



Project Achieve
21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) Program
(2022-2023)

Lead Agency

Suitland Family and Life Development Corporation
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Drew Freeman Middle School
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Year II Evaluation Report
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Program Overview	1
Description of the Program	1
A Typical Day of Programming	1
Family and Community Outreach	2
Research Design	2
Theory of Action	2
Research Questions	3
Research Tools	3
Evaluating the Research	7
Attendance	7
Research Question #1: Conditions for Success	8
Fidelity of Implementation	9
Satisfaction	10
Perceived Learning	11
<i>Sub-Question #1: Facilitating Outcomes</i>	12
<i>Sub-Question #2: Family Engagement</i>	13
Research Question #2: Social Emotional Learning	14
<i>Sub-Question #1: Facilitating Outcomes</i>	15
Discussion	16
Limitations	16
Recommendations	17
References	18
Appendices	19
Tables	
Table 1 Student Survey Questions	4
Table 2 Observer Survey Questions	5
Table 3 Teacher Survey Questions	6
Table 4 Family Survey Questions	6
Table 5 Student Attendance	7
Table 6 Student Ratings (Constructs)	7
Table 7 Observer Ratings	8
Table 8 Student Ratings (Learning)	10
Table 9 MCAP Proficiency	12
Table 10 Teacher Ratings	13
Table 11 Family Ratings	14
Table 12 Program Recommendations	17
Table 13 Evaluation Recommendations	17

PROJECT ACHIEVE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grant initiative at Drew Freeman Middle School (DFMS), called *Project Achieve (PA)*, is designed to provide middle school students with a structured, academically enriched out-of-school time program aligned to the instructional school-day program. Its goals are to enhance math and literacy skills as well as to foster social-emotional learning and growth through engaged, project-based learning. All DFMS students were encouraged to enroll in afterschool programs. Students were specifically identified based upon their prior year grades in RELA (Reading, English and Language Arts) and Mathematics as well as those who were encouraged and recommended by teachers and staff to receive academic support and tutorial in literacy and mathematics.

Beginning with their dismissal from school, *PA* students engaged with social-emotional learning (SEL), an uninterrupted hour of academic instruction through a variety of learning activities (Appendix A), character education, service-learning and enrichment activities.

This report presents the findings of the *Project Achieve 2023* Evaluation – an effort to assess the progress made toward the goals set out in the grant application. The evaluation questions for this year’s implementation of *Project Achieve* were:

- *To what extent and under what conditions are student outcomes in mathematics and reading proficiency met?*
 - *What strategies and activities for meeting these student outcomes were put in place?*
 - *What was done to engage family members in supporting student learning?*
- *To what extent does social-emotional learning (SEL) contribute to meeting proficiency for English Language Arts and Mathematics?*
 - *What strategies and activities for promoting SEL were put in place?*

To address these questions, we examined evidence related to (1) fidelity of implementation, (2) satisfaction (students, teachers, and parents), and (3) learning / perceptions of learning, all of which are connected to student achievement in the literature. We primarily used attendance data as well as survey instruments and focus groups to gather evidence for the three constructs.

Attendance: Student participation was slightly higher than last year, with 104 students enrolled out of 114 predicted (versus 82 out of 114 in 2022 and 61 out of 144 in 2021), an increase of approximately 20% from last year. The switch to in-person from virtual programming impacted attendance due to a transportation issue which took significant time to resolve. Daily attendance dropped to just under 11% of students per month, with the highest attendance (17%) in April.

Fidelity of Implementation: Survey responses indicate that *Project Achieve* activities were implemented with fidelity. Students and teachers reported that most lessons had activities that incorporated hands-on learning and motivated students to do better in their regular classes.

Student Satisfaction: Survey responses generally indicate student satisfaction with *Project Achieve* activities. Students believed that those activities were interesting and a good use of their time. Observers and teachers also noted high levels of student satisfaction, as expressed in both scaled and open-ended responses.

Family Satisfaction & Participation: There were a variety of opportunities for families to engage with *Project Achieve* activities and learning sessions. One of the priorities of Family Engagement as students returned to the instructional school was the social-emotional and physical needs of students and their families.

Student Learning:

Students regarded *Project Achieve* activities overall as helpful to their learning. They complimented their *PA* teachers, saying they were knowledgeable, well-prepared, and helped them when they had trouble with their lessons or activities. Data from students, parents and teachers also indicate that *PA* staff were successful in establishing a variety of after-school events for students and parents with the potential to enhance academic and social- emotional development.

Based on our analysis of the data, we recommend that for future grant cycles, *PA* staff continue to vigorously recruit students throughout the school year, to monitor their attendance, and to contact parents to promote more consistent attendance.

PROJECT ACHIEVE 2022-2023 EVALUATION

Program Overview

As set forth in the Guidance for Local Evaluations of Maryland 21st CCLC Programs, this year's evaluation was conducted to assess the progress made by *Project Achieve*, in its second year of funding (2022-2023), toward providing high quality, after-school-time opportunities for students' academic enrichment. The following sections detail the data collection processes in regard to *Project Achieve* and an analysis of findings. The report concludes with end-of-project recommendations.

