L.E.A.D Afterschool

CREDIT FOR LEARNING



L.E.A.D. Afterschool

Wasilla, Alaska

125 Average number of students served during the school year

58% Families with low incomes

Main funding sources:

- 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative

Creating a path for career exploration and readiness

Student-centered, active, and engaging learning experiences that build on young people's interests, while developing their skills and knowledge, are at the heart of high-quality afterschool programs. Young people of all ages can benefit from these experiences, however, adolescence is a critical time for exposure to these types of learning opportunities, when young people are discovering their interests and passions as they begin on their path toward adulthood.

Afterschool programs can provide older youth opportunities to find their inspiration and gain skills that will benefit them in and outside of the classroom while allowing them to earn school credits. Credit-for-learning programs in the afterschool space—which can range from students earning physical education credits through a local YMCA to taking part in a boat-building course for elective science credit—are a valuable resource that individualizes knowledge acquisition and complements school day lessons for middle and high school youth.

Overview

L.E.A.D. (**L**ead by example, **E**ngage mind and body, **A**ctivate dreams, **D**emonstrate technical skills) **Afterschool** program serves students attending Burchell High School, an alternative school in the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) district of southern Alaska. The program aims to help students, many of whom come from difficult backgrounds, prepare for college or a career by providing opportunities to explore different career paths and build skills through experiential and project-based learning electives, all while earning school credit.

A typical day for students

Each trimester, students can choose up to two courses—such as robotics, pottery, or creative writing—that then become their area or areas of focus during their time at L.E.A.D. Afterschool. A typical day involves a short teacher-directed lesson, followed by hands-on project-based learning, where students may work independently or in small groups. The program director instructs teachers to keep lectures to 15 minutes per day to allow students to spend the majority of their time at the program facilitating and directing their learning. During this time, the teachers observe and engage with the students one-on-one as needed.

Outcomes

An external evaluation by Sterling Evaluation and Assessment found that the L.E.A.D. Afterschool program has had a positive impact on students' academic achievement and school day behavior. Compared to non-participants, L.E.A.D. Afterschool students attending the program for 30 days or more, on average had higher math and English course grades, had an average of 22 fewer school-day absences, were issued fewer behavioral referrals, and graduated at a rate 11.2 percent higher than non-participants. Additionally, the evaluation found that based on surveys, interviews, and focus groups with principals, site coordinators, parents, students, and school day teachers, L.E.A.D. Afterschool was viewed by stakeholder groups as helping to promote learning, provide leadership opportunities, and improve students' overall school experience.

Program characteristics

Burchell High School is different from other schools in the Mat-Su district in that students who apply to attend typically have struggled in a traditional public school setting. Many of the students at Burchell High School come with personal and academic challenges, and the school serves the district's highest population of homeless students and teen parents. A priority for L.E.A.D. Afterschool is to help Burchell High School students prepare for life after graduation by connecting them with opportunities to explore career options, as well as building their social and emotional skills and competencies.

At Burchell High School, students take their core classes during school hours and elective courses primarily through the afterschool program. The classes are broken up into trimesters to allow greater variety in class offerings and credits earned per year. The electives place students at the center of learning to take on the role of active learner rather than passive listener, and focus on experiential and project-based learning to help students develop leadership, problem-solving, goal setting, project management, and planning skills. The program encourages students to take control over their education, increasing their roles and responsibilities in the learning process. Rather than teachers directing the learning taking place, students lead group activities, take an active role in asking questions and seeking answers when problems arise, and are given the autonomy to decide what and how they want to learn.

Many L.E.A.D. Afterschool courses also provide students with opportunities to explore different career paths. For example, past electives have included health studies, where students receive CPR certification, and classes on various construction trades. This trimester, L.E.A.D. Afterschool is offering a restaurant management class. Students learn the basics of running a restaurant, including ordering supplies, maintaining inventory, and managing a large staff, while gaining culinary experience. For this elective, students earn a half credit in culinary arts and a half credit in entrepreneurship. In a robotics class currently being offered, students learn the basics of coding while constructing robots that perform various tasks. In this course, taught by a former rocket scientist who designed the rockets that helped land the Mars Rover, students earn an elective credit in science.

The need for credit-for-learning opportunities

Credit for learning expands educational opportunities for youth, where young people can explore their interests and delve deeper into subject matter outside of the classroom. These programs provide diverse learning experiences, promote student engagement, and prepare students for life after graduation.

