

Corinth—South Tippah Academy of Learning

Corinth School District (MS)

2020-2021 Summative Evaluation of the Corinth—South Tippah Academy of Learning 21st

Century Community Learning Center Program

High Road Learning

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List of Acronyms

21st CCLC: 21st Century Community Learning Center

CCR: College and career readiness

CSD: Corinth School District

ELs: English learners

iReady: Internet-based assessment and instruction program licensed to school districts by Curriculum Associates

MAAP: Mississippi Academic Assessment Program

MS: Mississippi

PBL: Project-based Learning

STSD: South Tippah School District

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Executive Summary

For more than a decade, the Corinth School District (CSD) has worked in partnership with business leaders, community organizers, parents, and educators to design and implement innovative approaches to closing the achievement gap. Community-based efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 among educators and students during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years resulted in CSD to re-imagine how to provide developmentally appropriate interventions to those students most impacted by school closures and remote learning. Educators combined the power of data, technology, and research-based interventions to create, implement, and share effective approaches to ameliorating the impact of COVID-19 on students most at-risk from not making progress towards college and career readiness (CCR). To achieve this goal, CSD continued its existing 21st CCLC partnerships with The Lighthouse Foundation and Project Attention. This alliance supported the community-based efforts to provide educational, social, physical, and nutritional supports in the greater Corinth community. To create scale, CSD formed a new partnership with the South Tippah School District (STSD). These two school districts in partnership with The Lighthouse Foundation and Project Attention created the Academy of Learning. These organizations comprised the *Academy of Learning*.

The overarching goals of this initiative were to: (1) Increase student achievement; (2) eliminate achievement gaps of minority and economically-disadvantaged subgroups students; and (3) strengthen family ties to schools. The team attempted to meet the needs of students regardless of the mode of their participation (i.e., in-person, remote, or hybrid). The evaluation team used student achievement data provided by the schools to estimate the impact of the program on student achievement and closing the achievement gap. The data were analyzed using SPSS (v. 28.0.0) and R (v. 4.1.1).

In general, students who participated in the Academy of Learning made progress towards meeting grade level expectations for academics and behavior. The districts were active in meeting in diverse learning needs of participants given the complexity and uncertainty of that COVID-19 created on a daily basis. Student gains in early literacy and numerical grades were significant. The innovation to provide young students with a Zero Period may have been especially beneficial to promoting Kindergarten and First Grade readiness after these students missed on schooling during the Spring of 2020. Unfortunately, the policies of the school districts meant that initiatives to improve parent outreach and participation in their child's or children's education could not be implemented.

The Academy of Learning should continue the elements of the program that were especially beneficial, including the blended learning Zero Periods in the primary grades. School leaders may want to explore how to scale the idea to students at all grades. District leadership, school administrators, and site coordinators will need to create innovative means to increase attendance, especially in middle and high school. Of special note, is a need to re-design the program that supports students' completion of Pillar Projects. This element may not have been fully implemented in order to provide the services related to tutoring, credit recovery, and ACT preparation. These are worthwhile efforts, but the Pillar Project may need to be taught in ways that blend all elements of support for older students.

Evaluation Purpose and Evaluation Questions

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide key stakeholders on the Academy of Learning design team, site coordinators, administrators, classroom teachers, and support staff with results to (1) summarize the impact on participating students and their parents or caregivers and (2) inform decisions about the strengths and areas in need of improvement. Data from diverse sources (e.g., interviews, surveys, achievement tests, etc.) were triangulated to provide a comprehensive view of the Academy of Learning, describe its impact on participants, and provide recommendations that could be implemented (or tailored to meet local needs) in ways that enhance the management of the project and resources. The results and recommendations are meant to provide key stakeholders, at a minimum, with data and recommendations to have meaningful conversations about re-designing the program and, at a maximum, directly implement changes that may lead to greater impact.

The following evaluation questions guided the collection, analyses, and reporting of data to monitor the program's support of students who regularly participated in the program (≥ 30 days). The Academy of Learning will result in:

Evaluation Question 1: A five percent *annual* increase in the number of students meeting grade level expectations.

