

March 2022



LINK • Club

Linking Instruction. Nurturing Knowledge.

Out-of-School Time Program

An Overview



An ACPS afterschool program made possible through city-wide collaboration:



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OSTP in Alexandria

Introduction

The time between the last school bell and when parents arrive home from work has long been a concern of families, law enforcement and community members due to the potential dangers and risky behaviors that take place after school. Many of Alexandria's children are alone and unsupervised between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m., the peak hours for juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and sex. According to the Youth Risk Survey, **the hours after school when children are on their own are not just a time of risks, it is also a time of lost opportunities to help students grow and develop the skills and competencies to make positive life decisions that can lead to their future success.**

What is OSTP?

As the name implies, **out-of-school time programs (OSTP)** are targeted to the hours that school-age children are not in school. According to national standards, OSTPs operate ten hours or more per week on an ongoing basis and provide a variety of regularly scheduled, structured and supervised activities where learning opportunities take place. They do not include single focused activities such as PTA-sponsored enrichment programs, music lessons, sports practice tutoring or school-based clubs.



Benefits of OSTP Services

Research clearly demonstrates multiple benefits of OSTP to youth and communities. Benefits for children and youth regularly participating in OSTPs include:

- better school attendance and engagement in learning
- reduced behavioral issues
- improved test scores and grades
- less involvement in risky activities
- opportunities for recreation that support healthy development

OSTP Best Practices

Multiple institutions nationwide produce significant research and documentation of best practices that deliver quality OSTPs. The most commonly recognized standards for the OSTP profession come from the research and development of the Core Knowledge and Competencies framework produced by the National AfterSchool Association. The OSTP Core Knowledge and Competencies were established to create agreements across programs and funding streams about how to work with and on behalf of children and youth during out-of-school hours. According to this framework, providers of high quality OSTPs consistently display the characteristics illustrated below.



Need for OSTP in Alexandria

It is common knowledge that the majority of Alexandria's school age children have working parents and many live in single parent households where the parent works full time. Ensuring the safety of their children during these after school hours is crucial. The 2020 Afterschool Alliance report "America After 3PM" highlights the need for afterschool programs to keep children safe, inspire learning and support working parents.



- 78% of Virginia parents agree that afterschool programs help give working parents peace of mind about their children when they are at work.
- 74% of Virginia parents agree that afterschool programs keep kids safe and out of trouble.
- 82% of Virginia parents agree that programs provide kids opportunities to learn life skills, like the ability to communicate and work in teams.
- 77% of Virginia parents agree that afterschool programs help working parents keep their jobs.
- 89% of Virginia parents support public funding for afterschool programs.

OSTP Report to the Community | 2017 Results

According to ACPS parents/guardians surveyed across all schools and grade levels in 2017:

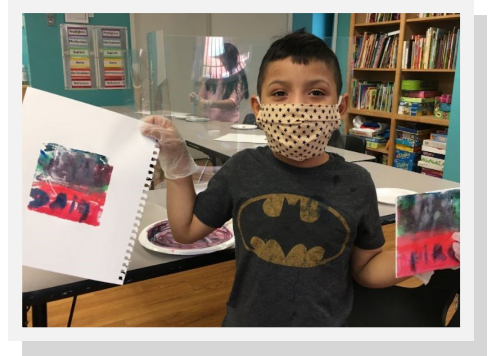
- Less than half of all families (43%) indicated that their child was enrolled in any afterschool program.
- The rate of participation in afterschool programming was lowest among middle-school-aged youth with less than a quarter of all families with middle-school children (24%) indicating their student was currently enrolled in any type of after school program; and only 15% of those participated regularly.
- Cost was the number one reason families gave for their child not attending an afterschool program.
- The primary reason families indicate that they would enroll their child in an afterschool program is to gain skills for school success.

