill up quickly, so plan ahead. Then all involved staff should be trained before starting the program.

Resources: Plan ahead for the space in which you will conduct the program activities. Make arrangements to have the butterflies cared for over the weekends. (They tend to emerge during the morning hours.) Materials include plastic containers, a small amount of netting, scissors and paper towels.

Calendar: Plan the timing of activities carefully. By early October the butterflies should be on their way to Mexico for the winter. The transition from egg to adult takes about ten days. Adult butterflies should be kept no more than ten days.

Contact Information

Boys and Girls Club of Gloucester County
 15 East High Street
 Glassboro, New Jersey 08028
 (856) 423-9322
 Contact: Jeannette Hinton-Suiter, jsuiter@gcbc.org



Hands-on Learning with Sign Language

**Bergen Family Center
Grieco Elementary School
Englewood, New Jersey**

Program Content: Arts, Literacy, Math, Science

Partners

Bergen Family Center, founded in 1898, is Bergen County's oldest continuously operating family service agency. Bergen Family Center offers multiple educational and recreational programs for children from 10 months to 11 years. Services include daycare, preschool and afterschool programming. Now in its 110th year, Bergen Family Center supports, strengthens and enriches family life through innovative programs and quality services.

Grieco Elementary School opened in January 2009. While in transition to becoming an elementary school for grades 1–3, Grieco Elementary is currently serving approximately 390 students in grades 2–4. Grieco Elementary School is dedicated to meeting the district mission of achievement for all students. The administration and staff of Grieco make priorities of working together and of using data and research-based practices to promote improvement.

Program Enrollment: 144 (Grades 2–3)

Practice Description

Children at the Grieco Elementary School afterschool program are enthusiastically learning to express their thoughts by moving their hands, bodies and faces—that is, they are learning American Sign Language (ASL). ASL has been used by the deaf community since the early 19th century; Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc are credited with nurturing its development in conjunction with their founding of the American School for the Deaf. Grieco's Sign Language Program for children in grades 2 and 3 began in September 2008. Almost all of the children in the afterschool program have participated in learning basic ASL signs as a fun and novel way to improve and expand their communication skills.

Signing is offered one day each week for one hour; children are divided into four groups. An afterschool program staff member who is proficient in ASL facilitates the program. The facilitator

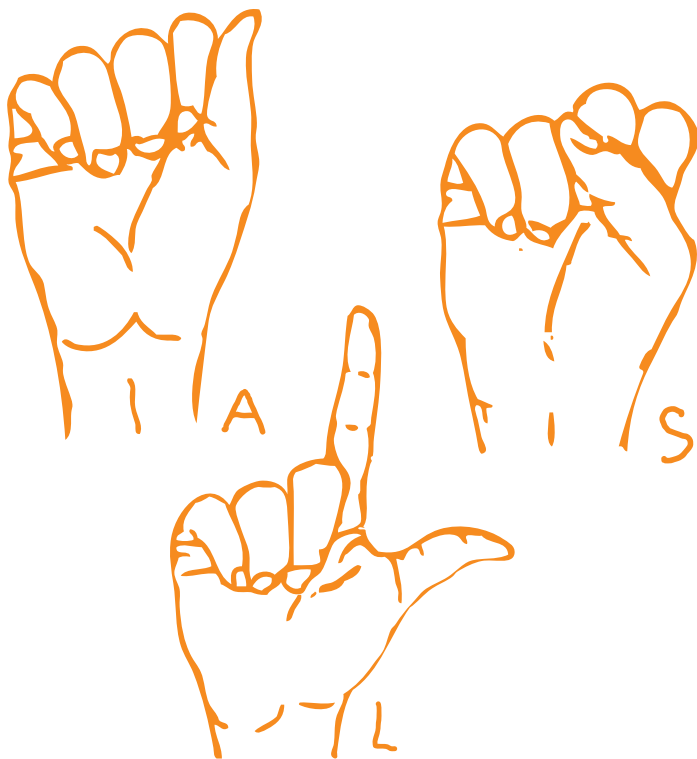
plans activities in a sequence that builds on prior sessions' learning to introduce new language. Children start by learning the hand alphabet and then progress to short, familiar phrases. Then they begin to use signs to communicate with one another. They also learn about the structure of sign language delivery, because hand position and body orientation are important factors in signing.

Each spring the afterschool program showcases the children's activities and accomplishments in a presentation to parents, families and school community members. At the most recent showcase, children wore black T-shirts emblazoned with white finger-spelling hands. To demonstrate their accomplishments, children took the stage to sign several basic conversations.

Parents say that they appreciate their children's sign language learning. Some parents shared that they have themselves learned some signs from their children!

Grieco Elementary School now has a substantial number of children who can sign because of their participation in the afterschool program. The sign language program has been particularly enriching for children who formerly demonstrated weaker oral communication skills than most. As the facilitator put it, "Many of the children who are usually very shy and introverted are now signing. They're saying 'Look what I can do, and I don't have to talk a lot.'"

Parents say that they appreciate their children's sign language learning. Some parents shared that they have themselves learned some signs from their children!



Rationale for the Practice

The afterschool program, suffering from severe budget cuts this year, faced a shortage of enrichment consultants. Program staff were asked to organize a new menu of enrichment activities based on their own interests and experiences. One staff member, who had taught herself ASL, was eager to impart her excitement over sign language to the children. In addition to providing a new and enriching experience, learning to sign can enhance other communication skills. Research suggests that learning sign language has similar cognitive effects to learning a spoken language and can facilitate literacy in similar ways. Sign language activity supports the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for language arts literacy for second and third grades, specifically practicing active listening and communicating in clear, concise and organized language.