Description of the Program

In keeping with the mission of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, *Project Achieve* seeks to create out-of-school time learning centers “that provide students with academic enrichment opportunities as well as additional services designed to complement their regular academic program.” In particular, the project strives to provide learning opportunities that will strengthen mathematics and literacy skills as well as promote social-emotional learning.

Drew Freeman is a Title 1 school that serves close to 900 sixth (6th), seventh (7th) and eighth (8th) grade students: approximately 80% are African American and over 80% are on Free and Reduced-Price School Meals (FARMS). The targeted students for *Project Achieve* are those in need of additional support in reading and mathematics. Parents were informed about *Project Achieve* through individual letters, teacher and staff emails, school messenger notifications, website postings, individual interactions (via text, phone, and zoom), etc.

Student Enrollment and Family Participation

Project Achieve enrolled 104 students, fewer than the original target of 114 students. In addition to after school programming, *PA* provided various family engagement activities through a variety of means and focused on different topics of interest and/or education.

A Typical Day of Programming

Project Achieve began directly after student dismissal from the instructional school day. DFMS students are released in a staggered manner - first, car-riders and then bus-riders. Students transported home by the regular school day buses are held under supervision either in their classrooms or the cafeteria until bus arrival. Student participants within the after-school programs may be held until a school intercom announcement releases *PA* students to the Project Success room (location of Boys and Girls Club).

Boys and Girls Club (BGC) supervises students and takes attendance until the arrival of after-school program staff just before 3:00pm. Students are escorted by a *Project Achieve* staff member to the Library/Media Center for supper and social time until 3:25pm. Students, teachers and staff then begin clean-up and prepare to transition to the designated classroom for Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Students are welcomed again to the *Project Achieve* program and the facilitator conducts the social emotional learning lesson and/or activity for the day, which are typically 30 minutes in duration.

Upon completion of SEL, students transition to the academic hour, during which they participated in STEM (Project Learning Tree) and Service-Learning Projects. Students also have access to

homework help in core content areas (reading, math, science, and social studies) during this time. Following the one hour of uninterrupted academic instruction and homework help/tutorial, students return to the Project Success room for academic enrichment and character education activities facilitated by BGC. At approximately 5:50pm, a school intercom announcement releases students for bus dismissal, and all remaining students are brought to the main lobby for parent-pick up by 6:30pm.

Family and Community Outreach

Project Achieve also has a Family/Community Outreach component which offered supports, services, and opportunities for both students and their families. Information is disseminated via handouts, emails, texts, and phone calls; hosting occurs through small sessions (e.g., Social Media, Gaming & Mental Health) and large group meetings (e.g., Virtual Math History Night).

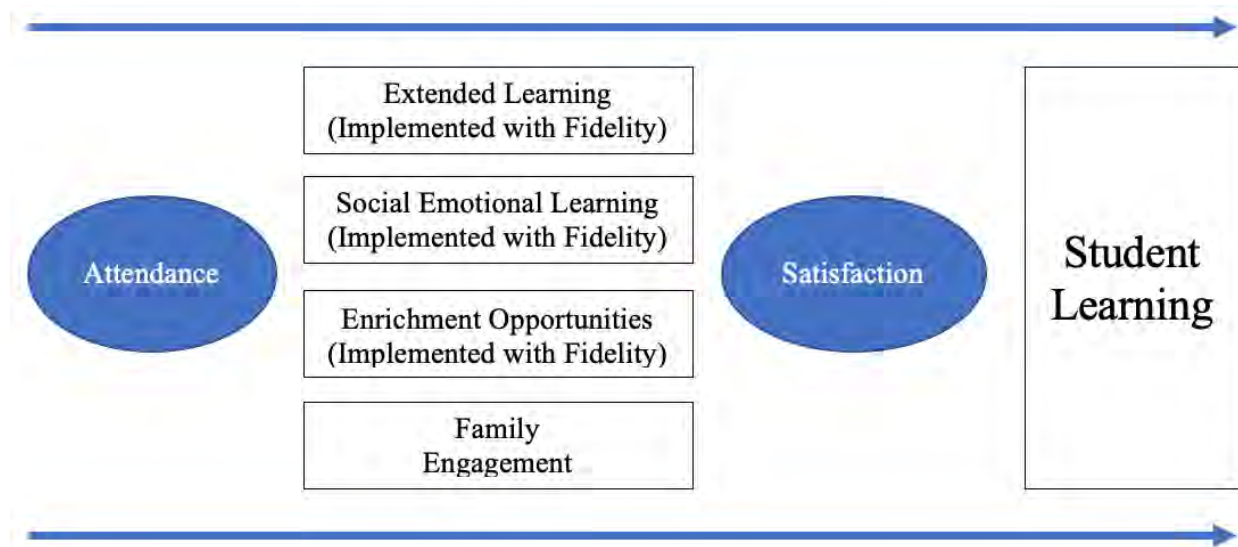
Research Design

The following sections detail the theory of action behind *Project Achieve*'s implementation, then introduce and discuss the findings related to our research questions.

