

Evaluation of Culturally Specific  
After-School Programs in Saint Paul:  
**Project SPIRIT and  
American Indian Youth Enrichment**

by

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Saint Paul, MN  
April 2018

## Executive summary

This evaluation demonstrates the application of a culturally responsive approach to evaluation focused on two after-school programs in Saint Paul, Minnesota, both supported by Interfaith Action of Saint Paul: Project SPIRIT, an African American culturally based program and the American Indian Youth Enrichment (AIYE) program. In the 2016-17 school year, Project SPIRIT served 71 elementary school students (grades K-5) at four elementary schools in Saint Paul; 99 percent of students and 90 percent of staff at the schools are African American. All students were living at or below 200 percent of the Federal poverty line. The AIYE program serves up to 100 American Indian students with both after-school and summer programs. Students and staff were American Indian. All students were living at or below 200 percent of the Federal poverty line.

Data collection methods used in this evaluation included classroom observations, reviews of curriculum and student work and staff records on student work, and interviews with students, parents, and staff.

*Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* was used in the evaluation as an inquiry framework to examine how the two programs support basic needs, safety and security, social belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization in culturally specific and developmentally appropriate ways. Moreover, both programs support development of academic skills, enhance self-efficacy, and provide cultural knowledge and connection. Students gain awareness of their heritage and history and receive culturally relevant educational support.

*Findings from the evaluation show that each program has positive impacts on students who participate in the program. There are positive impacts related to cultural identity and connections that were identified and documented. These positive impacts are important and different from those of more traditional after-school programs.*

Based on the evaluation of these two programs, we (the authors of this report, in collaboration with the program staff) developed a research-based model for evaluating such programs that goes beyond measuring traditional academic outcomes. The standardized instruments typically used to evaluate after-school programs have not adequately addressed criteria that capture core dimensions of community-based, culturally specific after-school programming. The evaluation model presented here is derived from working with Project SPIRIT and the AIYE program. It is built on seven critical dimensions for describing, understanding, and evaluating community-based, culturally specific programs: (1) culturally specific characteristics and processes; (2) parent relationships; (3) characteristics of the cultural community served; (4) socio-economic characteristics and factors; (5) relationship with the schools the children attend; (6) culturally appropriate and engaged leadership; and (7) nature and degree of support from the larger, dominant-culture (white) community.

For each of these seven critical dimensions, we examined and report on: (1) relevant research literature on the importance of each dimension; (2) what the evaluation found about the significance of each dimension; and (3) examples of program practices related to each dimension as documented from Project SPIRIT and the AIYE program. What began as an evaluation of two

after-school programs evolved into an assessment of gaps in the commitment of communities to support vulnerable children. During the evaluation period, both programs faced dramatic funding cuts. The threat and consequences of those cuts had an effect on program operations and staff morale. The recommendations were influenced by these funding cuts.

## **Overall recommendations**

1. *Reconceptualize, support, and fund programs as culturally based, community-connected, youth development programs.* Categorizing and funding these programs as “after-school” programs simply describes when they occur (after school) and positions them as a continuation of the school day, with the same goals, approaches, and outcomes. While these culturally focused, community-connected, student-centered, and trauma-informed programs help students with homework and support academic development, they are more comprehensive in supporting all dimensions of healthy youth development, including strong cultural identity, which is positively related to academic outcomes.
2. *Connect programs to the University of Minnesota’s Institute for Child Development and Center for Youth Development.* A formal relationship with programs at the university would ensure that the programs continue to be research-based. Additionally, this relationship with the university and with other colleges would provide a consistent source of graduate student volunteers to enrich the program.
3. *Position community support and funding as ongoing legacy commitments.* Minnesota has made a sustainable, tax-based commitment to preserve Minnesota’s history and cultural heritage, which includes support for culturally specific initiatives. The year-to-year challenge of fundraising and financial uncertainty creates a stressful environment for these programs and their staff, which is felt by students and families. Funding insecurity is not a reflection on the programs or their demonstrated effectiveness, but rather on the larger community’s lack of commitment to serve the needs of vulnerable African American and American Indian youth. The nature and scope of dominant (white) community support is a foundational issue that determines the sustainability of these programs. The evaluation shows the programs are effective, and therefore, the decision to support them is a moral issue:

*“The moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped.” — Minnesota’s U.S. Senator, Hubert H. Humphrey, 1977.*

*“The test of the morality of the society is what it does for its children.” — Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), Protestant Lutheran Pastor, active in the German resistance to the policies of Hitler and Nazism.*

## **Acknowledgements**

This evaluation was supported by a grant from the 3M Foundation.

Randi Ilyse Roth, Executive Director, Interfaith Action of Greater Saint Paul, provided overall administrative leadership and coordination of the evaluation in relationship to the two programs evaluated. Interfaith Action of Greater Saint Paul staff collaborated in the design of the evaluation and coordinated implementation and access: Shanene Herbert, Director, Faith+School Partnerships, and Director of Project Spirit; Kathy Denman-Wilke Director, Department of Indian Work; and Rebecca Fairbanks Dickinson, American Indian Youth Enrichment Coordinator, Department of Indian Work.

The evaluation design and fieldwork team included Vanessa McKendall Stephens (culturally responsive evaluation); Karen Gray and Nora Hall of GrayHall LLP (Project Spirit classroom observations and parent interviews); Nora Murphy (developmental evaluation design); Charmagne Campbell-Patton, Gifty Amarteifio, and Brian Green (classroom observations and student interviews). Anna Granias and Sheila Bell from Wilder Research supported the evaluation of the American Indian Youth Enrichment program with student interviews, parent focus groups, and community member interviews.

We are grateful to program staff, students, and parents for their openness to and participation in the evaluation. The leadership of Interfaith Action of Saint Paul also deserves special mention. Without her dynamic and dedicated commitment and leadership, the program would be unfunded, it would not be operating this year (2017/2018), and this evaluation would not have occurred. *Leadership matters.*

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## **A. Introduction**

This report provides results of an external evaluation of two culturally based after-school programs in Saint Paul, Minnesota supported by Interfaith Action of Saint Paul: Project SPIRIT, an African American culturally based program, and the American Indian Youth Enrichment (AIYE) program. The first phase of the evaluation took place in the 2015-16 school year and focused only on Project SPIRIT. The second phase of the evaluation covered the 2016-17 school year and included the American Indian Youth Enrichment (AIYE) program. The first half of the 2017-18 school year was also included in the evaluation.

In the 2016-17 school year, Project SPIRIT served 71 elementary school students (grades K-5) at four elementary schools in Saint Paul; 99 percent of students and 90 percent of staff at the schools were African American. All students were living at or below 200 percent of the Federal poverty line. The AIYE program serves up to 100 American Indian students with both after-school and summer programs. The programs provide Indigenous cultural activities for Saint Paul American Indian youth in grades 1-6 that are led by American Indian educators/staff.

Both programs support development of academic skills, enhance self-efficacy, and provide cultural knowledge and connection. Students gain awareness of their heritage and history and receive culturally relevant educational support.

Evaluating two programs, each serving a culturally specific population, permitted the evaluation to identify important cross-cutting themes of effectiveness for culturally specific after-school programs. This report presents a model for evaluating culturally appropriate after-school programs that was developed based on findings from the evaluation of these two programs.

### **1. Methods**

The conclusions reached by the evaluation are derived from several sources, including; (1) direct observations of the programming; (2) interviews with students; (3) interviews with program staff; (4) interviews with parents; (5) interviews with community key informants; and, (6) review of program documentation, including curriculum and lesson plans. We will first present the evidence and evaluation conclusions for Project SPIRIT, then the results for the AIYE program. See the appendix for more detailed information about the methodology.

### **2. Program and evaluation evolution**

What began as an evaluation of two after-school programs evolved into an assessment of gaps in the commitment of communities to support vulnerable children. During the evaluation period, both programs faced dramatic funding cuts. The threat and consequences of those cuts had an effect on program operations and staff morale. The recommendations were influenced by these funding cuts.

Despite these challenges, this evaluation has drawn conclusions about culturally specific after-school programs that have resulted in a research-based model for evaluating such programs. At the end of this report, we will present the model. We use that framework to document what the application of the model reveals about the approach and effectiveness of each program. See the Appendix for more information about culturally appropriate evaluation.

### 3. The research basis

Extensive research documents the importance of children experiencing culturally appropriate learning environments and the role that a strong cultural identity plays in academic and social outcomes for students. Research also shows the important role parents and families play in student success, and the role of schools and after-school programs in engaging families. Finally, there is research that demonstrates the role that schools and other community factors have in influencing the outcomes of students and how these factors can support or hinder the impact of culturally specific after-school programs. See the Appendix for more information.

### 4. Speaking truth to power

People outside the school system seldom get a look inside. This evaluation provides an opportunity for a close look at the kinds of challenges the program faces. Part of the purpose of this evaluation is to give voice to

*“[T]he full range of difficulties that exist out in the community filter into the classroom and after-school programs through the children.”*

those who are doing the work, who have deep insights into what African American and Native American children face, but whose voices are seldom heard. Speaking truth to power is a longstanding purpose of evaluation. Capturing truths to convey to the larger community is a related evaluation responsibility. That is the reason for the extensive quotes in this report. We urge readers to savor the opportunity to hear what it is like in the trenches. It is not all pretty. It is seldom easy. In the end, it may just be hopeful and inspirational. But we begin with the facts, the evidence of what the program deals with and must handle. Some of the stories cannot be sufficiently masked to avoid identification of the individuals involved, and those are not included here. But as the quotes suggests, the full range of difficulties that exist out in the community filter into the classroom and after-school programs through the children.

### 5. Limitations of this study

There are several limitations of this evaluation that should be noted. First, there were significant funding cuts to both of these after-school programs which staff found out about during the course of the evaluation, and which may have affected the observations. Second, because of budget limitations, this evaluation is based on a handful of observations of these programs, which operate every day after school. More extensive observations would be needed to capture the full range of program experiences.

Overall, the student interviews were difficult for the students to get through and many of their responses were unclear or off-topic. A few students asked to stop mid-way through the interview and others had limited attention to be able to effectively complete it. Therefore, alternative methods of gathering information directly from students should be explored for future evaluations, or we should focus the interviews with the older students. Finally, at times, the students and parents/guardians referred to the AIYE summer program (whereas the after-school program during the school year is the focus of this evaluation). We attempted to clarify when it was clear to us they were referring to the summer program, but there may be other instances where participants were referring to the summer program but did not specify that.

## **B. Student outcomes**

### **1. The niche of culturally specific after-school programming and evaluation**

Evaluation can help to determine whether a program is “doing things right” as well as “doing the right things.” “Doing things right” means being effective and efficient in meeting participants’ needs and achieving intended outcomes. “Doing the right things” means understanding students’ needs, building a program to meet those needs, setting appropriate goals, and measuring appropriate outcomes given students’ needs. “Doing the right thing” with regard to student outcomes requires a realistic appraisal of what is feasible in relation to what is desirable and an understanding of and attention to students’ culture and the power dynamics within the schools and communities in which these students live.

