

Kansas Middle School After School Activity Advancement Grant

2009-2010

“The Zone” After School Program Eudora Public Schools

June 26, 2009

Need for proposed program

Middle school is an ideal time to plant the seeds for adolescent and early adulthood success by connecting students with their peers and caring adults, while helping them navigate a period of physical, social, and cognitive changes. Many factors point to the need for age appropriate physical activity, career / higher learning opportunities, and academic enhancement:

- Childhood obesity and attendant health problems are on the rise. Exposure to habits such as fast-food, junk-food, sedentary video gaming, lack of physical activity during the school day, and emphasis on medical intervention rather than healthful prevention need to be countered.
- Academic time trumps active time. Eudora middle school 6th and 7th graders participate in a Physical Education(PE)/Health class, which means they are physically active only every other day. PE is an elective for 8th grade, and only 20% are enrolled.
- Not all students are motivated by competitive physical activity (sports). Students participating in a focus group ask us to support a diversity of activities for their interests.
- Rapid technology and environmental changes create new career and education paths. Exposure to places, people and possibilities makes a meaningful difference for students whose life situations might not otherwise allow them to visualize themselves in post-secondary education or careers.
- Many of our students need support now to develop ‘success habits.’ 7% of EMS students have serious homework completion issues; another 10% have no access to technology in the home, even though technology use for completing homework is expected. Sometimes parents want to help with homework, but don’t know how. The current after-school homework program, funded through Title 1, does not serve

everyone. For example, it doesn't serve our special education group, which did not make AYP this year. In addition, it can be difficult to attract students to a program that focuses exclusively on homework.

Description of Activities

Translating the three activity areas (physical activity, career/higher learning, academics) into language and themes that will appeal to middle school students, EMS will call its after school program "The Zone." Not only does it describe a place to be or to hang out, "the Zone" is also slang for the experience of peak performance, when mental and physical functioning seemingly flows effortlessly. *Get in 'The Zone'* will communicate a fun and exciting place where students can 'belong' and acquire 'success habits' to use throughout life. Because the desire is to sustain the program long-term, at startup students will help choose theme names and activities, in addition to the menu of activities proposed here:

Physical activities will be geared to diverse interest groups, whether it is taking video games into the 'active zone' (eg: Wii bowling, dancing, etc.); focusing on low-impact but highly healthful stretching, strength training, etc.; using technology and/or teamwork to encourage walking or other cardio activities; or capitalizing on student clamoring to 'go green' with gardening, landscaping and other activities focusing on interacting with nature and helping the planet. Students will be able to propose ideas for physical activities. Numerous areas lend themselves well to academic enrichment and career/higher learning being incorporated.

For example, many students have approached the EMS principal about 'going green' with recycling, gardening, etc. In developing physical activities related to gardening and landscaping, students can also learn about climate zones, native plants, nutrition of various vegetables, and other subjects that will be directly useful and engaging in their interest area. They may research composting options for recycling. They may branch out into learning about renewable energy and career options that are emerging. They may tour the technical school and the culinary program where high school mentors can use some of the garden produce and demonstrate their skills. The ASP will allow curiosity and the enthusiasm for discovery to help create depth and breadth in student experience.

Career/higher learning activities will include: a tour of Johnson County Community College during a special night when other area colleges convene and provide speakers who share about post-secondary education opportunities with middle and high school students; tours and demonstration programs one day each week

through the Eudora Technical Education Center, which includes culinary arts, auto collision, agricultural science and printing; speakers who share about their career fields; hands-on opportunities to complete job and post-secondary education applications; access to computer lab to research careers and fill out profiles in the Career Pipeline; and some fun activities for becoming financially savvy and setting up good money habits, which can aid students now as well as in planning for post-secondary education and potential career earnings.

One key to engaging this age group and target audience to consider career and post-secondary education is to provide them with interesting, hands-on experiences that they can relate to now, such as tying in their interests as already explained. Allowing them to have a fun here-and-now experience, while exposing them to the 'next steps' (such as the weekly tours and demonstrations at the Technical Education Center), and encouraging/supporting their attaining success habits now, helps young people begin to understand not only the progression of interests into potential career/education areas, but also to see the meaningfulness and 'pay off' of their earnest efforts now. The after school program will utilize this holistic approach.

Academic Enrichment activities will be threefold:

1. The Homework Zone where students will have access to computers, tutors and library
2. Specific enrichment activities and competitions from: researching recycling/renewable energy and other topics of interest, to holding reading competitions or book clubs, to holding giant erector set competitions, to discussing with friends and play acting 'life skills' that emphasize healthy, success-oriented choices and decision-making.
3. Academics woven into everyday activities, such as math within financial literacy activities, science and health in physical activities and fitness, etc.

With the changed state economic conditions and a new configuration of schools in our district, the funding for the current homework-only program provided at EMS will be shifted. To attract additional students and our target populations, a more holistic and dynamic approach is required. Youth in this age range technically can care for themselves after school, and will often not be required by parents to participate in supervised, structured activities. To retain youth throughout the school year and into the following years will require we actively involve them in the program design, assess satisfaction periodically, and help them feel successful now as well as hopeful and excited about their futures. Additionally, this age level and target audience stays engaged

not only for the activities, but also due to bonding with a caring and consistent adult. To accommodate 50 students, a staffing ratio at the recommended 1 to 12 will facilitate these bonds.

A consistent place to come, emphasizing three core success areas, and offering a variety of activities and interests within those areas, will especially appeal to middle school youth. Matching funds from Safe Schools Healthy Students (SSHS) and the District's food services and transportation funds will be coordinated for effective resource use. To maximize the middle school program benefits this grant would allow, parent outreach through our SSHS Family Resource Center, including workshops on paying for post-secondary education and other family-friendly topics, will support the success habits students will learn at *The Zone*.