Theory of Action

As seen in Figure 1, the theory of action behind *Project Achieve* asserts that extended learning and enrichment opportunities, including service learning and social-emotional learning, accompanied by family engagement, positively impact student learning (see, for example: Hall, 2014; Krenichyn et al., 2008; LFA, 2008; Taylor et al., 2017; Whalen, 2007; Mo & Singh, 2008). Those opportunities depend, however, on fidelity of implementation. When implementation aligns with program goals (e.g., hands-on learning, school curriculum), there are higher rates of participant satisfaction and attendance—the immediate, mediating conditions for engagement in learning.

Figure 1. *Project Achieve* Theory of Action



Research Questions

As noted in the theory of action, this evaluation examines whether and how various factors contribute to student proficiency in reading and math. Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS) use the MCAP assessment as its outcome measure for reading and mathematics proficiency. This year’s first evaluation question asks:

- *To what extent and under what conditions are student outcomes in mathematics and reading proficiency met?*
 - *What strategies and activities for meeting student outcomes were put in place?*
 - *What was done to engage family members in supporting student learning?*

During and following the pandemic, the *Project Achieve* team discussed and began to examine the impact social-emotional learning (SEL) has on student learning. Research has begun to establish what educators have recognized since the pandemic started: students have experienced a trauma, and they are in need of social-emotional learning to navigate their experiences (see, for example, Li et al., 2021). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as the process through which we “acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, 2022). To explore whether and how *PA*’s focus on social and emotional learning has impacted student learning, we asked:

- *To what extent does social-emotional learning (SEL) contribute to students’ proficiency in mathematics and reading?*
 - *What strategies and activities for promoting SEL were put in place?*

Research Tools

As noted above, the outcome measure used for reading and mathematics proficiency was the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP). English Language Arts/Literacy (ELA/L) assessments focused on writing effectively when analyzing text while mathematics assessments focused on “applying skills and concepts, understanding multi-step problems that require abstract reasoning, and modeling real-world problems with precision, perseverance, and strategic use of tools” (MCAP).

PA staff also collected data to assess other dimensions of the theory of action: (1) attendance, (2) fidelity of implementation for the various program components, (3) family engagement, and (4) participant satisfaction. To do this, they looked to focus groups, interviews, and surveys to determine how successfully the conditions for reading and mathematics improvement were implemented. This data, along with feedback related to staff meetings and professional development sessions, allowed us to document essential work related to the on-going operations of *Project Achieve*. In addition to the data reports required by MSDE, *PA* staff developed interview and survey instruments to determine how successfully the conditions for reading and mathematics improvement were implemented. We describe the surveys, observation instruments, and interview questions in more detail below, followed by the findings, discussion, limitations, and recommendations.

Surveys

Survey instruments were developed to collect data from students, observers, teachers, and parents. Teachers were asked to evaluate the professional development sessions and staff meetings they attended, and family members were asked to fill out surveys on family engagement events they attended. Teacher and parent surveys included both open-ended and closed response questions.

Student Data.

Students filled out surveys for Academic (7th and 8th grade), Enrichment, and/or Character Education (6th and 7th grade) components of *PA*. A total of 35 surveys (Academic: 28; Enrichment / Character Education: 7) were collected at the conclusion of *Project Achieve*.

Students were asked to assess their learning and overall satisfaction with the various *Project Achieve* activities representing the constructs described in the theory of action (Table 1). Forced choice items were on a scale of 1-5 (i.e., 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree). The questions were presented with language to assist in differentiation of the scaled responses: FIVE (5) means that your experience was amazing and you have already seen changes in yourself, while ONE (1) means that you did not gain anything from participation. Students were also asked two open ended questions about the best part of their *PA* experience and suggestions for improvement.

The table below details which questions align with each construct. Only the Academic (7th and 8th graders) survey included questions related to reading, math, and social-emotional learning.

Table 1: Student Survey Questions

SURVEY QUESTIONS	
Construct	Measured by Asking Whether / If <i>PA</i> :
<i>Fidelity of Implementation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gave students motivation to do better in regular classes provided hands-on learning opportunities allowed collaboration with classmates and teachers used technology for communication and collaboration
<i>Satisfaction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the program was a good use of time lessons/activities were interesting they were satisfied with the program
<i>Social-Emotional Learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> helped students learn coping strategies helped students learn about themselves
<u><i>[General] Learning</i></u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teachers were knowledgeable about content teachers provided individual help to students teachers were prepared
<u><i>[Literacy] Learning</i></u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> helped improve reading skills helped improve reading comprehension helped improve vocabulary
<u><i>[Math] Learning</i></u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> helped with math assignments helped improve math skills and understanding

Observer Data.

