

Reimagining Lutheran Education for the 21st Century: Reaching the Community through Effective After-School and Summer Programs

Introduction

On April 11-12, 2013, Wheat Ridge Ministries' Center for Urban Education Ministries (CUEM), in partnership with Lutheran Foundation of St. Louis, hosted college representatives, educators, and funders from across the country. This two-day summit in St. Louis showcased models of successful after-school and summer programs in urban settings.

In a time when many of our urban faith-based schools are closing, churches and schools have an opportunity to continue to share the Gospel with their neighbors through effective and comprehensive after-school and summer programs.

The presenters in this summit ranged from those operating programs in traditional Lutheran schools to those working with charter schools to those who have planted new churches through their programs.

The opportunities are endless and open for Lutherans to positively impact the education of children and families in their communities.

Goals of the Summit

- Learn innovative strategies concerning Christian before and after-school programs.
- Connect with high-performing urban education leaders.
- Encourage positive university partnerships with urban ministries.
- Produce and widely disseminate white paper summarizing the event.
- Provide an opportunity for replication of successful models.

Format of the Summit

- Day One consisted of visits to two exemplary urban after-school programs: The ARK at Messiah Lutheran Church, St. Louis, MO, and Bethlehem After School at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St. Louis, MO
- Day Two offered three different panel sessions with two expert panel presenters per session. Questions and comments were addressed during and after these presentations.

Day One Visits:

The ARK (Art, Recreation, Knowledge) program at Messiah Lutheran Church works in tandem with South City Prep, a charter school which leases Messiah's formerly vacant school building. The ARK provides free Christian after-school care to over 90 students in fifth, sixth and seventh grades. The mission is to mentor the youth of its community and provide Bible study, safety, sports, healthy snacks and the opportunity for students to grow in love and respect for God and others. The student/adult ratio is 10:1. Several of the mentor staff are students at Concordia Seminary St. Louis and more than 10 organizations provide funding, resources and programs. The students are assigned to grade and gender-specific groups and spend 20 minutes working on homework, enjoying a healthy snack and participating in a Christocentric discussion with their adult mentor. The ARK recreation period then commences which includes a schedule offering of sports, arts and crafts, cooking, board games, guest speakers, outdoor recreation and table tennis.

After School at Bethlehem works in conjunction with Better Learning Communities Academy, a Lutheran-led charter school on St. Louis' near north side. While the charter school operates as a public school by law, after-school programs may utilize a Christian basis and background. Bethlehem leaders see a threefold ring of support around the children and families: school, after-school program, church.

Day Two:

Panel One: The Lutheran Vocation of Education

Presenters: John Schmidtke, Senior Pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St. Louis, MO and Chuck Conover, Retired Education Executive, Missouri District – LCMS

Key lessons shared:

- Programs must be mission focused, not about making money. Churches must be clear on what they are doing and why they are doing it.
- There must be a commitment on the part of both school and church representatives toward shared outcomes.
- The school is the stage that brings people into the church. The school is NOT the ministry.
- We must renounce inflexibility and embrace change.
- Strong music and strong preaching keeps people coming to church so it is up to us not only to get them in the doors but to keep them there.
- Rental money must be reinvested in people's lives, not into fixing properties.
- There must be a point person for outreach that is clearly defined as part of someone's job.
- Lutheran schools that are stuck in the past will not make it to the future.

Panel Two: Effective Models of Wraparound After-School and Summer Programs

Presenters: Rita-Pihra Majurinen, Leif Ericson Day School, Brooklyn, New York, and Matt Hoehner, Educational Enterprises, St. Louis, MO

Ms. Pihra-Majurinen SCAMP (Summer Creative Arts and Music Program) is an outreach program of Leif Ericson Day School, a Lutheran school located in Dyker Heights, Brooklyn. SCAMP provides children entering Nursery through Grade 7 in the surrounding communities a safe, caring and fun place to be for up to six weeks in the summer. Class offerings include hands-on learning for art, music, drama, computers, dance, movement-oriented games, water play, thematic units, and professional direction – all led by a devoted staff.

Key lessons shared:

- Find the niche in your community. What can you offer that is needed but no one else offers? (e.g., length of camp, focus of camp)
- Bigger isn't always better – quality is key.
- Flexibility is a draw for parents, especially those with young children.
- Strong staffing is vital. Mentoring of junior counselors leads to a stronger staff down the road.
- Communication with the intent to build relationships and to promote understanding fosters trust and creates priceless positive word-of-mouth public relations, and expands the presence of the program within the larger community.
- Having students collaborate in the planning process for the program keeps them engaged and returning each year.

Pastor Matt Hoehner Compass Educational Programs, the Christian outreach arm of Educational Enterprises, serve students attending Eagle College Preparatory Schools in Phoenix, Arizona, and will also soon serve students in St. Louis. The pre-school and before and after-school programs strive to create Christian learning communities that inspire, support and equip students to become serving leaders. Three C's, Christ/College/Character, are the central themes of Compass. Compass before and after-school care helps students: 1) build strong values through an extensive character development program, 2) enjoy time with friends, 3) work on homework and strengthen skills through tutoring and collaborative learning, 4) read books and participate in story time, 5) create through arts and crafts, 6) play outdoors, 7) work on computers, 8) enjoy nutritious snacks and 9) grow in the knowledge of God.