Evaluation Question 2: Ten percent of students achieving a 5-point *annual* increase in GPA with "B" as the goal.

Evaluation Question 3: A 5% *annual* increase in the percent of students scoring proficient on state test

Evaluation Question 4: A 20% *annual* increase P-K students receiving intervention will meet grade K-level expectations as demonstrated by meeting the cut score on the state test.

Evaluation Question 5: Fifty percent of students demonstrating an increase in positive school behaviors and commitment to remain drug/alcohol/tobacco free.

Evaluation Question 6: Fifty percent of 8th and 12th grade participants will complete a Pillar Project, (multi-media project and presentation) related to addressing a cultural/local or global issue/problem.

Evaluation Question 7: Fifty percent of parents will participate in at least 5 school events throughout the year.

Evaluation Question 8: Twenty-five percent of parents will volunteer to assist with school events.

Evaluation Question 9: An increase of twenty percent participation in parenting classes/activities over baseline.

Program Background

The Community. One of the major goals of the Academy of Learning is to provide a safe environment that reduces negative influences on students. The program is targeted at students who attend CSD and STSD who also live in highly impacted communities. In these neighborhoods, poverty is prominent and drug-related crime escalates annually. The per capita income for these two communities is below the state average for Mississippi and percentage of

Economic and Social Conditions in Corinth and Tippah Consortium			
Fact	Corinth	Tippah	State
Per capita income	\$21,012	\$19,443	\$23,434
Percentage of persons living in poverty	20.7%	22.8%	19.7%
Percentage of high school graduates, adults 25+	84%	73.7%	83.9%
Percentage of Children in Single-Parent Homes	34.2%	56.4%	44.9%
Percentage of languages other than English spoken in home	3.8%	14.9%	3.9%
Percentage of unemployed adults	6.7%	12.8%	6.4%
Rate of teen pregnancy	52.7	22.9	39.2

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and Claritas/ MS Dept. of Health (2019)

persons living in poverty is higher than the average for Mississippi. The STSD is especially impacted by the economic conditions in their local area. Research confirms that poverty contributes to academic failure because poor families often cannot afford educational resources or participate in school-related activities. CSD and STSD, *The Lighthouse Foundation* and Project Attention will focus on providing students with intensive tutoring, counseling, cultural enrichment, and study skills to enable them to succeed in school and the workplace.

Rationale for the Academy of Learning. Research indicates that students who live in highly impacted settings are at an increased risk for academic, social-emotional, and behavioral problems compared to students who do not go home to similar environments. The members of the Academy of Learning believe that failure to address difficulties may (even will) result in

missed opportunities for changing a child's academic trajectory and development of the soft skills desired in the 21st Century workplace. Each member of the team believes that children deserve to be healthy, safe, engaged, and challenged. To address the needs of all students, the *Academy* has a philosophy of serving the whole child by developing relationships that build the protective factors needed for a healthy, balanced life (Loveless, T., 2012; Cunningham, J. et.al, 2014; Means, B, et.al, 2013).

The Program. The Academy of Learning after-school program was open for approximately 2.5 hours per day, four days per week for 24 weeks during the school year. The schedule for the each day started with time for a nutritious snack followed by approximately 60 minutes of time dedicated to the teaching and practicing of study skills. Students, for the next 30 minutes, were immersed in academic tutoring, ELA, and math instruction. The Mississippi College and Career Standards provided the overarching framework for the teaching and learning activities during this time period. This intensive time period was followed by about 30 minutes academic enrichment using digital tools to explore different topics associated with ELA, mathematics, etc. Students accessed more than 12 software programs at the various project sites. Of special emphasis was STEM, Art, and PBL, or financial literacy. The final 15-minutes of each day was dedicated to character education, anti-bullying, healthy lifestyles, and dropout prevention. Students attending the *Lighthouse* in the afternoons participate in tutoring and unique activities, such as Boyz2Men (boys) and Refined (girls), 7th – 12th grade leadership programs encouraging goal setting and providing life coaching.