L.I.N.K. Club

An ACPS Out-of-School Program

Background

- The City of Alexandria's Children and Youth Master Plan, which was unanimously approved in June 2014 by the Alexandria City Council and Alexandria City School Board, placed a significant focus on services available for Alexandria's youth during out-of-school time, including the following goals:
 - Ensure that out of school time programs are offered in all areas of the city, are free or low-cost and located at neighborhood schools/recreation centers.
 - Align in-school and afterschool programs that deliver academic/social enrichment with school curriculum in instances where students are not meeting grade-level expectations.
 - Create an integrated and aligned out-of-school time system that includes review of best practices/quality, assessment of needs and preferences, identification of service gaps, access, affordability and opportunities to develop civic responsibility.
 - Call for the development of a work group to address the City's OSTP needs (established 2017)
 - Conduct a city wide assessment of out of school time opportunities (conducted in 2018)
- To address the goals of the Children and Youth Master Plan and various areas of the ACPS' 2020 Strategic Plan, particularly as it related to addressing achievement gaps, the ACPS Office of Community Partnerships and Engagement designed and implemented LINK Club, (Linking Instruction, Nurturing Knowledge), a high-quality afterschool program with an emphasis on academic achievement support and opportunity for high-need, low-income students at no cost to families.

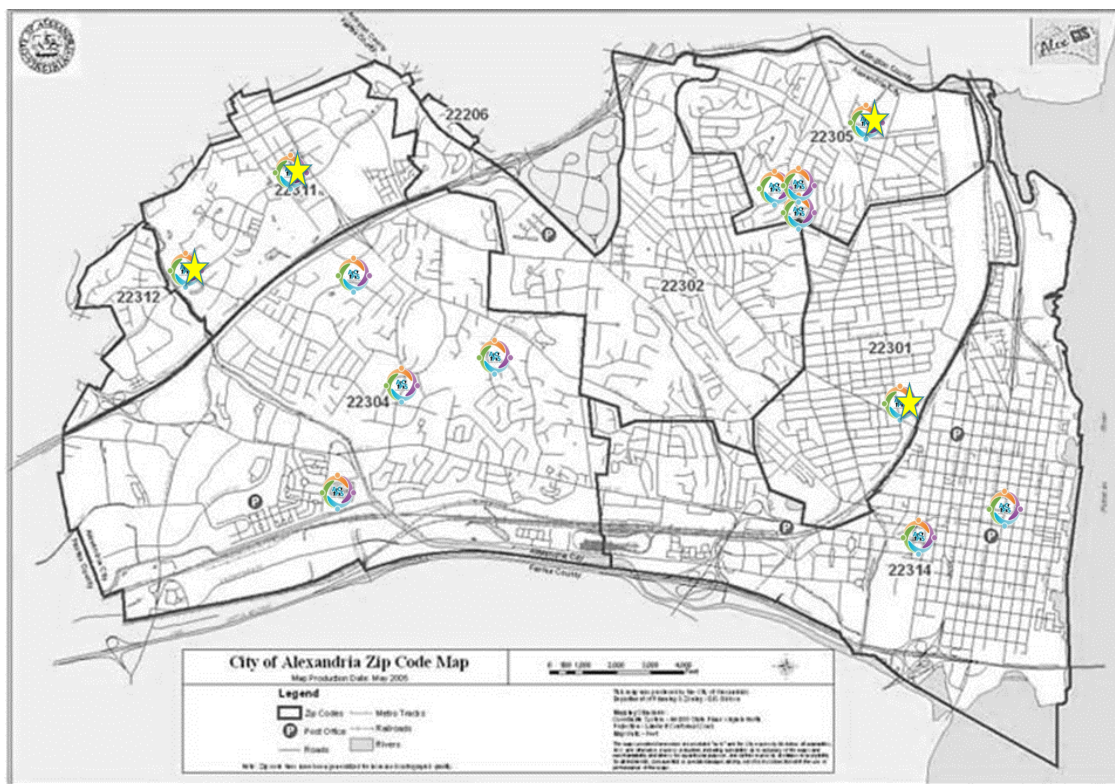


- In 2017, with funding secured by a U.S. Department of Education 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) grant, ACPS launched the first LINK Club site located at Brent Place Apartments, an affordable housing community in Alexandria's West End where there is a history of complex needs impacting the families residing there.
- In 2019, ACPS was awarded an additional four 21st CCLC grants, an amazing achievement as only 28 were awarded across the entire state.

Overview

- LINK Club is ACPS' afterschool program is designed to provide high-quality after-school services with an emphasis on academic support, enrichment, social-emotional support and family engagement to our division's most vulnerable students and their families.
- LINK Club is made possible through federal, state and local grants, including five 21st Century Community Learning Center grants made available by the U.S. Department of Education and in collaboration with the City of Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Homes for America and Community Lodgings, Inc.
- LINK Club operates Monday-Friday between the hours of 3pm-6pm. While all eligible students are encouraged to apply for LINK Club, a rubric is used to ensure the highest need students are served.

