

A Community Comes Together Through Afterschool in Weiser, Idaho

This is Afterschool



Program Profile

BEST

The BEST Program in Weiser School District in Weiser, Idaho, is a 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) that serves around 100 students in grades 2 through 8. The majority of BEST students—50% who identify as Latino and 50% as Caucasian—come from working-class families in Weiser, where the poverty rate is 17.7% and the median household income is \$30,000. Many of the students' parents work full-time in the agriculture and onion-packing industry. BEST is the only afterschool program serving Weiser's community of 5,500 people.

Four days a week, BEST students at schools across the district work with teachers, para-educators, and junior and senior high school students on homework and academic enrichment, in low student-to-teacher ratios, ensuring every participant gets the help they need. The academic program is complemented by exposure to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) activities through a partnership with the University of Idaho 4-H Extension Office, art and cultural activities, physical education, and career readiness programming.

BEST also engages parents and siblings with periodic family enrichment and literacy days throughout the year, including dancing and exercise classes, tennis clinics and walking challenges on Saturday mornings.

BEST, now in its 10th year of programming thanks to 21st CCLC funding, is considered a shining star in the community and was recently named the Weiser Chamber of Commerce student program of the year.

A typical day for BEST students

Four days a week (Monday through Thursday), BEST begins each afterschool day with 20 minutes of physically active play and snack-time, followed by 20 to 30 minutes of computer time and homework help. The rest of the day follows an alternating theme, which may include activities comprising 4-H, STEM, physical education or art. For example, students have worked on a city mosaic mural for a local business, with each student creating a tile.

Throughout the year, middle school students participate in field trips to nearby colleges in the Treasure Valley through the State Department of Education's GEAR UP Program, where students learn about potential careers.

And on Saturdays, families are invited to BEST programs to work on homework together as well as for open gym time.

Outcomes

Ninety-two percent of Pioneer Elementary's BEST students scored a 2 or 1 (1 indicating "proficient," 2 indicating "near proficient," and 3 indicating "not near proficient") on the Idaho Reading Indicator (a test to determine a student's reading performance). In addition, Pioneer's BEST coordinator constantly had to raise the bar on Accelerated Reader goals as students kept surpassing them. Three boys who were initially unable to reach the 15-point mark worked diligently, and by the end of the program were in the "70-point club."

BEST | Weiser, Idaho

130

Average number of students served during the school year

50%

Latino students

17.7%

Poverty rate in Weiser, ID

21st Century Community Learning Centers

In Idaho, 21st Century Community Learning Centers serve 7,653 kids in 96 communities.

Community Learning Centers bring together diverse partners to meet community needs. A typical program receives \$67,000 from partners to supplement its federal funding. Nationwide, partner contributions totaled more than \$1 billion between 2006 and 2010.

Nationally, children attend programs in:

- Public school districts: **7,892**
- Charter schools: **386**
- Community-based organizations: **959**
- Faith-based organizations: **115**

In a nationwide study of students who regularly attend a Community Learning Center, teachers report that:



1 in 2 improved their math and Language Arts grades



More than 2 in 3 improved their homework completion and class participation



3 in 5 improved their behavior in class

About BEST

From DNA testing on strawberries, to computer programming, to building collages from photographs of nature, to field trips to local theater productions, to learning about healthy domestic relationships, BEST students are exposed to an ever-growing variety of programs that boost the academic experience they receive each day.

Through its partnership with the University of Idaho 4-H Extension Office, students learn about science, agriculture, horticulture, food and nutrition through hands-on experiences such as grafting plants to one another to combine characteristics or conducting DNA testing on strawberries. They've even learned to make ice cream from scratch. Students also engage in STEM learning by building robots and WeDos (LEGO robots), using Ozobots to learn coding, and doing scavenger hunts guided by GPS systems.

And they get to experience art in the world around them through activities like finding their names spelled out in patterns in nature, which they then photograph and turn into collages. They're also exposed to art and culture in their community. Recently, students and their families were treated to a free performance of "Aladdin" at Treasure Valley Community College, along with a formal dinner at the community center. For some of the families, many of whom live paycheck-to-paycheck, this was the first time they'd had such an experience.

BEST prides itself on partnerships with local organizations, nonprofits and public service departments that help enhance its programming. For example, three times a year, the Weiser Police Department hosts BEST students at the recreation center for foosball, billiards and other games. BEST also partners with Rose Advocates, a local domestic violence shelter, to empower students with knowledge about what contributes to healthy relationships. The mayor, a former teacher, even comes by the centers once a month to engage with students. She always advises students to do well in school, be kind and do their best.

In addition to these partnerships, BEST ensures that it continues to give back by supporting its community. Recently, the students helped install a mural on Weiser's main street. And they partner with a naval military service group to write letters to soldiers serving overseas on the USS Harry S. Truman (CVN-75).

Finally, one of BEST's top priorities is that all of the more than 25 staff members are well-compensated, live comfortably and know they're valued. Staff receive regular professional development and training so they have the necessary resources to meet the unique needs of every BEST student who walks through the door each afternoon.



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