Observers rated similarly aligned items (Table 2) on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*) as well as open-ended questions related to highlights and recommendations). A total of 15 surveys were collected, covering at least eight different lesson topics, two homework help sessions, and various learning activities (e.g., Earth Day community clean-up). Note that observers provide survey responses for General Learning only (primarily teacher actions), while data related to student learning in reading, math, and social emotional skills were collected from open-ended survey and interview questions.

Table 2: Observer Survey Questions

SURVEY QUESTIONS	
Construct	Measured by Asking Whether / If <i>PA</i> :
<i>Fidelity of Implementation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided hands-on learning opportunities • allowed collaboration with classmates and teachers • used technology for communication and collaboration • had a clear objective
<i>Satisfaction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lessons/activities were interesting
<i>[General] Learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers provided opportunities for student reflection • teachers were knowledgeable about content • teachers were prepared • teachers provided individual help to students

Teacher Data.

To ensure that Project Achieve continued to operate in accordance with its goals and objectives, the PA staff held professional development and staff meetings throughout the year. These meetings were a way of communicating the overall goals of the program, maintaining staff cohesiveness, helping teachers implement the program with fidelity, and dealing with attendance and other learning problems. During the 2022-23 school year, there were two staff meetings and three professional development (PD) sessions. Generally speaking, PD activities and staff meetings were scheduled approximately one month apart so that data from *PA* providers was collected throughout the program.

A total of 38 surveys were collected, with questions grounded in the existing literature on effective professional development (e.g., Desimone & Garet, 2019) and framed so as to provide the *PA* staff with additional data for improvement. *PA* teachers responded on the same five-point scale as observers (one being strongly disagree) and answered open-ended questions about highlights and recommendations. The teacher survey is for programmatic purposes and therefore is not organized by construct in the same way as the student and observer surveys. For the purposes of this evaluation, the questions were grouped into categories: Objectives, Use of Time, Convenience (of time/location/platform), Participant Engagement (active involvement, shared decision-making), and Satisfaction (Table 3).

Table 3: Teacher Survey Questions

SURVEY QUESTIONS
<p>The professional development / staff meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • had a clear purpose and objective • was at a convenient time • was convenient to attend (e.g., virtual platform, location) • involved shared-decision making • actively involved all participants • made an efficient use of the time • was satisfying • was enjoyable

Family Data.

A wide range of events was offered to engage DFMS families throughout the year (i.e., Ed-Tech Workshop, PSAT Workshop, Books & Literacy Showcase, Math History Night, and Mental Health Parent Forum). Following each event, parents were provided links to surveys with a total of five questions, including three forced choice ratings (one is to strongly disagree) and two open-ended questions (Table 4). Similar to the teacher surveys, the parent / family engagement survey is for programmatic purposes and therefore is not organized by construct in the same way as the student and observer surveys.

Table 4: Family Survey Questions

SURVEY QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The time of the session was convenient for my family • I received new information or strategies to help me work with my child at home • The session was interactive and allowed my family to practice the new learning • Give 3 words to tell what you liked about the session • Would you recommend any changes to future sessions?

Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews were held with both teachers and students to obtain supplemental information on *Project Achieve*. Questions for teachers and staff addressed challenges, supports, communication, cohesion, student engagement, and other programmatic details (e.g., administrative roles). Students were asked about what they had learned in general and specific to literacy as well as about their teachers, in addition to questions about their favorite part of the program and suggestions for improvement. A total of eight (8) *PA* teachers and staff members participated in both focus group interviews, and 18 students participated (two seventh-graders and 16 eighth-graders).

Evaluating the Research

In the following section, we review the primary conditions that support student proficiency in math and reading (Theory of Action, Figure 1): attendance, fidelity of implementation, perceptions of learning, and general satisfaction, including the foundation of family engagement (Research Question #1), with focused attention on whether and how social-emotional learning contributes to proficiency (Research Question #2):

- *To what extent and under what conditions are student outcomes in mathematics and reading proficiency met?*
 - *What strategies and activities for meeting student outcomes were put in place?*
 - *What was done to engage family members in supporting student learning?*
- *To what extent does social-emotional learning (SEL) contribute to students' proficiency in mathematics and reading?*
 - *What strategies and activities for promoting SEL were put in place?*

Attendance

As detailed in previous reports, attendance numbers were down in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 due to the pandemic and COVID-19 guidelines. Last year, while still virtual, average attendance increased by thirty percent from the previous academic year. For the 2022-2023 school year, the number of students enrolled increased to 104 (out of 114 proposed), but early attendance was low due to issues with transportation (bus availability). Once this had been resolved, attendance rose to its highest in April, at 17% (Table 5).