Locations



School-based LINK Club Sites:

Ferdinand T Day Elem. / RPCA - serves 100
Francis C. Hammond Middle / RPCA - serves 100
Jefferson Houston PreK-8 / ARHA - serves 75

Community-based LINK Club Sites:

ARHA Ruby Tucker Center - serves 15
Brent Place - serves 40
Community Lodgings Fifer Cntr. - serves 30
Community Lodgings New Brookside Ctr. - serves 30
Community Lodgings Beverly Hills Ctr. - serves 30
Patrick Henry Recreation Center - serves 30

NEW LINK Club Sites—FALL 2022: ★

Cora Kelly Elem. / Chick Armstrong RPCA
to serve 90
John Adams Elem. / John Adams RPCA
to serve 75
William Ramsay Elem. / Wm. Ramsay RPCA
to serve 90
George Washington Middle / RPCA
to serve 90

Quality of Services

In keeping with industry best practices, **ACPS LINK Club meets all standards** of the National Afterschool Association's Core Knowledge and Competencies Framework and holistically addresses the needs of Alexandria's children and youth, as follows:

Learning Environments and Curriculum

- A primary focus of LINK Club is “linking” the instructional services received during the school day to the support provided during afterschool program hours.
- ACPS certified teachers facilitate “Power Hour” in small groups with a maximum ratio of 10 to 1.
- During Power Hour, students benefit from homework help, academic coaching and reading and math interventions determined by school administration based on student data. Specific interventions currently used include:
 - Literacy—Leveled Literacy Intervention, Reading Eggs and Book Worms
 - Math—Do the Math, Number World, DreamBox and Eureka Math
- LINK strives to bring learning to life for students through STEM project-based learning activities offered each week. Curriculum and material kits provided by Camp Interventions for elementary students and Flying Classroom for secondary students. Weekly STEM projects emphasize creative problem solving, innovation, decision-making, communication and collaboration.



Youth Development



- Beyond academic support, LINK Club is designed to foster positive growth through social interactions and enriching intellectual opportunities.
- LINK Club has partnered with over 20 local non-profits that provide a variety of elective clubs at a reduced cost to promote physical, social, emotional and cognitive development, communication skills, imagination and creative expression.
- LINK elective clubs include options such as robotics, visual arts, cooking, chess club, theater, coding, music instrument lessons, dance, and sports. LINK electives help to nurture students' natural talents while also teaching important life skills and improving students' self-esteem .

At LINK Club, we nurture students' natural brilliance and support their individual learning style in an effort to grow life-long learners.

Child/Youth Observation and Assessment

- As an ACPS program, LINK Club understand the goals, benefits and uses of individual observations and assessments. Benchmark data, including Individual Education Plans and WIDA assessment results are provided to LINK Club teachers for each student at the beginning of the program year along with previous year SOLS scores.
- At the end of each quarter, LINK teachers receive students report cards and depending on grade level, data including: Fountas and Pinnell reading level; the Scholastic Reading Index; Think Through Math score; and PALS scores.
- LINK Club teachers consult with classroom teachers throughout the year to ensure proper alignment and implementation of individual interventions, strategies and supports used during the school day.
- LINK Club teachers complete quarterly Progress Reports based on students' efforts and progress in LINK Club. Copies of each student's report are provided to the students' home room or advisory teachers, as well as to their parents.
- Twice per year, an ACPS licensed administrator conducts evaluations of all LINK Club teachers and/or tutors providing academic support to students.



Interactions with Children and Youth

- LINK Club recognizes the importance of providing a nurturing environment where positive relationships and communication is central and strives to always provide students with a pleasant and harmonious environment.
- Strategies that are consistently expected of LINK Club staff include communicating clear expectations of student behavior, modeling program expectations, assuming the best of students, using a caring tone of voice, utilizing community circles to address problematic behavior and praising and recognizing good behavior.
- Social-emotional supports at all sites include character-building, mentoring and peace circles designed to teach compassion and empathy building, anger management, conflict resolution skills and empowerment.
- Middle school students are trained in Safe Dates and Be Bold, Be Responsible curriculum to prevent teen pregnancy and promote healthy relationships.
- Students also complete pre-, mid-year and post-surveys designed to assess their attitudes toward self, school and the LINK Club.
- As needed, Student Services staff, including school social workers, nurses and counselors, are also consulted to support the specific needs of students and/or their families.





