



THE FEDERATION FOR
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROFILE

MILDRED I. LAVIZZO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Mildred I. Lavizzo Elementary School, located in Chicago's Roseland community, has operated as a community school for four years through its partnership with Metropolitan Family Services. Lavizzo serves nearly 400 students in Head Start through 8th grade.



MAKING DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS TO SUPPORT ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT

When deciding how the Lavizzo's 21st Century Community Learning Center¹ funding would be used to develop OST programming to support academic progress, Resource Coordinator Breanne Dale and Principal Tracey Stelly's priorities were to provide opportunities that would support the school's efforts to (1) get off academic probation and (2) improve students' ability to perform in the classroom and on standardized tests. One of the strategies used to spur this improvement is the strategic placement of students in OST programs. Each year, Dale and Stelly review student data around grades, test scores, attendance, and behaviors. Using this information and their knowledge of individual students, Dale and Stelly place students in the programs that will offer the supports that best suit the students' unique assets and needs. Additionally, Lavizzo provides training for OST activity workers with limited prior teaching experience to better prepare them to provide academic support. As a result, many students have received both academic support and enrichment opportunities through their participation in OST programming. This approach has had an impact: over the course of four years, Lavizzo's academic performance has improved from being on academic probation to the highest possible standing, a shift that is due to the hard work of the school's staff, students, and families.

¹ The 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grant is a national grant, disbursed by the Illinois State Board of Education, that many community schools use to develop afterschool, weekend, and summer programs that support students and their communities.

Highlights of community school work

- Making data-driven decisions to support academic improvement
- Structuring a cohesive, streamlined out-of-school time (OST) program
- Establishing an integrated focus on health and wellness
- Encouraging parent engagement
- Using community school resources to welcome new students

Resource Coordinator (RC):

Breanne Dale

Principal: Tracey Stelly

Lead Partner: Metropolitan Family Services

Student opportunities: GEAR UP; on-site learning garden; Common Threads; school-based dental services; outside facilitators through Red Cross and University of Illinois; SES tutoring; sports including flag football, volleyball, basketball, and cheerleading.

Parent and family opportunities: Evening GED classes; Family Cooking Class through Common Threads; Local School Council. A Parent Engagement Center is being developed.

STRUCTURING A COHESIVE, STREAMLINED OST PROGRAM

In order to further Lavizzo's community school work, Dale and Principal Stelly have intentionally developed OST programs that run efficiently, are integrated with the school day, and are led by a staff with a markedly low turnover rate. To accomplish this, they have employed the following strategies:

Strengthening the connection between the school day and OST activities

• **Blending staff** Part of the connection between Lavizzo's school day and OST can be seen in the strategic blending of school day and OST staff. Staffing decisions are made collaboratively between Principal Stelly and Dale. Principal Stelly selects and hires school day teachers and paraprofessionals, who have developed relationships with students and their families, to support OST programs. Because activity workers have also established relationships with members of the school, they are strongly considered for school day positions when the school has funding to hire additional full-time staff member. In the past, activity workers have been hired to provide academic support during the school day. Dale has been able to draw upon this staff blending in order to streamline communication between the school day and OST, as well as to maximize the relationships developed with students and families.

• **School-wide incentive system** The connection between the school day and OST is also apparent in Lavizzo's school-wide student incentive system. Students can earn tickets from school day and OST staff for exhibiting above-and-beyond behavior before, during, and after school. Students can then use their tickets to buy school supplies and other small treats at the Pawsitive School Store, which is funded through the 21st Century grant.

Consistency in afterschool program leadership and structure

• **Program leadership** Lavizzo's afterschool program is led by a consistent group of activity workers, each of whom is assigned to one group of students for the duration of the year. Activity workers are responsible for taking attendance, providing classroom management and mentorship, and addressing minor discipline issues for their group. The leadership of the afterschool staff makes it possible for Dale to address larger issues as they arise.

• **Daily structure** Lavizzo's afterschool program allows students a structured environment to receive academic support and participate in hands-on learning activities. To ensure that student groups' activities are developmentally appropriate, students are separated by grade level: K-2nd grade, 3rd-4th grade, 5th-6th grade, and 7th-8th grade. Activity workers lead their groups using grade-level curriculum meant to strengthen students' academic skills. On a regular basis, Dale also brings in outside facilitators to lead six-to-eight week sessions on a variety of topics. The outside facilitators lead classes focusing on concepts not covered during the school day. For instance, the Red Cross facilitated sessions on fire safety and hand-washing for the K-2nd grade group, and representatives from the University of Illinois provided nutrition education for 3rd-4th graders. During these sessions with outside facilitators, activity workers remain with their designated groups and provide essential support and oversight.