### **2. The challenge of holding after-school programs accountable for academic outcomes**

Students come to after-school programs following a full day of traditional schooling. Their school experience is largely regimented and geared toward standardized academic outcomes. They are generally taught by teachers who do not look like them. Expectations for what they can achieve are generally low. They arrive in the after-school program tired, bored, sometimes bursting with energy from sitting all day, hungry, and very much ready for something that is different from what they have just experienced all day in school. They may be in the after-school program as long as three hours.

How, under these conditions, and in this situation, can after-school program be expected to be evaluated by the academic achievement outcomes of students? Those academic outcomes are the responsibility of the traditional schooling. Moreover, attributing achievement test gains to the school versus the after-school program is methodologically impossible.

**What outcomes, then, are appropriate and reasonable for culturally specific after-school programs to be evaluated by?**

### **3. Culturally specific after-school program student outcomes**

Based on Project SPIRIT and the AIYE program, we are positing the following ten outcomes for culturally specific after-school programs. This paper presents evaluation findings on each of these criteria with supporting and confirming research findings.

- a. *Students get fed.* Most of the students in the Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The SPPS website confirms that the vast majority of students in these programs’ schools qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The availability of nutritious food after school supports healthy physical development.
- b. *Students are safe.* We hear, anecdotally, that many participants in after-school programs do not come home to anyone after school. In many cases, parents work outside the home and cannot afford in-home evening child care. Having working parents may be considered a community strength, however, it means that students need a place to go after school. In some cases, parents may be home, but the home situation may be difficult. Many students

come from families facing economic challenges, which cause stress and can create an unhealthy environment for the development of young children. Students need a safe, supportive after-school environment. During after-school hours students should experience a safe environment, supervised by competent adults, and receive appropriate support for healthy child development.

- c. *Students get help, as needed, completing their homework.* Keeping up with homework is a critical factor in school success. The after-school program does not control the content of the homework, its appropriateness, or its quality. However, the program can help students keep up with their homework which is well-documented in research to be a key factor in ongoing school success. Students with stressed families are at high risk of not keeping up in school.
- d. *Students get help solving personal problems.* Staff pay attention to the students' well-being, and sometimes take note of the fact that a student is dealing with a health issue. In those situations, staff can share with parents at pick-up time what they have observed. They can also share any problems that have emerged around discipline during the school day, learn valuable information from the parents about anything that is happening at home, and monitor the overall well-being of students. Staff can also provide helpful resources to parents.
- e. *Students feel cared about, valued, and important.* The students in these after-school programs come from a wide range of family situations and have a diversity of experiences in their daytime classrooms. Some students struggle at home or in school. No matter what the student's underlying baseline, these programs can add to a student's sense of feeling cared about, valued, and important. Research on child development consistently finds that feeling cared about and valued is critical to healthy social and intellectual development.
- f. Students engage with culturally appropriate and stimulating learning resources and develop a strong connection to their cultural heritage and identity. They are taught by teachers who look like them and share their heritage and background. Staff choose books, videos, and enrichment activities that are culturally specific and appropriate, and affirm and extend cultural identity beyond what the traditional school is either able to do or willing to do. Strong cultural identity has been demonstrated by research to be a protective factor for healthy youth development, and strong cultural identity is also positively related to better academic outcomes.
- g. *Students get exposed to positive role models and build positive relationships as part of a culturally specific community.* Feeling connected to their cultural community supports a student's sense of belonging, enhances their feelings of social cohesion, builds social capital, and mitigates social isolation and withdrawal.
- h. *Students develop interpersonal skills.* The after-school programs provide opportunities for students to learn together and interact with each other during exercises that teach collaboration and sharing. They also provide an opportunity for older students to help mentor younger students and for those more experienced in the program to help newer participants.

- i. *Students develop positive self-esteem grounded in their individual strengths and qualities.* In the after-school programs staff give students affirming messages about their value, their strengths, their capabilities, their rights, and their potential. A small student-teacher ratio allows personal attention to and interaction with individual students. Research shows that self-esteem support helps children develop personal resilience and long-term success.
- j. *Students are encouraged to aspire to live a fulfilling life.* The program's activities, rituals, and culturally specific interactions help students to feel that they have a positive future and can be successful.

### **C. Research Framework for Student Outcomes: Ten Criteria Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Later in this report we will present research findings specific to after-school programs and youth development that inform and support the evaluation model that we have used and the criteria of excellence articulated, codified, and operationalized in that model. First, we begin more generally by showing how the 10 criteria just reviewed map onto and align with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.<sup>1</sup>

In 1943, social psychologist Abraham Maslow developed a theory of human needs that he organized in the form of a pyramid named Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The pyramid describes lower-level needs (food, safety) as fundamental and necessary for meeting higher-level needs (social connection, self-esteem, and self-actualization). Because Maslow's Hierarchy is so well known and widely used as a social science theory and research framework, it is informative to look at how the after-school culturally specific evaluation criteria align with the Hierarchy. The results show that these two after-school programs cover the full range of Maslow's Hierarchy. In that regard, these two after-school programs are holistic and comprehensive in meeting the needs of students.

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<sup>1</sup> Maslow's hierarchy focuses on the development of the individual. However, levels five, seven, eight, and arguably ten focus on how the individual functions in community. The two culturally specific after-school programs being evaluated here focus on the development of the individual child and on how the children and families build community. Both are important, and both are examined in this analysis and framework. We acknowledge that the universality of Maslow's Hierarchy of Need is a matter of debate and that there is disagreement on its relevance in different cultural contexts. We are not asserting the model's universal relevance in this evaluation; we are using it as an organizing framework to present our findings because it is widely known and understood.

## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



### Aligning culturally specific after-school program outcome criteria with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Culturally specific after-school program outcome criteria
<i>Self-actualization</i>	10. Students are encouraged to aspire to live a fulfilling life.
<i>Self-esteem</i>	9. Students develop positive self-esteem grounded in their individual strengths and qualities.
<i>Belonging:</i> Social ability, sense of connection	5. Students feel cared about, valued, and important. 6. Students engage with culturally appropriate and stimulating learning resources, and develop a strong connection to their cultural heritage and identity. 7. Students are exposed to positive role models and build positive relationships as part of a culturally specific community. 8. Students develop interpersonal skills.
<i>Safety/security:</i> Health, family	2. Students are safe. 3. Students get help, as needed, completing their homework. 4. Students get help solving personal problems.
<i>Basic needs:</i> food, shelter	1. Students get fed.

The evaluation identified ten student outcomes for the culturally specific after-school program. We have aligned these outcomes with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The alignment with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs shows the comprehensive and holistic nature of the student outcomes. The table on the next page summarizes the evaluation findings.

**Summary Overview of Project SPIRIT and American Indian Youth Enrichment Program  
student outcomes aligned with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

<b>Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs</b>	<b>Ten Culturally Specific After-School Program Outcome Criteria</b>	<b>Project SPIRIT Evidence of Student Outcomes</b>	<b>American Indian Youth Enrichment Program Evidence of Student Outcomes</b>
<i>Self-actualization</i>	10. Students are encouraged to aspire to live a fulfilling life.	<p>Students are provided with positive role models of successful African Americans and their contributions to social change.</p> <p>Students practice taking positive actions and learn to solve problems.</p> <p>Students understand that keeping up with homework and school work will lead to future opportunities and success.</p>	<p>Students learn about cultural values, hear traditional stories, and experience ways of practicing these traditions.</p> <p>Students are exposed to different career and education options, as well as to American Indian positive adult role models.</p> <p>Students are assisted with homework and encouraged to do well in school.</p>
<i>Self-esteem</i>	9. Students develop positive self-esteem grounded in their individual strengths and qualities.	<p>Daily affirmation: “I am somebody.”</p> <p>Individual support, attention, and help from teachers.</p> <p>Good Job Song.</p> <p>Books and stories with characters of color who have similar backgrounds and have overcome obstacles.</p>	<p>Students are exposed to and practice Indigenous language, stories, cultural values and teachings, and cultural practices such as smudging and drum and dance, which strengthens their cultural identity, pride, and literacy.</p> <p>Students are given opportunities to learn from and teach each other.</p>
<i>Belonging:</i> Social ability, sense of connection	<p>5. Students feel cared about, valued, and important.</p> <p>6. Students engage with culturally appropriate and stimulating learning resources, and develop a strong connection to their cultural heritage and identity.</p>	<p>Students gain a strong sense of African American identity grounded in understanding cultural history, the seven Kwanzaa principles, and appropriate cultural teaching materials and experiences.</p> <p>Students are taught by teachers from their own culture who look like them.</p>	<p>Students feel loved and cared about from staff.</p> <p>Staff are mostly (or all) Native American, and all stakeholders believe this is important for students to feel comfortable, safe, and understood.</p> <p>Students are exposed to American Indian community organizations and</p>

<b>Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs</b>	<b>Ten Culturally Specific After-School Program Outcome Criteria</b>	<b>Project SPIRIT Evidence of Student Outcomes</b>	<b>American Indian Youth Enrichment Program Evidence of Student Outcomes</b>
	<p>7. Students are exposed to positive role models and build positive relationships as part of a culturally specific community.</p> <p>8. Students develop interpersonal skills.</p>	<p>Students teach each other (peer learning).</p> <p>Students are exposed to field trips outside of and within their own community.</p>	<p>leaders, as well as mainstream cultural institutions through field trips.</p> <p>Indigenous value systems (Lakota Virtues and Ojibwe Values) are used as the basis for the program's curriculum; these value systems heavily emphasize interpersonal relationships.</p>
<i>Safety/Security:</i> Health, family	<p>2. Students are safe. Students expect firm and consistent discipline and correction balanced with love and care as individuals</p> <p>3. Students get help, as needed, completing their homework.</p> <p>4. Students get help solving personal problems.</p>	<p>Facilities are safe.</p> <p>Discipline is grounded in personal responsibility and group accountability.</p> <p>High expectations are set and enforced for appropriate student behavior.</p> <p>Program staff offer homework help</p>	<p>Students and families feel safe at the program (although not always on the bus home afterwards).</p> <p>The program environment is calm and free from excessive behavior disruptions, and minor disruptions are addressed by staff in a caring and culturally relevant manner.</p> <p>Staff support students to work on academic areas where they need to improve and to address classroom concerns.</p> <p>Staff support students to solve social and family problems and are willing to address concerns with the appropriate parties.</p>
<i>Basic needs:</i> Food, shelter	<p>1. Students get fed.</p>	<p>Food with individual and culturally appropriate adaptations when possible.</p>	<p>Students get a healthy snack right before the program starts.</p> <p>Students learn about healthy Indigenous food options.</p>

## D. Project SPIRIT student outcomes

### 1. Meeting basic needs

- Students get fed

Project SPIRIT students receive a daily snack a snack provided by Saint Paul Public Schools. The At-Risk Afterschool Meal Program helps students get the nutritious meals they need in a safe, supervised location. For many students, this is their only opportunity to access a healthy meal after the school day ends. The standards for suppers and snacks served in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) are based on the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), science-based recommendations made by the National Academy of Medicine, cost and practical considerations, and stakeholder input. Program staff reported that having food for the students is a particularly important part of the after-school program.

