Business After School
Clarksville-Montgomery County School System, Clarksville, Tennessee

ABOUT THE PROGRAM
Business After School was modeled after the Clarksville Area Chamber of Commerce’s Business After Hours, where members network to make connections. Business After School invites the same audience to learn more about the school system by networking with school district faculty and administrators, while learning about instruction and curriculum initiatives directly from the students. This deeper understanding of what and how students are learning, along with the new relationships between internal and external leaders, helps to improve public support of student achievement.

At the inception of the program, the community knew very little about the system’s focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Using a networking platform with which local leaders were familiar made for a great opportunity to feature the STEM program. The event was at a high school, and included not only math and science students from that secondary level, but also expanded to include several elementary schools and one middle school in that feeder group.

The event was so successful that another event was held the following January to feature the system’s new high school college and career academies. Not only did the chamber leadership attend, but its staff helped to promote the event through its newsletter and website. As a result, business leaders, elected officials, local judges, and community members attended the event.

The program is a collaboration between the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System Board, district leadership, Clarksville-Montgomery County Education Foundation, and the Clarksville-Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce.

THE BOARD’S INVOLVEMENT
This community outreach event is strongly supported by the school board. Board members attend the Business After School events to speak about various school system initiatives and network with business and industry leaders. Board members also assist in the communication and recruitment of business and industry leaders to attend Business After School.

RESULTS
For the 2016-17 school year, the events included a STEM-focused Business After School in the first semester, visiting a different group of schools, and a high school college and career academies showcase in the second semester. Moving the venue to different schools has helped target businesses from different parts of the community, and has built pride in the schools and growth in the high school the academies. The showcase has increased academies’ enrollment exponentially, from 366 when the academies opened to an enrollment of 1,643 today. Business After School has proved successful in increasing the number of Partners in Education for the district’s 39 schools.

When one business leader attended, she was so inspired that she decided to begin a teaching career, and was later hired by the district. This opportunity for leaders in the community to network with school leadership, and experience what students are learning, has increased community involvement with the school system. Business After School increases business and industry’s understanding and support of the school system and helps them make a connection between their work and the education of their future workforce. Because of this program, businesses have come forward to volunteer to host STEM externships for more than 500 teachers, a way for teachers to experience how STEM is used in industry and business so that they can help students make connections between their standards and real-world careers. This program can be easily replicated by districts across the country to help them engage more stakeholders in support of public education.

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The Charles Drew Horticulture Program
Detroit Public Schools Community District, Detroit, Michigan

ABOUT THE PROGRAM
The Charles Drew Transition Center is a postsecondary vocational center for students who are moderately and severely cognitively impaired, visually impaired, hearing impaired, physically impaired, and students with autism. The Transition Center creates a continuum of services to ensure that young adults aged 18-26 have access to an age-appropriate learning environment. The Horticulture Program was created for the dual purpose of providing hands-on vocational horticulture skills for special-needs adults leading to possible employment opportunities while providing much-needed access to fresh, locally grown produce for school families, thereby helping, by the increased consumption of fresh food in the home, to help alleviate the inner-city issues of childhood obesity and early-onset diabetes.

The Drew Horticulture Program is currently managed by a student team of 80, rotating through a typical high school hourly schedule, while another 400 students are actively ready to assist when needed. The 53-member teaching staff are all on board, with many providing assistance in the areas of planting, harvesting, educational lessons, and more.

THE BOARD’S INVOLVEMENT
The School Board of the Detroit Public Schools Community School District, was elected in January of 2017, where it regained authority over district issues after many years of being under the authority of Emergency Financial Managers.

District leaders, in cooperation with then Detroit Public School’s Office of Nutrition, identified the Transition Center as the site of this new and innovative program. Drew was identified based upon the goal of having a work study site for special needs students, and in having the acreage on campus to allow for a 26’ x 96’ hoophouse in which to grow food items for the school cafeteria. Funding was in part provided through the federal lunch program, which allowed for the establishment and maintenance of school garden programs.

RESULTS
All goals of providing food for families have been met or are in progress, and are achieving the impact anticipated. More and more people, students included, are being impacted by consuming more produce, and hopefully continuing this practice at home. In the school year 2015-16, the comprehensive horticulture program, including hoophouse and production, produced just under 18,000 pounds of produce for the school lunch program at Drew, and for the lunch programs at over 20 other Detroit Public Schools Community District schools. This production has saved the district over $200,000 in actual food product purchases. In 2016-17, the program is on pace to match this output and possibly beat projections.

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

With the guidance of the school board and the superintendent, the 50,000-student school division has overhauled its Code of Student Conduct. The Code, however, is just one piece of a new approach to discipline across Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS)—one that emphasizes student supports and interventions to better accomplish the division’s educational goals. Suspension rates for African-American students as a group were considerably higher than those of their white classmates. The district needed to ensure that discipline was being applied fairly and consistently across the division. It also needed more proactive supports and interventions.

The new approach needed to encompass a shift from an older policy of zero tolerance to an approach allowing administrators more flexibility to take into consideration students’ behavioral history and other circumstances. The goal is to help students learn to meet the school division’s behavioral expectations.