Clear communication between activity workers, school day staff, and families

Dale holds consistent staff meetings with her activity workers to discuss any new grant requirements and processes. These meetings are also used to communicate messages from Principal Stelly on what else she would like to see the OST program provide for students. Lavizzo's staff calendar includes a schedule of OST programming so that school day staff is informed of important times and dates. Additionally, Lavizzo's school newsletter contains a Community Schools section, which is used to inform families of any relevant announcements and upcoming opportunities; these announcements are also included on Lavizzo's website.



ESTABLISHING AN INTEGRATED FOCUS ON HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Lavizzo's emphasis on health and wellness is evident in many aspects of the school, both inside and outside the building and during the school day and OST. The school's current thematic unit is Health and Wellness; classroom curriculum and assignments are organized around concepts of health and wellness and reinforced through activities and events outside of the school day. Students attend physical education classes both during the day and as OST participants. Additionally, Lavizzo developed an on-site learning garden with support from grants from Openlands and The Kitchen [Community]. Students prepared and planted the garden and continue to maintain it during Lavizzo's OST and summer programs.



ENCOURAGING PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Parents and guardians serve as an integral part of Lavizzo's community school strategy. A number of Lavizzo's parents serve as activity workers in OST programs. The school has also prioritized communication with parents. Every week, Lavizzo issues an outgoing call to parents and families with updates on student activities and upcoming events. Inside the school's parent room, Dale has set up a communication board that displays information on topics such as employment opportunities and summer programs for students. Lavizzo recently received a grant from the University of Wisconsin's Digital Literacy program that will provide five computers to be used to transform the parent room into a Parent Engagement Center. Through its partnership with Olive Harvey, Lavizzo offers GED classes for parents that are scheduled during the evening to accommodate work and childcare schedules. The GED classes provide a means of strengthening parents' involvement and connection with the school as a place that serves both them and their children.

USING COMMUNITY SCHOOL RESOURCES TO WELCOME NEW STUDENTS

Lavizzo will serve as one of three welcoming schools for nearby Kohn Elementary School, which was closed at the end of the 2013 school year. Lavizzo's staff has already begun planning how they will utilize community school resources to welcome and include Kohn's students and families. In order to prepare Kohn's students to join Lavizzo's OST program, Dale has spoken with Kohn's current Resource Coordinator to coordinate a tour of Lavizzo's building and OST classes. Lavizzo also plans to host a day for Kohn's students and families to come and plant in Lavizzo's learning garden, as well as to dedicate a planter box to the incoming students.



Common Threads

Common Threads facilitates a number of classes and events that support Lavizzo's emphasis on health and wellness. Common Threads offers a number of programs: **Cooking Skills & World Cuisine**, an afterschool class, hosted by nearby Fenger Academy High School, that combines lessons on movement, nutrition, cooking, and culture; **Small Bites**, an in-school nutrition curriculum, facilitated by Lavizzo's teachers, and designed to support Common Core Math and English standards; and **The World Garden**, in which students tend to the school's garden as they learn about plants, harvesting, cooking healthy foods, and exercising. The organization also hosts **Family Cooking Class**, where families practice preparing healthy recipes and discuss strategies for budgeting for

ENCOURAGING HIGH SCHOOL AND CAREER READINESS

Encouraging students' high school and career readiness has become a priority for Lavizzo. Through their school's partnership with GEAR UP, Lavizzo's 7th and 8th grade students gain exposure to college and the workforce through college tours and career fairs and expos. In order to further prepare students for the academic challenges of high school and, eventually, college, GEAR UP also provides OST, weekend, and summer academic support in math and reading, as well as school day tutors.

By utilizing funding and volunteers provided by Chicago Cares, Lavizzo has developed High School and Career Readiness Centers in multiple locations in the school's hallways. The Centers, which are decorated with college pennants and hold college pamphlets and brochures, are meant to be quiet places for students to access information on college and career options. The Centers' reading mats and comfortable seating also make them a favorite place for student groups to work on projects.



KEY LESSONS

- Work with school staff to identify students who could most benefit from the opportunities offered in OST programming. **Recommending individual students through personal invitations may help incentivize students who may not otherwise sign up for programs.**
- Develop ways for school day and OST staff to collaborate. These relationships can help provide information and perspective that can further staff members' understandings of students' assets and needs. **Encourage OST staff to attend staff meetings when possible, and invite school day staff to visit and participate in OST classes.**
- When possible, coordinate OST opportunities to complement school day learning. **Organizing OST activities to align with your school's thematic or curricular unit is one strategy to reinforce the connection between OST and the school day.**
- Consider what information and services would be most beneficial to your parents and determine which of these your school can provide. **By offering useful resources for parents, you can create a welcoming, responsive environment that can further encourage parents' engagement in their students' activities.**
- When your school is faced with significant changes, **think about how the partnerships you have established as part of your community school work can help you strategize in response to these changes.**

“21st Century has had such a huge impact that it's not even like they're 21st Century-- they're Lavizzo.”

-Assistant Principal Cathy Clark on Lavizzo's partnership with Metropolitan Family Services, funded through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant.

The Federation for Community Schools would like to thank:

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