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Success found in 21st Century After-School program

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

Fallsburg Junior-Senior High School English teacher and coordinator for the clubs, Jamie Lippen-Shanberg, provided an update on the 21st Century Community Learning Center After-School program.

This initiative is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, aiming to establish community learning centers for academic enrichment during non-school hours.

The program, now in its second year, continues to thrive, offering a diverse range of enrichment opportunities for Junior-Senior High

School students.

Erin Ruth, an English as a New Language (ENL) teacher and the leader of the Guitar Club, along with Brandon Lundgren, a social studies teacher overseeing the Gaming Club, shed light on the positive impact the program has had on students.

The program, running from 2:45 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. on weekdays, presents students with a choice between academic sessions and enrichment activities.

According to Lippen-Shanberg, the program has seen success, with approximately 400 students signed up, although not all attend daily.

Academic sessions are available for students needing additional



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

At Fallsburg, the Guitar Club empowers students by providing a platform to grasp fundamental skills and knowledge, forming a solid foundation for further development.

support, ensuring they meet academic eligibility standards. For enrichment activities, the program boasts an array of options, including cooking and baking, popular table-top game Dungeons and Dragons, and guitar lessons, among others.

Erin Ruth, leading the Guitar Club, expressed enthusiasm for the program, highlighting the opportunity it provides for students

Erin Ruth, Brandon Lundgren, and Jamie Lippen-Shanberg said the expanded after-school programs have grown, offering students opportunities to learn and collaborate across diverse fields.

to learn and collaborate.

The club has grown, with approximately 20 students participating, learning basics such as chord charts and strumming patterns. Ruth mentioned plans for a guitar recital and emphasized the program's positive impact on students' confidence and social skills.

"On my first day of the guitar program, I ask, have you ever had experience with music or guitar? And then what's your inspiration," said Ruth. She added that some of the students have taken to their new instruments, even playing at family events.

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School Scene

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4F

Brandon Lundgren, overseeing the Gaming Club, discussed the importance of collaboration and cooperation among students. The club not only focuses on gaming, but also encourages teamwork and problem-solving skills. Lundgren emphasized the program's inclusivity, offering students a space to express themselves and build relationships with peers who share similar interests.

Lippen-Shanberg highlighted the success of the program, with students choosing to participate voluntarily, making it an intrinsic and motivating experience. The program's offerings extend beyond academics, fostering a sense of community and providing a valuable outlet for students who may not be involved in traditional clubs or sports.

The flexibility of the program, with different activities scheduled on specific days, allows students to explore multiple interests.

Fallsburg Central School Dis-

trict's 21st Century After-School program continues to make a positive impact on students, offering a diverse range of academic and enrichment activities, fostering collaboration, and creating a sense of community for participating students.

Elementary School

Benjamin Cosor Elementary School is buzzing with excitement as the 21st Century Community Learning Center After-School program kicks into high gear.

Katrina Gladding, the after-school program coordinator for the 21st-century grant in the elementary school, said that with approximately 300 students from grades K to 6 participating, the elementary school program offers a unique setup. Unlike the high school, where students have more free choice, the elementary program has a structured approach.

Students are divided into home classrooms after school, each led by two teachers. These classrooms

serve as the starting point for homework help and Project-Based Learning (PBL) activities.

PBL projects are open-ended and encourage students to investigate and produce a final culminating activity. Recent examples include planning a Thanksgiving meal within a budget, fostering creativity and critical thinking. The program also emphasizes enrichment activities, including art club, book club, crochet club, chess club, and even intramural cheerleading.

The after-school program incorporates a variety of enrichment activities to engage students, including yoga sessions provided by an external instructor. Additionally, the program collaborates with external partners such as Cornell Cooperative and Bethel Woods, bringing in programs like "Warrior Kids," focusing on healthy eating.

What are the differences between the high school and elementary programs? While high school students often stay for specific activities, elementary students benefit

from a more structured schedule that balances homework help and enrichment projects.

Looking ahead, Gladding envisions expanding the program by leveraging in-house talents and fostering partnerships with external organizations.

