Engagement and Success for Elementary and Middle School Students

FY2021-2022 Strategy Summary

Prepared by Social Policy Research Associates | October 2022

Introduction

The five programs funded under OFCY's Engagement and Success for Elementary and Middle School Students (ESEMSS) strategy were designed to help improve attendance, school connectedness, and academic performance, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Services included tutoring, writing workshops, dance and drumming classes, parent support groups, and one-on-one meetings to support socioemotional wellbeing. To summarize strategy achievements and progress to date, this report draws on attendance records, program reports, youth surveys, and an interview with one program (Chapter 510's Writing to Readiness). Cover photo is courtesy of Lincoln's West Oakland Initiative.

Strategy Results

936 Youth
participated in programming

169,536 Hours
of service provided

181 Average Hours
per youth participant

5 Programs
supported students

67% of Youth
feel more motivated to learn in school

$546,000
awarded to programs

Funded Programs

- Arts in Oakland Schools – Destiny Arts Center

- Athletes CODE (TAC) MS Engagement - S.P.A.A.T. (Student Program for Academic And Athletic Transitioning

- Elev8 Youth - SAFE PASSAGES

- West Oakland Initiative (WOI) - Lincoln

- Writing to Readiness - Chapter 510 Ink

Strategy Results

Beginning in the 2019-2022 funding cycle, OFCY adopted a Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework to assess its role in contributing toward city-wide goals. The RBA model is an approach to assessing the quantity of services provided by programs, the quality of those services, and the effect of those services on the lives of children, youth, and families. It does this by addressing **three guiding questions: (1) How much did we do? (2) How well did we do it? (3) Is anyone better off?**

FY21-22 Results Based Accountability Results

How much did we do?	
Number of Programs Funded	5
Number of Youth Served	936
Total Hours of Service Provided	169,536
Average Hours of Service per Youth	377
Number of Elementary Schools Supported	7
Number of Middle Schools Supported	6
How well did we do it?	
Enrollment: Average progress toward projected number of youth served[1]	113%
Total Service Hours: Average progress toward projected total hours of service	109%
Average Hours of Service: Average progress toward projected average hours of service	98%
Safety: Youth who agreed that they felt safe in their program	77%
Caring Adults: Youth who agreed that there is an adult at their program who really cares about them	75%
Positive Engagement: Youth who agreed that they are interested in what they do at their program	74%
Is Anyone Better Off?	
Motivation to Learn: This program helps me feel more motivated to learn in school.	67%
Academic Skills: I learned how to do things that help with my schoolwork.	58%

---

[1] At the start of the fiscal year, programs estimate their annual enrollment and the total number of hours of service they will provide. Progress is calculated as the actual enrollment divided by the projected enrollment.

The remainder of this report includes the following sections aligned with this RBA framework:

1)   Overview of Programs and Participants
2)   How much did the programs provide?
3)   How well did programs do it?
4)   Is anyone <u>better off</u> as a result of the strategy's work?

> **"It taps into something different when the learning is coming from the inside out. When a student is personally invested in the story they're telling, that in and of itself gives them joy. And then the confidence comes in surrounding them with professional writing mentors, who can support them every step of the way when they get overwhelmed or feel like they want to quit. And having fun, out of the box activities so that they can learn about genre, theme, and plot in fun and unusual ways."**
>
> –Staff, Chapter 510's Writing to Readiness

Photo courtesy of S.P.A.A.T.'s Athletes CODE

Programs and Participants

During FY21-22, 936 unduplicated youth participated in Engagement and Success for Elementary and Middle School Students (ESEMSS) programs at seven elementary and six middle schools that have a high number of children and youth who qualify for free and reduced-price meals.[2] Designed to support academic success and school connection, services included the following:

ESEMSS programs support academic success and school connection through engaging activities such as creative writing, dance, and literacy interventions.