One experienced staff member explained:

*They need energy. [Often the kids do not like the lunch that was served by the school, . . . ] So, they get to Project SPIRIT and they're so hungry. They get a snack and that allows them to muster three more hours of energy. Occasionally, we bring in our own snacks for the kids as a treat. But treats are important. And kids will tell you, "I'm hungry." Once they get home, they have a meal with their families.*

However, providing food for students can be challenging. Administratively, Project SPIRIT program staff have to pick up snacks and then track which kids take what.

*They'll give us maybe ten snacks. It's usually milk and a snack. Black kids don't like milk (high lactose intolerance among Black children), so they won't take the milk. They'll take the snack and then they'll still be hungry. If we had eight students for that day and had picked up ten snacks, those two snacks that are left over have to be put back in the refrigerator and we can't give those away. It's so absurd. Kids are like, "Can we have that extra snack?" "No", I have to tell them, "I'm sorry. It's not allowed."*

*Some kids don't like the snack so they'll put it on the table and then other students can grab it because we've already tallied that they took it. But if there's not a kid to claim that snack and give it away, then we can't give it away.*

Lactose intolerance, allergies, and gluten intolerance make providing snacks challenging. White or chocolate skim milk are the available options. Juice is more expensive, but occasionally the program gets juice.

*We have a student who has some severe allergies, serious allergies to peanuts and gluten. She's really good. She's in 3rd grade and her skin is really sensitive so she has eczema all over her body. When we bring in snacks, we really remember her, and we make sure that we make provision for her specifically. It's so hard as a young person to decline a snack that looks so good. A cookie or whatever. But she's really good at it. She knows. One of the things we have to do is look at food labels closely.*

## 2. Safety/Security

- Students are safe.
- Students get help, as needed, completing their homework.
- Students get help solving personal problems.

The after-school program meets building and operating standards for such programs to ensure the safety and security of students. Project SPIRIT provides a safe environment, supervised by competent adults, and offers appropriate child development support.

Another aspect of safety and security involves managing student behavior, which related to program staff members' approaches to discipline. Observations showed that Project SPIRIT staff spent a considerable amount of time monitoring, managing, and correcting student behavior. Students are told to sit still, pay attention, and stay focused. Students often seem distracted and antsy after a full day of schooling, so managing student behavior is an important task for program staff.

### a. Strengths of approach to discipline

Project SPIRIT students are greeted with high fives, hugs, and smiles and are celebrated when exhibiting appropriate behavior. Staff report that when Project SPIRIT students are observed engaging in inappropriate behaviors, they are given the opportunity to correct their behavior and are treated fairly. The Imani Circle is a key part of the design of Project SPIRIT. It is designed to empower every student and to ensure that there is a time during which students can give input and air their grievances. Staff believe that participation in the Imani Circle decreases bullying because the students gain confidence when they have the opportunity to share in the circle.

### b. Challenges of approach to discipline

Several students expressed frustrations about how they are disciplined. This was particularly mentioned at one site where students talked at length about "walking the halls," which they do when one person acts out. Staff explained that this is teaching collective responsibility and accountability. A staff person explained:

*We don't want this program to become more school, right? So, if we say this is about academics, academics, academics, students will stop coming. Kids want to have fun. We can make things fun, but they know it's still learning. So then, if it feels too much like regular school, then we see behavior problems increase. When students are bored, or they're tired of just learning because it is a long school day, they'll begin to act out and then we'll have to make phone calls home or pull them out to talk to them about their behavior. Kids have excuses. They're tired. Whatever their excuse is, most of them are valid. They just can't handle an additional three hours of learning. But if a student doesn't comply with a request for appropriate behavior, then it distracts the entire classroom. So, we must keep control. It's a balance - fun and learning and appropriate behavior.*

The challenges of maintaining safety and security are far from trivial. Children living in poverty are more likely to have experienced trauma. Even young children can pose a threat to the safety

of other students. A staff person provided an example of what Project SPIRIT staff need to be prepared to deal with.

*Issues of violence can arise. A couple weeks ago, we had an incident with a student who has significant problems. She is a foster child in a new foster family. She has significant emotional issues. We gave provision for her to participate in our program since her other siblings go to school here. So, two weeks ago she came into our classroom and completely acted out. She was told to calm down. She didn't listen. And then she overturned a table and sat underneath the table. She's in 1st grade. She completely wreaked havoc in the classroom, then ran out of the classroom. So, because what she did endangered other students, the flipping over the table, and because she could have endangered herself by running out of the classroom, we had to take disciplinary action.*

*There have been other cases where a kid, while playing, hit another student and the student was injured. Saying it was not intentional doesn't matter. A student was injured. We have to take disciplinary action. We have to troubleshoot. Sometimes it requires a meeting with parents or guardians. What we do varies.*

*One of the things we tell parents is that **we're not a throw away program** where as soon as your student commits one offense, then we throw your kid away. Our discipline system cannot resemble the zero-tolerance system currently in place for Saint Paul Public Schools. But, our bottom line is violence toward another student, or endangering yourself, or any sexual behavior gets dealt with. We have to maintain a safe environment – and we do.*

*[One additional challenge is that . . . ] when we have programming at Project SPIRIT, we don't have access to Saint Paul Public School nurses because they leave at the end of the regular school day. So, any after-school program that comes into school doesn't have any access to the school's First Aid kit or medical information on students so we have to purposely store our own information and ask that families disclose illnesses or allergies and that they provide the adequate medication for it and give it to us personally, because Saint Paul Public Schools won't hand over medication to us. We have kids on ADHD medicine and kids who need Epi-Pens. Because of the price of Epi-Pens, families do not have the ability to purchase two, one for the school and the other for the after-school program. So that becomes a concern.*

### 3. Belonging: Social ability, sense of connection

- Students feel cared about, valued, and important.
- Students engage with culturally appropriate and stimulating learning resources and develop a strong connection to their cultural heritage and identity.
- Students are exposed to positive role models and build positive relationships as part of a culturally specific community.
- Students develop interpersonal skills.

**Project SPIRIT students' sense of belonging is grounded in community strengths.** Staff and parents emphasized that the African American community brings significant strengths to the program expressed in four explicit program values:

1. **Fortify.** The parents and the community work together to prepare the students to face life's challenges with strength drawn from deep cultural traditions and history. Then, by design, Project SPIRIT acts to strengthen this fortification.
2. **Unite.** The parents and the community work to build community among students and families to foster a common bond. Then, by design, Project SPIRIT acts to strengthen this bond.
3. **Nurture (Love).** The parents and the community do their best to protect and correct students to create an environment of love, safety, and security. Then, by design, Project SPIRIT acts to provide an additional, reinforcing environment of love, safety, and security.
4. **Impact.** The parents and the community foster cooperation and interdependence among students. Then, by design, Project SPIRIT acts to provide an additional environment in which this cooperation and interdependence are modeled.

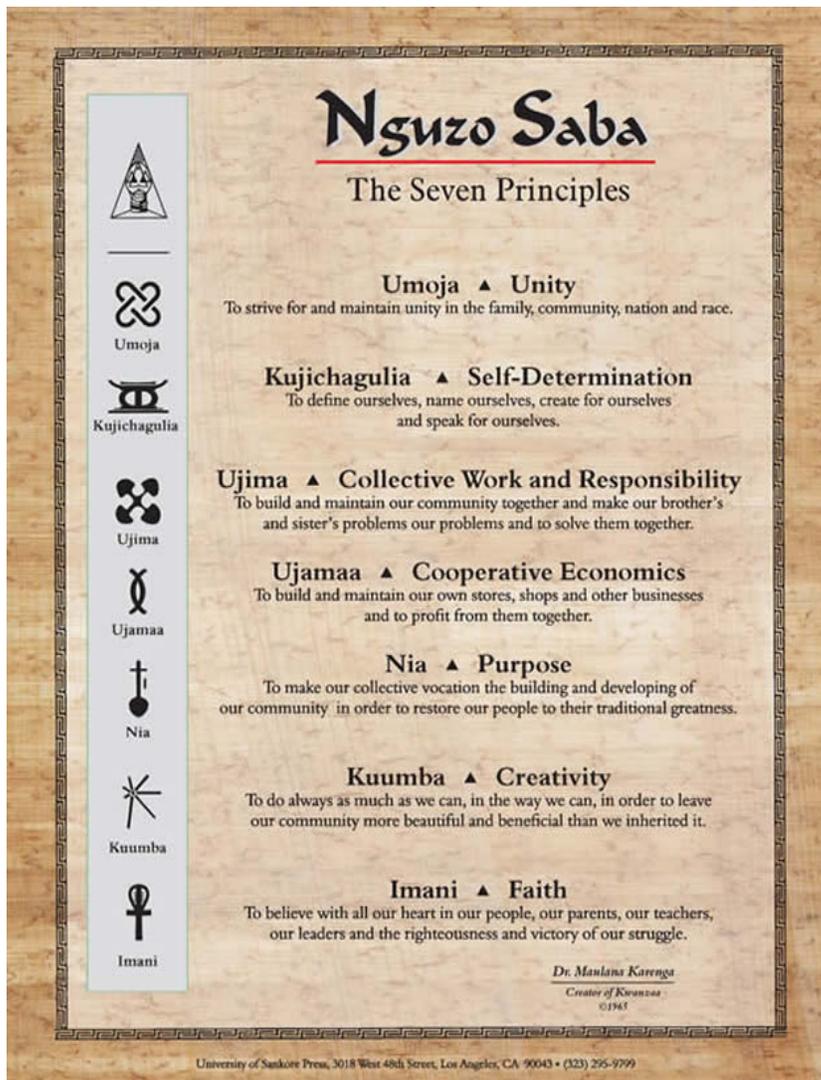
Observations of Project SPIRIT showed staff who care a lot about the students. Staff were observed affirming individual students' potential and worth, including reminding them that they are smart and can achieve.

The staff, in conversation and interviews, expressed an appreciation for and understanding of the ways mainstream education is not always conducive to learning for students from minority cultural communities. The program incorporates culturally specific activities that provide students with a deep sense of connection to their heritage. Staff are primarily African American.

For example, Project SPIRIT incorporates culturally based elements such as standard call-and-response activities and songs students sing to recognize and congratulate each other for their academic successes. The program connects youth with their history; for example, students learn about prominent African American women in history.

