

After School Child Care A Critical Need

The Situation

A safe, affordable, enriching and conveniently located out-of-school environment was needed by an estimated 70 percent of Lewiston's school age children in kindergarten to sixth grade.

National studies show that children left at home alone are bored, lonely and are at the highest risk to fall into negative behavior patterns. National FBI reports show highest juvenile crime rates are between 3 and 8 p.m. Employers report that the most inefficient time for employees is between 3 and 5 p.m. when the employees are worrying about the safety of their children.

The mobile society in which we live does not promote getting to know neighbors as friends. Not all children and families are community neighbors because they are unsure of safety. Therefore, many socialization skills of making friends and using positive conflict resolution skills are not learned.

A survey conducted in cooperation with the Lewiston School District in 1991 showed a significant number of parents were interested in an after school care program located on school property.

Our Response

In cooperation with the Lewiston School District, the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System in Nez Perce County established an after school

program at Whitman Elementary School in February of 1993. During the fall of 1994, two additional sites opened at Webster and Camelot elementary schools. In 1997, another site opened at St. Stanislaus Tri-Parish School. In the fall of 1999, the Lewiston School District based students from Camelot, McSorley, McGhee, and Orchards elementary schools to the sites at Whitman and Webster.

We discovered the optimum size group per site for the multi-age group of children is approximately 25 to facilitate the teaching of life skills and for the development of friendships.

The Lewiston School District and St. Stanislaus Tri-Parish School provide shared space for the After School Adventures Program which operates from school release until 6 p.m. during the regular school calendar and includes early release days as well. The After School Adventures Program operates during school improvement and vacation days on non-school days from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. when at least 12 children will attend. In 1996 and 1998 a 53-day summer program operated from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. In 1999, a 48-day summer program served 55 children. The summer sessions allow extra time for discovery. A computer camp was also offered for a week this past summer.

Activities each day include recreational time, a nutritious snack, directed enrichment, free time and homework club. A Connectivity Grant has provided two computers. Students are able to expand their

computer skills with the Internet and software programs, including: Jump Start, Kindergarten, First Grade and Second Grade, Microsoft Encarta, Money, Publisher 97, Front Page 98, Office Professional & Bookshelf, SIM Farm, SIM Tower, The Magic School Bus Explores the Ocean, The Age of Dinosaurs, Hot Dog Stand, Orly's Draw A Story, and SIM Safari.

Other enrichment units included fossils and rock collecting with a field trip to the Clarkia Fossil Bowl. A transportation unit on trains included movies, a visit to Locomotive Park to climb on an old engine and caboose and the local model train club brought two different train sets and allowed the children to operate them in the gym. Environmental units included caring for the world, recycling, water quality, and identification of trees and weeds. Another field trip gave children the opportunity to go fishing and study fly tying. Homework contracts helped children learn the importance of a commitment to contracts, follow through, accountability, time management, organizational skills, practicing math facts, spelling strategies and research techniques. Most importantly, students discovered that learning is fun!

A male science teacher has provided hands on science experiments and directed recreational activities one afternoon per week after school and during the summer afternoons. This carries an additional bonus because some of the students do not have positive a male role model at home.

Teachers emphasize consistent clear expectations and rules, respect for self and others, teamwork and appreciating differences. Daily they also incorporate how to manage anger, choose alternatives to violence, and use appropriate language to communicate feelings and ideas.

A social and emotional development evaluation instrument for each student was implemented to help the program teachers consistently communicate the children's behaviors to parents.

Achievements

A survey was given to parents, school age care staff, school district principals and teachers. Survey results revealed that all segments are complimentary regarding the program. The majority of parents rated the health/safety condition, quality of educational activities and quality of recreational activities as excellent. Almost all parents have not been late for work or quit a job since their family's involvement in the program. Most have not been absent from work or left work early. The parents felt the program helped children develop interests in new topics/activities and follow directions and rules of adults more willingly. Program staff helped children develop new interests. Shy children became more outgoing. Children gained skill at joining in group activities. Rejected children made new friends. A social worker for the Lewiston School District specifically recognized this program as successfully teaching conflict/anger management in helping three students learn appropriate ways to solve problems. Another student who was very shy and withdrawn was supported and encouraged to become more outgoing and self-confident. The social worker also remarked about our success in creating a caring safe environment where the children are introduced to activities and projects that they would never be exposed to otherwise.

Children from high, medium and low risk behavior patterns are served by the program. Included also are a diverse range of physical, social, emotional, racial, and economic backgrounds. There were 134 children enrolled in the 1998-99 year compared to 12 in 1993.

For More Information

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