- Creative writing workshops
- Dance programming
- Literacy interventions
- Academic case management
- College and career readiness programs
- In-school and afterschool academic supports
- Parent engagement
- STEAM service-learning projects

Since the onset of COVID, many programs also deepened their wraparound support offerings, such as food distribution and holiday gift drives. Programs typically identified potential participants through their partnerships with school sites and school-based afterschool programs. Some also used social media to promote their program.

> Each [class] has its own curriculum, but it's all rooted in this culturally responsive teaching model. It includes free writing and ways of visually engaging with character development details, collective storytelling, and collaborative storytelling, imagination and visualization games... And then we also always have a revision process, so there's the rigor of revision, editing, and feedback.
>
> –Staff, Chapter 510's Writing to Readiness

---

[2] Participating schools included Esperanza Elementary, Hoover Elementary, Horace Mann Elementary, International Community School, Laurel Elementary, Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary, PLACE at Prescott, Coliseum College Prep Academy, Elmhurst Community Prep, Montera Middle School, United for Success Academy, West Oakland Middle School, and Westlake Middle School.
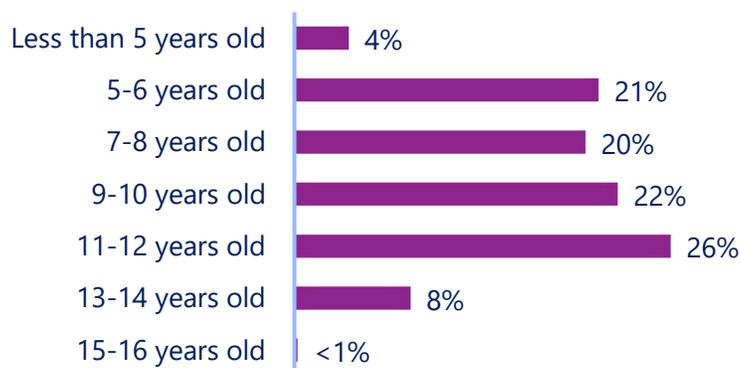
Program Spotlight

To inform this report, SPR conducted interviews with staff and/or youth participants from one program:

In **Chapter 510's Writing to Readiness** program, students from Westlake Middle School tap into their creativity in a safe and supportive writing workshop, where they partner with professional mentors and illustrators to create and publish their own novels. The program leads an afterschool writing workshop and hosts students in Westlake's writer's room, an inclusive and inspiring space designed in collaboration with students, where they can focus on their craft. As noted by staff, the program's strength "lies in curating creative writing and publishing workshops, where [they] work within our model of culturally responsive teaching, where [they] have arts teaching artists at the helm, and where the students can really write from their imagination, from what they feel excited about, from their life story and have themselves at the center of the curriculum."

89% of participants were between five and twelve years old.

In line with the strategy's focus on elementary and middle school engagement, 89% of participants served by programs in this strategy were between the ages of five and twelve, as shown in the graph below.
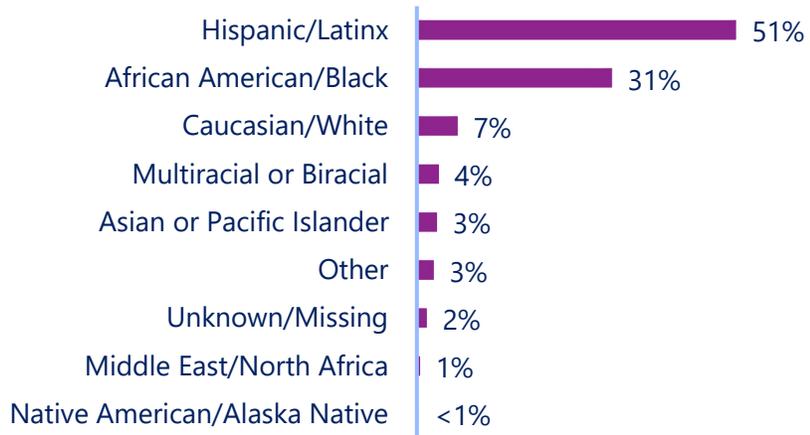
Age of Participants