Boosting motivation and engagement

When students are interested in what they are learning and have the opportunity to experience and develop a sense of agency, it can increase their engagement and motivation to learn. Credit for learning employs this student-centered learning approach, where learning is tailored to students' interests and needs, and students have ownership of their learning. This approach can be especially beneficial for older students, as school engagement has been found to decrease as students get older, or for youth who are disengaged from school.

Improving college and career readiness

Credit for learning provides youth the chance to engage in real-world learning experiences and learn about potential career paths while earning school credit. In these hands-on and applied learning contexts, students can develop skills that employers value, such as problem solving and collaboration, be mentored by and build connections with industry professionals, and complete internships or apprenticeships.

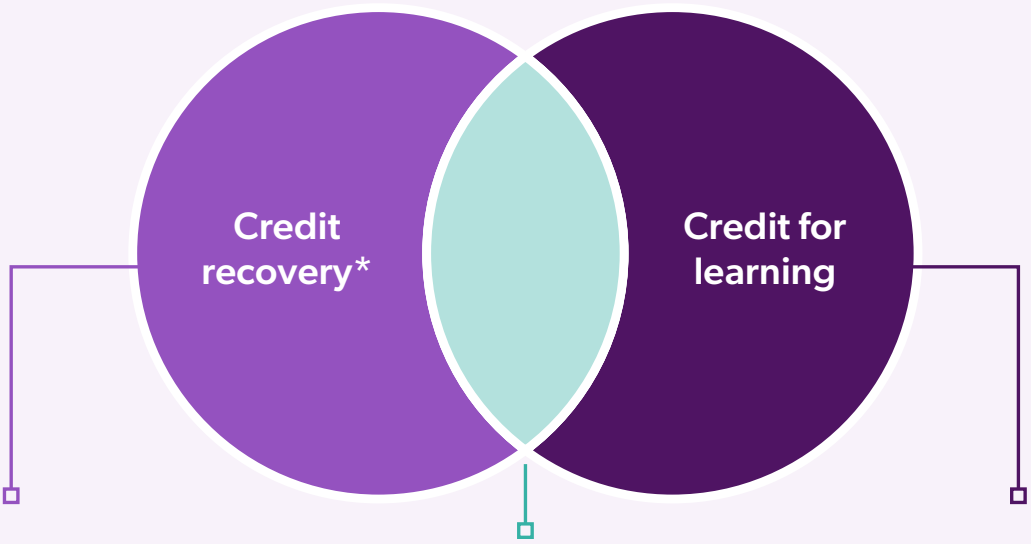
Addressing opportunity gaps

Research shows that students attending high-poverty schools too often lack access to the same learning opportunities as students attending low-poverty schools. Credit for learning can address equity issues present in the education system, broadening access to learning opportunities that schools may be unable to provide.

Read *Credit for Learning: Making Learning Outside of School Count* to learn more.

Credit recovery vs. Credit for learning

While the underlying intention of **credit recovery** and **credit for learning** differ from one another, there are overlapping strategies between the two credit earning opportunities.



- Intended for students who are ***falling behind academically*** or ***at-risk of not graduating on time***.
- Students can ***redo coursework in a class they have failed*** or ***retake the class*** in an alternative manner, such as in summer school, during afterschool or weekend classes, or online.

- Provides opportunities to earn credits outside of the school day that count toward graduation requirements.
- Can take place in afterschool and summer programs.

- Intended for students interested in ***earning additional credits*** toward graduation, or students looking to ***further personalize their education or pursue an interest***.
- Students can ***earn credits for various activities and experiences outside of the classroom***, such as community service projects, internships or apprenticeships, independent studies, and student-led projects.

**U.S. Department of Education. (2018). Issue Brief: Credit Recovery. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/high-school/credit-recovery.pdf*

Program history

The afterschool program at Burchell High School began in 2010 when the school recognized the need for students to earn additional credits in the out-of-school time space. Due to Burchell High School's limited size, in conjunction with the number of credits students need to graduate, the school decided to make electives for credit available outside of the classroom. In the last two years, the program was renamed L.E.A.D. and shifted toward its current model focusing primarily on preparing students for their time after high school by offering career exploration, project-based learning, and skill building opportunities.

Recommendations

for creating a path for career exploration and readiness:

- Increasing student responsibility and letting students take control of their education is the best way to prepare them for adult life. The afterschool space is the perfect environment to give kids this opportunity.
- While offering specific career-focused programming is beneficial for exploring different career paths, project-based learning can help to improve foundational skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking that will benefit students in any career they choose.