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21CCLC FORMATIVE EVALUATION

MIDDLE SCHOOL SITE OBSERVATIONS

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ABOUT FORMATIVE EVALUATION

Formative evaluation is a type of assessment conducted during the development or implementation of a program, product, or project to gather feedback and improve it. Unlike summative evaluation, which occurs at the end to assess the overall success, formative evaluation is used to monitor progress and make adjustments in real-time.

Formative evaluation is valuable because it helps identify strengths and weaknesses early on, ensuring that necessary improvements can be made before the final product or program is completed. This continuous feedback loop enhances effectiveness, efficiency, and the quality of the work, leading to better outcomes.

PROGRAM OBSERVATION

Observation as formative evaluation involves closely watching and documenting participants' behaviors, interactions, or responses during the implementation of a program or activity. This method provides real-time insights into how well something is working, identifying areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

Observation allows evaluators to gather direct, firsthand information on how participants engage with the content or process. This can highlight issues that might not be evident through surveys or interviews, and helps adjust the program to better meet the needs of participants. Observations provide a more natural and immediate understanding of the learning or process in action. Self-assessment and reflection from program leaders can be triangulated with the observations (e.g., added to the data) to enhance the data's validity and reliability.

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MIDDLE SCHOOL SITE

The Middle School Site is led by paraprofessionals and youth workers hired the 21st Century grant. This school-based afterschool program serves grades 6-8.

Students enrolled at this site go directly to snack. They then stay for homework help if they have missing work. If missing work is complete, they can choose to attend various enrichment opportunities such as Creativity Club.

This report contains the Middle School site results.

JW SMITH SCHOOL SITE

The JW Smith School Site is led by the Boys & Girls Club of the Bemidji Area (BGCBA). This school-based afterschool program serves the grades K-3, with priority given to students who attend JW Smith Elementary School during the school day.

Students enrolled at this site have a snack after their school day ends. After snack they choose between 3 activity options. Then there is a collective meeting before 3 more activity options are provided.

A separate report contains the JW Smith School site results.

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MIDDLE SCHOOL SITE OBSERVATIONS

A summary of effective practices in five areas of program quality are provided below. A table showing themes of the observations with examples begins on page 7.

The five areas used to assess program quality are based on the *Effective Practices Assessment Tool* provided by the *Believe It. Build It. Effective Afterschool Practice Guide* published by Ignite Afterschool. This tool was used to during the program observations and completed by program staff as a self-assessment to supplement the evaluation observations.

Intentional Program Design

The homework help programming **emphasizes an academic focus** with clear goals for completing missing work. Staff actively communicated goals verbally and sometimes through visual aids, helping students stay on track. Student choice was encouraged with the option to attend clubs once academic work was completed and through flexibility during snack time. The program utilizes tools like exit tickets and surveys to gather feedback and improve the program. While some days were emphasized a singular focus on quietly pursuing academic work, other days offer more guidance and encouragement through **visible goals, helping students stay motivated**.

Overall, the program fosters a **sense of academic responsibility**, and engagement, while ensuring that students are actively working toward their educational goals.

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Supportive Relationships and Environment

The program showed a **balance between student autonomy and staff authority**, with staff trusting students to express when they need help but also establishing clear boundaries and expectations. On one observation day, the program felt more focused on compliance and maintaining silence, while on another day, the staff adopted a more relational, supportive approach, encouraging individual engagement and positive reinforcement. Some staff expressed awareness of the potential intimidating effect of their tone, others strived to foster connections with students, particularly by expressing curiosity about their interests, such as music choices, and creating a more relaxed atmosphere. The **consistency of boundaries** helped maintain structure. The display of student work in the program space further reinforces the value of each student's contributions.

Overall, the program **balances structure and individualized support**, with noticeable differences in staff approach from one day to the next.

Youth Voice and Leadership

The program demonstrated a balance between **structured task completion** and student autonomy. On one day, students were directed to sit quietly once they finished their homework. On another day, students had the freedom to choose from quiet activities after completing their missing work, **fostering independence and decision-making**. Staff interactions with students were generally supportive, with a gentle, inquisitive tone when students were off-task, though there were missed opportunities for more individualized support, such as asking students about the specific help they need. Peer collaboration was not emphasized, with **students working individually**, potentially missing out on the benefits of cooperative learning. The staff's response to a student's celebration of completing missing assignments suggests they may be missed opportunities for positive reinforcement, as a **encouraging tone could further motivate students**.

