

**Extended Learning Opportunities in Fostering
Student Achievement**

Meyzeek Middle School Profile

Jefferson County Public Schools
Louisville, Kentucky



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Extended Learning and Development Project
Work supported by The Mott Foundation
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Background

Meyzeek Middle School is located in Smoke-town, an economically depressed, low-income community adjacent to downtown Louisville. Meyzeek is an inner-city school that draws more than half of its student population, referred to as the “resides” students, from the surrounding neighborhood. Eighty percent of the neighborhood students qualify for free and reduced meals.¹ Approximately one quarter of the neighborhood students live in 40203, the city’s poorest area, where the median household income is approximately \$12,000.² Meyzeek is also a math and science magnet school, with an Advance Program³ that draws students from the more affluent neighborhoods in the northeast section of Jefferson County. Approximately eleven hundred and ninety sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students attend Meyzeek Middle School and are equally divided between the magnet and non-magnet (comprehensive) programs. The demographic and geographic diversity of the school, coupled with the blend of accelerated and traditional curricula offered to students, is the essence of Jefferson County’s managed-choice system⁴; a system

that many of its supporters in the county credit with making it possible, “to hold on to that suburban middle-class element and keep them involved in the public schools”.⁵ However, critics of the district’s managed choice system view the magnet programs and Advance Program offered at schools like Meyzeek, as “gated communities, special enclaves that have the effect, if not the intent, of separating the poor, and black, and academically behind students from the reestablishing...a rather rigid class structure within the public school system”.⁶

The racial and geographical composition of the magnet and non-magnet programs mirrors the disparity between the two distinct communities that Meyzeek serves and lends credence to the argument that the choice system is skewed in favor of middle class white students. Seventy-three percent of the magnet students are white and seventy-two percent of the non-magnet students (“resides”) are black.⁷ This racial disparity is also evident in the Advance Program. Approximately 13 percent of Advance Program (AP) students at Meyzeek are African-American, yet black students account for 40 percent of the total student body.⁸ Moreover,

¹ The school’s overall FARM percentage is 52 percent.

² Estimate is based on a conversation with Stephon Gilkey, the Youth Services Coordinator at Meyzeek Middle School.

³ The Advance Program is a gifted and talented program that is offered at designated elementary, middle and high schools in the Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) district. Students in the intermediate (grades 4-5), middle and upper school levels are evaluated for admission into the program. Participating schools may choose to have a self-contained Advance Program or have Advance Program students attend some classes with students of varying abilities and attend other classes with Advance Program students. Meyzeek Middle School is one of twelve middle schools in the district that offers the Advance Program.

⁴ The Middle School Managed Choice Plan in the Jefferson County Public School District gives students and their parents several options in choosing a middle school including: (1) attending their

“resides” school which is based on their place of residence, (2) submit an application for acceptance into a Magnet school or program, (3) submit an application for acceptance into an Optional Program or (4) to submit an application requesting approval of a transfer to another school. The district’s racial balance guidelines are considered in the school assignment process.

⁵ John Norton, “Managing to Learn”, *Changing Schools* 2 (Fall 1998): 44 paragraphs. Retrieved June 4, 2002 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.middleweb.com/CSLV4Managing.html>
Norton’s article discusses managed choice middle schools in Jefferson County.

⁶ John Norton, “Managing to Learn”.

⁷ Approximately 1 percent of the students in the magnet program live in the neighborhood in which the school is located.

⁸ The overall racial composition of the students at Meyzeek Middle School is: 54 percent white, 40 percent African-American, 4 percent Asian, and 2

the disparity is reflected in student academic achievement as African-American students consistently lag behind their white peers on the Kentucky Core Content Test, the state's assessment test. For example, on the Spring 2001 performance report generated by the Kentucky Department of Education, 65 percent of white seventh grade students at Meyzeek scored at the proficient/distinguished level in reading compared to 37 percent of African-American seventh grade students. In science, 51 percent of white seventh graders at Meyzeek scored at the proficient/distinguished level compared to 14 percent of African-American students. These realities are mirrored in many public schools across the nation but what makes Meyzeek unique is the effort put forth by the school administration to create a climate of inclusiveness and an unwillingness to accept differing levels of achievement from its diverse student body.