Table 5: Student Attendance

ENROLLMENT AND ATTENDANCE BY YEAR		
<i>By Month</i>	<i>2022 – 2023</i>	
	Number (#) Enrolled	Percent (%) Attendance
January	28	15.7%
February	55	11.7%
March	104	3.89%
April	92	17.3%
May	93	5.85%
OVERALL	74 (average)	10.89% (average)

Research Question #1: Conditions for Learning

In the following sections, we review quantitative and qualitative data (i.e., surveys, open-ended questions, focus groups) and draw on student and teacher perceptions to evaluate:

- *To what extent and under what conditions are student outcomes in mathematics and reading proficiency met?*

Overview

PA's theory of action posits that a combination of academic, enrichment, and social emotional learning activities that students engage with regularly (attendance) can lead to increases in student learning and satisfaction, when implemented with fidelity. Students and observers responded to survey questions aligned with these constructs (refer back to Table 2) and overall ratings were determined by averaging the mean score on each item within that construct (e.g., questions 14 and 15 relate to social-emotional learning).

Students

Students indicated primarily positive ratings across all constructs, with averages hovering around 4.0 (ranging from 3.7 to 4.3), as shown below (Table 6). Averages were highest for General Measures of Learning (related to teacher practices), Satisfaction, and Fidelity of Implementation, while the lowest ratings were for Perceived Learning in Reading and Math. Construct ratings are further discussed below.

Table 6: Student Ratings (Constructs)

STUDENT RATINGS BY CONSTRUCT (Scale of 1 – 5)						
	<i>Fidelity</i>	<i>Satisfaction</i>	<i>Perceptions of Learning</i>			<i>SEL</i>
			<i>General</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Math</i>	
Academic	3.7	4.1	3.9	3.9	3.7	4.0
Enrichment	4.5	4.4	4.6	-	-	-
Character	4.4	4.2	4.7	-	-	-
OVERALL	4.2	4.2	4.4	3.9	3.7	4.0

Observers

Following recommendations from previous evaluation reports, in 2021 the *PA* team modified the questions on the observer survey to be more focused on measuring general learning: Were there opportunities for students to reflect? Was the teacher knowledgeable and prepared? Did they help individual students as needed? As with previous years, observers were more likely than students to give *PA* sessions positive ratings (see Table 7). The three constructs were rated at an almost perfect average (4.9), with both Satisfaction and General Learning rated at 5.0 and Fidelity just below that (4.8). Ratings have continued to increase with these more directed questions (+0.2 per year), which gives greater confidence in their validity and additional assurance that *PA* activities were enacted with fidelity (e.g., opportunities for students to reflect).

Table 7: Observer Ratings

OBSERVER RATINGS BY CONSTRUCT (Scale of 1 – 5)			
	<i>Fidelity</i>	<i>Satisfaction</i>	<i>General Learning</i>
2021	4.4	4.6	4.6
2022	4.6	4.8	4.8
2023	4.8	5.0	5.0
OVERALL	4.6	4.8	4.8

Fidelity of Implementation

To measure fidelity, students and observers answered questions about several programmatic components (e.g., motivation, instruction, engagement). Refer back to Tables 1 and 2 for details.

Students

Students indicated that participating in *Project Achieve* motivated them to do well in their other classes and, in line with the other *PA* goals, provided hands-on learning and engaged them in collaborative efforts with classmates and teachers. Responses to the four questions used for measuring fidelity of implementation averaged 4.0 out of five. Students gave the highest ratings to questions about hands-on learning and collaboration (4.2, respectively). Open-ended feedback from observers emphasized these practices, with comments about students working together and using technology (i.e., “*I loved how the students were eager to find out what they were putting in their bodies using the Yuka app*”).

Observers

Parallel to student survey questions about fidelity of implementation, observers were asked whether objectives were clear and whether hands-on learning, collaboration, and technology were used to engage the students. The surveys indicate high levels of fidelity, with observer ratings ranging from 4.7 (hands-on learning; technology) to 4.9 (collaboration) and 5.0 (clear objectives). As noted above, open-ended responses provided additional detail about what these things looked like in practice.

Teachers

Teacher surveys are specific to the professional development and staff meeting experiences, so this construct was not applicable. Where possible, responses from open-ended survey questions and focus group transcripts are referenced to support the data.

Families

Additional details are provided under the sub-question related to parent and family engagement. Where applicable, responses from open-ended survey questions are referenced elsewhere to support the data.

Satisfaction

To measure satisfaction, students and observers were asked how interesting the program (lesson, activity, etc.) was. Students also rated their overall use of time and satisfaction. Teachers who attended professional development and/or staff meetings rated satisfaction, as well, for primarily programmatic purposes. As such, their responses are not measured or discussed by construct aside from where open-ended responses support or conflict with the *PA* evaluation.

Students

As with fidelity of implementation, survey responses indicate general satisfaction for the *Project Achieve* activities: students thought the classes were interesting and a good use of their time. Student ratings averaged 4.2 for overall satisfaction.

In both the focus group interviews and survey comments, students were asked directly or indirectly about their satisfaction with the program. Several students referred to the social aspects, such as “*being able to do it all with my friends and being able to get to know my teachers*” while other students mentioned specific teachers (e.g., “*getting to be with Ms. Gooch*”).