Project SPIRIT organizes the curriculum around seven principles derived from African culture. A month is spent on each principle with small group activities, stories, and creative opportunities to learn about the principle and its implications. The final month of the school year is spent reviewing all seven principles. See a list of the principles in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Nguzo Saba: The Seven Principles



A sample of Project SPIRIT students who had attended the program for at least two years were interviewed about the principles they had learned; several also had siblings who currently or previously participated in the program. These are “high-dosage students,” which means they had the opportunity to absorb more from the program over time. Students were asked to share their thoughts about and experiences with the principles.

Student responses varied significantly. There were many differences in how much students remembered, understood, and could explain about the principles. Rather than being able to articulate specific principles and their relevance, **they displayed a strong sense of African American identity in general.** They know that there are principles that are unique to their African American community. Different students emphasized different principles as particularly relevant to their own experience.

Students expressed the importance of knowing about their cultural history, knowing about important African American people in history, and being inspired by the contributions of African Americans throughout American history.

#### *a. Parent perspectives*

Interviews with the parents of participating students revealed strong support for having their children learn about and appreciate their African American culture and African heritage. One parent reported that her child attends a school in which they are the only person of color in their class. She said when she saw the Project SPIRIT table at an event, she raced to sign up her child.

Another parent talked about the excitement her sons showed when learning about the history and movements of Step Dance as performed in the African American community. Nearly all parents said their children did not receive African American history in their regular classrooms. Parents expressed a belief that exposing their children to African American history was very important to their children's emotional and intellectual development.

Most family members also said that their children talked to them about what they were learning in Project SPIRIT, which they linked to obtaining vital knowledge about their African heritage. Parents also expressed satisfaction with their interactions with Project SPIRIT classroom leaders. They were especially appreciative when leaders went beyond the expectations of their jobs to ensure both parent and child engagement.

#### *b. Project SPIRIT staff*

Findings from the evaluation show that Project SPIRIT hired classroom leaders with a high-level of culturally responsive pedagogy skills. Teachers expressed a strong commitment to helping advance the academic achievement of African American students and building relationships with parents that go beyond their job responsibilities to ensure student participation in the program. Classroom leaders identified the importance of building a network of community leaders who support and advocate for teaching African American history and culture in regular classrooms. They also draw on each other's skills and expertise for special Project SPIRIT activities. Project SPIRIT encourages classroom leaders to offer a variety of activities to support youth development and multiple learning styles. They offer arts and crafts activities, free time for play, team sports, dance/movement activities, and civic-oriented opportunities.

The staff are committed to Project SPIRIT's mission. One staff member explained:

*I'm from the African American community. For myself, I feel a deep connection to the community. The ownership that I feel for Project SPIRIT's success comes, in part, from knowing the historical trauma that organizations have inflicted on neighborhoods that they claim to serve.*

*Ultimately, this is about your passion. It's about the community context that you work in and care about. It's your folks, your people, your kids. So, you must never lose that vision.*

*We love the kids. It all begins with having the kids feel that love.*

#### 4. Self-esteem

- Students develop positive self-esteem grounded in their individual strengths and qualities.

Research shows self-esteem to be a critical factor in lifelong success as well as a protective factor. Protective factors are conditions or attributes (skills, strengths, resources, supports or coping strategies) in individuals, families, communities that help people deal more effectively with stressful events and mitigate or eliminate risk in families and communities. A strong sense of cultural belonging, addressed previously, is not only a protective factor, but also enhances children's self-esteem. Findings from this evaluation show that the self-esteem of children is enhanced as a result of participation in Project SPIRIT.

For example, a theme that cut across students' experiences was the impact of the daily affirmation, a core element of the program.

The students repeat the affirmation every day in a call-and-response process.

I am somebody.

I am capable and lovable.

I am teachable, therefore I can learn.

I can do anything when I try.

I'll be the best that I can be.

Each day, each day, each day.

I will not waste time because it is too valuable.

And I am precious and bright.

I am somebody.

I am somebody.

I am somebody.

All students know the affirmation by heart and were able to describe what it means to them. Some of what students said include:

*It means that even though somebody talks about you, you're your own person.*

*I can be myself and I don't have to be anybody else.*

*I think about it . . . to help me have a good day. Ever since I've heard that, the first time I heard I am somebody, I would go home, wake up, say I am somebody to help me do a good job in school.*

*It means you learn about who you are and stuff. That's about it . . . it makes me think that I am somebody and I am special.*

*It mean you're somebody and you're . . . I don't know how to explain it. It's hard to explain. But it means you're somebody and you're brave.*

*It means that that people are independent and they have feelings and no one can bring you down because you're saying 'I am someone and I believe that I am someone.'*

## 5. Self-actualization

- Students are encouraged to aspire to live a fulfilling life.

Self-actualization involves the capacity to take effective action. One form of effective action is keeping up with homework. Research shows that regular school attendance and keeping up with homework are critical factors in ultimate school success. Project SPIRIT students recognize and appreciate the help they get with homework. Parents also expressed appreciation for the homework help their children receive in the program.

The three-hour after-school program devotes an hour to school work. One staff member explained:

*We make sure that they do their homework. It would be unrealistic to send them home at 6 o'clock without doing their homework because they're not likely to do their homework after 6. We definitely make sure that they complete their homework.*

*Students who have been told by their teachers that they need to complete their homework will assure their teacher, "I'm going to do this at Project SPIRIT." And their families will tell you, it's really helpful for us to help them with their homework and not send it home. In fact, they get kind of upset if their student happens to not complete their homework with us.*

*We emphasize with students that practice is always beneficial. Just the routine of getting homework done is beneficial. And reading. I know most of our students are not going home to read, if they have a choice, so we get them to read. If they get done with their homework, then they will grab a book. But getting culturally appropriate books is also a challenge with our very limited resources.*

Classroom observations validated the importance assigned to homework and the engagement of staff in helping get homework completed.

How teachers assign homework reveals the problem of low expectations for some children. A staff person explains what they've experienced.

*One of the things that we're finding is that classroom teachers and schools, in general, believe that because students come from poverty, that if they send home homework, they're just not going to do it anyway. Or, because school days are so much longer now, they don't want to inundate parents or frustrate students, so they don't send home homework. So, students will come to us and we know what their grade level is, and that they are behind in reading and math, and they say, "My teacher didn't give me homework." That's problematic.*

*There are cases where if they don't come with homework, on those days we'll have the older students reading to younger students, or specific students will ask to work specifically with the classroom leader and will read with them. Every week we print out a little packet of individualized work for each student. So, in addition to whatever homework they have, they can work on that packet if they choose. It's not really an option not to do any work during that academic hour.*

Self-actualization for effective action also flows from the Kwanzaa principles. In interviews students talked about how what they are learning in Project SPIRIT affects choices and decisions

they make. One student talked about how the principles help her walk away when kids are being mean. Another student talked about drawing on what he learned in Project SPIRIT to handle being bullied. Teachers help the students think through problems they encounter and find ways of handling issues they face using the Kwanzaa principles.

The children in Project SPIRIT are still too young for us to attempt to anticipate how their experiences will affect future actions. What they do in the future will depend on a great deal more than what happens to them in the program. However, in the program, they learn about how, even as children, they can make a difference in the world. Here is an example from a classroom observation and staff interview:

*One of the things that we're able to do is to talk about the role of children in protesting, like Civil Rights sit-ins, from a historical perspective. We tell them about the children's movement and, generally, the role of children in every single movement. The children's movement of the 60's came about because children jump-started the movement toward equity because their families had to work and maintain the home. So, the kids were out on the front lines protesting together. And it was intentional because they had less to lose. Although they were hit with hoses and dogs, when the nation saw the abuse inflicted on children, people nationwide became more sympathetic, more so than if it had happened to their parents. Parents protesting would have been labeled lazy and shiftless—get them back to work kind of thing. The kids took over the movement at the beginning and then handed it off once the nation took notice. So, we tell them that history.*

*They hear what kids have done and they feel empowered, really. Our kids had no idea. No one had told them. They don't get that in regular school. Oh, my gosh, they hear the part kids played, and they see it and understand it. They really do. Even our African American families didn't know this history. Our families don't know that kids really were an integral part of the Civil Rights movement. I think kids feel empowered just by that message. We can do it. We talk about the role of a protest or a sit-in and what that does. Or writing to your Congress person and making change. And being thoughtful about the change. Of course, not every problem can be solved with a protest. There are different things we can accomplish, starting with ourselves and our community.*

It is instructive to look at effective actions taken during the program. Modeling self-actualized behavior is likely to have the deepest impact on future behavior. Here is an example of real-time effective action:

*One of our kids lost a relative to violence over a weekend. That Monday kids were talking. Staff members were asking, "What are we supposed to tell the kids?" So, we did away with curriculum that Monday and had the kids focus on writing supportive cards. One of the things I was very specific about is, do not reinforce negative and frightening things they've heard. The cards they wrote said things like, "We wish you a bright and sunny day." Or, "we can't wait to see you again." Those kind of messages, to lift her up.*

*So that's what they did that day. Things kind of calmed down. Even though all the kids heard what happened on the news, they were able to do something about it, to take some action to help a friend. So that's what we did.*

## E. American Indian Youth Enrichment student outcomes

### 1. Meeting basic needs

- Students get fed

#### a. Students get fed

During the American Indian Youth Enrichment (AIYE) program observations, Wilder Research staff noted that all students who participate in the program are offered a healthy, substantial snack right after school and before programming begins. All of the AIYE program students sat together during the snack time, but there were students from other after-school programs also present in the American Indian Magnet School (AIMS) cafeteria at the same time. (On other days, students may get their snack and bring it to the AIYE program room to eat with just their small group.) In general, snack time was observed to be an enjoyable, social experience for the students. Any behavior concerns, such as rowdiness or bullying, were quickly corrected by AIYE program staff and other after-school program staff.

Although they were not asked specifically about getting fed during the program, a few students mentioned that they appreciate the snack they receive at the program.

One student noted:

*Whenever there's a student or someone that's, like, having a hard time at home or they can't eat, Ms. Sue [the former program coordinator] will bring some extra food for them to eat so they don't go home hungry.*

### 2. Safety/Security

- Students are safe.
- Students get help, as needed, completing their homework.
- Students get help solving personal problems.