Meyzeek is a school that is designed to serve a diverse community of learners yet an ongoing struggle has been to serve students of different racial, socio-economic, and geographic backgrounds and to ensure the academic success of all its students. Moreover, in recent years, the school has also struggled to overcome its isolation from the surrounding communities and the perception of the school by Smoketown and Shelby residents that, "although Meyzeek was physically associated with Smoketown, it was really about something else...a system of apartheid..."⁹

percent "other" (demographic data is based on the school's 2001 performance report). Data regarding the demographic composition of the magnet and traditional programs is based on a 1998 article written by John Norton entitled, "Meyzeek Middle School: A Microcosm of Middle School Issues." Published in *Changing Schools* 2 (Summer/Fall 1998): 34 paragraphs. Retrieved June 5, 2002 from the World Wide Web:
<http://middleweb.com/CSLV4Microcosm.html>

⁹ John Norton, "Meyzeek Middle School: A Microcosm of Middle School Issues".

Reforms implemented by the former and current school principals, included changes in faculty teaching schedules, establishing a community school, and developing one of the district's best Youth Service Centers. In addition, the school established an Extended School Services Program, which is funded by the Kentucky Department of Education as part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in order to provide additional assistance for students at-risk of academic failure. Finally, the school administration has made explicit efforts to sponsor afterschool activities that reflect student interest and to open the school door to the community at large. Viewed in sum, these changes have served to revitalize the relationship between the school and the neighboring communities and to narrow the gap between Meyzeek's magnet and "resides" students.

Beginnings

In 1990 the Kentucky state legislature passed the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in response to a 1989 state Supreme Court ruling which cited widespread spending inequities throughout the state and declared the existing system of education unconstitutional. Kentucky's reforms included major substantive changes in keeping with the principle that all students can learn at high levels, given the time, effort and opportunity. Key reforms included: providing equitable resources for all districts and schools, allocating additional resources to those districts serving a high number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, establishing site-based decision management (SBDM) councils empowering local schools to make crucial decisions regarding curriculum, staffing and other matters affecting student learning, and holding schools accountable for achieving state standards. Extended School Services and Family/Youth Service Centers were two of the key programs established as a result of KERA, that have had a significant impact on Meyzeek's ability to respond to the needs of

its at-risk student population and the larger community.

Extended School Services

The Extended School Services (ESS) program was created in order to fund extended learning time for at-risk students. The Kentucky Department of Education allocates funds to every school district in Kentucky for the purpose of establishing extended learning programs. These funds are then re-allocated to every school within the district in compliance with the law that every school have an ESS program. ESS programming can occur before/afterschool, Saturdays, and summers, although more than 90 percent of students served in ESS participate during afterschool hours. ESS is considered an intervention, as opposed to remediation, program as teachers refer students to the program as soon as academic issues arise.¹⁰ The goals of the program are to sustain students current level of performance, engage students that are identified as at-risk of academic failure (i.e. students that have been or might be retained a grade level, students that are at-risk of not graduating on time, etc.), and to close the achievement gap. ESS is intended to be an extension of the regular program of academic instruction that is fundamentally integrated and linked with the school day.

¹⁰ Dean Coleman, the District Coordinator of the ESS program for Jefferson County, noted that schools within the county vary in their efforts to target students. Some schools target the neediest students by primarily serving those students that have scored in the lowest three stanines on the state's standardized test. Other schools focus on early intervention and try to provide support to those students who are "at-risk" of falling behind their peers. Coleman noted that Meyzeek does a particularly good job, relative to other schools in the district, of targeting both groups of students (i.e. they have designed a dual program that addresses the needs of students who have experienced some level of academic failure and those students who would likely fail if not given some additional support and interventions).

Although all ESS programs must serve at-risk students and link with the school day, individual schools have some latitude in terms of actual program content and structure. The ESS program at Meyzeek focuses on those students that need additional help but emphasizes approaches that differ from school day instruction and fostering deeper connections between students and faculty. Moreover, Ms. Vissman, the school's principal, views Extended School Services as one vital aspect of the many programs offered at Meyzeek whose overarching goals include addressing students academic needs, instilling positive feelings about school, engaging students in productive afterschool activities based on their interests, and deterring risky behaviors by encouraging students to make positive decisions regarding their use of time.

ESS is considered a seamless part of the school day at Meyzeek. The program is staffed by school day faculty and the activities are typically based on what has occurred in the classroom during the school day. The types of assistance provided to students include: reiterating and/or reviewing concepts and skills that were introduced during the school day, homework assistance, study skills instruction, and assessment preparation. Overall, the program content emphasizes developing students' reading and writing skills, focusing on the areas in which students are having particular difficulties. Teachers at Meyzeek work in teams during the school day in order to collaborate across classrooms and coordinate activities. The teams are composed of four faculty members who teach one of the core subject areas (math, language arts, science and social studies). These same teams work together to coordinate activities in the ESS program. Teachers are provided general guidelines by Libby Enlow, the ESS program coordinator, regarding what types of activities need to be incorporated into the program but also are given latitude in structuring specific program content. Although there is no specific time devoted to