Age	Percentage
Less than 5 years old	4%
5-6 years old	21%
7-8 years old	20%
9-10 years old	22%
11-12 years old	26%
13-14 years old	8%
15-16 years old	<1%

In line with OFCY's focus on reducing race-based disparities in education, about 85% of participants identified as Latinx, Black, Asian, or Pacific Islander.
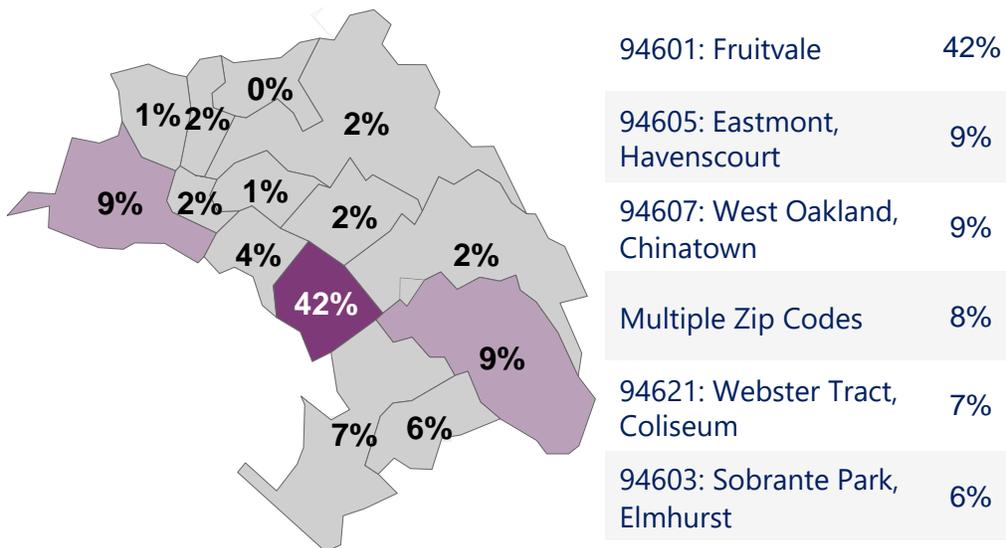
About 85% of participants identified as Latinx, Black, Asian, or Pacific Islander.

Race/Ethnicity of OFCY YDL Participants and Oakland

Hispanic/Latinx	51%
African American/Black	31%
Caucasian/White	7%
Multiracial or Biracial	4%
Asian or Pacific Islander	3%
Other	3%
Unknown/Missing	2%
Middle East/North Africa	1%
Native American/Alaska Native	<1%

As illustrated below, most participants lived in East Oakland. Over 40% of the youth served by the strategy lived in or around Fruitvale.

Over 40% of participants lived in the 94601 zip code in Fruitvale.

Zipcode of Residence

94601: Fruitvale	42%
94605: Eastmont, Havenscourt	9%
94607: West Oakland, Chinatown	9%
Multiple Zip Codes	8%
94621: Webster Tract, Coliseum	7%
94603: Sobrante Park, Elmhurst	6%

Table lists zip codes where at least 5% of participants live.

How Much Did Programs Do?

Programs provided most services in person and drew on their ability to offer virtual services as needed, allowing programs to continue operating during COVID outbreaks or safely connect students to mentors and tutors from the community.

Programs provided 169,536 hours of service. As schools fully reopened in the fall, programs transitioned back to school campuses while sometimes maintaining some form of virtual programming. For example, after offering online workshops in FY20-21, Chapter 510's Writing to Readiness re-engaged students in in-person workshops this year while also coordinating online mentoring between students and professional writers. S.P.A.A.T.'s Athletes CODE program offered some services virtually, such as study hall, for students who had to quarantine during COVID-19 outbreaks.

Programs offered a range of services to support academic growth and build connections to school. As shown below, students spent the most time overall in academic activities, followed by youth leadership, civic engagement, and community building.