She expresses a desire to introduce a music class and possibly organize intramural soccer in the spring.

There's a recurring theme of increased student engagement and attendance, with students eagerly anticipating the diverse array of after-school activities.

The program not only provides academic support but also fosters a sense of community and excitement among students.

As the program continues to evolve, the Fallsburg Central School District aims to enrich students' lives by exposing them to new experiences, building a positive and engaging after-school environment.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

In the elementary school, the district extends daytime lessons and offers enjoyable after-school activities for students to participate in.

Benjamin Cosor Elementary School's Walking Classroom revolutionizes learning experience

STORY AND PHOTO
BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

A novel and innovative initiative is making waves at Benjamin Cosor Elementary School — the Walking Classroom.

This groundbreaking wellness program is not only engaging students but also fostering a healthy learning environment.

The program's success is made possible by a \$50,000 grant from Sullivan 180's Empowering a Healthier Generation (EHG) program, underscoring the commitment to holistic education and well-being.

Stacy Strassburg, the school's EHG coordinator, said this grant-funded initiative



supported by Sullivan BOCES, aims to integrate nutrition education, physical activity, and overall well-being into students' daily routines.

The Walking Classroom involves students listening to 20-minute podcasts of a lesson on handheld devices while engaging in physical activity, whether walking in the classroom or outside.

"They were 100 percent engaged in those lessons," said Strassburg.

Strassburg details the positive impact it has on students' engagement and retention of lesson content, noting a significant transformation in students' physical activity levels over the school

Students participating in the walking classroom, one of the initiatives to keep students active while learning.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

year.

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and while that might not seem like a lot, we were able to ultimately positively affect over 300 students with those 11 teachers,” said Strassburg.

Despite initial challenges in gaining staff buy-in, the Walking Classroom became a sought-after addition to the curriculum, with teachers integrating it into their lessons. The enthusiasm from students, initially met with groans, evolved into anticipation for the next Walking Classroom session.

Positive feedback from parents, gathered through surveys, indicates that children are not only excited about the program but also

sharing their enthusiasm at home. The Walking Classroom extends beyond regular school hours, making its way into the extended day program, contributing to a more active and engaging learning experience for students.

Looking ahead, Strassburg envisions the program’s widespread adoption across all classrooms, tying together various wellness initiatives within the school.

Stacy Strassburg (left), BCES’s EHG Coordinator, and BCES Principal Mary Kate Stinehour expressed that parents’ positive feedback, collected through surveys, reveals that children are enthusiastic about the walking classrooms.



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Sullivan 180 grant fuels Benjamin Cosor Elementary School's Wellness Initiatives

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

Benjamin Cosor Elementary School is embarking on a transformative journey, thanks to a generous \$50,000 grant from Sullivan 180, which remains committed to addressing immediate health concerns and promoting innovative ways for all residents to lead healthier lifestyles.

This substantial grant is breathing life into the school's holistic wellness initiatives, particularly through the Empowering a Healthier Generation (EHG) program. Spearheaded by Stacy Strassburg, the school's EHG coordinator, this grant-funded initiative is aimed at fostering healthy lifestyles among students.

The EHG program encompasses a range of wellness initiatives, including nutrition classes provided by Cornell Cooperative Extension, Moser from Snap Ed, a celebration cart replacing traditional birthday treats, and the introduction of a blender bike for healthier smoothie options.

"They were both grant funded



Those are some big checks! Grants from Sullivan 180 power wellness initiatives at Benjamin Cosor Elementary School.

Congratulations, Fallsburg!

Benjamin Cosor Elementary School competed and won second place in the 2023 Sullivan 180 Empowering a Healthier Generation Competition. This competition charged Sullivan County public schools with creating a culture of health and wellness among students, staff, parents, and their communities.

On September 21, Fallsburg received the following awards:

- 2nd Place (\$50,000) - Benjamin Cosor Elementary School
- Collaborator Turtle Award, sponsored by the Zufall Family Foundation (\$500) - Fallsburg High School
- Nutrition Turtle Award, sponsored by Foster Supply Hospitality (\$500) - Fallsburg Central School District

Thank you Fallsburg School District for empowering a healthier generation!

through Cornell Cooperative Extension, and they're just replacements for our birthday treats," said Strassburg.