discussing ESS, the discussion is usually embedded within the instructional teams planning of daily or weekly activities. Students who are failing one or more classes are referred to ESS¹¹, however the program is open to all students who desire extra help.¹² The ESS program meets one day a week, in two-hour segments, for a series of sessions in the fall, spring and summer terms. The student to teacher ratio is approximately 8-1, but varies based on student participation. Teams of teachers typically split their group of students and rotate tutoring sessions so that the students can receive additional help in all of their core subjects. Because of the flexibility in how the program is administered at the building level and the small student to faculty ratio, teachers are able to tailor their tutoring sessions to reflect individual student needs. This student to faculty ratio is particularly important at a large urban school like Meyzeek where, according to Ms. Vissman, the school's principal, the student-teacher ratio for school day instruction ranges from 29 to 31 students per faculty member. Given the challenges and constraints that this creates for classroom teachers, the significant difference in student-faculty ratio in the extended learning program allows many of these same teachers to work more closely with students who attend the program and develop stronger relationships, something which several of the teachers mentioned as a beneficial aspect of ESS.

¹¹ Parents of students who are failing one or more classes receive letters and phone calls informing them of the ESS program.

¹² Approximately 174 students participated in the Extended School Services program during the 2000-01 academic year. Forty-four percent of these students participated between 1-5 days and 48 percent participated 6-15 days. Sixty-one percent of the students were African-American, 34 percent were white, 3 percent were Asian American and 1 percent were Hispanic. Male and female representation in the program was roughly equal with 51 percent of males and 49 percent of females participating. Participation statistics in ESS for the 2001-02 school year will not be available until September 2002.

The majority of students were working on their writing portfolios in ESS during the spring semester, which is a required part of the states' assessment.¹³ In one class students shared their portfolio writing with their peers for review and constructive criticism. In another classroom students received explicit directions from a team of instructors on completing one of the required elements of their portfolio. In this particular assignment students were supposed to choose a particular commodity and then develop an advertisement campaign to assist a company in successfully marketing the product. Students sat in groups and received detailed instructions from the lead teacher before they began working on their individual projects. As every student was at a different level of completion, the teacher walked around the room and assisted them individually.

In other classrooms students participated in activities that were more explicitly linked to the school-based curriculum. One group of students participated in a physical activity designed to illustrate the uses of bar graphing, a concept they learned during the school day. In this activity, students were asked by the teacher to form parallel lines based on the number of family members in their households. The teacher then elicited from the students what the class average was based on their lines. Other students went to the math teacher for additional help with their homework problems. In another classroom several eighth grade students worked in small groups on their homework assignments.¹⁴ In this

¹³ Council staff visited Meyzeek Middle School in March 2002. It should be noted that student writing portfolios were due at the end of the month and several of the teachers were using ESS time to work intensively with students in a manner that was not possible during the school day. This perhaps skewed what we observed in that over the course of the school year, activities in ESS are aligned more with school day curriculum and not state assessment requirements.

¹⁴ In this classroom we also observed a student conducting research on the Internet on Sylvia Plath as

class, one young African-American female student did her homework while a small baby doll sat perched on her textbooks. When asked why she had a doll at school she responded that she participated in a program operated by the school's Youth Service Center called "Baby Think It Over" and she was responsible for nurturing and caring for the baby afterschool and during the evening hours. In addition, teachers regularly sign up for use of the computer lab in order to ensure that students, who may not have computers at home, have access to them during the afterschool program.

In all of the classrooms, students worked in pairs or in groups or individually with the teacher. Teachers usually rotated amongst the students, providing assistance and direction as necessary. One faculty member who teaches in both the magnet and comprehensive programs cited the peer learning that takes place during the afterschool hours as one of the most effective mechanisms for improved student learning, task completion and fostering relationships between students. In her ESS sessions, students from the magnet program volunteer to tutor students in her comprehensive classes afterschool. They work together in pairs to the mutual benefit of both students as one student has the opportunity to review with a classmate what they have learned and the other student receives the additional support and reiteration of the day's lesson.

Libby Enlow, the ESS program coordinator, is primarily responsible for determining which team teachers will staff the afterschool program. She also is responsible for allocating ESS grants funds. Grant funds are appor-

part of an English assignment. ESS incorporates computer time for students to complete assignments and conduct research. As access to technology is limited in low-income neighborhoods like Smoketown and can serve to widen the gap between the "resides" and magnet students at Meyzeek providing this access is critical in meeting students' needs.

tioned to individual schools in Jefferson County based on their "at-risk" student population (which is primarily based on free and reduced meals percentages). This money is used to pay teachers who serve as ESS instructors, to provide transportation home following the program, and to pay for snacks for the students.¹⁵

The Extended Student Services program at Meyzeek focuses on providing the additional *academic* support that students, particularly those that live in the immediate surrounding neighborhood, need in order to achieve stated academic goals. Yet ESS is a piece of the whole range of services, programs, and supports available at the school. The Youth Services Center, which focuses on removing the non-academic barriers to student success, is another crucial aspect of the puzzle.