Tips for Adaptation

Environment: Be sure to provide a quiet space for instruction so children can concentrate. You want to create a serious atmosphere that shows respect for language development and the deaf community.

ASL Materials: Have plenty of printouts to send home with children, such as alphabet sheets, finger-spelling descriptions and basic word signs. Resources include:

- National Institute on Deafness and Other Disorders, www.nidcd.nih.gov
- American Sign Language University, www.lifeprint.com/asl101/
- *Signing Time! Vol. 1: My First Signs DVD* by Rachel de Azevedo Coleman
- *The American Sign Language Handshape Dictionary* by Richard A. Tennant

Practical Application: Teach words and phrases that have practical application in the children's lives. Words and phrases they regularly use at home and at school are the ones children are most likely to practice and retain.

Curriculum: The curriculum plan should include not only basic grammar, vocabulary, finger spelling and numbers, but also cultural information about the deaf community and the history of sign language.

Contact Information

Bergen Family Center
44 Amory Street
Englewood, New Jersey 07631
(201) 862-6141
Contact: Jared Martin, jmartin@epsd.org

Promising Practices Program Tips

Enhancing Communication with Families

Partners: Citizen Schools - New Jersey, Ivy Hill and First Avenue Schools
Category: Family/School/Community Connections

As a central element to its program model, program staff at Citizen Schools phone each youth's parent or guardian every two weeks. The phone call has a dual purpose: to inform parents about their children's activities and learning in the afterschool program and to actively listen to parents' perceptions, concerns, questions and aspirations for their children. Each phone call is documented in the program phone log to keep a record of communication. Program staff participate in pre-service training on family communication to ensure professionalism and appropriate implementation. Before the first phone call is made, program coordinators develop a Student Profile Information sheet which summarizes: a) the child's school schedule, b) the child's feelings about school and afterschool program participation; and c) names of key family members/supporters. Program leaders suggest that regular, high-quality communication between Citizen Schools staff and parents or guardians of program participants supports a variety of desired outcomes linked to school success and achievement.



Contact information:

Citizen Schools - New Jersey
107 Ivy Street, Newark, New Jersey 07106
Telephone: (973) 991-1295
Contact: Jarrad Toussant, jarradtoussant@citizenschools.org

Holiday Celebrations

Partners: New Jersey Community Development Corporation (NJCDC), Paterson School #5

Category: Program Operations/Administration

The afterschool program staff at Paterson #5 have developed an effective and cost-saving practice for including holiday celebrations in their programming. All program-wide holiday celebrations are scheduled the week following the actual holiday. Activity groups within the program may engage in holiday activities on the normal schedule, but the program-wide celebration is delayed. Program leaders have been able to take advantage of post-holiday sales as well as donations from businesses reducing holiday inventory. Since attendance can also dwindle during the days leading to a holiday, moving the major celebration has allowed more children to participate. Staff and children have responded positively to the change and can enjoy re-celebrating a holiday with less stress and commercial overload.



Contact Information:

New Jersey Community Development Corporation
32 Spruce Street, Paterson, New Jersey 07501
Telephone: (973) 413-1626
Contact: Victoria Fernandez, vfernandez@NJCDC.org

Strategizing Snack Time

Partners: Hispanic Family Center for Southern New Jersey, Summer Elementary

Category: Program Resources/Space

Space limitations and supervision concerns inspired the development of a creative snack schedule strategy at the Summer Elementary afterschool program. Children are served snack on a rotating schedule. Following school, children report to the cafeteria, library or gym in pre-designated age groups. Kindergarten and first grade children are the first group to be placed in the cafeteria and receive snack. After twenty minutes of homework time, second and third grade children replace them while fourth and fifth grade children continue homework time. Kindergarten and first grade children move on to other activities. The last group, fourth and fifth grade children, receive snack after forty minutes of homework time. The rotating snack time practice has been beneficial for the program in multiple ways. Snack time is more manageable for the staff by reducing the number of children in the cafeteria at one time. Previously, all children snacked in the cafeteria together. The overall atmosphere in the cafeteria has improved: there is less noise and better organization. Detailed communication with program staff and day school teachers ensures the arrival of each group in their appropriate location following school dismissal.



Contact Information:

Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey
35-49 S. 29th Street, Camden, New Jersey 08105
Telephone: (856) 541-6985
Contact: Clayton Fitch, cfitch@hispanicfamilycenter.com

Newspaper Club

Partners: Educational Information and Resource Center (EIRC), Lindenwold Middle School

Category: Program Content – Arts, Literacy, Math, Science

A newspaper club at Lindenwold Middle School afterschool program has allowed youth to explore their creative writing, reporting, interviewing, photography and design skills. Newspaper Club is offered one day a week for ninety minutes and is open to all students. With guidance from an adult facilitator, youth research and write articles related to club activities and events, staff members and students and the local news. Program leaders emphasize the importance of a youth-generated paper, which requires that youth actively use computers and digital cameras while working on all aspects of production. The Newspaper Club serves as a forum for youth creativity and self-expression, and strongly aligns with New Jersey Curriculum Standards for middle school writing with a focus on process and product.



Contact Information:

Educational Information and Resource Center (EIRC)
606 Delsea Drive, Sewell, New Jersey 08080
Telephone: (856) 346-3330 x2340
Contact: Kimberly Liano, kliano@lindenwold.k12.nj.us