Another indicator of overall satisfaction with the program is that, when asked directly what could be improved, students frequently gave answers such as, “*I like it the way it is*” and “*nothing to improve.*” Other suggestions were for more teachers to help assist students and opportunities to do outside activities.

Observers

Observers rated participant satisfaction based on whether the lesson or activity was interesting. Their responses to open-ended questions provide details specific to the 5.0 rating, repeatedly mentioning student engagement and participation, using words such as “*eager*” and “*high energy*” to describe what they observed.

Teachers

Teacher data not only indicated satisfaction with staff meetings and training activities, but focus group responses support the previous ratings about the sessions offered in *Project Achieve* being satisfying to students. For example, several teachers noted students’ appreciation for the social aspect of the program. Others referenced specific activities (e.g., smoothie challenge) as things students “*were really into.*”

Families

Additional details are provided under the sub-question related to parent and family engagement. Where applicable, responses from open-ended survey questions are referenced elsewhere to support the data.

Perceived Learning

To measure perceived learning, students and observers responded to general questions about learning (e.g., how knowledgeable the teacher was; opportunities for student reflection) in addition to student-specific questions related to literacy, math, and social-emotional learning. Social Emotional Learning is included in Table 8; however, it will be discussed more extensively under Main Research Question #2. The following section focuses on general learning conditions (e.g., teacher preparedness) and the math and literacy learning constructs.

Table 8: Student Ratings (Learning)

STUDENT LEARNING				
	<i>General</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Math</i>	<i>SEL</i>
Academic	3.9	3.9	3.7	4.0
Enrichment	4.6	-	-	-
Character	4.7	-	-	-
OVERALL	4.4	3.9	3.7	4.0

Students

The General Learning construct contained items about program teachers—how knowledgeable, prepared, and helpful they were. Students were particularly complimentary of their teachers, agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were knowledgeable (4.4) and helped students when they needed it (4.5). Within the focus group, students described their teachers as prepared (rated 4.1 on the scaled responses), patient, knowledgeable, and “*on point.*”

When asked what they had learned from the program, students mentioned learning to control their feelings and better ways to communicate. Students were also asked about their literacy and math learning. Their responses were mostly positive, with students asserting they were doing better with their reading comprehension and learning new math strategies. Others discussed specific improvements in their grades or related assignments. For example, one student said they “*feel like the math teacher was really doing his part because he really helped me with my IXL's. He's the reason why I had a good grade on my IXL.*”

State Testing.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing adjustments based on students attending school face to face or virtually, we have been unable to address proficiency in reading and mathematics using a standardized assessment during the time of this grant. The 2022-2023 school year marks the first since then that Project Achieve has been able to gather proficiency data using the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP). The assessment is scored using four levels of performance: Beginner, Developing, Proficient, and Distinguished. MSDE released additional guidance related to students who are on the “Cusp of Proficiency” as well. See Table 9 for a breakdown of student performance in both ELA (reading) and math using percentages based on the number of students in seventh (40) and eighth (64) grades. This data will be used for comparison in future evaluation.

Table 9: MCAP Proficiency

STUDENT PERFORMANCE (PERCENTAGE OF PA PARTICIPANTS)							
	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Beginner</i>	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Proficient</i>	<i>Distinguished</i>	<i>Cusp</i>	<i>No Data</i>
ELA	7 th	17.5%	42.5%	22.5%	2.5%	17.5%	15.0%
	8 th	27.0%	53.0%	10.0%	-	10.0%	10.0%
Math	7 th	37.5%	47.5%	-	-	10.0%	15.0%
	8 th	80.0%	7.0%	-	-	1.5%	13.0%

Observers

Observers indicated that PA teachers were highly knowledgeable and prepared, rating each as Strongly Agree (5.0). Similarly, observer ratings were high (5.0) on providing opportunities for student reflection and giving students individualized attention. Several observers referenced specific teachers in their open-ended responses:

“Ms. Gittens...did well with breaking down the task into smaller steps for them to be able to complete.”

“Mr. Robinson did a fantastic job of breaking down the information for the students and often teaching them another method to grasp the concept.”

Teachers

Engaging students in learning was of obvious importance to the teachers as they explored ways to involve students. Although student attendance remained low throughout the year, PA teachers seemed to find ways to get students interested and involved as the year went on. In focus groups, one teacher noted that some *“students appreciated the program as their grades improved over the last two quarters of the academic school year.”*

Sub-Question #1: Facilitating Outcomes

The data discussed above makes clear that *Project Achieve* has implemented programmatic elements that support student learning. While this finding is beneficial for research, it does little to provide information for practitioners, which is why Sub-Question #1 asks more specifically: *What strategies and activities for meeting these student outcomes were put in place?*

Strategies and Activities

To ensure that *Project Achieve* continued to operate in accordance with its goals and objectives, the PA staff held both staff meetings (2) and professional development activities (3) throughout the year. These provided a way of communicating goals of the program, maintaining staff cohesiveness, helping to implement the program with fidelity, monitoring attendance, and dealing with academic learning problems. At the end of each session, participants were asked to fill out and submit surveys evaluating various components (e.g., use of time, shared decision-making) with scaled (1-5) and open-ended question prompts, for a total of 37 surveys submitted.