Meyzeek's Youth Services Center

Youth Services Centers (YSC) in Kentucky developed as a result of KERA in order to address non-academic barriers to learning including school attendance, substance abuse, poor health, unemployment, and mental health issues. The mission, as articulated by the Kentucky Department of Education, was to "*enhance students' abilities to succeed in school by developing and sustaining partnerships that promote early learning and successful transition into school, academic achievement and well-being, and graduation and transition into adult life*".¹⁶ In the 1991-92 school year, the first year of implementation of the reform act, Family Resource/Youth Service Centers were funded at 9.7 million dollars and served 232 schools. Funding for Family Resource and Youth Service Centers for the 1999-00 school year totaled 42.5 million dollars and the program served more

¹⁵ Teachers are paid their hourly rate for the two hours that they participate in the ESS program.

¹⁶ From the Kentucky Department of Education's report, "Results Matter: A Decade of Difference in Kentucky' Public Schools 1990-2000". April 2000.

than 1,000 schools. While Family Resource Centers primarily operate in elementary schools, the Youth Service Centers operate in Kentucky's middle and high schools and are explicitly designed to grapple with the issues that face youth in their pre-teen and teenage years.¹⁷ These services vary based on the school site but typically include: health and social service referrals, employment counseling, training and placement, summer/part-time job development, drug and alcohol abuse counseling, and family and mental health counseling. Schools must have more than 20 percent of students who are eligible for free and reduced meals in order to qualify for funds.

The YSC at Meyzeek Middle School was established under Mr. Gilkey's leadership in 1992, shortly after KERA was implemented statewide. Mr. Gilkey serves as a full-time coordinator for the YSC. The center operates out of a portable trailer that is located on the school's campus. The Youth Service Center is open eight hours a day, five days a week and provides a range of supports tailored to meet the particular needs of the students at Meyzeek and the larger community. The center collaborates with the local health and social services departments in order to more effectively serve students, many of whom are recipients of multiple services offered through the YSC.

Mr. Gilkey coordinates a myriad of different health, social and other support programs including; anger management (for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students with control issues), drug prevention counseling, pregnancy prevention (a course called "Baby Think It Over" for eighth grade boys and girls), functional family therapy (which

¹⁷ Programming offered by Kentucky's Family Resource Centers include: full-time preschool care, afterschool childcare for children ages 4-12, parenting classes, Parent and Child Education (PACE) programming, health services and/or referrals to health services.

addresses substance abuse and domestic violence issues), summer camp, Saturday school (which is mandatory for habitually truant students), and drop-out prevention. The YSC also serves youth who are no longer in school (drop-outs). The Center's Safe Harbor program trained a cadre of teachers, who in turn trained the entire Meyzeek faculty, in working with students who have severe behavioral problems. The Safe Harbor room is also a stopping off place for students who have been suspended from school in order to get them to assess, in their own words, how they might have acted differently.

YSC, through a grant from the Department of Juvenile Justice, supports the school's Truancy Court, which operates every Thursday during the school year. Judge Joan Byer presides over Truancy Court, which chronically absent students and their parents are required to attend. The students' teachers also participate and provide feedback to the judge and the family regarding the student's progress. The judge talks openly and directly with students and their parents about the students' absences and/or behavior in school. The judge recommends a course of action to resolve whatever issues and/or circumstances are preventing the student from attending class or behaving well in school. Each session concludes with a particular word that the audience (parents, teachers and students) is asked to reflect upon with the rest of the group.¹⁸

¹⁸ CCSSO staff attended one session during our site visit to the school. The judge arranged for one student, who was habitually late and absent from school, to be paired up with an older "buddy" from Atherton High School, who would wake her up and participate in other Girls Club activities with the student. The Girls Club is a mentoring group that is also sponsored by Meyzeek's YSC. At the conclusion of court, the judge stated that the word of the day was "hope". She then asked every teacher, parent, and student in the room to share with the group "what they hope for".

YSC, with funding from the Housing Authority of Louisville, also sponsors C.H.O.I.C.E. (Children Have Options in Choosing Experiences), a drug-prevention and intervention program for students with parents who reside in public housing and are dealing with substance abuse issues. The program features field trips, workshops, and mentoring. At the conclusion of the program, students who are matriculating to high school and their parents participate in an awards ceremony where they are honored.

