

High Five After-School Program

*Spooner Elementary School
Spooner, Wisconsin*

To help low-income children bridge the socioeconomic achievement gap and raise their test scores in math and language arts, Spooner Elementary established an after-school program called High Five. After surveying parents for possible course offerings, the school created a variety of clubs to engage kids in fun and constructive activities such as drama, crafts, cooking, gardening, reading, and homework help.

Three members of the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) worked with teachers, parents, and volunteers to brainstorm ideas for the program and provide material support. The school searched for curricula that would make lessons come alive for the children. The format of the lessons was intentionally different from the regular school day. One of the challenges for Spooner was setting aside enough classroom and gymnasium spaces for all the programs. The ATP worked out a system to share the areas and utilize all possible space.

Children attend the High Five After-School Program from the end of the school day until 5 p.m. In addition to the activities, the school provides free parenting books to families when they pick up their children. Members of the community were recruited to instruct classes; for instance, a group called the Master Gardeners teamed up with the 4H Club and taught a gardening unit to children.

Once the High Five program began, teachers noticed improvements in students' academic behavior and self-esteem. The program has helped staff build better rapport with

the students. The community, too, is spreading positive feedback about the school's efforts, and more community members are showing interest in volunteering at the school. Parents at Spooner feel more open to reaching out to teachers and staff for help with parenting. Families also feel more comfortable knowing that their children are in an environment rich with caring adults, high academic standards, and active play time. One parent said, "My child loves coming to High Five, rather than going to the babysitter's. She feels like a big person. I love all of the different things that my child is learning." This has been a positive experience for everyone involved, and the school is already planning program opportunities and improvements for next year.

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