Total Hours of Service Provided, by Type of Activity

Activity	Hours
Academics	97,870
Youth Leadership, Civic Engagement, and Community Building	43,610
Arts, Dance, Music and Culture	26,856
Sports & Recreation	1,097
College and Career Readiness	72
Family Engagement & Parent Education	32

Although programs reported a successful transition back to in-person programming, several programs faced a range of attendance challenges throughout the year, particularly due to the pandemic. COVID infections among students, program staff, and school faculty resulted in inconsistent
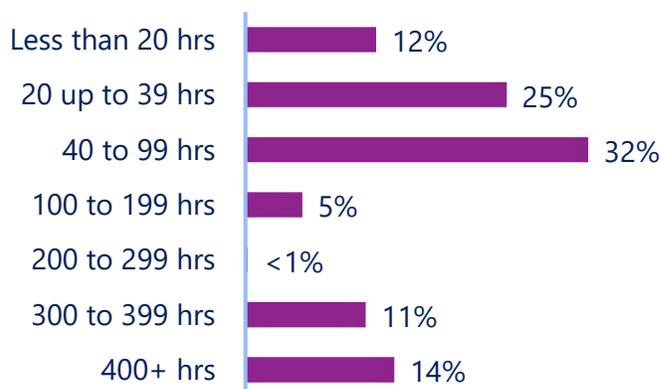
student attendance, staffing shortages, and decreased capacity for partnerships with schools. In addition, some programs reported that declining enrollment at OUSD made recruitment more challenging, while low morale on school campuses and disruptions caused by impending school closures hurt student engagement in school and ESEMSS activities. In response to these challenges, programs used virtual platforms when necessary, focused on building group cohesion and community with their youth, and adapted the program schedule to accommodate when they could engage the most students.

Programs reported that COVID-19 infections resulted in inconsistent student attendance, staffing shortages, and decreased capacity for partnerships with schools.
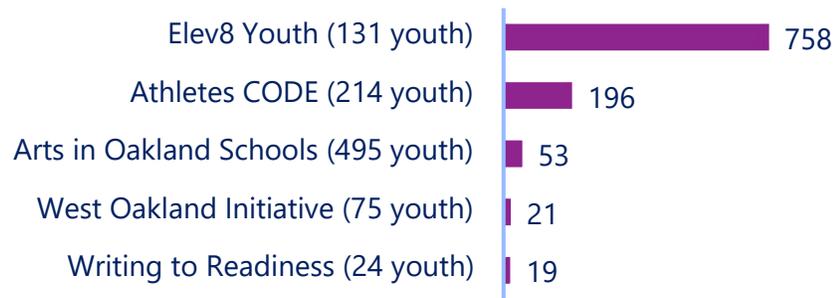
Youth spent 181 hours in programming on average, but hours of attendance varied widely. As shown below, about one-third of participants spent less than 40 hours in programming while one-quarter spent at least 300 hours in programming.

Youth spent an average of 181 hours in programming, with attendance varying widely across programs.

Hours of Attendance

Less than 20 hrs 12%
20 up to 39 hrs 25%
40 to 99 hrs 32%
100 to 199 hrs 5%
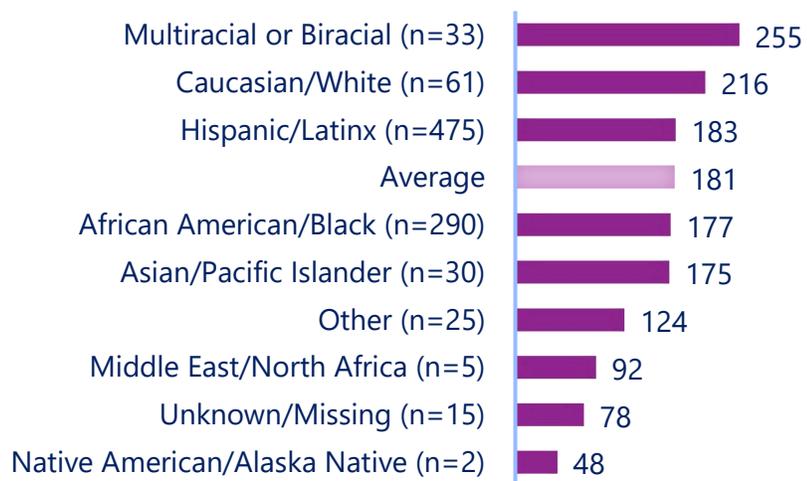200 to 299 hrs <1%
300 to 399 hrs 11%
400+ hrs 14%

