

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

OSU study lauds Akron after-school programs

Innovative learning opportunities for students seen as model for other urban districts, communities

By John Higgins

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An Ohio State University study presented Thursday praises Akron's school, city and community leaders for creating learning opportunities outside

of the regular school day that enrich what students learn during classes.

The case study holds up Akron's many initiatives and programs as a model for other urban school districts and

communities.

"The significant number of young people, parents, other adults and entire families served by Akron's innovative programs and services is inspiring," the study concluded. "And it helps

to set a standard for others."

The study highlights the unique school-city partnership to help build new schools with a city income tax that double as community centers, including the new math and science middle school that will open this fall in a temporary location while its permanent home at the former National Inventors Hall of Fame is completed.

The study also praises another city-district partnership, the "Akron After School" elementary school program as well as after-school programs at Perkins and Jennings middle schools. Research conducted by Kent State University on the programs shows improved math and reading scores for participants.

Some of the many programs featured in the study include:

- Kindergarten Readiness Advantage for Summit County, a work group of the Summit County P-16 Alliance seeking to improve preschool education and the transition to kindergar-

ten.

- University Park Alliance, which is seeking to improve early childhood education in the University of Akron neighborhood.

- Specialized schools offered through Akron Public Schools for both advanced students and those who haven't succeeded in traditional settings.

- Several programs aimed at college preparation, including: Destination College, Seniors to Sophomores, Akron Early College High School, APS career and technical education and Summit County Coalition of Access Programs.

"When you see everything that we do as a district and a community to support education, it's pretty awesome," said Akron After School coordinator Desiree Bolden, who assisted the evaluation team from the Ohio State University College of Social Work.

The study included interviews, focus group discussions and site visits.

The study's authors were particularly impressed with the

many partnerships that Akron Public Schools enjoys in the community and the creative funding solutions those partnerships have found to pay for programs.

"Akron's innovations are examples of the kinds of path-breaking developments that significantly enhance the capacities of schools, districts, families, governments, and private sector agencies to work together to improve outcomes," according to the study.

The Ohio Department of Education commissioned the study, which is one of two that was done as part of the Ohio Afterschool Network's "Supporting Student Success" project.

The other report examined potential funding sources and challenges for such programs.

The Ohio Afterschool Network used the findings to create policy recommendations, which are in a document called "A Time for Learning." It is available online at <http://www.ohioafterschoolnetwork.org>.

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