The programs mentioned provide a glimpse of the supports that are available to students and their families at the Youth Service Center. Although several of the programs are funded by state monies allocated for Youth Service Centers, many more of them are funded through other public and/or private entities and are the result of the YSC partnering with outside agencies to provide programming. During the 2001-02 school year for example, the Meyzeek YSC received grants from Wesley Community House, the Department of Juvenile Justice, Project Shield, the Salvation Army, Boys and Girls Club, East Louisville Ministries, Ten Broeck Hospital, and other private contributors. Mr. Gilkey is primarily imbued with the responsibility of securing funding to continue programming, a task that is considerable in light of the fact that most of the state grants funds are used for salaries and operational costs and the state education agency primarily allocates *seed* money to Family and Youth Service Centers with the expectation that they will become self-sufficient.

Stephon Gilkey employs an additional staff member on-site and also utilizes therapists, graduate students, and faculty members to provide programming. He exercises immediate oversight of the numerous programs that are funded and sponsored by the YSC. Mr. Gilkey works closely with Ms. Vissman and the rest of the school administration to deliver

essential services and integrate YSC programming with the rest of the school day.

The comprehensive programming offered by the YSC is probably one of the reasons why it has been credited as being one of the best centers in the county. Another reason most certainly has to do with the success of the YSC in reaching out to the larger community and bridging the gap between Meyzeek and neighborhood residents who no longer felt connected to the school. For many local residents, their affinity for Meyzeek stretched back to the days when they themselves attended the neighborhood school, which was then called Jackson Junior High. This relationship was severely strained when Meyzeek became a Math and Science magnet, in addition to being a neighborhood school, and began to attract more affluent, and, for the most part, white students from the suburbs. The school essentially functioned as two separate schools, one for the magnet students, and one for the “resides” students. In addition to the increasing alienation of neighborhood parents and longtime residents, there was a sense within the school building itself, that the school was a magnet but we “let those kids across the street come in”. This was exacerbated by uneven patterns of parent participation as the magnet students’ parents became increasingly involved with the school and the participation levels of neighborhood parents dwindled.¹⁹

“The school and the community have to be connected and working together to reach the same goal.”
Stephon Gilkey, Program Coordinator

Meyzeek’s former principal, Debbie Baker is credited with undertaking significant efforts to bridge the ever widening gap between the school and the surrounding community. She

¹⁹ Anne Lewis, “Putting the Community Back into Neighborhood Schools” 3 (Fall 1999): 49 paragraphs. Retrieved June 5, 2002 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.middleweb.com/CSLV6comm.html>

went out into the community and sought to build relationships with local leaders and served on local service boards. She also implemented a number of key policy changes at the building level including requiring all teaching teams to teach both magnet and non-magnet students, opening the school to the community for afterschool activities, and fostering the growth of the Youth Services Center.²⁰ Patricia Vissman has continued in this vein by requiring that magnet and non-magnet students be mixed together in their related arts courses, (e.g., instrumental music, art, physical education, theater arts, and computer skills), in order to foster a greater sense of community *within* the school.

However, much of the credit also goes to Stephon Gilkey and Anne Ames, who, through their respective programs and their status within the community²¹, helped initiate a process of reconciliation between the school and the neighborhood. Students began to view to the Center as a place where they could discuss problems or plan activities. Community residents took advantage of the after hours programming sponsored by the Center. Neighborhood parents began to seek refuge and counsel in the Youth Services Center, where they felt there was someone who was responsive and would listen to their concerns or as Gilkey states²²,

“When they [parents] were upset, they used to go in and holler at the school people. Now, they come here first and we talk about the problem and when they get to the school office, they say what they want to in a calmer way.”

²⁰ John Norton, Meyzeek Middle School: A Microcosm of Middle School Issues”.

²¹ Gilkey is a former social worker who is known to community residents based on his previous position as a family assessor for Family Protective Services. Ames, who is referred to as the “Mother Theresa of Smoketown”, formerly served as a security guard at Meyzeek and is currently the Community Schools Liaison.

In addition, YSC programming, by reflecting the *interests* of the larger community, has been successful in involving the neighborhood parents to a greater degree than existed before. Parents now attend many of the activities sponsored by the YSC including school performances, student art exhibits, and pizza nights. In sum, the YSC, by meeting the needs of the students and their parents and inviting the community into the school through the community schools program, offered Meyzeek a structured and “effective” way to strengthen its relationship with the neighborhood.