Hours of attendance varied across programs. Notably, 94% of the youth who spent at least 100 hours in programming were from Safe Passages' Elev8 Youth or S.P.A.A.T.'s Athletes CODE. The average time that participants spent in the other programs ranged from 19 to 53 (see chart on the following page).

SPR

Average Hours of Participation by Program[3]

Elev8 Youth (131 youth) — 758

Athletes CODE (214 youth) — 196

Arts in Oakland Schools (495 youth) — 53

West Oakland Initiative (75 youth) — 21

Writing to Readiness (24 youth) — 19

The number of hours spent in programming also varied somewhat by race/ethnicity, but there was very little variation in hours of attendance among the racial/ethnic groups that comprised most participants (Latinx and Black youth.)

Average Hours of Participation by Race/Ethnicity

Multiracial or Biracial (n=33) — 255

Caucasian/White (n=61) — 216

Hispanic/Latinx (n=475) — 183

Average — 181

African American/Black (n=290) — 177

Asian/Pacific Islander (n=30) — 175

Other (n=25) — 124

Middle East/North Africa (n=5) — 92

Unknown/Missing (n=15) — 78

Native American/Alaska Native (n=2) — 48

There was very little variation in hours of attendance among the racial/ethnic groups that comprised most participants.

---

[3]   Some students participated in more than one program and are represented in each program they attended in the chart.

How Well Did Programs Do It?

On average, programs exceeded the number of youth they projected serving and the number hours of service they anticipated providing.

As part of the RBA framework, OFCY tracks a series of indicators to assess how well grantees implemented their programming. The first three indicators include progress toward projected program enrollment, total hours of service, and average hours of service per participant. As shown below, program attendance and enrollment were strong, with programs on average enrolling 113% of the youth they anticipated and providing 109% of their anticipated hours of service. On average, programs provided 98% of the hours of attendance per youth that they anticipated.

Program Performance: Progress Toward Projections

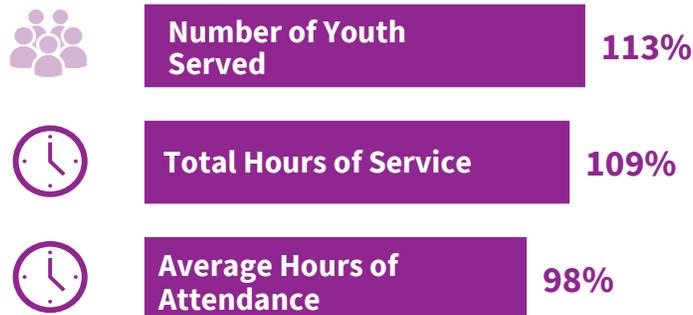|	
Number of Youth Served	**113%**
Total Hours of Service	**109%**
Average Hours of Attendance	**98%**

Photo courtesy of Destiny Art Center's Arts in Oakland Schools

In addition to these performance measures, OFCY uses youth surveys to assess program quality. Surveys reveal that participants generally felt safe, connected to adults that cared about them, and engaged in their programs.

Program Quality: Youth Survey Responses (n=264)

Safety

77%

Youth who agree that they feel safe in their program.

Caring Adults

75%

Youth who agree that there is an adult who cares about them at their program.

Positive Engagement

74%

Youth who agree that they are interested in what they do at their program.

A focus on ensuring that students and staff felt safe as they returned to school campuses infused ESEMSS programming this year. In addition to maintaining COVID-19 safety protocols and ensuring that physical meeting spaces were well ventilated, programs also responded to the heightened social emotional needs the pandemic caused for many students. As discussed on page 15 in the student outcomes section, programs used community building activities to support emotional safety and social cohesion among staff and participants.