Notably, the program is committed to promoting physical activity, with additional Physical Education (PE) time incorporated into the daily schedule.

"Our administration does support movement breaks throughout the school day to get our students up and moving, you know, instead of just being seated all day," added Strassburg.

The school utilizes its BCES nature trail for various outdoor activities, such as snowshoeing, providing a unique and invigorating experience for students, many of whom are not familiar with outdoor settings in their daily lives.

The Sullivan 180 grant is not merely a financial boost; it signifies a commitment to the well-being of the school's students. Looking forward, the funds will be utilized to expand outdoor offerings, creating dedicated outdoor classroom spaces.

"How do we make it aesthetically pleasing, and have that outdoor space for students to be able to utilize," were the questions they were asking themselves, said Mary Kate Stinehour, Benjamin Cosor Elementary Principal.

These spaces will include benches, picnic tables, outdoor whiteboards, and greenery, enhancing the school's commitment to providing unique and enriching learning environments.

As Benjamin Cosor Elementary School continues to receive support from Sullivan 180, it stands at the forefront of holistic education, demonstrating the positive impact that targeted grants can have on fostering a healthier and more engaging learning environment.

Sullivan 180

According to Sullivan 180, the following is the full incentives worked on at BCES:

Staff and Student Yoga: Introduction of rejuvenating yoga sessions for both staff and students, promoting mindfulness



Upcoming outdoor learning space will soon be transformed with benches, tables, whiteboards and greenery as part of the Sullivan 180 grant.

and stress relief.

Comet Breakfast Broadcast: A wellness-focused platform for announcements, disseminating valuable information about various aspects of physical and mental health.

Fruit and Vegetable Carts: Vibrant and accessible carts placed in hallways to encourage healthy eating habits among students and staff.

Family Engagement Days: Instituted events that serve as a bridge between home and school, fostering communication and collaboration for the holistic development of every student.

Alternative In-School Suspension Program: A pilot initiative in collaboration with Bethel Woods, providing a supportive environment for students to reflect on their actions and offering a pathway for personal growth and positive change.

Changes in Food Offerings: Significant improvements in cafeteria food offerings, including the

introduction of salad bars and new kitchen equipment, promoting nutritious and appetizing meals.

Drug Awareness Presentations: Hosted presentations by Catholic Charities and PARFACT for graduating seniors, addressing the dangers of substance abuse and providing essential knowledge for their transition into the next phase of their lives.

Reopened Pool: Symbolizing a commitment to physical fitness, the school's pool has been reopened, offering students an additional avenue for exercise and recreation.

Wellness Days and Conference: Winter & Spring Wellness Days and a Wellness Conference Day emphasize the importance of a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

SNAP-Ed Programs: Hosting initiatives that educate students about nutrition and strengthen ties between the school and local organizations, fostering a sense of unity in promoting health and wellness.



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Fallsburg Central School District's innovative partnership with SUNY Sullivan

STORY AND PHOTO
BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

Fallsburg Central School District has embarked on an initiative, partnering with SUNY Sullivan to offer students the opportunity to take college courses and earn credits, ultimately obtaining an associate's degree concurrent with their high school diploma.

Meryl Giarrizzo, a Fallsburg Central School District School Counselor, said the unique nature of the partnership represents an early pathway for students to attain their associate's degree while still in high school.

Giarrizzo explained that the collaboration with SUNY Sullivan had been in the planning stages for some time, with the first cohort commencing the program two years ago.

Joe Levner, Fallsburg Central School District School Counselor, said that Fallsburg is leading the way to dual diplomas in the county, with about 125 students graduating in June, eight of them marking the inaugural graduating class that will receive both a high school diploma and an associate's degree.

Sonja Vandyke, Fallsburg Central School District School Counselor, said the current program allows students to achieve an associate's degree; a significant milestone at no additional cost to their education.