The Code of Student Conduct is the guiding document for behavioral expectations. Students, parents, and guardians sign the Code annually, signifying that they have read and understand it. HCPS began a two-year conversation with the community about improving the document. This involved public input sessions in each of Henrico County’s five magisterial districts, hosted by various board members and HCPS staff members. The Student Support and Disciplinary Review Office, along with the Department of Instructional Support, played central roles in creating the document’s details. As feedback emerged, the two teams worked to revise the document as directed by the board.

The revised Code that emerged for the 2015-16 school year categorizes violations more thoroughly, and then prescribes a range of disciplinary or intervention options. Administrators still have flexibility, but wide-scale disparities in policy and practice are less likely. The approach is designed to minimize cultural and implicit bias and offer more divisionwide consistency.

The other big change to the Code is an emphasis on student supports and interventions. Previously, the Disciplinary Review Hearing Office—which changed its name to the Student Support and Disciplinary Review Office in 2014—functioned as a hearing office with a reactive approach to discipline.

HEARING OFFICE

The HCPS School Board has been instrumental in guiding and supporting the new philosophy of student behavior. Remaking the Code of Student Conduct required consistent leadership over several years. Board members attended public input sessions throughout the county to solicit stakeholder feedback. They then worked with HCPS staff members to continually revise the proposed Code as they processed community feedback. From the start of the process, the board has worked to solicit recommendations for behavioral supports and interventions from staff members, and to find funding for those proposals.

RESULTS

HCPS is seeing some encouraging signs when data are compared with the years before more supports began to be added. Between the 2009-10 and 2014-15 school years, out-of-school suspensions for African-American students dropped 42 percent. A 2015 UCLA report cited HCPS as a national leader in reducing suspension rates.

Disciplinary statistics from the first year of the new Code’s adoption offer some encouragement.

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War on Absenteeism—Graduation Enhancement Technicians
Manatee County Public Schools, Bradenton, Florida

ABOUT THE PROGRAM
The spring of 2015 found Manatee County Public Schools analyzing data in an effort to improve outcomes for students. School officials noticed that students in Title I schools were accruing significantly more absences than those in non-Title I schools. As related research ensued, they were confronted with some troubling national statistics: Low-income students are four times more likely to be chronically absent than others—often for reasons beyond their control, such as unstable housing, unreliable transportation, and a lack of access to health care. And, by sixth grade, chronic absences become a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school. Having an excellent command of the needs based on the data, the superintendent and school board decided to focus efforts and resources on reducing absenteeism as a way to close the achievement gap.

In a direct and concerted effort to address absenteeism, the district developed a job description for Graduation Enhancement Technicians, better known as GETs, and hired a GET for every Title I school (25 in total). The primary responsibility of the GETs is to establish and maintain effective working relationships with families, students, school staff, and community agencies in an effort to remove any and all barriers to school attendance. This includes contacting families every time a student is absent; conducting effective home visit; partnering with school-based social workers, guidance counselors, and other school-based personnel; and connecting families with health services and community resources for food, clothing and housing. Recognizing that many of these responsibilities typically fall under the auspices of a school social worker, the district funded an additional half-day of social worker allocation for each Title I school.

GETs also implement the Check and Connect Mentoring Program at each of their schools. Check and Connect is a comprehensive intervention designed to enhance student engagement through relationship building, problem solving, and capacity building.

THE BOARD’S INVOLVEMENT
The school board of Manatee County Public Schools stated in the district’s strategic plan that it would address achievement gaps for all students. However, it was the board’s willingness to support a nontraditional approach to closing the achievement gap that demonstrated leadership. More specifically, the board approved the job description and the hiring of the 25 GETs. Board members were also instrumental in the grant approval process that helped secure the necessary funds to make this program a reality.

Also, the board approved the creation of an Absenteeism Task Force. The goal of the Absenteeism Task Force is for personnel from across the district to come together to analyze all school district policies and procedures related to attendance, absenteeism, and truancy.

RESULTS
Success can be measured in two ways. The first is in the reduction of chronic absenteeism and the second is in the increase in average daily attendance. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent or more of school. The district reduced chronic absenteeism at Title I elementary schools by 55 percent and by 36 percent at Title I secondary schools. The district had an overall reduction of chronic absenteeism in Title I schools of 50 percent. The GETs also improved average daily attendance by .28 percent in Title I elementary schools, 1.83 percent in Title I middle schools, and 2.12 percent in the Title I high school.

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School of Innovation
Springdale School District, Springdale, Arkansas

ABOUT THE PROGRAM
The Springdale School Board had the vision to ensure the district is serving all students in the district from various backgrounds. This program allows students a flexible experience, with a focus on the development of executive skills. It allows students who do not speak the same language and do not have the same income levels to come together and learn to work as a team. The outcome has provided increased learning options and achievement for students. This program was a risk for the school board as all members had to be willing to allow the vision to come to fruition. Their belief in ensuring learning for all students allowed the model to come forward. They are leaders in education.

THE BOARD’S INVOLVEMENT
The Springdale School Board has been in complete support of the program, from allowing a competency-based model to be formed in the district to investing $30 million dollars in building a one-of-a-kind learning lab.

RESULTS
Students have exceeded learning expectations in the classroom and out of the classroom. The district has been impressed with the students' ability to be community leaders.

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