Chapter 510's Writing to Readiness program also shared ways that they fostered positive engagement, despite the strain many students were experiencing during the year. For example, teaching artists gave students the freedom to draw on their own lives, experiences, passions, and imagination to tell the stories that they wanted to share.

"We strike this balance between centering the student's imagination and the student's experience. So it's not so much of, okay, here's the material you have to learn and write about. It's like, here's our theme, here's our resources, now what excites you about this or what's the story that you want to tell? Where does your imagination go with this? What experience in your life do you want to bring forward?

–Program Staff, Chapter 510's Writing to Readiness Program

The program also connected young writers to professionals in the field, including authors who mentored students through their process of writing, revising, and publishing, and artists who illustrated their published work. Finally, the teaching artists also listened to the needs of their participants. For example, after students in one class shared that they were struggling to focus after school, the teaching artist listened to the students' ideas and shifted the curriculum to incorporate mixed media, with the students building sculptures over which they overlaid their poetry.

Through practices like these, programs created an environment where students could learn, grow, and thrive.

Is Anyone Better Off?

As part of the RBA framework, OFCY uses youth survey questions related to academic motivation and skills to assess if ESEMSS participants are better off because of their participation. As shown by the survey results on the following page, most youth reported gaining the experience and skills that the strategy aims to provide.

Participant Outcomes: Youth Survey Responses (n=264)

Motivated to Learn

67%

Youth who agree that they are more motivated to learn in school

Support with School

58%

Youth who agree that they learned skills that help with their schoolwork

> "A big part of our focus is creating safe and supportive communities for Black, Brown and queer youth to bravely write. A big through line is around confidence and joy. Using a culturally responsive teaching approach, how do we create spaces where students can grow their sense of confidence and joy in the writing process? And then how does that influence their success in school, in class and also in life?
>
> –Program Staff, Chapter 510's Writing to Readiness Program

As shared below, participant survey data and program interviews supplement these RBA indicators to tell a more comprehensive story about the ways that ESEMSS programs foster positive youth development and academic success.

Academic Preparedness and Engagement

ESEMSS programs had an explicit focus on increasing academic preparedness and engagement with schools. With the aim of boosting literacy rates and reducing chronic absenteeism, Lincoln's West Oakland Initiative integrated in-class supports, afterschool academic services, parent

74% of surveyed middle school students agreed: This program increased my desire to stay in school.[3]

---

[4] Elementary students received a shorter version of the survey and did not respond to all questions.

engagement, and case management at three elementary schools and one middle school. S.P.A.A.T.'s Athletes Code program offers several academic supports to middle school student athletes during afterschool hours. Services include academic case management and advising, life skills workshops, and study hall.

> **"We found that our strength is in (supporting students' writing journey) and then that allows the students to be like, "Wow, I wrote this novel with Chapter 510 this year; of course, I can write this essay in English class." It creates a boost of confidence.**
>
> –Program Staff, Chapter 510's Writing to Readiness Program

Sense of Belonging and Mental Wellness

72% of surveyed middle school students agreed: This program helps me feel happy to be at this school.

67% of surveyed youth agreed: I feel like I belong at this program.

With the transition back to in-person activities, and in response to intensifying social emotional needs reported by many OFCY programs, ESEMSS staff reported focusing on emotional safety, social cohesion, and community building. For example, at Destiny Arts Center's Arts in Oakland Schools, teaching artists began the year guided by the following questions: How do we come together again? How do we rebuild a sense of social cohesion and community? And how can we help students process and integrate during COVID-19? At Safe Passage's Elev8 Youth, staff members dedicated the first quarter to "Getting to Know You" and social emotional learning activities to promote a positive school culture and climate and continued offering social emotional learning activities throughout the year to support mental and emotional health. As noted in the quote below, teaching artists that led workshops at Chapter 510's Writing to Readiness created opportunities for students to feel celebrated and affirmed to build a supportive environment and sense of engagement.