High school students could also participate in expanded learning opportunities during the school day. The goals for providing access to these resources were to provide additional academic interventions and provide opportunities for credit recovery. The focus for these

opportunities was to capture adolescents academically behind their same-age peers during the school day so as not to impinge on their participating in after-school programs or employment. Certified instructors provided intense tutoring and ACT prep for 3 hours a day for 5 days a week for 24 weeks during “free” periods for students.

A dyslexia intervention class was offered to students enrolled in grades 7-12. The class focused on nonfiction content reading, and expository writing. Students were exposed to a blended learning model of teaching and learning, linking digital literacy, real-world reading and writing, and direct instruction.

Art instruction was provided by an Emmy-award winning creative arts director. This person produced instructional art videos for students in Pre-kindergarten through 6th grades. “Mr. Color” videos were available to teachers, students, and parents, via the district YouTube channel.

A motor skills lab provided perceptual motor stations to enhance the fine and gross motor skills of students aged 4-8 years old. The motor skills lab was open to all students during regular physical education time during the school day.

The youngest learners (pre-kindergarten and kindergarten) and early adolescents (7th-8th grades) could attend Zero Period, an intense academic tutoring program provided before-school. For student in pre-kindergarten, free choice centers that aligned with the MS Early Learning Standards were available while others children participated in small, teacher-directed group instruction focused on foundational literacy and early numeracy development.

For ELs, total immersion, with appropriate translation support, were practiced. Priority was given to ELs when scheduling and providing services. During each program component, these students received targeted English instruction from an EL interventionist and a program

designed to address learning a foreign language. Corinth High and Middle School ELs who were significantly below grade level students were enrolled in an extended block class.

Students enrolled in the CSD were provided with a 3-week inter-session during October of 2020 and March of 2021. These intersessions were available because of the unique, extended school year calendar. Students could attend Foundational Studies program to receive intensive tutoring in the core academic subjects, ACT prep, financial literacy, and Credit Recovery. The structure of intersession, as well as a shortened summer schedule, was designed to prevent summer loss. Each day of intersession, *The Lighthouse* staff provided presentations on character education, dropout prevention, and mental health. Intersession also includes tutoring, ACT prep, and Credit Recovery. These activities were targeted at students enrolled in for 7-12th with the goal of lowering dropout rates. The lowest quartile of Prekindergarten students also received instruction to prevent regression. All libraries will remain open during each program component.

Staffing. The superintendent of CSD provided overall direction and guidance to the project. The Director of Literacy for CSD provide the day-to-day operational support to the each of the site coordinators and certified teachers who provided the services to students throughout the school day, intersession, and summer learning/enrichment program. The Director of Literacy conducted an initial program, in-person and zoom, to the site coordinators. This program was designed to introduce the goals and objectives of the program, day-to-day roles and responsibilities, and share means of communication between teachers, site coordinators, and project leadership. This individual also provided on-going technical support as needed. The site coordinators were responsible for keeping attendance, allotting students to various classrooms to ensure maintenance of teacher to student ratios, coordination of snacks, and making sure students had transportation home at the end of each day. Appropriate teacher to student ratios of 15:1 was

maintained throughout the 24-week program. All teachers were certified educators in Mississippi.

Attendance

The Academic of Learning had approximately 400 students who attended at least one day during the 24 weeks, with about 350 students who regularly attended (i.e., ≥ 30 days).

Progress Toward Goals and Objectives

The following evaluation questions guided the collection, analyses, and reporting of data to monitor the program's support of students who regularly participated in the program (≥ 30 days). For the following section, the evaluation question is presented with a summary table of results and / or a brief description of the results. All data were analyzed using SPSS (v. 28.1.1) or R (v.4.1.1). Mississippi MAAP data were not used for purposes of evaluating project impact because datasets were not available to the districts in a time conducive to analyses by the evaluation team. Data from iReady were available and used for purposes of monitoring the project's impact on student proficiency / grade level expectations (Question 1).

Evaluation Question 1: Five percent *annual* increase in the number of students meeting grade level expectations. These results should be interpreted with caution because of the low numbers of students who attended 30 or more days. COVID-19 seems to have made it nearly impossible for attending after-school and intersession. These results are so different from previous years results that they should be considered an outlier.