In general, we observed a calm environment in which students were actively engaged in some type of activity at all times. There was no point at which we observed chaos, unruly or disruptive behavior (that was not immediately and effectively redirected by AIYE program staff), or students milling about with nothing to do or not engaged in any activity. A community stakeholder said:

*I have seen other [after-school program] groups work, there's not that connection, or people have a tendency to turn their back and let the behavior continue. [AIYE] does not do that. They call them [students who are misbehaving] right on the spot. We're a group, we have to work together, you're going to be respectful—that's one of our teachings, being respectful. And that means not just to those elders, but to yourself. If you want to be respected, you have to know how to be respectful of others, and that includes that child that stands next to you.*

All of the parents in the focus group indicated that they feel their child is safe while participating in the AIYE program (with the exceptions regarding transportation home from the program, as noted below). One parent/guardian said:

*I think [AIYE staff] act as advocates for our kids, and go above and beyond. I feel really safe with my kids being here with Ms. Rebecca, and I don't trust my kids with everyone. I trust Mr. D [too].” During the discussion, these parents shared their feelings of safety and trust in the AIYE program staff in contrast with staff from AIMS and the other after-school program in the building, with one parent saying about the staff from the school or other program (unclear), “They are just here for a pay check.”*

A community stakeholder described how the neighborhoods where these American Indian students live may not always be safe, and many students would be home alone after school because all adults in their household are working if they did not have the AIYE program. He said:

*Sometimes our families [parents] have to have two jobs just to pay the bills, keep the family functioning, put food on the table. It forces our children to kind of almost raise themselves at times.*

These students would be stuck indoors by themselves after school with very limited physical activity and possibly also poor nutrition (or nothing to eat). This respondent recognized AIYE program as a safe place for students.

A few students described how the program staff know other members of their family, and two of the students interviewed said they have family members who work for the program. Because the American Indian community in Saint Paul, Minnesota is relatively small, program staff are more likely (than in a non-culturally specific program) to know the students' family members. This may be beneficial in terms of the staff's ability to build trust with the students more quickly and maintain regular communication with their families. One student specifically noted that they feel safer coming to the program because they know the program staff from outside of the program. This familiarity could also create challenging situations for staff to navigate if they are having issues or problems with a student that need to be addressed with their family (this is just our speculation, not anything that specifically was noted as a concern by any respondents).

One student noted that when they tell their friends who are not in the program about it, their friends want to join the program, but their parents/guardians will not let them because they want them to come home right away after school, especially in the fall when it gets dark out so early. Another student said:

*The first time we came here, we were really scared because we were little, and we didn't really know what to do. But when we came here and then went back home, we were really happy that we came.*

Finally, one parent in the focus group described how her son had been bullied that same day in school and how she had to come to the school to pick him up, but he really wanted to stay for the AIYE program, despite the situation, because he felt the program would help him to feel better. After this comment, another parent noted

*Sometimes this program keeps kids at this school, because if it weren't for this after-school program they wouldn't want to stay there [due to bullying and other safety concerns].*

During the parent/guardian focus group, the participants universally agreed that the bus transportation home from the AIYE program (which is provided by the SPPS) is unreliable and gives them concerns about the safety of their children. One parent/guardian said:

*We take them out of the class after school because of the buses. They really run terrible buses. They say they are going to be on time, but then they run really late, especially when it snows.*

One student specifically noted that the smudging<sup>2</sup> they do at the beginning of the program helps her to feel safe, because it reminds her of the smells and experiences at home, where her grandmother smudges often.

### 3. Belonging: Social ability, sense of connection

- Students feel cared about, valued, and important.
- Students engage with culturally appropriate and stimulating learning resources, and develop a strong connection to their cultural heritage and identity.
- Students are exposed to positive role models and build positive relationships as part of a culturally specific community.
- Students develop interpersonal skills.

#### a. Students feel cared about, valued, and respected

When asked if they think the program staff care about them, students universally responded affirmatively. One student said:

*They [the program staff] make us a whole family. . . . We're a whole family no matter what.*

Another student said:

*They stick up for you when you're feeling bad. They help you get through it.*

A third student said:

*They care about everybody in the program because it's kind of like a small family.*

When asked if they would feel comfortable telling program staff if something bad happened to them or their family, a student said:

*I guess I would feel comfortable, but I wouldn't want to talk about it in front of the whole class. I would pull them aside and talk about it and kind of ask them for their advice or something. Because I know like when something bad happens to somebody in the*

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<sup>2</sup> There are four sacred medicines traditionally used by the Ojibwe People: Tobacco, Sage, Sweet Grass, and Cedar. Tobacco is the first and most fundamental medicine. It is used to communicate with the spirit world through offering. The other three medicines have many different uses. **Smudging** is a traditional method of burning these sacred herbs to produce a smoke cloud, which is used in various cleansing or prayer **ceremonies** and purification or healing **rituals**. The teachings for each medicine go hand and hand with the Medicine Wheel Teachings (<http://ojibweresources.weebly.com/medincine-wheel.html>).

*program, say somebody passes away, everybody goes out of their way to try to make them feel better.*

Another student mentioned that they know the program staff care about them because if they are trying to leave or don't feel like being there that day, the staff tell them that they want them to stay.

One community stakeholder talked about how the AIYE program handles concerns or issues about their students' home life that may come up in a more culturally appropriate way, which may contribute to feelings of safety and trust among students and families:

*[Students] feel confident in talking with [AIYE staff]. They'll open up. . . . You know, not everybody comes from the greatest of homes. No matter how much pride you can have in yourself, it doesn't mean to say things are great at home, so when they know they have that safe place [at AIYE], they want to come. And I think when they do open up it's not like [AIYE staff/volunteers] run to child protection or anything like that. [AIYE staff are] willing to work with the parents. . . . Not everything is done that colonialism way.*

Another community stakeholder noted how the AIYE program responds to a crisis or important event in the community, and how that demonstrates respect, caring, and a connection to the bigger picture of the community's needs and preferences:

*When something happened within that cultural community [an elder passed away and there was a community gathering occurring at the AIYE program site] they were respectful and responsive and adapted not only for the young people and their families, but for their staff.*

The parents/guardians also strongly indicated that the AIYE program staff care about and show respect to them and their families, as the following exchange from the parent focus group illustrates:

*Facilitator: "Can you say more about your relationships with program staff?"*

*Parent/Guardian 1: "I think they are great!"*

*Parent/Guardian 2: "Ms. Rebecca and Mr. D know my children really well."*

*Parent/Guardian 3: "Each individual is their own person here."*

*Another parent/guardian, responding to this comment: "I don't think they do favoritism here."*

*Parent/Guardian 4: "If one child needs something or extra help, they'll bring it to my attention and will try to find resources for help."*

*Another parent/guardian, in response: "Ms. Rebecca called me before school started about free backpacks . . . ."*

*Parent/Guardian 5: "That's the 'over and above' I'm talking about! If there's a problem and the kids want to call me, she'll let them use the phone to call me."*

And a moment later in the discussion, there were more indications that the program staff care about their children:

*Just being understanding of our needs and culturally our ways. And [Rebecca] is very kind-hearted and works well with parents and kids.*

*b. Students engage with culturally appropriate learning resources and develop a strong connection to their cultural heritage and identity as American Indians*

The American Indian Youth Enrichment Program curriculum and daily activities and teachings are based on the values and cultures of the Indigenous peoples of the region.

Mr. D provided additional insight about these cultural values:

*The number of and what virtues are taught vary in each Dakota/Lakota band and community. There is not one set of virtues that are used by all, one is not more correct than another but all are accepted as a guide to being a good virtuous person who put the welfare of the people as a whole above the individual. The following are some of the bands of Dakota and Lakota people and some of the virtues that they follow.*

**Figure 2a.** [The seven Ojibwe teachings](#)

- To cherish knowledge is to know **Nibwaakawin** — **WISDOM**. Symbolized by the **beaver**.
- To know **Zaagidiwin** — **LOVE** is to know peace. You must love yourself in order to love another. Symbolized by the **eagle**.
- To honor all of the Creation is to have **Minwaadendamowin** — **RESPECT**. Symbolized by the **buffalo**.
- **Aakodewewin** — **BRAVERY** is to face the foe with integrity. The **bear** symbolizes the moral courage to do the right thing.
- **Gwayakwaadiziwin** — **HONESTY** in facing a situation is to be brave. Symbolized by **Wilderness Man**.
- **Dibaadendiziwin** — **HUMILITY** is to think things through carefully and to know your place. Symbolized by the **wolf**.
- **Debwewin** — **TRUTH** is to know all of these things. Symbolized by the **turtle**.

**Figure 2b.** [The D/Lakota virtues](#)

- **Wówaunšila** — **Compassion**: One in which the emotional capacities of empathy and sympathy (for the suffering of others) are regarded as a part of love itself, and a cornerstone of greater social interconnection and humanism - foundational to the highest principles in philosophy, society, and personhood.
- **Wówačhaŋtognake** — **Generosity**: Generosity is one of the most obvious virtues among American Indians. Lakota people actually measured their worth by how much they gave away. Those unadulterated too much by western culture's emphasis on material wealth still do. Generosity is about giving and/or sharing our time, our wealth, our ideas or our possessions in behalf of others. One way to

think of it is as the opposite of greed or selfishness. A person with this trait has a good balance between taking care of self and taking care of others.

- **Wóohitike — Courage/Bravery:** Courage or bravery was defined by Lakota educator, Pat Locke, as the "strength of character which equips us to meet danger and trouble, to live our values, and to tell the truth in the face of ignorance." Courage is the quality of mind that enables us to risk what we value for a higher purpose.
- **Wówičakǎ — Honesty:** An honest person, in our opinion, does what he or she says. Honesty is about being trustworthy. People with this character trait truly care about truth and here we want to repeat Parker Palmer's definition of truth as being a "conversation about things that matter conducted with passion and discipline." The passion is about sincerity and the discipline relates to the five inner skills in the conceptual model. We see honesty as a subcategory of integrity.
- **Wówachinthanka — Patience:** The state of endurance under difficult circumstances, which can mean persevering in the face of delay or provocation without acting on annoyance/anger in a negative way; or exhibiting forbearance when under strain, especially when faced with longer-term difficulties. Patience is the level of endurance one can take before negativity.
- **Wówakis'ake — Resiliency:** The ability to spring back from and successfully adapt to adversity.
- **Wóksape — Wisdom:** A deep understanding and realization of people, things, events or situations, resulting in the ability to apply perceptions, judgments and actions in keeping with this understanding. It often requires control of one's emotional reactions so that universal principles, reason and knowledge prevail to determine one's actions. Wisdom is also the comprehension of what is true or right coupled with optimum judgment as to action.

