

Expanding Out of School Programming

Initiative Summary Statement:

Expand coordination of, and investment in, out of school programming to provide K-12 students meaningful wellbeing, academic advancement, and career development opportunities.

Initiative Description:

Objective: Regional partners can collectively increase investment in out of school programming to provide K-12 students with greater access to programs that help support students' overall personal development as well as academic and career achievements. Out of school programming includes before school, after school, expanded learning, and summer programs. These programs promote positive youth development and offer a safe space where youth can explore their potential. Effective programs provide learning settings that bring a wide range of benefits to youth, families, and communities. Programs can support social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development, reduce risky behaviors, promote physical health, and provide a safe and supportive environment for children and youth. Furthermore, these programs provide safe, productive spaces for youth in the time after school but before working parents and caregivers may be available.

Expanding coordination of and investment into out of school programming could include the following strategies:

- Conduct and share new research to inform approaches for out of school programming;
- Expand existing partnerships with and training for nonprofit organizations that provide coordination and/or additional services at schools for all students, but especially for students who are performing below grade level;
- Identify outreach strategy and services for at-risk, abused, or neglected children;
- Coordinate with partners to identify and determine available funding for programs and invest funding into local children's programs;
- Increase student access to bilingual (English/Spanish) out of school programming/services; and
- Explore solutions to offer year-round out of school programming, which could include expansion of existing or creation of new summer programs, a pilot for year-round schooling, or other tactics.

Need: The County seeks to provide data-driven out of school programming that helps to meet the unique needs of the County's diverse K-12 student population as they recover

from the experience of Hurricane Ian, focus on academics (e.g., literacy), and prepare to enter the workforce. Lee County is the eighth largest school district in Florida with more than 101,000 students enrolled in 118 schools, including 32 charter schools. Almost 46,000 students live in homes where English is not the primary language. Lee County Economic Development Office has already identified regional trends in the youth student population and youth workforce, with unique considerations within local neighborhoods; overall, the labor force participation rate in the County is about 53 percent. However, the labor force participation for those aged 25-65 years is 80 percent, indicating that labor force participation is significantly lower for residents younger than 25 years. Lee County School District has identified that of the 2022 graduating class, about 60 percent of graduates planned to attend a two- or four-year degree program, about 11 percent planned on attending a technical college/school, about 6 percent planned to enter the workforce directly, and 3 percent planned to enlist in the armed forces, and the remaining 20 percent was uncertain or was choosing an alternative option. Additional data is needed to explain the reason(s) for the younger population's relatively low workforce participation so that solutions can be offered, including through out of school programming.

Regional Approach: A regional approach to expanding out of school programming includes strategies that build on existing efforts, engage the whole community, and share resources to support effective program implementation. There is already a significant out of school providers network that offers a diverse range of programming. For example, the FutureMakers Coalition works with partners to support the development of high quality before and after school as well as summer programs in partnership with multiple local nonprofit organizations. The goal is to improve student outcomes as well as support teachers and families at little to no cost to the families. Building upon this and other efforts could include formalizing potential current informal "handshake" initiatives and realizing opportunities to expand cross-sector partnerships by working with the healthcare sector to destigmatize and expand mental and behavioral health services through the education system.

Regional stakeholders can also engage the whole community in supporting students as part of expanding or creating new out of school programs and partnerships. Involving and informing parents in out of school programming is critical; bilingual out of school program staffing and communications will help achieve this goal. Additionally, partners can engage the whole community by creating new or expanding appropriate volunteer opportunities that benefit schools and students. Regional stakeholders should also take into consideration available programs and outreach efforts for children who are in at-risk, abusive, or neglected homes.

The positive impact of these and/or other aligned strategies can be magnified through effective implementation and pooling of resources. For example, schools may need to establish a liaison position to manage expanded programs and/or volunteers and could explore the possibility of sharing staff resources across schools or jurisdictions. Additionally, regional partners may choose to establish data sharing agreements to collect, disseminate, and act on data to inform approaches for out of school program design and implementation. One outcome of this collaborative approach may be that the most vulnerable students who are at risk of being underserved by education (and other) institutions have access to high-quality out of school programming.

Impact: Implementing this Initiative would result in a healthy, well-educated youth population that was supported through graduation and prepared to enter the workforce. Potential measures of success include increasing the number of students in out of school programming, increasing academic proficiency in key subjects, increasing school attendance, increasing teacher engagement/satisfaction, and decreasing “summer melt”. Overall, all students in the County would have access to out of school programming, in their languages, and experience increased support for college and career readiness.

Key Considerations:

- Leverage existing programs by assessing the needs for expansion rather than creating new unfamiliar programs for specific groups of youth.
- Develop public charters to include in existing out of school programs to improve overall outcomes.
- Language accessibility and inclusivity should include American Sign Language to support deaf and blind community members.

Co-Sponsoring Branches:

Education and Workforce, Economic Recovery, Cultural Resources

Stakeholders:

- County departmental experts on economic development and education
- School Districts
- Charter Schools
- Lee County Parks and Recreation
- Library Systems
- Lee Health
- Early learning and children’s services groups
- Workforce coalitions and task forces

- Arts and cultural organizations
- Non-profit and faith- based organizations

Potential Funding Sources:

- U.S. Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Florida Department of Education
- Florida Department of State Division of Library and Information Services

Resources:

- Lee County School District Fast Facts

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