Table: ELA

	Attendance	n	Fall	Spring	Delta	Percent Proficient ¹	
						Fall	Spring
Grade 1	< 30 Days	26	348	388	+40.1	0%	0%
	>= 30 Days	4	348	415	+67.5	0%	25%
Grade 2	< 30 Days	19	376	435	+59.5	5%	0%
	>= 30 Days	8	387	415	+27.8	0%	0%
Grade 3	< 30 Days	26	440	456	+15.9	11.5%	0%
	>= 30 Days	12	425	462	+36.8	0%	0%
Grade 4	< 30 Days	19	482	509	+27.5	0%	0%
	>= 30 Days	2	462	447	-15.0	0%	0%
Grade 5	< 30 Days	13	503	544	+41.1	0%	0%
	>= 30 Days	5	532	577	+45.2	0%	0%
Grade 6	< 30 Days	13	547	558	+11.0	7.7%	7.7%
	>= 30 Days	2	585	577	-7.5	50%	0%
Grade 7	< 30 Days	22	562	559	-3.6	18.2%	4.5%
	>= 30 Days	0					
Grade 8	< 30 Days	25	566	553	-12.9	12.0%	8.0%
	>= 30 Days	1	553	593	+40.0	0%	0%

¹ iReady proficiency = “at grade level” or better

Table: Math

	Attendance	n	Fall	Spring	Delta	Percent Proficient ¹	
						Fall	Spring
Grade 1	< 30 Days	26	343	367	+24.8	0%	0%
	>= 30 Days	4	337	375	+37.8	0%	0%
Grade 2	< 30 Days	19	360	402	+42.5	0%	0%
	>= 30 Days	8	365	385	+20	0%	0%
Grade 3	< 30 Days	26	398	418	+19.5	0%	0%
	>= 30 Days	12	402	431	+29.3	0%	0%

	Attendance	n	Fall	Spring	Delta	Percent Proficient ¹	
						Fall	Spring
Grade 4	< 30 Days	19	423	450	+26.5	0%	0%
	>= 30 Days	2	379	432	+53	0%	0%
Grade 5	< 30 Days	13	446	479	+32.9	7.7%	7.7%
	>= 30 Days	5	446	469	+23.2	0%	0%
Grade 6	< 30 Days	13	461	482	+21.1	7.7%	0%
	>= 30 Days	2	471	486	+15.0	50%	0%
Grade 7	< 30 Days	22	472	474	+1.8	18.2%	0%
	>= 30 Days	0					
Grade 8	< 30 Days	25	483	483	+0.4	8.0%	0%
	>= 30 Days	1	498	452	-46	0%	0%

¹ iReady proficiency = “at grade level” or better

Evaluation Question 2: Ten percent of students achieving a 5-point annual increase in GPA with “B” as the goal. Students who participated in CSD’s program in grades 3-12 grew an average of 6.1 points on a 100-point grading scale. All students who attained or grew towards a “B” when a numerical grade is converted into a letter grade. Please note that numerical and letter grades are not provided to students in Pre-kindergarten through 2nd grade.

Evaluation Question 3: Five percent *annual* increase in the percent of students scoring proficient on state test. No data from the Spring administration of the MAAP examination were available to the evaluation team at the time of analyses and write-up of the final report. Project staff at CSD and the evaluation team will use the Spring 2021 MAAP results as one of the baselines for comparing academic growth during the 2021-2022 school year.

Evaluation Question 4: Twenty percent annual increase P-K students receiving intervention will meet grade K-level expectations as demonstrated by meeting the cut score on the state test.

All students (n=127) enrolled in Pre-kindergarten during the 2020-2021 school year participated in the Zero Period program. Of these students, the evaluation team was able to create a matched dataset of students who were administered a Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 STAR Early Literacy assessment. In the Fall, only 6 students (5.7%) met CSD's standard 530 Scale Score (approximately 75th percentile) for Kindergarten-readiness. In the Spring, 60 students (57%) of the students met the standard for Kindergarten-readiness. This is significant growth during an especially challenging year.