Meyzeek is also one of four schools in the county that receives federal funds to operate a GEAR-UP program. The school has a five-year grant that is administered by the University of Louisville. Although the program is open to all students, GEAR-UP targets the non-magnet, low-income students at Meyzeek with the explicit aim of demystifying the college experience. The school works with the neighborhood community college to sponsor “walking trips” where Meyzeek students have the opportunity to visit the community college campus. In addition, the entire eighth grade visits the University of Louisville and attends classes during the spring semester. These activities provide students with the opportunity to go outside of their school and neighborhood environments and promote the idea that a college education is within their grasp. Although GEAR-UP college trips may not be considered a typical afterschool activity, it constitutes an extension of student learning and exposure outside of the classroom that is particularly relevant for students who may not otherwise be afforded the opportunity.

“Meyzeek, Meyzeek, the school that never sleeps.” Patricia Vissman, School Principal

To get a complete sense of the myriad of programs offered at Meyzeek Middle School, it is best to consult the school newspaper or the coach sponsor sheet, which lists all of the activities offered at the school for the current academic year, the day and times they meet and the faculty sponsors. Many of the activities listed are typical of what might be available in many middle schools around the country. There are athletic team sports and a large variety of clubs that students may join or try out for. In addition, there are several activities that involve preparation for county, state, and national academic competitions, including Quick Recall and the Future Problem Solvers clubs.²³ School staff primarily serves as afterschool club sponsors. However, parents also sponsor several of the clubs. Although most of the faculty members are paid their hourly rate to sponsor afterschool activities, the clubs that exist are primarily the result of a particular interest that they wanted to share with students.

Given the diverse and disparate make-up of the student body at Meyzeek, one particular challenge has been to establish and fund afterschool activities that appeal to all students. This is particularly essential at a school where the majority of non-magnet and magnet students do not regularly interact during the school day. While some afterschool activities like the jazz band, orchestra, and art club, attract a wide range of students, other clubs do not. For example, far more magnet students participate in the academically oriented clubs than non-magnet students. What emerges in talking with faculty club sponsors however is their acknowledgment of these disparities and the strategies many of them have employed to combat these divisions. In addition to encouraging non-magnet students to participate in the academically oriented clubs, Ms. Vissman and the staff have established several clubs that

²³ The sponsor sheet for the 2001-02 academic year lists 39 clubs, academic competitions, and sports teams in which students can participate.

are designed to attract neighborhood students.

One example is the Girls Scouts sponsored by faculty member Venetta Parmley. The program is funded by the local YMCA and focuses on providing students with enrichment opportunities and teaching leadership skills. The troop often goes on field trips designed to expose them to life outside of their immediate surroundings. One field trip included an overnight stay at a hotel that was for many their first time. Ms. Parmley stresses exposing the students to new activities and interacting with people from different backgrounds. Another example is the school's Urban 4-H club, headed by Ms. Chanda, which focuses on engaging neighborhood students in service-related activities and caring for the environment. Approximately 30 of the 90 students that are members of the club participate in the afterschool activities including cooking, making crafts that are donated to local nursing homes, and beautifying school grounds. For instance, this year the students made birdhouses and donated them to a neighborhood park in Louisville. Ms. Chanda emphasizes building the students' self-esteem and their commitment to helping to others. She deliberately targets the neighborhood students but the club is composed of both magnet and non-magnet students.

This year at Meyzeek, the school established two new clubs based on student interest: Dribbling Bears and a Step Team. Dribbling Bears is sponsored by Cyndi McHolland, who is a member of the faculty at Meyzeek. She is assisted by Delton Lyles, who is a security guard with the Community Schools program. About 35 students participate regularly and their involvement is contingent upon attending the ESS program. In this way, students who stay afterschool for academic support are also able to participate in enriching and fun activities. The bears practice their dribbling routines in one of the school's gymnasiums. Students make up the routines that combine

group movements with showcasing individual students' ball-handling skills. The bears perform for parents and at other schools. During practices, Mr. Lyles infuses in students a sense of personal accountability and commitment. In one practice, which took place prior to the students' performance in another school district, he expressed that students need to take responsibility for their actions and to represent themselves and their school well when visiting other communities. The step team just started at Meyzeek in the spring '02 semester when students approached Ms. Vissman and asked if they could start a club. The step team practices after ESS in the other school gymnasium. The girls make up their routines and take an active role in running their afterschool practices with the guidance of their faculty sponsor. Both of these activities are fairly new but underscore the school's commitment to engaging all students in positive, well-supervised, and interesting activities during the afterschool hours.

The majority of the afterschool activities at Meyzeek are funded through Safe School, YSC, Community School, and local district funds. In addition, some of the programs receive donations from community organizations and local agencies. Ms. Vissman is primarily responsible for allocating funds at the building level to make sure that programs are adequately supported. She is also primarily responsible for coordinating most of the activities that take place before, during and after school hours.