Overall, the program provides **a mix of structure and autonomy**, with opportunities for improvement in offering more individualized support and celebrating student successes.

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Responsiveness to Culture and Identity

The program's environment **heavily emphasized academic performance**, particularly missing homework, without acknowledging the broader aspects of students' identities or lives, such as their social or emotional needs, and interests. Staff had forms for family engagement that **acknowledged student's strengths** and areas for growth. There were potentially missing opportunities to **foster a more inclusive and supportive environment** during programming. To improve, the program could benefit from a **stronger focus on recognizing and celebrating** the whole student, including acknowledgement of students' identities and personal interests.

Community & Family Engagement

The program displayed a **strength-based approach in its communication** with families, focusing on both students' strengths and areas for growth. Clear and consistent communication is maintained through **bulletin boards** and the **Remind app**, ensuring families are well-informed about program activities. The involvement of **community partners** and **outings for student events** strengthens the connection between the program and the broader community. Additionally, the practice of having **students write thank-you cards** promoted gratitude and helps reinforce positive social behaviors.

Overall, the program demonstrated a **commitment to open communication, community engagement, and fostering appreciation** among students.

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Program Area	Theme	Examples
Intentional Program Design	Academic Focus & Goal Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program has a strong focus on academic responsibility, with a clear emphasis on completing missing work. Staff consistently verify missing work using Skyward and encourage students to focus on their academic tasks during program time. Goal-setting is a key aspect of the program, with staff clearly communicating missing work and setting specific goals for students, both verbally and, on some days, in writing on the whiteboard. This provides structure and clarity about what students need to accomplish.
	Student Choice & Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are given opportunities to participate in clubs when they have completed their missing work. This provides an incentive for students to finish academic tasks, offering them a rewarding option for their hard work. During snack time, students have the freedom to choose how to spend their time—whether to rest, use their phone, or get started on their work, which shows an emphasis on student choice and time management.
	Clear Program Structure & Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On some days, the program includes clear goals and instructions presented on a dry erase board, outlining the tasks and expectations for students. This visual aid helps students understand what is expected and what they are working toward. Staff explicitly connect skills to real-world activities, showing students the practical application of what they are working on, which helps to make academic work feel more relevant.
	Engagement & Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program is designed to keep students engaged in their academic work, with days having a focused purpose, such as working quietly on missing homework. On some days, this focus is strengthened with more structured programming, where goals are clearly visible and students are encouraged to meet them. Exit tickets and surveys are used by staff to gather student feedback and encourage reflection on the program design. This shows an interest in student input and a desire to improve the program based on their experiences.
	Program Consistency & Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program maintains a consistent focus on academic work, but there are differences in how the focus is communicated and structured across observation days. One day had a more focused, singular goal (quietly working on homework), while the other day included more structured programming, with clear goals and encouragement for progress.

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Program Area continued	Theme continued	Examples continued
Supportive Relationships & Environment continued	Student Autonomy & Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The staff trusted students to express when they needed support, rather than proactively asking for help. This indicates a belief in student independence, where students are expected to advocate for themselves when necessary. On the second observation day, staff asked students questions about their missing work, signaling a shift toward empowerment and trust in student responses.
	Staff Communication & Tone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The staff acknowledged that their vocal tone could be intimidating, and students' body language seemed to support this observation. This suggests that while staff may be aware of their tone, it could still have an intimidating effect on students. There was an explicit example of staff stating, "don't be truant or you'll be in juvie," which may convey an overly punitive message rather than a supportive or encouraging one. This stands in contrast to the more relational approach observed on the second observation day.
	Boundaries & Consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear boundaries are established and consistently reinforced throughout the program, such as reminders to students to put away their phones and avoid distracting their peers. These boundaries are communicated consistently across staff, and the classroom rules are visible in the space, reinforcing a structured environment.
	Program Environment & Staff Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On one observation day, the environment felt focused on compliance and quietness, with staff enforcing rules strictly. On the other day, the program felt more relational, with staff adopting a calm, warm tone, making jokes, and providing positive reinforcement to students. The staff allowed students to choose appropriate music when not working on homework, engaging with students' personal interests and listening to their song preferences. This shows an effort to create a more relaxed, enjoyable atmosphere and connect with students on a personal level.
	Engagement & Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relational day included more positive engagement, with staff showing curiosity about students' song interests and reinforcing positive behaviors with praise. This highlights the staff's ability to foster connection and recognize individuality within the group. Additionally, the display of student work on the fridge helps to create a space where student contributions are valued and acknowledged.