Overall, connecting to their American Indian heritage, language, and cultural practices was by far the most commonly mentioned positive feature of the program by both students and parents/guardians. All of the community stakeholders who we interviewed also recognized building students' cultural identity and pride as key components of the program. One stakeholder particularly noted that this exposure to culture is beneficial for biracial students who may not have had much or any opportunity to learn about or build a sense of pride in their Native American background. Another said:

*I do really appreciate that intentionality around those cultural pieces and just seeing how it was woven into different activities.*

When asked how the program has changed how they feel about being Native American, one student said:

*I didn't really know what Native American was like, or what it was [before I joined the program], and then as I got older I learned that it's a really cool culture and you should be proud to be Native American and not ashamed of it. Because I know how stereotypes*

*are, and how they judge Native Americans, and some people are sometimes ashamed or embarrassed of it, and, like, we should take pride in it because it's a very amazing and interesting culture.*

A community member stakeholder described:

*As an American society, we have been exposed to a thinking that is not Indigenous in nature, to values and worldviews that are not traditional to American Indian students or families, and that's been occurring for centuries. So any time we get a chance to express ourselves through culture, history, language, that reminds us as Indian people who we are. Even though we kind of see the world differently, we may have different values that don't always match up with our wider society, it is still valid and it's still okay. And that's what I think American Indian Enrichment Program provides that sense of pride for our students just to be who you are as Indian people.*

Many of the parents/guardians who participated in the focus group spoke with pride about how their child has learned Ojibwe or Lakota language, stories, and cultural practices. One parent/guardian said:

*I'm proud of her because she was in a quiz bowl today and she's almost fluent in Ojibwe. She's 10.*

Another noted that she was separated from her American Indian heritage and Indigenous language due to adoption, so she isn't able to teach her children these things, but this parent said:

*My daughter knows a lot [about the culture and language] from coming to this program and coming in to this school [AIMS].*

Finally, one parent/guardian said:

*Before coming here, my son didn't know he was Native. My son was considered white [because of his fair skin and blue eyes]. When we came here he was questioning things. . . . I am glad he got into this program after school to build his confidence. The other day in his drum group he got complimented on how confident and outspoken he is, and he's started to teach the other kids [in our family] what he knows.*

A community member also noted that AIYE program participants learn cultural values and teaching and another stakeholder described how these values are reinforced throughout the students' time at AIYE.

When asked about how their time at the AIYE program is different than the regular school day, a student said:

*Well, in regular class we don't learn about the Lakota culture. We just learn about regular boring stuff. . . .*

In response to the question "what do you like most about the program?" one student said:

*That I learn about my culture. . . . This is the only time when I get an hour or two to learn about my culture. . . .*

When asked what kinds of things they do to connect with Native American culture in the program, the same student went on to say:

*Mostly every day we get to learn stuff about culture. . . . It's fun to learn. Like, even though we're learning, it's fun to learn.*

However, this student (and several others) also pointed out that they mostly learn about Lakota culture (because their primary instructor is Lakota), but the student is Ojibwe, and they have less access to learning about Ojibwe culture and language in the AIYE program. A community stakeholder had a similar observation about how the AIYE program differs from the school day:

*There's that academic piece. So I think I was in a literacy class that I was observing [at AIYE], and [they are] finding ways to make it not classroom like; you know it was sitting in a circle and being able to have opportunities to see each other, and build community, and then having some craft activities that reinforce the content from the book, so it was non-school like.*

Another student told a short version of the Ojibwe story about drumming and the spirit of the drum. A different student described the play they put on (last school year) about the story of raven and how he became black, which is a traditional Muskogee story. Both of these examples indicate the extent to which the traditional stories, and the meaning of the stories, was internalized by these students. One student said:

*We study Lakota and Dakota language. And we do projects on the language. It's kind of like an extra culture class [in addition to what they get during the regular school day at AIMS] . . . . We sometimes go on field trips. . . . And now we get tested on reading and stuff so they have us read a little bit more to help. So it's kind of like a reading class, but it's more fun.*

Parents/guardians liked the Indigenous food preparation and Native American crafts activities the students do in the AIYE program. They also mentioned the drumming and singing. One parent/guardian said:

*Before you even pick up a drum, there are things you need to learn. Mr. D took the time to teach the kids to take care of and respect the drum, what it means, and everything. He took the time to explain things first.*

Several parents/guardians also appreciated that their child has a chance to practice Indigenous language skills at the AIYE program, and felt that the program helped to increase their child's confidence in using the Ojibwe/Lakota words they know. Staff were observed using Ojibwe and Lakota to provide instructions during transitions between activities and other ways of casually integrating the language (so rather than always having to learn language in a "language class" the students in the AIYE program are exposed to it more informally). Several community stakeholders also mentioned appreciating the healthy eating focus of the program, both in terms of providing a healthy snack and also teaching the students about healthy, Indigenous foods. A couple stakeholders suggested more focus in the future on Indigenous food and also increasing students' physical activity levels.

When asked about the “read aloud” portion of the program, most of the students we interviewed said they enjoyed this program component, and most also felt positively about the reading selections being focused on Native American cultures, characters, and topics. One student said:

*I like the stories [Mr. D] picks, because they all go with the Lakota Virtues. And they all have a lesson, and it kind of helps you when you're in a similar situation, like during the school year.*

Several community stakeholders mentioned and appreciated the culturally relevant reading activities; one respondent described how an AmeriCorps Vista volunteer at AIYE had created culturally relevant activity plans for AIYE with a strong literacy component.

On the other hand, community stakeholders believe it is a mistake to place too much emphasis on reading/literacy at the expense of cultural activities, and they do not believe it is a fair expectation to hold AIYE (Or any after-school program) accountable for students' reading outcomes. One stakeholder said:

*I do like the math and the reading piece that's a part of it, but again, that's the responsibility of the school, it shouldn't be a responsibility of the American Indian Youth Enrichment Program. This [program] should be about culture, history, language . . . and it should be focused on that.*

Another student said:

*The stories that he reads . . . I like the way he tells them, and, like, he doesn't just read it, he reads it like he really means it. And then he stops the story sometimes and tells us about it. . . . Besides, like, book stories, he tells us really funny stories, like, that he's experienced and stuff.*

We observed Mr. D telling a story about the Ojibwe trickster Nanaboozhoo. During the story he paused to talk with the students about differences in Ojibwe dialects by telling them how this character is called slightly different names in different parts of Ojibwe country. He then indicated to the students when they are learning their Native language to “*not over think it,*” which is an example of strategies he uses to put the students at ease and help them feel confident while learning new materials.

A couple of students said that they liked to smudge at the beginning of the program every day and that it helps them to calm down. Wilder Research observed the smudging process, taking note that students were lightly instructed by Mr. D about their behavior and etiquette during the smudging, and that the students were self-correcting and gently correcting each other to ensure the smudging was completed respectfully and calmly. Mr. D also specifically told the students that smudging is a time to find their inner calm and let the problems from their day slip away (“*when we smudge, we remove any negativity from the day.*”) One community stakeholder described how AIYE program staff modified their approach to smudging to make it more meaningful to students, after receiving feedback from an elder about it. Research has also shown that burning natural products like sage can actually make an environment healthier by reducing airborne bacteria that can cause illness (Nautiyal et al. 2007).

A few students mentioned the field trips as a favorite component of the program. Parents/guardians also appreciated that their children got to experience different things in the community like the Minnesota History Center the Science Museum of Minnesota, Belwin Nature Center, Fort Snelling, and the “art museum in Minneapolis.” Several of the parents expressed how much they and their children enjoyed the snow tubing field trip last year, and requested that again this year.

Several students also expressed pleasure with having “choice time” during the program so they could color or use perler beads or drum or do homework. One student even said that the only thing they do not like about the program is that choice time doesn’t come until the very end of the day.

A few students also noted that there is one day during the week where a different teacher leads the activities, and there is less focus on cultural content on these days. When asked what they like best about the program, one student said:

*The fun activities. It was on a Thursday when Mr. D wasn't there. We made slime, but mine didn't turn out so good. But I actually know the different ingredients for fluffy slime. . . . So first glue, then the shaving foam, then you mix it. You can add food coloring, then you add the contact solution.*

The students seemed to enjoy these activities in general, but placed more emphasis overall talking about the cultural activities. This finding points to another important program element: *giving kids the time, space, and resources to explore their own interests and enjoyable activities.*

Some students also noted that they do their homework while at the AIYE program. One student said:

*So sometimes after school I wouldn't understand what the homework was about and how the project was supposed to be, so then I'd usually ask Mr. D or my mom [who works at the program] or some other staff there. . . . I'd usually ask them, like, 'how do I do this?' or 'how does this work?' and then they would help me with it.*

One parent/guardian also said:

*I know they do homework because my daughter says she does her homework there. They help her. When she comes home, she is so excited, [she says,] 'Ms. Rebecca helped me with my homework!'*

Another parent/guardian described how her child was struggling with reading, so during the summer program Rebecca worked on reading with her – they took books on the bus for her child to read on the way to field trips and brought a book for her to read at the park. Now, her child’s reading has improved, and she attributed the improvement to this extra attention from Rebecca and the AIYE program staff over the summer. The parents/guardians thought that homework help was a new program component this year, and they liked this addition. Thus, the program provides kids the time, space, and resources to get their homework done and provides general academic support.

- c. *Students are exposed to positive American Indian adult role models and build positive relationships with other children, adults, families, and organizations in the local American Indian community*

When they were asked about the adults who work with them through the AIYE program, students most frequently spoke about Mr. D, who is the primary instructor and activity lead on most days of the program. (Mr. D is a full-time teacher at AIMS, so he is familiar to the students from their regular school day.) One parent said:

*Mr. D is a really good role model for the kids.*

Parents/guardians who participated in the focus group were more likely to talk about their interactions with Rebecca when they were asked about the AIYE program staff. Rebecca is the program coordinator, and as such she has a lot of communication with families and provides a lot of support during the initial registration and program enrollment process, as well as providing regular communications to families about transportation, field trips, and any concerns that come up about their child.

One student said of the program staff:

*They're all awesome and smart and talented.*

Another student said:

*Ms. Victoria is a role model. She's nice and she helps kids calm down and stop misbehaving.*

In addition to the current program staff we specifically asked about (Mr. D, Ms. Rebecca, Ms. Victoria, and Ms. Sequoia), a couple of students mentioned Ms. Donna and Ms. Sue as other adult mentors or role models who are associated with the program. A community stakeholder also mentioned that the students love their time on Thursdays with Dennis Gilbert from Ain Dah Yung, who works on commercial tobacco use prevention.

