

DOINGWHATWORKS



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Not Just More of the Same: Engaging Students in After-School Learning Opportunities

John Muir Elementary School, Washington • December 2009

Topic: Increased Learning Time: Beyond the Regular School Day
Practice: Organize Instruction

Highlights

- John Muir Elementary School Principal Awnie Thompson details the importance of engaging offerings after school.
- Muir's program tracks students' needs and customizes enrichment needs based on preferences and needs of populations served.
- The focus here is on providing individual supports, engaging opportunities, and homework help to ensure academic and social proficiency in participating students.

About the Site

John Muir Elementary School
Seattle, WA

Demographics

55% Black
22% Asian

16% White

1% Native-American

62% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

8% Special Education

John Muir Elementary collaborates with Powerful Schools—a community-based organization—to operate after-school classes that promote students’ math and literacy skills while engaging them in fun activities.

Aspects of this program include:

- Many classroom teachers stay after school to teach in the after-school program.
- Students select courses that balance academic learning with engaging enrichment.
- Powerful Schools works to recruit community resources such as volunteers and promote parental awareness and participation.
- Every year, after-school teachers receive rigorous training around academic curricula used at the after-school program.

Full Transcript

Hi, I am Awnie Thompson. I am the principal of John Muir Elementary School, which is one of the Seattle Public Schools.

Our student intervention team is made up of the parent, the principal, head teacher, special ed resource teacher, psychologist, counselor, family support worker, nurse, just anyone that we think might be able to give some input. And we get together and we talk about the student’s strengths, and we talk about any concerns or what was the reason that we brought the student to the student intervention team. And frequently, if we have academic concerns, we will talk about, well, let’s see if we can get them into an after-school class, and we will make the recommendation based on the particular area of need. If the student is struggling with confidence in mathematics, we will recommend maybe the chess class or the origami class along with the after-school math class.

For ongoing communication between the school staff and the after-school staff, some of that happens by e-mail, but a lot of it just happens by conversation because we are all in the same building and we all know each other and know the kids—a lot of that is just conversation. The teacher coming to the after-school person saying, “Can you work with my student on this?” or “The biggest concern that I have is phonics skills” or whatever that particular piece might be. There is just a lot of personal communication that goes on all the time to make sure that it’s what we need, which means that it is always changing. And maybe not dramatic changes but always modified just slightly.

The academic classes both in math and reading—we always have a math and a reading each term—are designed to be very fun for the students so that it's not just more of the same of what they are getting during the day. We have a lot of games both in the math and also in the reading classes and a lot of activities, and it is very active. And part of our thinking in having that was in part just so that students would want to do that after school, but also for students, particularly if the students are not necessarily the most successful students in their regular class, we don't want them to just have more of what may not already be working for them.

Our reading classes have been more teacher created. The teachers who have worked with those classes have focused more on what the needs of the students were at that particular time, but always focused on making sure that it is highly engaging for students so that they want to be there and that it's fun for them so that it's not feeling like I have just got another hour of school tacked on. So, for example, they might do readers theater. The very young students in the reading classes do a lot of making puppets or making different kinds of props to go with what they are learning about.

We also have a Homework Center where the students can come and do their homework after school a couple of days a week as well. That's one of the offerings that's not as structured but is also beneficial for students who may not have a quiet place at home or someone who can help them with their homework.