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Program Area continued	Theme continued	Examples continued
Youth Voice & Leadership	Student Autonomy vs. Direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program alternates between structured and choice-based environments. On one day, students were directed to sit quietly after finishing their homework, indicating a more structured approach. On the other day, students were given choices about what to do once their missing work was complete, promoting student autonomy and providing opportunities for self-direction.
	Staff Interaction and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On the relational day, staff demonstrated gentle and inquisitive approach when students were off-task. Instead of assuming the student was disengaged, staff asked questions to understand what the student was doing, showing a non-judgmental approach to behavior. When students needed help, staff showed them how to do the work, but there was a missed opportunity to ask the student specifically what they needed help with. This indicated that while staff are willing to support students, there may be moments when a more individualized approach would better meet the student’s specific needs.
	Lack of Peer Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students were required to work individually, without opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration. This suggests a focus on individual accountability and personal work completion, but it may limit opportunities for students to learn from or support one another.
	Tone & Student Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A student celebrated the completion of two missing assignments. The staff response was, “ok, keep working,” which suggests a potential disconnect between recognizing student achievements and maintaining motivation. This response might not have been as encouraging or celebratory as the student expected, potentially affecting the student’s engagement and morale.
	Youth Voice in Program Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth are given an opportunity to provide feedback through the exit tickets at the end of some program days. This feedback tool allows youth to express their opinions and helps staff gauge the effectiveness of the program. It shows that staff are open to hearing from youth and are invested in improving the program based on their input.
Responsiveness to Culture & Identity	Cultural Representation & Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program space had minimal cultural imagery, with the American flag being the primary visual representation. While there was some Ojibwe language signage visible in the hallway, it was limited and may not fully represent or engage with the cultural identities of the students in a meaningful way. This suggests an underrepresentation of diverse cultural backgrounds within the program space.

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Program Area continued	Theme continued	Examples continued
Responsiveness to Culture & Identity	Focus on Academic Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a clear, strong emphasis on students missing homework, which is the primary purpose of the program. • Students' interests were acknowledged through the choice to choose music after academic programming was complete.
	Personal Connection & Individual Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were missed opportunities to show awareness of students' unique identities and interests. That staff may not consistently make efforts to engage with students on a personal level, or to recognize and celebrate their individual strengths, hobbies, or interests in conversation. Such an approach could potentially facilitate students' sense of belonging and engagement in the program.
Community & Family Engagement	Strength-Based Communication & Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program emphasizes a strengths-based approach by sending home reports that highlight students' strengths as well as areas for growth. This reflects a focus on recognizing and encouraging students' positive attributes while also identifying areas for improvement, supporting a growth mindset.
	Clear Communication & Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program maintains a transparent communication system through various means. There is a bulletin board that provides essential information about events, the schedule, and program updates, keeping students and families informed. Additionally, the use of the Remind app allows for quick, efficient communication with families, ensuring that they stay connected and updated on program activities.
	Community & Family Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community partners actively participate in the program by attending family nights and events, helping to create a collaborative, community-focused atmosphere. This involvement strengthens the connection between the program, the students, and the wider community. • Students wrote thank you notes to professionals involved in an event, which encourages gratitude and recognizes the contributions of others. This practice fosters a culture of appreciation and positive social interactions.

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL SITE IS A PROGRAM THAT IS EXHIBITING EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AS AN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM



Quality Programming

This program shows intentional program design. The environment is focused on its academic goals seeking to reduce the amount of missing academic work students have and providing opportunities for creative engagement. The observation results show the program is meeting this purpose.

Opportunities for Improvement

Some adjustments to programming may improve the program quality of this site:

1. Seek for consistency in facilitating a supportive environment. Expand on current practices that show interest in each individual student and seek communication norms that are empowering rather than messages based on fear or judgment.
2. During family engagement, staff acknowledged student's strengths. The program may benefit from a stronger focus on recognizing and celebrating the whole student during programming, including acknowledgement of students' identities and personal interests.
3. Increasing positive reinforcement for youth who accomplish their daily tasks could bolster the supportive environment. This could be achieved through verbal celebration when a student finishes their work and by tracking accomplishments with visuals in the room (e.g., daily goal setting on the white board, tracking number of days with goals met, etc.)
4. Consider opportunities for peer-to-peer support and leadership. There may be opportunities for students working on similar tasks to support one another. When students have completed their work and there are not other clubs or activities available, there could be leadership opportunities for students to support others.