Mia Irlbacher, Alexander McBride and Haris Basic, the students, shared their enthusiasm for the program. Mia highlighted the program's positive impact on her college readiness, citing the balance of challenge without overwhelming pressure. All three students expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree, providing a distinct advantage as they prepare for higher education.

According to Alexander, the college courses carry a different dynamic, with heightened expectations and sharper deadlines. However, he emphasized the program's overall worth, underscoring

the potential to transfer credits seamlessly to a four-year university.

The students indicated that parental support played a crucial role in their decision to join the program. Mia and Haris noted a mutual agreement between them and their parents on the program's benefits, including significant cost savings and the advantage of entering college with a foundation of credits.

Addressing the challenges, the students acknowledged the workload but emphasized that it was manageable. They spoke of the program's role in honing time management skills, a vital asset as they navigate through college-level coursework.

Additionally, the students high-

lighted that teachers' attitudes in the college courses conveyed a sense of urgency and responsibility, providing a taste of the expectations awaiting them in higher education.

Looking ahead, Vandyke said there are plans to strengthen and expand the partnership. With this year serving as a pilot, there is growing interest among middle school students, sparking discussions about potential future expansions and ways to inform and involve parents earlier in the process.

Alexander McBride, Mia Irlbacher, and Haris Basic will graduate this year, earning both an associate's degree from SUNY Sullivan and their high school diploma through the partnership with SUNY Sullivan.



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My Brother's Keeper

STORY AND PHOTO
BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

In 2014, U.S. President Barack Obama launched the My Brother's Keeper initiative, a nationwide effort aimed at addressing persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color.

Embracing this initiative, the Fallsburg Central School District has fostered the growth of its own My Brother's Keeper program, creating a transformative impact on the lives of its students.

Kristen Meyer, a member of the technology department, shared her journey from volunteering to steering the program after the departure of former coordinator Dr. Aleta Lymon, Family and Community Liaison with the Fallsburg Central School District.

Meyer said the program's expansion to include girls, emphasizing need-based selection and a commitment to fostering growth.

"We conduct college visits with grant money, exposing students to a balance of college and trade careers. It's not just about college; there are various paths to success," Meyer emphasized.

Bilingual math teacher Anthony Cordero emphasized the mentorship aspect, with the team meeting students every other week to celebrate successes, reflect on challenges and provide a supportive environment.

The overarching goal, according to Cordero, is to guide students through high school and towards graduation, emphasizing growth over perfection.

Director of Student Equity and My Brother's Keeper Coordinator, Lindsay Severino, who assumed her role in July, spoke about the program's responsiveness to cultural and linguistic needs, extending support beyond My Brother's Keeper to initiatives like clothing donation closets and the A Single Bite program.

"My Brother's Keeper provides opportunities to connect with

students, amplifying their voices in decisions and initiatives," Severino stated.

Fallsburg Junior Senior High School Principal Shana Bruestle expressed gratitude for recent successful field trips orchestrated by Severino and highlighted plans to integrate new cohorts of seventh and eighth graders. The program's success, measured not just in academic improvement but also in building strong bonds, sets the stage for a broader, more inclusive future.

Math teacher Daniel Redmond said the focus is on struggling students, not seeking perfection but inspiring growth. The program, starting with 30 minority males, has evolved into a close-knit group that has seen remarkable successes.

As Fallsburg Central School District's My Brother's Keeper program continues to thrive, it stands as a testament to the power of mentorship, support, and inclusivity in shaping the futures of young individuals. The

commitment of educators, administrators, and the broader community showcases the transformative impact such initiatives can have on the lives of students, setting them on a path toward success and fulfillment.

Daniel Redmond, Fallsburg's math teacher, Kristen Meyer, Fallsburg's Technology Department, Anthony Cordero, Fallsburg's bilingual math teacher, and Lindsay Severino, the My Brother's Keeper Coordinator, all emphasized the importance of keeping the program alive in Fallsburg.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Students from My Brother's Keeper enjoyed a field trip to Philadelphia.

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