As shown in Table 10, staff meetings and PD sessions had clear purposes and objectives (4.7), were scheduled conveniently (4.7), and used time effectively (4.7). Overall, staff were satisfied with the meetings and training activities (4.6) and agreed there was active participant involvement and shared-decision making (4.4). Attendees also commented on the positive tone and energy in the meetings, as well as the ability to collaborate by sharing information about students in order to brainstorm for their benefit. There were no suggestions for improvement.

Table 10: Teacher Ratings

STAFF MEETING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DATA	
Objectives	4.7
Use of Time	4.7
Convenience of Scheduling	4.5
Participant Engagement	4.4
Satisfaction	4.6
OVERALL	4.6

Service Learning

Students participated in the “Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL)” and “Earth Day Community Clean-Up” service-learning projects, which aim to cultivate individual and collective responsibility, accountability, connectivity, and increased awareness of environmental literacy and stewardship, as well as health and wellness.

Both service-learning projects were implemented using the Project Learning Tree curriculum and supplemental materials for research purposes. Student participation in both projects included a hands-on culminating activity. The Earth Day Project included several community clean-ups on school grounds and the surrounding neighborhoods. For the HEAL project, students collaborated in small groups with their peers, teachers, and other staff to create their own smoothie recipes and then share their completed smoothies with others. Multiple students, observers, and teachers referenced the smoothie activity, saying that it was engaging and educational while being fun.

Both survey and focus group comments included various references to these projects, and one student said their best experience so far had been *“Earth Day; Because I got to walk around outside, pick up the trash outside and learn about how to keep the earth clean and how if the earth was cleaner, we could have better air [no] pollution in the air.”*

Sub-Question # 2: Family Engagement

An additional component in the theory of action is the notion that family engagement contributes to student learning. The second sub-question asks *what was done to engage family members in supporting student learning?* Following each parent and family engagement event, parents were provided links to surveys with a total of five questions, including three forced choice ratings (one is to strongly disagree) and two open-ended questions.

Table 11: Family Ratings

PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT	
The time of the session was convenient for my family	4.4
I received new information or strategies to help me work with my child at home	4.2
The session was interactive and allowed my family to practice the new learning	4.3

Comments on the surveys were similarly positive, often referring to workshops as fun, entertaining, informative, and helpful. Others praised the organization and virtual accommodations. Notably, as it relates to the overarching *Project Achieve* goals, one parent said they appreciated the fact that parent sessions “*help me to stay ahead to help Kennedy when she [has difficulty] understanding.*” Overall, there were minimal suggestions for change (and seemed at times to contradict the general sentiment (i.e., no more interactive games).

Research Question #2: Social Emotional Learning

In the following sections, we review quantitative and qualitative data (i.e., surveys, open-ended questions, focus groups) and draw on student and teacher perceptions to evaluate:

- *To what extent does social-emotional learning (SEL) contribute to students’ proficiency in mathematics and reading?*

Overview

Social Emotional Learning has always been part of the *PA* theory of action, often through the Second Step curriculum or activities sponsored by and with the Boys and Girls Club or other character-building sessions. Following the pandemic, *PA* team members recognized the importance of social emotional learning and became more intentional about whether and how it impacts student proficiency. In addition to ratings for learning related to math and literacy skills, the second research question considers the extent to which social emotional learning contributes to student proficiency in reading and math.

Students

Student ratings for Social Emotional Learning have increased in past years, going from 3.2 in 2020 to 4.0 in 2021 to 4.7 in 2022. Following recommendations from last year’s evaluation report, the questions were slightly revised in order to more accurately capture the impact SEL had on student learning (as described previously, surveys included language to assist in differentiation of the scaled responses: FIVE (5) means that your experience was amazing and you have already seen changes in yourself, while ONE (1) means that you did not gain anything from participation).

It is possible the specificity allowed students to reflect and answer more thoughtfully, but despite the ratings going down to 4.2 this year, it is important to note this is still a positive rating and that multiple students listed SEL as one of their favorite parts of *Project Achieve*. During the focus group, one student said the SEL lessons, along with homework assistance, helped their literacy in that “*I feel like I can understand & [I] know what I’m doing more*” while another student said their favorite lesson was when they talked about “*self-love and confidence.*”

Observers

Observers did not rate social-emotional learning, but several of them referenced SEL topics and student engagement in their open-ended responses:

“The Students did well with interpreting different kinds of stress. They were able to determine coping mechanisms and things to do to help eliminate stress in their lives.”