> "Our teaching artists always have this intention of creating spaces of belonging and spaces where students can have their brilliance, their ideas, their opinions, their thoughts, and their vulnerabilities affirmed and celebrated and welcomed. I think starting from that place of building community and inspiration does a lot for the students to feel engaged in the process."
>
> –Program Staff, Chapter 510's Writing to Readiness Program

65% of surveyed youth agreed:
This program helps me to feel like a part of my school.

Sense of School Connectedness

Building student connections to school became increasingly critical to help school communities heal after a year of remote instruction, frequent COVID-related student absences, and for several schools, the threat of school closures. As mentioned above, Destiny Arts' Arts in Oakland Schools and Safe Passages' Elev8 Youth focused on community building to reestablish social cohesion and a positive school climate. To support students at an elementary school threatened by closure, Destiny Arts Center provided a creative outlet for students and tried to establish "continuity, connection, and joy in a time of uncertainty."[5]

Middle school students were far more likely than elementary students to agree that the program helped them achieve academic outcomes and sense of belonging.

Outcomes by Youth Subgroups

An analysis of survey responses by student characteristics revealed that middle school students were far more likely than elementary students to agree that the program helped them achieve the academic outcomes and sense of belonging highlighted in the sections above.[6] For example, 78% of middle school students agreed that the program helped with their schoolwork, compared to 50% of
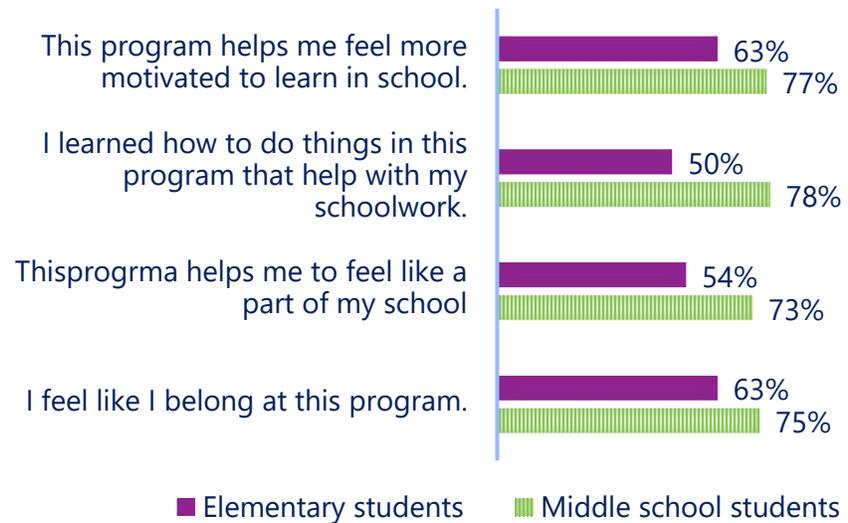
---

[5] As reported in Destiny Art Center's Quarter 3 Grant Report.

[6] All findings were statistically significant at $p<.01$.

elementary students. Other examples are illustrated in the chart below.

Survey Responses by Grade Level

This program helps me feel more motivated to learn in school.
Elementary students: 63%
Middle school students: 77%

I learned how to do things in this program that help with my schoolwork.
Elementary students: 50%
Middle school students: 78%

Thisprogrma helps me to feel like a part of my school
Elementary students: 54%
Middle school students: 73%

I feel like I belong at this program.
Elementary students: 63%
Middle school students: 75%

■ Elementary students   ▥ Middle school students

Conclusion

The five programs funded under the *Engagment and Success for Elementary and Middle School Students* strategy partnered with 13 schools to support school engagement, academic growth, and positive youth development for 936 students. Although the programs faced some challenges navigating COVID-19 safety protocols and low student attendance in schools, on average they exceeded their enrollment targets and the number of hours of service they projected providing. Programs offered a range of services including creative writing workshops, academic case management, in-class and afterschool academic support, and enrichment opportunities during the school day, resulting in most students feeling more motivated to learn and prepared academically.