All kindergarten students (n=186) also accessed the Zero Period blended learning activities. Of the total number of students, a matched dataset of students was used to estimate the impact of the program on growth. A Fall Scale score of 713 or higher (75th percentile) was used as the cut-point for determining readiness for 1st grade. In the Fall of 2020 only 1.8% (n=3) were ready for 1st grade. In the Spring of 2021, 60% (n=102) met or exceeded the cut-point used to estimate readiness for 1st grade. Kindergarten students experienced significant growth during the 2020-2021 school year.

Evaluation Question 5: Fifty percent of students will demonstrate an increase in positive school behaviors and commitment to remain drug/alcohol/tobacco free. Students who participated in the middle school and high school program agreed to stay drug/alcohol/tobacco free.

Evaluation Question 6: Fifty percent of 8th and 12th grade participants will complete a Pillar Project, (multi-media project and presentation) related to addressing a cultural/local or global issue/problem. No students who attended 30 or more days completed a Pillar Project. The instructional / intervention focus dedicated to academic tutoring, credit recovery, and ACT preparation.

Please note: Due to COVID-19, the policy of both school districts and community organizations precluded parents from participating in on-campus events, volunteer or extra-curricular. Therefore, these questions could not be evaluated.

Evaluation Question 7: Fifty percent of parents will participate in at least 5 school events throughout the year.

Evaluation Question 8: Twenty-five percent of parents will volunteer to assist with school events.

Evaluation Question 9: An increase of twenty percent participation in parenting classes/activities over baseline.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Central office staff, administrators, site coordinators, teaching staff, and support staff created an ambitious program designed to mitigate the impact of the learning gaps exacerbated by COVID-19. Closing learning gaps for students most at-risk for academic difficulties, lack of social-emotional development, and behavioral challenges is difficult in the best of circumstances. To implement such a program in the midst, and in spite, of the impact of COVID-19 on educators and families is exemplary. This is especially true given the goal of mitigating the impact poverty or learning English as a second language on learning. The goal of 21st CCLC is to implement programs that provide each child with an environment where their academic, physical, social-emotional, and nutritional needs are met. This goal was even more important as parents, their children, and educators worked during the second school year of disruptions due to COVID-19. In this regard, CSD used certified teachers and support staff dedicated to improving the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral well-being while putting themselves at risk. These educators exemplified

their dedication to teaching the *whole child during* and *after* the school day as well as during summer enrichment

The results need to be interpreted with caution. As a general rule, the impact of 21st CCLC on the educational, social-emotional, and behavioral well-being of students is facilitated or limited by other initiatives being implemented during the school day. The 2020-2021 school year was disrupted due to measures taken to protect educators, students, and their families from COVID-19. For example, students who might otherwise attend school and then the 21st CCLC after-school program might have been quarantined for 10-14 due to a positive test or close contact. Certified teachers and staff might have been available one day but not available for a stretch of time for the same reasons. COVID-19 might have also created stressors that may be associated with more student behaviors requiring higher levels of intervention. Importantly, CSD targeted their program at students who live in poverty. Research suggests that these students and their families might have been directly exposed to COVID-19 which could have limited their attendance in school and/or ability to participate in an after-school program. Students may not have been directly exposed to COVID-19, but the indirect exposure could have been just as impactful. For example, a parent's or caregiver's loss of employment could push a family who lived on the cusp of poverty into more a more dire situation. Importantly, the loss of academic learning time and social interactions from March 2020-July 2020 may have resulted in such deep learning gaps that it will take more than a single school year to close even greater learning gaps.

In this interpretive context, the following recommendations are proposed. These suggestions will need to be considered in the context of educators and families working together during the third year of COVID-19 related impacts on schools and homes.

Parent Engagement. Corinth School District made outreach to parents a key goal for the 2020-2021 academic year. Unfortunately, school policy dictated that parents were not allowed into the schools during anytime of the school day. This step was taken to ensure the safety of parents, educators, and support staff. The 2021-2022 school may provide an opportunity for site coordinators and teachers to dedicate the time and effort to open the school doors to parents or caregivers. Staff may open the physical school doors or open the virtual school doors via technology. Educators, parents or caregivers, and their children achieved a level of acumen using video-conferencing tools (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams), learning management systems (e.g., Canvas), and support tools (e.g., youtube.com) in an on-going effort to support learning during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. The school district might blend face-to-face opportunities with digital tools to create models of parent engagement that leverage the best of both approaches to create a hybrid model of parent engagement. For example, project staff may sponsor an in-person open house, stream it on Facebook Live, and record it for broader dissemination to parents who might be interested in their children taking advantage of 21st CCLC during or after the school day.