Youth Engagement

- The student voice is an important element to LINK Club success. Whenever possible, students provide feedback to help design and improve programming to ensure positive engagement.
- Students help to determine what elective clubs are offered. While we encourage students to try new things at LINK Club, students are typically provided a choice between various opportunities offered so that they can participate in those of most interest to them.

- Peer Advocates from Alexandria City High School facilitate monthly leadership workshops to help empower middle school students.

Cultural Competency and Responsiveness

- LINK Club actively promotes respect for cultural diversity. To ensure an inclusive, welcoming and respectful environment, when possible, art and imagery is posted that reflects the students and families served and music is often incorporated into arrival and throughout other program times.
- LINK Club aims to hire staff that reflect the diversity of our students and we also encourage our community partners to do the same.
- Leveled books purchased for use during LINK Club are diverse and include bilingual books that English Learners can check out and take home to read with parents.
- Bilingual Family Engagement staff assist with ensuring culturally responsive communication with families and all written materials for families are translated into Spanish.
- English classes are offered to adult family members year-round in partnership with the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia.

Family, School, and Community Relationships

- LINK Club builds on respectful, reciprocal relationships with families and the Alexandria community to promote optimal development for students.
- Bilingual Family Connectors conduct outreach to families and quarterly LINK Club newsletters and progress reports are provided to families in their preferred language.
- In partnership with ACPs Family and Community Engagement (FACE), LINK Club implements culturally competent practices to connect with families of the participating students and connect them with a variety of family engagement activities geared at supporting student achievement and development.
- Family engagement opportunities include monthly workshops geared at supporting student learning and development. Interpretation is provided and, when in person, childcare and a light dinner are provided at all events to help eliminate barriers to participation.
- Public and private agencies enrich LINK Club services through in-kind partnerships and funding supports. Primary partners include the City of Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services, Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Homes for America, Community Lodgings, Inc., Literacy Council of Northern Virginia, INOVA Health Systems and many, many more.



Safety and Wellness

- The safety and wellness of ACPS students is vital to LINK Club. LINK Club staff are all trained in CPR and first aid training and are mandatory child abuse and neglect reporters.
- LINK Club staff receive a copy of medical forms for any child that has a chronic or temporary medical condition or allergies.
- All LINK Club premises are inspected annually by the local Fire Marshal to ensure space is free of fire hazards and that there is adequate safety exits for students.
- Criminal and sex offender background checks are performed on all LINK Club staff, partners, vendors and volunteers working with students.
- To counter food shortage within the community, nutritious snacks and dinner are provided daily to students through the ACPS Office of Nutrition and the Child and Adult Care Food program at all LINK Club sites. Weekend food bags are also offered through community partnerships at several sites.
- ACPS Pupil Services provides busing home after LINK Club for all sites serving students that reside outside of the immediate program location to ensure a safe transport home.



Program Planning and Development

- School administrators participate in the planning of LINK Club operations that serve their students, particularly as it relates to staffing, facility usage and academic and social-emotional supports offered.
- LINK Club would not be possible without the collaboration of division leadership. Staff from all ACPS departments serve as subject area experts in all other factors of programming: Teaching, Learning and Leadership help identify and support curriculum options offered; Student Services staff support the implementation of RULER curriculum, PBIS and restorative practices; Technology Services has been integral in ensuring all sites have connectivity and chromebooks purchased are loaded with same software as students' chromebooks; Facilities and Operations help to secure space, provide meals and transportation and implement prevention, preparedness, and health and safety practices; Human Resources helps with the ongoing hiring of staff ; and Financial Services is essential in managing grant reimbursement funds and processing hundreds of time sheets each pay period.
- Existing within the ACPS Office of Community Partnerships and Engagement, LINK Club benefits from the office's role in coordinating ACPS community partnerships, managing grants, volunteers and leading family and community engagement efforts.