When asked about the importance of having all Native American staff in the program, some students thought it was good because the Native American staff might understand better how to teach about Native American cultures. One student said:

*I think that [having all Native American staff] is good, because there's not a very big Native American community, and it's good to know they are having a program about that.*

A couple of the students indicated that they did not think all of the staff were Native American. During the program observations, Wilder Research staff noted that Mr. D seemed to feel very comfortable and natural in the way he interacted with the students and incorporated Lakota (and to a lesser degree, Ojibwe) language and concepts into his interactions with students, which would likely not be as natural for a non-American Indian staff person to accomplish (observer's opinion). The community stakeholders agreed that having Native American staff is critical because these staff understand the culture and because they have more empathy for students' life

situations, and students feel more comfortable interacting with them. However, one community stakeholder also noted that having non-Native American staff could also create a good opportunity for the staff to get exposed to Native American teachings and pedagogy, and learn more about how to work effectively with Native American students. One stakeholder said:

*One thing that I really liked was that they had Native staff. That, when you went to program you saw people that looked like you, and I think that's something that was huge, because they could relate to us and it was on a more personal basis. It felt comfortable to go somewhere and see someone that looked like you running things.*

When asked about other community organizations they got to know about through the AIYE program, most students did not name any other organizations. One student mentioned a “family center” (the American Indian Family Center in Saint Paul, most likely). In addition to culturally specific organizations and community resources, students are also given the opportunity through field trips to engage with broader community resources that they otherwise may not have the opportunity to visit. (A few of the specific places students went on field trips were named by students or parents, and are listed above.) Community stakeholders mentioned several community-based organizations that AIYE is currently connected with (Ain Dah Yung, Sprockets) and/or should become connected or more connected to (Indigenous Roots Cultural Center, Dream of Wild Health, American Indian Family Center, Saint Paul Indian Education). These community stakeholders talked about the importance of AIYE program participants having a chance to connect with, learn from, and see the example of successful Native American adults in various professions – they both appreciated when this does happen already through AIYE and encouraged more of it. One community stakeholder said:

*A few years ago, they had different guest speakers and one of them, he was Dine, he was from Arizona. But he was a resident doctor at the U of M and he wanted to get another degree attached to that so he could go home and be the top notch doctor and administrator for his tribal hospital, and he was a really great inspiration to the kids. They had a lot of questions for him, like ‘Why do you gotta go to school so long to be a doctor?’ You know, they’re kids! They sound like dumb questions, but if it’s a question that as an adult you think is dumb, that’s really something that a child is asking and they’re asking truthfully. The kids really liked that back and forth communication, and then when you bring in a Native person there’s more of a connection. More of a realization that ‘Hey, I can do this.’*

Parents/guardians appreciated when Rebecca and the AIYE program staff connected them to other resources in the community, such as free backpacks or free shoes or coats for students. During the focus group, parents/ guardians also mentioned other American Indian programs available to them and their children (e.g., Families of tradition, a wellbriety program; Indian Education through Saint Paul Public Schools; and the Division of Indian Work, in particular the food shelf; and a community Christmas party, although it was unclear to them if and how one gets an invitation to this particular event), but it was not clear if they had learned about these other programs and resources through the AIYE program.

*d. Students develop interpersonal skills*

When asked about what has changed for them as a result of their participation in the AIYE program, one student said:

*They taught us to respect the earth and stuff like that. And protect people and not do bullying or anything.*

Another student specifically connected their interpersonal skills growth to learning about the Lakota Virtues:

*Well, we learned about generosity and how you can share, because it's one of the Lakota Virtues, Generosity, meaning that you care for somebody else and you give them stuff.*

A parent said:

*I am proud of my daughter because she is caring and compassionate of other people.*

This illustrates the strong value placed on interpersonal skills in the American Indian community and the importance of having an after-school program that teaches and models culturally specific interpersonal values and behaviors. Parents/guardians also observed ways in which the AIYE program has helped their child's interpersonal skills. One parent recounted a story about a day when her son had a substitute teacher. All of the other students were making fun of the teacher, who had a physical disability. This parent/guardian said that her child talked to his classmates and encouraged them not to bully the teacher; she said:

*Even if they are his friends, he can talk to them [and encourage them to act right].*

A community stakeholder talked about how shy students in particular benefit from the program:

*Students who are quiet, withdrawn with other students during the school year--during the summer [at AIYE] when they're just with the Native students, they open up. They blossom. They communicate better. They feel more comfortable.*

One student mentioned liking that there are a range of ages of students in the program and

*It's really fun because sometimes if you're in a younger grade you can make friends with the older kids, and the older kids get to help out more. . . . Sometimes during the day you're hanging out with a lot of people and it gets very . . . boring, or like, 'you guys talk about the same stuff every day' . . . but in the program you get to talk about the language. And if you and your friend are in a different class, [the program] is kind of like a social class too because you get to talk to them, but you also get to do really fun projects." This same student, who participated in the AIYE program for several years, also said "I signed up for a lot of activities, so sometimes I do junior coaching or I go downstairs with the little kids and teach them games and stuff like that. I signed up for a lot of that because I like helping younger kids. . . . It makes me happy that they're happy, so it's good all around.*

Finally, one parent/guardian in the focus group indicated that she uses the AIYE program as a reward for her grandchildren whom she has custody of, both of whom have severe behavioral and emotional problems, because they like the program so much. She said:

*The program is an incentive. That's how I use it for my boys. If you don't get in trouble during the day, then you can go to [the AIYE program]. It's such an enjoyment. And it's educational!*

A community stakeholder and a couple of parents also indicated that students' school attendance may be bolstered by program participation, because the students like the program so much and they know they have to go to school to be able to go to the program on any given day.

#### **4. Self-esteem**

- Students develop positive self-esteem grounded in their individual strengths and qualities.

In the parent/guardian focus group, many of the parents talked about their child's increasing confidence or self-esteem. In particular, several parents/guardians and community stakeholders mentioned how strengthening their child's identity as an American Indian person has contributed to their overall self-confidence. In response to a question about the impact the program has had on their child, one parent/guardian said:

*More confident within themselves . . . My son has always wanted to be a [Native-style] singer. He's been scared and intimidated. He said he wanted to sing but he was too shy. But Mr. D relieved that pressure, and now he waves and twists his [drum] stick and his confidence has really grown. He will sing now.*

Another parent/guardian said:

*When he goes to the program and he learns something, then he totally blows my mind when he tells me what they did. I asked him where he learned that and he said, 'my after school program.' It feels good to see him learn. It really impacted him by having more confidence.*

#### **5. Self-actualization**

- Students are encouraged to aspire to live a fulfilling life.

When asked about how the AIYE program has helped them with their future plans for school and life, one student said:

*Yeah, because sometimes random stereotypes would come up and they [program staff] are like, 'whoa!' [staff pause to acknowledge and question that stereotype]. Sometimes we have to prove stereotypes wrong, because they [the world in general] think that Native Americans, like, don't go to college and they don't graduate, and if they do go to college it's because their reservation or tribes gives them money for it . . . But I wanted to prove stereotypes wrong so I am actually in AVID [an elective college prep and study skills course] and it helps me learn a lot more about college . . . I really want to go to college because I know it will help me when I am older. AVID is like another family, but sometimes people think AVID is just another class, it's like extra work. It is a class. It is more work, but it's not extra. It helps you to prepare yourself for how people are going to try to con you when you go to college about taking out loans that you won't be able to pay back . . . They're teaching us how to not spend a lot of money on college, and how not to take out a big loan that we're not going to be able to pay back.*

One parent/guardian also observed how the program is helping her child to plan for his future:

*My son now sets goals for himself, like what work he needs to do. After he started coming to this program, he said, 'I'm going to stay here [AIMS] until 8th grade, and then I am going to go to Harding because they have the Native program [American Indian Studies track]'. . . . I have to stay in this area because he loves this program so much.*

A student said:

*I actually wanted to be a marine biologist . . . because of a few of the animals in the videos [that we watched during the AIYE program].*

And a third student said:

*Like, if I think about it, I could probably do that stuff like Mr. D does, teach kids about their culture. Teaching kids their own culture is really good, and it will help them too . . . .*

Several of the parents/guardians also noted that their child comes home from the AIYE program eager to teach younger siblings and other family members what they have learned.

One community stakeholder who is also a former program participant talked about how AIYE created hope and confidence in him and his peers to go on to become successful adults. He particularly liked when AIYE brought in Native American college students to talk with the students.

While observing the program, Wilder Research staff noted the way in which Mr. D integrated a traditional Ojibwe story about gathering maple syrup with important life lessons such as (as said by Mr. D to his students) “*you appreciate things more when you have to work for it.*” In this way, the AIYE program staff help the students use traditional stories to integrate cultural values with life skills they need to be successful today and in their future. Staff also found ways to incorporate snippets of critical thinking throughout the program, for example, one comment Mr. D made in passing as he was telling the Ojibwe story: “*think about history and how people are treated based on who they are.*”

## **F. The culturally specific after-school program evaluation model**

The preceding parts of this report have focused on student outcomes. We turn now to a comprehensive evaluation model for culturally specific after-school programs.

Recent years have seen a proliferation of tools and instruments aimed at measuring the outcomes of after-school programs. In 2017, the Harvard Family Research Project published an inventory that included more than 100 measurement tools for evaluating Out-of-School Time Programs.

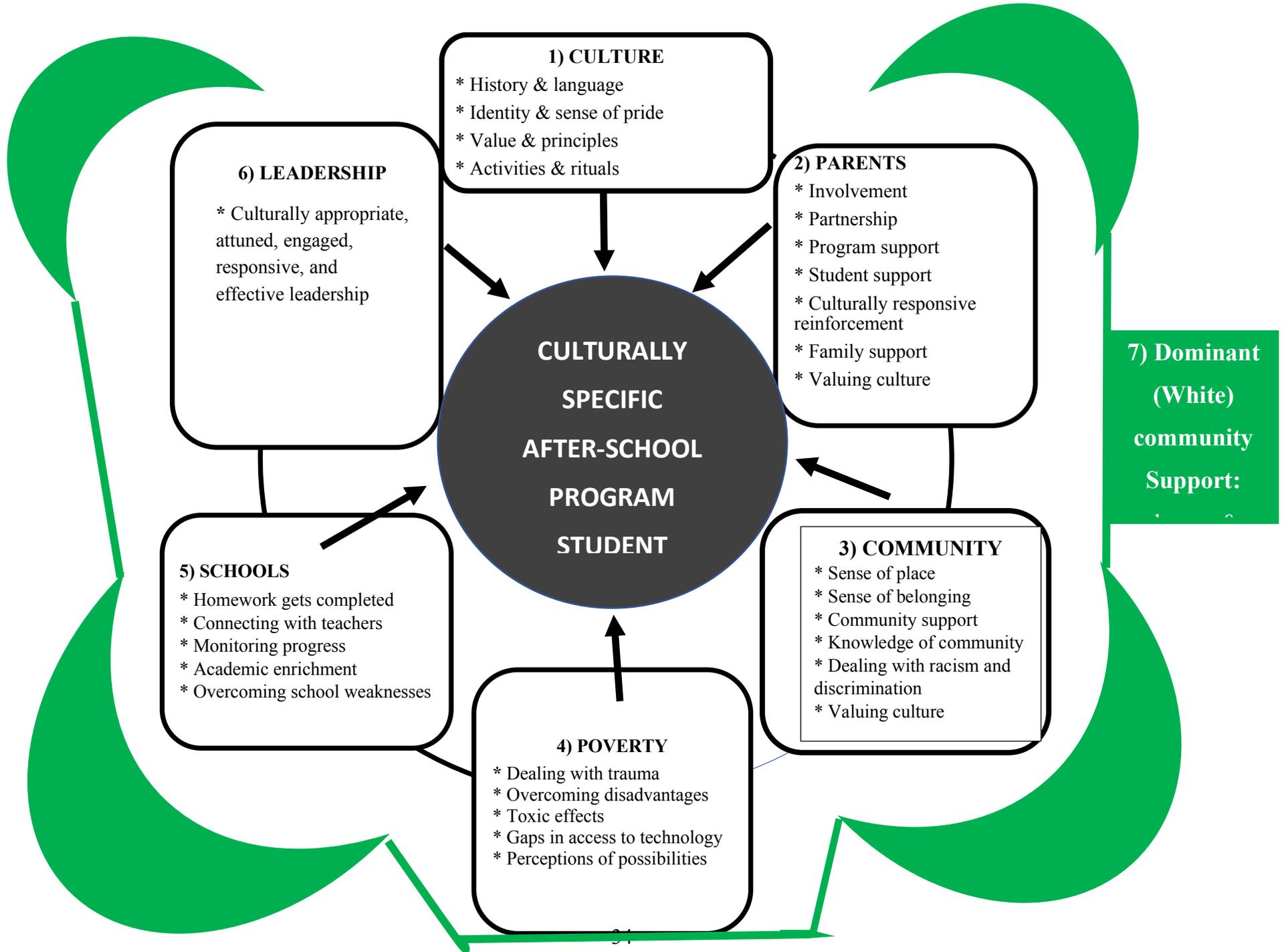
Categories of tools include academic achievement; educational attitudes; future orientation; mental health and behavior; healthy family relationships; identity and self-esteem; alcohol, tobacco, and drug use prevention; and program quality indicators. An example of the last category is the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) that is the centerpiece of the Saint Paul Out-of-School data network (Sprockets).

