

Sublette County 4-H afterschool program

Situation:

High-stakes testing, No Child Left Behind legislation, and budget cuts are redefining afterschool programs. While the need for community afterschool programs still hinges on the necessity for youth to have safe, supervised activities while parents are working, the programmatic needs are shifting from enrichment-learning opportunities only, such as arts, crafts, and recreation, to enrichment that supports academic achievement. Standardized testing and benchmark standards dictate that classroom instruction often strictly adheres to concepts, processes, and definitions while leaving no room for inquiry, open-ended questions, or transformation or application of concepts and processes into relevant skills. Research findings support that informal learning environments are increasingly successful in filling this gap and allowing students to more openly explore, create, and think.

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contributes to **ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

The Sublette County 4-H afterschool programs set as goals supporting and expanding academic programs. Daily participation of most of the youth makes afterschool programs ideal venues to enhance and build upon the activities of the school day while being more flexible and allowing time for exploration and discussion.

Board of Cooperative Education Services and Wyoming Women's Foundation grants targeted efforts to enhance reading and science skills. Programs included weekly book clubs that were adult-facilitated but student-centered and inclusion of a summer science camp to complement the school district's summer school.

Book club goals encouraged independent reading at least once weekly during the program and instructor-guided reading with discussion every week. Members helped select books and received copies to keep.

High school interns in the afterschool program worked with the parents and school to collect baseline reading score data in the fall and spring. This data was compared to the district average for each grade level.

Summer science camp goals included engaging students in hands-on science and creating an inquiry-based learning environment to help students understand how scientific methods can help make real-world decisions. Pre- and post-program assessments established the degree of participant understanding of scientific methods.

Impacts:

Fifty elementary-aged youth participated in the afterschool program book club. From fall to spring, 56 percent of the afterschool students increased reading scores over the district average. Kindergarteners had the highest gains in reading scores with 75 percent scoring higher than the district average for kindergarten. Data show book clubs improved student scores compared to others in their classes. The high school intern responsible for organizing the

book clubs learned to evaluate and select books for the students based upon age groups and then created activities to connect students to the books.

Thirty-four youth grades K-5 participated in the summer science camp. Pre- and post-tests showed improvements of:

- 30 percent for specific questions regarding data/ observations
- 19 percent for use of variables
- 16 percent terminology about scientific method

All are valuable components in scientific inquiry. Average net gains of 16 percent and 14 percent correct answers showed an increase in awareness and attitudes about science and its applications to everyday life. This gain is appreciable for the wide age span of the participants, kindergarten through fifth grade, and short duration of the program.

Noteworthy are improvements of:

- 42 percent for specific questions regarding science being useful in everyday life
- 36 percent in helping make decisions about food
- 22 percent in deciding what to buy in a store, respectively.

These are appreciable because several activities were dedicated to scientifically investigating and testing items young students could shop for and use in their everyday lives, including cookies and paper towels.



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