Technology. A key active ingredient to the success of teachers, parents, and their children may leverage the benefits of technology to create and share opportunities that immerse students in high quality best practice and daily practice of key literacy and numeracy skills. For example, project staff might record an exemplary phonics lesson being taught by a teacher in the classroom, upload that video for use after school, then blend that direct instruction with independent practice on another piece of software. The impact of technology might be extended to use at home, especially for students who might be remote

learners due to being immuno-compromised or quarantined due to COVID-19 or being in close contact with someone.

Attendance. This area is critical to closing the achievement gap. Project staff will need to increase the number of students who attend 30 or days during the school year as well as summer enrichment. *This is especially true for high school students.* Project leadership should explore incentives that may be used, either supported using funds from 21st CCLC or other sources, to entice parents or caregivers and their children to consistently participate in the initiative. Importantly, technology may be leveraged to include participation in 21st CCLC at home with appropriate means and safeguards to ensure that students do in fact actively engage the key elements of the program.

Professional Development. Today, more than any other time during the past decade, classroom teachers and support staff need high quality professional development. The professional learning opportunities should balance the focus on literacy and numeracy with programming and support on the social-emotional and behavioral impacts of trauma on learning. The experience of COVID-19 during the past two school years may have added a layer of trauma on top of the pre-existing traumas that result from living in poverty or near-poverty. After school time periods provide for flexible use of time that may be operationalized by learning centers (i.e., classrooms) where students receive a balance of services aligned to their profiles. For some students, the balance of time may tilt towards academic and social-emotional whereas other students receive only academic support. A critical component to this professional development is providing teachers and staff with the observational tools to describe the impact of trauma on a student's academic, social-emotional, and behavioral growth. *Importantly*, project leadership needs to recognize that

teachers and staff also experienced a great deal of stress during the past two and now three school years. This needs to be recognized and managed so that educators and staff *want* to exert the extra effort required by working with students for extended amounts of time during the school day and summer enrichment.

Communication. In general, communication between leadership and site-based staff was exemplary during a challenging time period. Technology may be leveraged to increase communication with parents (e.g., goals of the program, lessons, progress) and among staff. A digital newsletter, video messages, on-site and virtual open houses may each be used depending upon the goals and objectives of the communication.

Appendix

Biography of Evaluators

Carl Swartz, Ph.D. (Chief Executive Office and Chairman, High Road Learning). Dr. Swartz has co-authored articles about approaches to estimate text complexity, assessment and instruction of reading and writing abilities, and use of technology as a component of educational programs to enhance personalized learning for students with learning, attention, and language differences. He has co-authored book chapters as well as peer-reviewed articles in a wide range of journals including, *The Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *Developmental Neuropsychology*, *Educational Psychologist*, and *Educational and Psychological Measurement*. Dr. Swartz has been the co-principle investigator on research and curriculum development projects funded by The U.S. Department of Education and private foundations. Most recently, Dr. Swartz was the co- principal investigator and project lead on *Literacy by Technology*, a three-year technology development project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (3 years, \$3,200,000).

This technology is currently being scaled across the United States. He was also co-project director leading the development, testing, and scaling of *EdSphere*, a personalized learning platform in sites across the United States, Australia, Denmark, and Hong Kong.

In addition to his work at MetaMetrics, Dr. Swartz has served in higher education as a research scientist in the School of Medicine and clinical assistant professor in the School of Education at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Currently, Dr. Swartz is a Research Professor in the Department of Early Childhood, Special Education, and Literacy in the School of Education at UNC-CH. He received his undergraduate degree in education from Indiana University and his master's and doctorate degrees in education from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Swartz taught early adolescents with severe emotional disturbances and behavior disorders at a middle school in Greenville, South Carolina (1983- 1986).