Key lessons shared:

- Christ is the key.
- When facing adversity, one can blame, complain or be a blessing. Be a blessing.
- Love and respect are the keys to success.
- One must be intentional about communicating one's values.

Panel Three: Connecting Church with its Community

Presenters: Laura Bauer, The LIFE Lutheran Church and Day School, Westbury, New York, and Amy Daniels, McClintock Partners in Education, Christ Lutheran Church, Charlotte, North Carolina

Laura Bauer The Homework Help program at The LIFE seeks to 1) encourage a love of learning; to assist with homework, projects and test preparation; 2) build confidence in students' abilities by improving their academic performance; 3) be a resource to students and their families; 4) provide a safe, stable and welcoming place for students to learn; 5) partner with the community; and 6) show the love of Christ by giving time to help others. Dedicated volunteers serve as tutors to small groups of children. While one group is completing homework, another group does an activity which includes the Presidential Fitness Program, a craft or reading. Healthy snacks are distributed and students and their families are invited to participate in outside church activities.

Key lessons shared:

- Develop at least one strong bond with key personnel in the school district. Without cooperation the program will not run efficiently or effectively.
- Know your limitations. Only serve the number and age of children that you can handle with skill. You won't be able to handle every child with every need.
- Be constantly alert to potential volunteers.
- Be flexible and ready to adjust program as needs arise and change.
- Listen to the families and community to determine needs. The best outreach meets a community need.

Amy Daniels The mission of the McClintock Partners in Education (McPie) is "Creating Future Stories; Building Community; Supporting Families; Inspiring Volunteers so that **all** McClintock Middle Schools students succeed." Church members and families of students attending McClintock Middle School are drawn together through a variety of programs including weekly family nights; clubs (many based on STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, Math learning); summer camps and placements; support of families with school supplies, food, clothing, crisis loans, Christmas sponsorships, referrals, college tours and more.

Key lessons learned:

- Commit in a big way and expect God's blessings.
- Be in for the long haul.
- Building relationships and communicating well are essential.
- There must be a key liaison within the school building and within the church.
- Keep first things first and address the most pressing needs.
- Bridges Out of Poverty training is a great vehicle for training volunteers.
- Respect and appreciate families and volunteers.

Conclusions

- There is a need to start thinking differently about Lutheran education.
- Strong urban schools will have a major positive effect on the community.
- Thoughtful strategies are vital to success.

Practical Suggestions

- Ask three questions: Is it worth it? Can we do it? Is this the right time?
- There are examples of strong after-school programs already in place. Reach out to others instead of reinventing the wheel.

Summary

This gathering was the third in a series of summits planned by the Center for Urban Education Ministries surrounding urban education best practices. We believe it is necessary and critical to continue the discussion between like-minded urban educators. Connections were made, resources and ideas were shared. We intend to continue communication with the group, citing progress and sharing ideas.

Summit Participants

Brian Becker, Vice President for Ministry Programs, Wheat Ridge Ministries, Itasca, IL
Alan Bitter, Associate Director of Certification and Licensure, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, WI

William Cochran, Director for School Ministry, LCMS

Natalie Eagen, Luther Memorial Church, Chicago, IL

Cathy Rodgers-Edmonds, Better Learning Academy, Hyde Park, St. Louis, MO

Sasha Elliott, Amber Charter School, New York, NY

Bridget Flood, Incarnate Word Foundation, St. Louis, MO

Dennis Gehrke, Education Executive, Missouri District – LCMS

Steve Gerner, Director, Urban Education Institute, Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon, WI

Tom Grunow, Cornerstone Stewardship Ministry, Portland, OR

Mary Gundelach, Center for Urban Education Ministries, Atherton, CA

Jim Handrich, Center for Urban Education Ministries, Venice, FL

Tim Hipenbecker, President, Lutheran High School Association of St. Louis, MO

Jim Holman, Director, School of Teacher Education, Wisconsin Lutheran College

Hugh and Karen Kress, Peace Lutheran Church, Appleton, WI

Jonathan Laabs, Executive Director, Lutheran Education Association, River Forest, IL

Gene Ladendorf, Regional Superintendent, South Wisconsin District – LCMS

Mark L'Heureux, Education Executive, South Wisconsin District – LCMS

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Jeff Craig-Meyer, Executive Director of Development, Educational Enterprises, St. Louis, MO

Judith Meyer, Chair, Board of Directors, Eagle College Prep, St. Louis, MO

Quentin Poulson, Director Urban and Inner City Mission – LCMS

Henry Raedeke, Steering Committee, River Roads Lutheran School, St. Louis, MO

Mary Lou Rogers, Regional Director, Compass Educational Programs, Phoenix, AZ
Ann L. Vazquez, President and CEO, Lutheran Foundation of St. Louis, MO
Kristen Woehlke, Director of Before and After-School Care, Abiding Savior Lutheran School,
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