“Excellent discussion on overcoming failure. The video was practical and students were able to identify ways in which they can persevere even in failure and accomplish their goals. Student engagement was a highlight.”

Teachers

Teachers discussed social emotional learning in terms of student growth in confidence, leadership skills, and difficult conversations (i.e., controlling emotions).

Sub-Question #1: Facilitating Outcomes

Once the foundation had been established through training at staff meetings and professional development sessions, the program was modified to be more intentional about emphasizing the importance of and providing opportunities for social emotional learning. In order to contextualize the impact of SEL on student learning, the second sub-question asks *what strategies and activities for promoting social-emotional learning were put in place?*

Second Step

To address students’ social and emotional skills, *Project Achieve* implemented the Second Step web-based curriculum and incorporated training specific to this need in both staff meetings and professional development sessions. Second Step program provides a year of weekly SEL lessons, including professional development for teachers and service-learning for students, to address emotion management, situational awareness, and academic achievement through game-like challenges, candid videos featuring middle school students, and reinforcement activities.

Students

As detailed above, students participated in social emotional learning activities for thirty minutes each day. These activities were structured using the Second Step web-based curriculum and enhanced by additional activities during the final part of each day. Various components of the second step curriculum were addressed by students: anxiety, emotions, and working through tough times.

Several students described learning how to control their emotions as something they would take away, while others mentioned communication and thinking about why they do certain things as helpful to their learning.

Discussion of the Findings

Feedback from students, teachers and observers indicates that they continue to value the contributions *Project Achieve* has made to after school programming and student learning. In its first year returning face-to-face, the activities were implemented in ways that students and adults perceived to contribute to student learning. As intended, *Project Achieve* engaged students in cooperative, hands-on-learning and had them take responsibility for their learning. Students expressed satisfaction with the program, which was echoed in observer and teacher feedback.

The increased focus on social emotional learning was recognized by all participants and noted in multiple survey and focus group responses as an important part of student learning and engagement. The parents from whom *PA* staff received feedback also expressed satisfaction with the opportunities provided to them and their children. The supportive relationships that had been developed among the *PA* partners – teachers and staff members – were instrumental in enabling a positive learning environment.

Although there was an improvement in enrollment rates from last year, attendance numbers decreased due to issues with transportation that were beyond *Project Achieve*'s control. For future after-school grants, attention to promoting, encouraging, and increasing attendance is probably the most important aspect of the program which needs constant attention. No matter how good the program, if it fails to attract participants, it will necessarily fall short of its goals. As researchers have consistently found, program duration and consistency/frequency of contact are key factors in program impact (see Hall, 2014; Krenichyn et al., 2008; LFA, 2008; Whalen, 2007). No matter how valuable the *PA* sessions, if students do not attend regularly across a consistent period of time, impact will be negligible.

Limitations

Although these findings are encouraging, there are two key limitations. First, at the time of this report, there were no direct measures of student learning of math and reading. Given that there has not been testing data since prior to 2020, it would be difficult to evaluate whether and how *Project Achieve* impacted student learning for this report. It will, however, provide a baseline for evaluation moving forward.

Secondly, although student feedback derived from participants was generally positive and compared favorably to last year, it was based on a relatively small number of respondents. Although an average of students participated in *PA* activities at least partially, there were a total of 35 surveys submitted and 18 students who participated in focus group interviews.

Recommendations

In future, similar, after-school programs, we recommend that the program staff do the following:

Table 12: Program Recommendations

<i>PROJECT ACHIEVE</i> RECOMMENDATIONS	
1	Work closely with funding sources and school administration to start program activities as early as possible in the fall semester.
2	Work to increase the number of student participants and improve student daily attendance, including ongoing communication with students and families.
3	Encourage parent attendance at school events through varied means of communication and incentives and increase focus on student learning.

Table 13: Evaluation Recommendations

<i>PA</i> EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS	
1	Ensure that data collection instruments and open-ended questions align with the research questions (i.e., examine constructs, make more specific to role).
2	Find ways to collect survey, interview, and focus group data from more students

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Appendix A
21ST CCLC DAILY SCHEDULE

Suitland Technology Education Engagement Resource Center, Inc. (STEER)
Drew Freeman Middle School “*Project Achieve*”
21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC): 2022 - 2023 SY

Detailed Program Schedule with Time Blocks and Transition Times

Project Achieve meets Mondays - Fridays from 2:25pm to 6:00pm.

Program Schedule

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity</u>
2:25pm - 2:55pm	Staggered Dismissal from School Day to After-School Programs
3:00pm - 3:25pm	Supper/Snack & Social Time
3:30pm - 4:00pm	<u>Social Emotional Learning (SEL)</u> : Second Step Activities
4:00	<i>Transition</i>
4:00pm - 5:00pm	<u>Academic Instruction</u> : STEM and Homework Help/Tutorial
5:00	<i>Transition</i> <i>Parent Pick-Up Begins</i>
5:00pm - 6:00pm	Academic Enrichment Activities
6:00pm	Dismissal / Buses