The Elements of Success

Meyzeek's efforts to offer a range of services and programs that reflect the needs of its student body appear to be making a difference. This is reflected in Meyzeek ESS evaluation data that is collected annually by Jefferson County Public School District. Data on students that attended the ESS program for more than 5 days in the 2000-01 academic year indicates that a significant number of

students exited the program at the end of the term with improved grades in reading and math. At the time of entering the ESS program, 21 percent of students had entry grades of A or B in the primary subject of focus; this number increased to 51 percent by the end of the term.²⁴ Conversely, 61 percent of students had entry grades of D or F in their primary subject of focus while only 22 percent had D or F grades at the end of the term. In addition, qualitative data collected from teachers regarding student progress indicated that higher rates of homework completion, improved attendance, grade promotion, and increased class participation were also positive outcomes attributed to the program. Although the statistics cited earlier in this paper indicate that Meyzeek is a school that is still struggling to close the achievement gap between white/Asian students and African-American students, the ESS data suggests that there has been some progress on this issue.

In discussing the issue of success from a broader perspective, anecdotal evidence and comments made by the school staff are instructive. Ms. Vissman emphasizes that ESS has given teachers the opportunity to interact with a smaller number of students. As a result of this interaction students have been able to form positive relationships with adults that has lead to an overall improved interactions within the school environment. In her perspective, the range of programs available in the afterschool hours has resulted in students making better decisions regarding how they spend their time. ESS staff credit the program with fostering more positive relations between students and teachers as students begin to view their teachers differently in a more

²⁴ Individualized learning goals are established for each student upon entry into the school's ESS program. Most students have either math or reading as their goals although a small number of students have written language, science, social studies, arts & humanities as their stated goals. Some students have more than one learning goal. 2000-01 percentages refer to the number of students that improved their grades in their classroom work.

informal setting outside of the classroom environment. Students feel they are getting the individual attention and help that they need and therefore willingly attend the program. One faculty member commented that there is a notable difference in the quality of writing between her sixth grade students who attend the program and those who do not. Another faculty member observed that it is oftentimes the students who do not work in the classroom that come to ESS and willingly participate. Moreover, teachers at Meyzeek feel the benefits carryover into the regular school day as students who have a better understanding of the work are better behaved in the classroom. This sentiment is echoed by the school principal who views a lot of the “acting out” and poor behavior exhibited by students in middle school as a means to deflect from their academic deficiencies.

From Stephon Gilkey’s perspective, the programs and services sponsored by the YSC have become an integral part of Meyzeek for the benefit of the students. Housing the YSC on-site helps to promote the concept that it takes a myriad of supports to address the needs of students and ensure their success. His comments also suggest that the community schools and youth services center have fostered a different type of learning at the school; one in which the staff and administration are beginning to understand the need to forge links to the larger community so that both the school and the community are engaged in the endeavor of student educational attainment.

What Works

According to Ms. Vissman, the key to successful implementation of Meyzeek’s multifaceted programs is having a dedicated staff. Or, in her words,

“people who are willing to develop ideas, to commit themselves long-term to spending additional time working with students...without this you do not have a program.”

Every major program (ESS, Community Schools, Safe Schools, YSC, etc.) operating at Meyzeek is staffed with a program coordinator or liaison. In addition, every afterschool club has a sponsor, most of whom are also school day staff. Although the scope of their responsibilities varies depending on the size of the program and the number of students involved, all of these individuals have administrative duties associated with maintaining their respective programs. These duties typically include: communicating with parents, the administration, and other school staff; finding sources of funding; taking attendance; monitoring students in the program; and, developing program content. While most staff are compensated at their hourly teaching rate for their time, Ms. Vissman views their commitment to the students at Meyzeek and the opportunity to cultivate their own interests as the driving force behind faculty participation in afterschool activities. By actively seeking out and encouraging staff involvement, the school has also created a internal buy-in regarding the value of afterschool programs, which is one of the keys to program sustainability.

The ESS program in particular has also been successful because it is closely linked to the school day curriculum and is expressly tailored to meet the needs of the students. The emphasis on being “proactive” and providing interventions *before* academic difficulties become long-term problems for individual students is critical, particularly for students already deemed “at-risk” of academic failure. The program’s focus on the school day curriculum often translates into grade improvements that students see for themselves in the next marking period. Moreover, the program is flexible as students can “opt-in”, something that is particularly important given the ability of middle school youth to “vote with their feet” and engage in other activities in the afternoon hours. This type of scheduling also allows those students who may not require

ongoing assistance to drop-in for help for shorter periods of time.

Challenges To Implementation

Despite initial success in implementing effective extended learning programs, Meyzeek is still a school struggling with key issues that fall into two separate but related categories: (1) challenges directly related to the success and sustainability of its afterschool and student support programs and, (2) challenges that pertain to the school's ability to close the achievement gap and foster a genuine sense of community within the school.

