

INNOVATE! INTERVENTION PROGRAM AT AJ WHITTENBERG ELEMENTARY

Summary

The number one goal of Innovate! is to help at-risk children succeed in the 21st century. We are fundamentally working to break the cycle of poverty of students in our neighborhood one child at a time. Innovate! begins the summer before third grade and continues to support students through high school graduation. We work to broaden the horizons of children who rarely see beyond their street corner and to equip them with all of the skills they need to achieve their full potential. At its core, Innovate! includes the following elements:

- Academic Instruction in Math and ELA, lesson plans, not just homework help
- Creative teaching that engages students, many of whom have learn disabilities and other challenges
- Enrichment opportunities and field trips (Engineering, Music, Art, Dance, Science, College experience, etc.)
- Mentoring (each student is paired with a mentor with parent permission)
- Healthy Lifestyle Encouragement (Snacks, Meals, Physical Activity, Education)
- Hot supper in a family atmosphere
- Bus transportation is always provided
- Accountability for student academic and social performance in and out of school
- Soft skills (addressing behavior issues and arming students with 21st century skills)
- Family engagement including home visits in summer and as needed throughout the school year
- Consistency, following students and continuing support through high school and beyond

Once students finish elementary school, Innovate! goes with them. Our Innovate! Alumni program continues to provide academic support, Saturday events, mentoring and enrichment to students in middle and high school.

Innovate! is always free to students. It sets high expectations and provides the holistic support necessary to reach those goals. Importantly, a halo effect is maintained for the program. Children cannot sign up or apply for Innovate! They must be “chosen.” Children and parents are told that admission is based on “standing out” in at least two of three criteria: 1) academic performance, 2) potential, and 3) character of the student. Students of all abilities and their parents routinely ask to join the Innovate! program.

Demographics

- *Target Settings:* Urban
- *Target Groups Served:* Innovate! begins with rising third grade students (the summer before 3rd grade) and follows them through middle and high school. Our oldest students will enter ninth grade (high school) in fall 2017. All students are receiving free meals, a key indicator of childhood poverty. Innovate! students are equally male/female, 85% AfricanAmerican, 13% Hispanic and 2% Caucasian.
- *Districts Served:* Greenville

Research and Evaluation

What national or other research was considered during the development of this program/initiative? Describe the evidence that shows the program/initiative works.

Our starting point was education. All research, and our own experience, told us that education brings options, power and freedom. And, we knew almost instantly the students we wanted to focus on. Our analysis showed that while AJW was a top performing school, we had a clear Achilles heel: African-Americans, especially males, living in poverty underperformed every other student subgroup. We knew that this group had to be the core of any new initiative.

Our next step was research and benchmarking. We wanted to find someone that was already having success with children like ours, hopefully close to home. Our research included the following:

A Framework for Understanding Poverty and other works by Ruby Payne (communication and relationships)

Ron Clark Academy (professional development and one-on-one consultations)

Horizons National (Growing Achievement Gap)

In Their Own Words: A Public Vision for Educational Excellence in South Carolina (Riley Institute) YouthBASE afterschool program for kindergarten through second grade students

Bridges to a Brighter Future program at Furman University (rising 10th grade students)

Innovate! tracks performance in four areas and makes adjustments as necessary to assure student growth:

Academic: growth and proficiency

Attendance: program and school

Behavior: referrals and anecdotal

Engagement: Innovate! encourages students to help direct program offerings, field trips and celebrations

Measures of Success:

Preliminary 2017 SC Ready Data: Every 3rd grade Innovate! student is performing on grade level Math Benchmark:

Overall average gain of 57.6% across all Innovate! students and all grades.

ELA Benchmark: Overall average gain of 61.7% across all students and all grades.

Fountas & Pinnell Average Growth: 5 levels (guided reading – 4 levels is average for an academic year) Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP Testing):

- o 84% of all Innovate! students achieved growth in Math

- o 96% of all Innovate! students achieved growth in Reading

Resources

- *Annual Cost:* A full year of Innovate! includes both the elementary program at AJW plus Innovate! Alumni for middle and high school students. It includes school year support and a four-week summer program. The total cost is \$84,315.
- *Funding Sources:* Innovate! is funded completely through private donations and grants. An endowment through the Community Foundation of Greenville provides 60% of program funding each year. Approximately 25% of the current Innovate! budget is provided in-kind by community agencies. The major source of this in-kind funding is Project Host, which provides meals and snacks. The remaining 15% of the budget is raised annually through various grants and donations.
- *Staffing Needs:* Innovate! is managed by the program director at A. J. Whittenberg Elementary School. The program also has a part time program coordinator that manages day-to-day operations. AJW Teachers, 3 each program day, provide instruction. A middle school instructional coach provides tutoring for middle and high school students and AJW. During the summer program, 5 teachers provide instruction and enrichment each day.
- *Infrastructure/Equipment Needs:* We currently use GCS schools and GCS bus transportation for Innovate! and Innovate! Alumni. Our wish is raise the funds to purchase and maintain an activity bus to provide better transportation service to our students.
- *Partner Organizations:* Innovate! is independent and was created at A. J. Whittenberg Elementary School. Innovate! is a member of the SC Afterschool Alliance. We receive services from Project Host, and significant funding through the Community Foundation.

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