Professional Development and Leadership



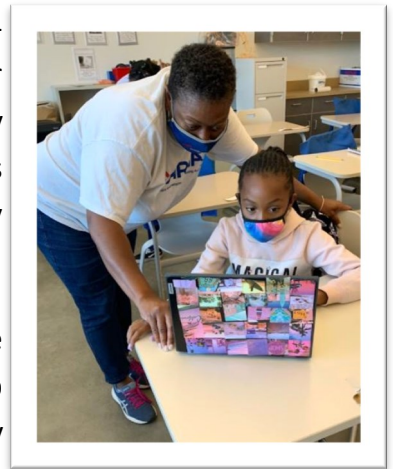
- As a part of the ACPS system, LINK Club is uniquely positioned to ensure staff is equipped with specialized education to best support every aspect of children's growth and learning.
- LINK Club staff are offered a professional development annually in areas of PBIS, cultural competency and restorative practices, project-based learning, maintaining, handling and serving meals to students and general safety protocols. Additional training is provided on a site-by-site basis throughout the year based on identified need.

How Are We Doing?

LINK Club Program Quality Self-Assessment

One of the goals of 21st CCLC grants is to create effective community learning centers that foster academic growth through enrichment activities for children. Virginia's Program Quality Self-Assessment (PQSA), administered by the University of Memphis Center for Research and Education Policy, is designed to assess 21st CCLC program quality and help staff think critically about continuous improvement.

To ensure feedback from all stakeholders, a PQSA survey link is sent to the following individuals at each site: LINK Club Site Coordinator, LINK Club teachers, the school principals, central office staff, co-applicants, community partners and parents of student served. Below are the highlights from the combined outcomes of all LINK Club PQSAs administered in February of 2022.



Academic Focus

- 100% of respondents indicated that academic focus is embedded into all activities.
- 97% of respondents indicated that activities are aligned with state learning standards.
- 93% of respondents indicated that activities are guided by lesson plans that are designed with evidence-based practices .
- 88% of respondents indicated that project-based, experiential activities that are academically challenging are offered.
- 92% of respondents indicated that Reading/English support uses curriculum that is aligned with school(s) curricula.
- 96% of respondents indicated that math support uses curriculum that is aligned with school(s) curricula.
- 85% of respondents indicated that student learning needs and accomplishments are regularly assessed and documented.

Student & Family Activities

- 94% of respondents indicated that families of students are provided with enriching literacy and other educational opportunities.
- 94% of respondents indicated that families of students are provided with strategies and encouragement to support student learning needs.
- 100% of respondents indicated that the program offers established time, place, and supplies for homework completion.

Address Youth Development Needs

- 89% of respondents indicated that the program offers students with opportunities for developing personal responsibility, leadership, and teamwork skills.
- 93% of respondents indicated that daily activities offer opportunities for group learning and peer co-operation.

Safe Environment

- 98% of respondents indicated that the program offers a safe and clean environment.
- 95% of respondents indicated that arrival and dismissal procedures are carefully planned/monitored.
- 90% of respondents indicated that the program has clear rules of conduct that are well known by staff and shared with students and families.

Coordination with School

- 96% of respondents indicated that program activities are coordinated with school curriculum and events.
- 88% of respondents indicated that regular communication between day school and after school staff is maintained to monitor academic and behavioral progress of students.
- 95% of respondents indicated that site coordinator and school administration frequently discuss program and school coordination.

21st CCLC Staff

- 94% of respondents indicated that staff are actively recruited, trained, and supported.
- 91% of respondents indicated that staff meets regularly to review program delivery and student needs to improve program quality.
- 95% of respondents indicated that topics on child development, curriculum planning, and cooperative learning are part of the professional development plan.

Community Partnerships

- 100% of respondents indicated that program purpose is clearly communicated to all partners.
- 100% of respondents indicated that families, schools, and community partners are encouraged to participate in planning and implementation of program activities.
- 100% of respondents indicated that program activities provided by community partners are reviewed regularly for performance.

Sustainability

- 96% of respondents indicated that additional funding sources (federal, state, local) are accessed to supplement program activities.
- 93% of respondents indicated that anecdotal "good news" stories are collected and shared to increase program support in the community.
- 96% of respondents indicated that partnerships with businesses and foundations are procured to expand program resources.