As is typical in most middle schools, students at Meyzeek exercise choice when it comes how they spend time afterschool. Indeed many of the afterschool activities currently at Meyzeek developed in response to student interest. The ESS program, in contrast, is an academic support program mandated by the state in response to clear student need for additional time on task. The challenge for the faculty and staff at Meyzeek is how to meet student needs by engaging students and utilizing different instructional strategies than those employed within the context of the regular school day. On this point the principal is also clear, if students do not "get it" during the school day, it is not effective to use the same approach or more of the same, in the afterschool hours. Meyzeek faculty have responded to this imperative by implementing hands on activities, working in small groups, and promoting peer learning. In some core subject areas, the task has proved easier than in others. Science, for instance, was one subject for which it was considered difficult to develop activities. While many staff note that students enjoy coming to ESS, they also acknowledge that the additional time constitutes a long day for students and faculty as well. To sustain student commitment to ESS, faculty will have to continue to think creatively and perhaps access some of the rich curriculum, standards-based materials that are

now being developed especially for after-school programs.

A related issue is specific planning time for faculty that is devoted to ESS. The team-teaching approach clearly is a success at Meyzeek and is credited with promoting a deeper level of collaboration within the faculty, particularly as they teach magnet and non-magnet students. Yet, according to Ms. Vissman, the level of collaboration varies across teams; some have made this an integral part of how they work, while others have not. This inconsistency can affect not only school day instruction, but content and quality in the ESS program as well. Several of the staff also site sufficient planning time as a challenge to ESS program implementation. Staffing a program with school day staff has significant benefits but also constitutes an additional responsibility for faculty. Moreover, implementing quality program content that is connected to school curriculum and interests and challenges students is a difficult task that requires planning time. This is an issue that the school's staff and administration will have to broach in order to continue to meet students' needs and build on what is already in place.

Ms. Vissman also views involving neighborhood students in positive and productive afterschool activities as an on-going challenge. Clearly the school has made a commitment to this issue by establishing afterschool activities based on articulated student interest. However, it should be noted that the Step Team and Dribbling Bears club discussed earlier mainly attract neighborhood students. The principal's vision that the school's magnet and non-magnet students come together and be involved in collective activities that reflect shared interest is not yet realized. Moreover, this challenge is part of the larger issue of building a sense of community within the school.

Meyzeek has been successful in accessing multiple sources of funding to support its varied activities and programs and funding is not considered a critical issue at this point. ESS and the YSC are funded by the state and considered sustainable. The Community Schools program is presently funded by Jefferson County Public Schools but does not have a permanent source of funding. The school's Saturday school program is supported through a Project Shield Grant. The Youth Service Center and the Community Schools program staff have focused on developing partnerships with other agencies and organizations in order to support activities that are not covered by state and local funds. The Youth Service Center in particular must actively seek out sponsors as state funds primarily cover staff salaries. In addition, state funding is considered seed money that will be combined with other funding streams to support the full range of programs coordinated by the YSC. According to Mr. Gilkey, the number of students in need of mental health services also continues to grow. It is likely that the YSC will need to find long-term sponsors so that student need does not outpace the center's capacity to deliver services.

Linked to these programmatic issues are the broader school issues of student achievement, parental involvement, and fostering a sense of community within the school. The disaggregated data presented earlier indicates that there is still significant room for improvement in narrowing the gap in educational attainment between black and white students at Meyzeek. In addition, while several staff noted an increase in the number of neighborhood parents attending evening programs (e.g. Dribbling Bears pizza night, foreign language night, etc.) and utilizing services offered by the YSC, the principal commented that parents of the magnet students tend to be more involved in the parent-teacher association's programs and activities. In her view, many of the "resides"

students' parents' own school experiences were not positive; therefore the Meyzeek staff and administration have to work at making the school an approachable and comfortable environment. Finally, Meyzeek has struggled to create a unified school community, one in which the academic success and social well-being of *all* students is promoted, instead of a building where there are "gated communities".²⁵

The current and former principals at Meyzeek have implemented a variety of changes to create a deeper sense of community in the school. While many of these changes relate to what occurs during the school day, the decision to establish a community schools program, to staff afterschool programs with teachers and parents, and to work closely with the Youth Services Center are all instances of changing the culture of the school that extends beyond the day. Although further reforms will be critical in mitigating some of the persistent issues at Meyzeek, one essential piece is already there: a shared sense of responsibility and commitment on the part of the faculty, administration, and volunteer staff to the idea that all students matter.

²⁵ John Norton. "Managing to Learn". 1998.