

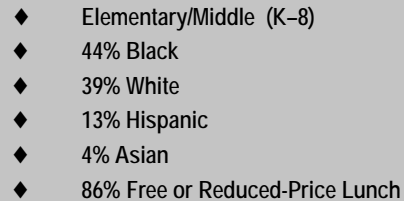
John C. Diehl Elementary School

2327 Fairmont Parkway

Erie, PA 16510

Principal: Jeannette Barczynski

Administrators, teachers, and parents in Erie, Pennsylvania supported the creation of CHAMPS, a districtwide after-school program designed to support student learning and social development. The objective of CHAMPS is to promote academic performance, reduce at-risk behavior, and help students develop social skills.

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- ◆ Elementary/Middle (K–8)
 - ◆ 44% Black
 - ◆ 39% White
 - ◆ 13% Hispanic
 - ◆ 4% Asian
 - ◆ 86% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

John C. Diehl Elementary School serves K–8 students in Erie, Pennsylvania. Most of its students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and many are English language learners. According to Principal Jeannette Barczynski, before CHAMPS, many students lacked homework support from their parents and were unsupervised after school. Ninety percent of CHAMPS participants come from families living in poverty and are clients of local food banks. The program offers students three hours in a safe, supervised after-school environment, a nutritious snack, and opportunities to experience activities they would not otherwise have access to. For example, even though tennis is not popular in the community, many students take it up through the program and ask for tennis rackets for their birthdays. The program is open to all students, although some are specifically encouraged to attend.

In addition to development of academic competencies, the program emphasizes physical activity and social skills. CHAMPS incorporates cooperative learning and peer tutoring features to increase academic and social skills for the younger students. For the older students, the program emphasizes leadership skills and positive communication.

Teacher Collaboration

Teacher collaboration is key to aligning the program with the school day. Regular school-day teachers participate as instructors in the after-school program, allowing a seamless alignment and continuity. Teachers hold weekly grade-level team meetings to identify student learning needs and plan how to address them. Based on those meetings, after-school instructors tailor activities to individual students' needs. In addition, during monthly all-staff meetings, CHAMPS staff and school administrators discuss continuity between different components of the school-day curriculum and the after-school program. For instance, instructors may discuss how to incorporate socialization and physical activities into the academic components of the program.

Communicating With Parents

The CHAMPS program places a high priority on communication with parents. Program staff plan and coordinate meetings for parents in which speakers provide information on learning, academics, higher education, and career choice. According to the school,

parental involvement leads to greater student participation in the program and a higher likelihood of student academic success.

Newsletters are sent to participating families on a regular basis. In addition to school and program news, these contain helpful hints and strategies to educate parents in child development and academic enrichment, such as ideas for creating fun at-home learning experiences that do not seem inherently academic. These mailings also highlight the importance of student participation in the program.

Student Accountability

Each quarter, school-day and after-school instructors review report cards with their students so students can set their own learning goals and track their progress, thereby developing a sense of ownership over their learning. In addition, teachers use agenda books, which are reviewed daily and sent home for parent signature, to ensure that students are on track with their expected progress. The students use these agenda books to record homework, plan their assignments, and track their academic performance.

Supports to Maximize Attendance

Attendance is a high priority for the CHAMPS program; the program staff consistently communicate regular attendance requirements to parents. If a student is absent, parents are expected to provide a note explaining why the child missed an after-school program session. If a student attends school but fails to attend his or her CHAMPS session, program staff call the student's home to make sure there are no personal problems, the parents are aware of the student's absence, and they are still committed to the program. If family members convey any issues during this conversation, program staff attempt to address them as efficiently and fully as possible. In this way, CHAMPS provides safeguards and supports to maximize student attendance.

On a monthly basis, the program requires site managers to complete a report on students with three or more unexcused absences or suspensions. In this report, the managers explain their next steps to address these absences. If student participation is terminated or the student decides to leave the program, the staff conducts an exit interview to ensure that all possible steps have been taken to retain the student.

To enable all interested students to attend the program, CHAMPS offers bus transportation from November to March. This provides a safe mode of transportation for students who are unable to be picked up by their parents. Since many students come from economically disadvantaged homes, CHAMPS also encourages participation by providing nutritious snacks.

CHAMPS utilizes a raffle program as an incentive for student attendance and achievement. Program participants receive tickets for attendance, participation, homework completion, and exceptional behavior. These tickets are entered in weekly and monthly drawings in which participants are able to win desirable prizes.

Evaluation Efforts

CHAMPS contracts with an independent evaluator to carry out an annual evaluation that answers three main questions:

- Does the program improve academic outcomes?
- Which practices were effective in promoting student outcomes?
- What feedback do students, parents, and teachers have regarding the program?

Previous evaluations have shown increased academic performance and school attendance and decreased at-risk behaviors (such as pregnancy and drug use) for participants. Multiple data sources are used to assess program effects, including state and district test results and student records.

Site managers complete monthly reports, which include academic assessment results, data on student behavior, social skills, and feedback from the students and teachers. These reports are used to revise curricula and instructional approaches. Finally, the program staff conduct student and parent focus groups to collect feedback and information to restructure the program.

The evaluation also considers alignment of the program to district and state goals, since the program is designed to comply with and meet these, as well as community and school goals. Recently, the school district rolled out a comprehensive electronic data system, which allows program site managers to access all student records, match curricula to students' needs, and create reports on their progress. This development allows the district to keep track of program participants and observe improvements on a macro level.

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