Moving the Work Forward

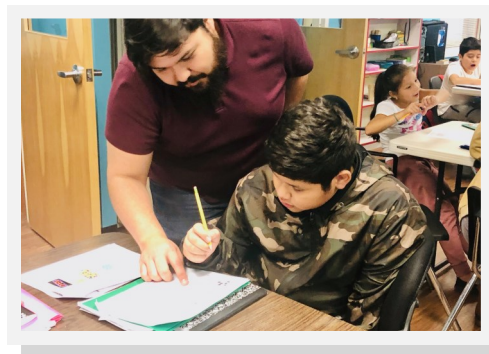
LINK Club Expansion

- In response to the success that the LINK Club has been recognized for and in alignment with the ACPS Strategic Plan and announced budget priorities, the Office of Community Partnerships and Engagement applied and received additional ESSER funding to support the expansion of the LINK Club services across the next three years to four new sites in collaboration with the school administration and the City of Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (RPCA).
- New sites include three additional Title I elementary schools (Cora Kelly, John Adams and William Ramsay) and George Washington Middle School. These additional sites will bring the total of Title I school-based LINK Club sites to six. LINK Club is also offered currently at six community sites in high-need areas supporting students and families living in low-income and public housing. The addition of George Washington Middle School ensures high-quality afterschool services are provided at all middle schools division-wide. This is in direct response to the identification of middle school as the area of greatest need in Alexandria for afterschool services and safety of students during the critical period of 3:00 to 6:00pm when parents are often not at home and students are exposed to risky behaviors.
- The new LINK Club programs are designed to leverage the school's existing Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) and Title I funds, as well as in-kind support available through our partnership with RPCA.
 - RPCA who will provide facilities and staff for wrap-around programming.
 - ELO budgets will fund teachers to provide integrated academic remediation and intervention.
 - Title I funds will be considered to cover additional academic enrichment opportunities.

Continuous Improvement

In addition, the ESSER funding is also being utilized to develop specific curriculum aligning with the Project GLAD and AVID models for academic out of school time support and the RULER curriculum for social-emotional supports. This curricular development is a true collaboration with the Departments of Teaching, Learning and Leadership and Student Services and Equity.

In addition, LINK Club is renewing its effort to support students' social-emotional development through a series of training for staff, including Developmental Assets and trauma-informed training. At the same time, we will implement strategies to support the social-emotional well-being for LINK Club staff that will simultaneously serve as additional modeling for supporting students need.



Change Maker Club

- During the weekly Change Maker Club, ACPS teachers will utilize curriculum developed specifically for implementation during LINK afterschool programming by ACPS Teaching, Learning and Leadership. This curriculum will integrate best practices from two other evidence-based instructional models: Project GLAD, a model of professional development dedicated to building academic language and literacy for all students, especially second language learners; and AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) an approach to helping teachers to deliver inquiry-based and student-centric instruction that inspires students to take control over their own learning.
- Centered around SOL standards and through units of study, ACPS teachers will utilize this curriculum to engage students in thematic exploration that focuses on being an agent of change within their own communities. The units of study will begin with a real world “hook” experience and culminate in an application experiential learning activity.

RULER Club

- Ruler Club will utilize an evidence-based approach to social and emotional learning of the same name. Developed at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, RULER supports students to understand the value of emotions, build emotional intelligence skills and create and maintain a positive school climate.
- The themes of each unit are consistent across grade levels, but the focus of each grade and its feeling words varies, centering on developmentally appropriate emotion concept. During weekly RULER Clubs, teachers will help students learn important skills, including setting and achieving positive goals, feeling and showing empathy for others, making responsible decisions and maintaining positive relationships.

Social Emotional Supports

- In partnership with the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services, all community partner staff supporting LINK Club will be provided a in-service training throughout the year focused on building positive relationships and supporting the social-emotional health of our students.
- Trainings will include four hours of Developmental Asset training and two hours of Adverse Childhood Experiences training for all staff in August followed by ongoing trauma informed and asset-building training sessions scheduled throughout the year.
- To support community partner staff providing services to students, LINK Club will also offer quarterly restorative circles and self-care workshops for the staff. The restorative circles along with workshops focused on mindfulness, breathing techniques and yoga, for example, will serve to support staff’s social-emotional health while also modeling and teaching strategies that can be used with students.
- LINK Club will utilize the Search Institute’s Developmental Asset Profile pre– and post-tests completed by students at the beginning and end of the program year to assess our progress.