These standardized instruments do not always adequately address criteria that capture core dimensions of culturally specific after-school programming. The evaluation model of such programming presented here has been derived from working with Project SPIRIT and the American Indian Youth Enrichment Program. This model is built on seven critical dimensions for describing, elucidating, and evaluating community-based, culturally specific programs: (1) culturally specific characteristics and processes; (2) parent relationships; (3) characteristics of the cultural community served (4) socio-economic characteristics and factors; (5) relationship with the schools the children attend; (6) culturally appropriate and engaged leadership; and (7) nature and degree of support from the larger, dominant-culture (white) community.

For each of these seven critical dimensions, we will examine: (1) what the research literature says about the importance of each dimension; (2) what the evaluation found about the significance of each dimension; (3) examples of program practices related to each dimension as documented from Project SPIRIT and the American Indian Youth Enrichment Program; and (4) finally, we offer recommendations for program improvement in each dimension. At the end of this section, we share what we found in applying this evaluation model to Project SPIRIT and the American Indian Youth Enrichment Program, to demonstrate the potential for evaluating other culturally specific after-school programs using this model.

See the next page for an overview of the model. In the graphic of the model, student outcomes are in the center of the model; those are the ten student outcomes presented earlier. The six dimensions affecting program success surround and contribute to the student outcomes. The outer green represents the foundational importance of support from the dominant (white) community.

Turtle Island is the name for North America among many Native American groups. The name derives from the creation story in which North America is an island supported on the back of a turtle. To communicate the cultural significance of this evaluation approach, the model is depicted on the back of a turtle.



## 1. Culturally appropriate evaluation

In considering a culturally appropriate evaluation model for after-school programs, it is helpful to contextualize this model within the general field of program evaluation where cultural sensitivity has become a core principle of professional practice and evaluation theory. The American Evaluation Association (AEA) has taken an official position affirming the significance of cultural competence in evaluation. Cultural competence is a stance taken toward culture, not a discrete status or simple mastery of particular knowledge and skills. A culturally competent evaluator is prepared to engage with diverse segments of communities to include cultural and contextual dimensions important to the evaluation. Culturally competent evaluators respect the cultures represented in the evaluation. See the Appendix for more information about culture, and how culturally appropriate evaluation supports reliability and validity of the research findings.

## 2. The model applied to Project SPIRIT

### *a. Culturally specific after-school program characteristics and processes*

Students are provided with positive role models of successful African Americans and their contributions to social change. Students' interviews show that they are gaining a strong sense of African American identity grounded in understanding cultural history, the seven Kwanzaa principles, and appropriate cultural teaching materials and experiences. Students are taught by teachers from their own culture who look like them.

Classroom observations revealed that teachers identified students' different needs and varied the ways they taught to ensure they engaged all students. These methods included individual and group recitations, the use of digital presentations, and call and response. Call-and-response is a form of verbal interaction between the classroom leader and students in which all of the statements from the classroom leaders (calls) are followed by responses (in unison) from students. This is a familiar historically rooted cultural practice found in African heritage music, sermon, and conversation, based in the importance of the oral tradition of African people on the continent and in the diaspora. The roots of call-and-response can be traced to certain patriarchal African cultures. The program compares these callers to ritual leaders like the Yoruba captains, who preside over the call-and-response in musical structures that are embedded in and reflect traditional ideals of social organization.

An observable aspect of the Project SPIRIT curriculum is work done by classroom leaders to address negative images of people of African heritage in society. This is done by presenting positive images of people of African heritage during "This Day in History" and validating African cultural contributions (e.g., 7 Principles of Kwanzaa). Classroom leaders' behavior can be called culturally responsive pedagogy, which allows for the discussion of topics such as civil rights, discrimination, and slavery.

The program offers arts and crafts activities, free time for play, team sports, dance/movement activities, civic-oriented learning (e.g., promoting doing good deeds in the community such as picking-up trash, helping others), and African heritage history and cultural studies.

Here's a more in-depth example of cultural content.

*So, right now we're in the first week of the month devoted to Imani, which is the last principle of Kwanzaa. It's about faith—your hopes, beliefs and values. So, we did a review of the themes because we feel it's important to review. We reviewed all the Project SPIRIT themes: Strength, Perseverance, Imagination, Responsibility, Integrity and Talent. We did little puzzles, little word finds, light games. Then we get into really talking about students' beliefs and emphasize the importance of believing that you can do **anything**, and you can affect change through belief and hard work, no matter what your inabilities are.*

*For our Imani lesson this week, I found a wonderful story book about this little disabled African boy, based on a true story. His name is Emmanuel, a boy from Ghana. He has some sort of disability with his leg. But, his idea is that he can still do anything. But, in Africa, it was taboo to have a handicapped child. So, his community told his family that they should just get rid of him. But they kept him, and he wound up being determined to do what others could do. He rode a bike. He was in a marathon. He was a rock star for a kid. He overcame so many obstacles. We talk deeply about overcoming obstacles and not labeling yourself and being very aware of the labels that other people put on you. That's what this week is about. The entire month is about Imani, "To have faith, to believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle."*

#### **b. Parent engagement**

The Project SPIRIT program has monthly parent nights. A staff member explained:

*We make them mandatory, even though we can't force attendance. We tell them this is your pay. We tell them during the orientation. This is your pay for having a free program. We even broke it down to how much it will cost if you put your kid in the Y after school. Here's how much you're saving. Here's how much it actually costs for our programming to happen. If your kid misses a day and misses snack, here's how much. We put that information out there.*

*I constantly think about how to **not** burden families. That's not what we want to become. We want to find ways that people want to be engaged and will take the initiative to be engaged, realizing that there are people that just aren't there, just aren't capable, don't see a value and are just so inundated with life in general that they just can't wrap their brain around what parent engagement actually looks like. And everybody wants good things for their kids. I'm very clear on parents wanting to help their students. Parents want to be great parents. Some people just do not know how.*

*I want the world to understand that the parents we're working with face tough challenges. They come from the same exact system that their kids are now in. And it hasn't gotten any better. So they're dealing with the trauma of their own education. They've come out of and are part of the same system in which their kids are being educated. They haven't had good experiences in schools so therefore, they have to work menial jobs. They're just struggling to live, to exist. We, as a program, we can't deal with all of that. But we do deal with all that because we have to deal with all of that. Parents that just have to work. Parents that don't own their own cars, that get kicked out frequently of homes, that have felonies, that are dealing with serious trauma outside of the educational system. So that trauma has been passed down to their children in some*

*direct ways as well as indirectly. They're all sitting in our parent night classroom together connected by having experienced some level of trauma. That's what I see, what I feel, what I know.*

*Do we have normal kids that have perfectly normal home lives and come from families that are stable? Yes, we do. But those other families have significant needs that filter into the classroom and affect the whole way that we conduct our programming, our interactions with their families, and how the kids show up to our classrooms. And in the past, it's been like, okay. All we need is black teachers to solve this issue. Nope. Because some of the staff members are part of the same system. The same experience. And while they can better speak to each experience of the kids, that doesn't necessarily mean they can solve the entire problem. Don't put that all on us.*

### **c. Community connections**

Interviews revealed that program staff feel a deep connection to the African American community and they make that connection part of how they work with students and parents. The program director explains:

*Project SPIRIT serves Black families in the Black community. We know the historical trauma that has happened to our communities. We take that into account in everything we do.*

*Part of what makes us unique is that we do what we do as Black teachers. We create our own curriculum based on our knowledge of our community, our students, and African American culture and history. We do it. That is really important. I tell people this all the time. When people ask me, what makes Project SPIRIT unique? I answer, our teachers, our Black teachers. The Saint Paul Public School system does not hire many Black teachers and have not made a way for Black teachers to be in the classroom where most Black children are. Having Black students taught by Black teachers is important to our community.*

*When you talk to our students and many of our parents, they will tell you, "We would love for other teachers to teach an African American curriculum. It is really valuable for them to see it and to feel it from their Black teachers, their Black classroom leaders. Because, if they don't see it, how do they know it can exist? How do they know it's possible or that it's valid or that it's important? That's my philosophy. I would love to teach every single Black child in Saint Paul and Minneapolis.*

The issue of Black students being taught by Black teachers is a central element of Project SPIRIT's relationship with the community. It is a matter of some passion, as is appropriate. Here's further insight from the program director:

*I don't know how many studies have to show that if students can see themselves in their teacher, then they're more likely to be successful. And kids don't believe that education is for them if teachers don't look like them. And so, all of this literature is out there. All these studies are out there about it. Yet, the public school system isn't set up to provide Black and Brown people in the classroom.*

*How do we place value on Black and Brown people in the classroom. If we say we value that happening, how do we make it a reality? So, yes, it's important for me. I don't think that parents can articulate that. It's important for their students to be educated by Black*

*and Brown people. Because, again, parents are part of the same system, right? But the more conscious parents can definitely see the value in having Black and Brown people teach Black and Brown children. We can see it in our interactions with the students daily. We can speak to their existence in their own communities. Whatever comes up, we can, off the top-of-our-head, think of examples of what to relate it to in terms of our culture. If somebody mentions a song, we're like, I know that song. Don't sing that song. That's inappropriate. Whereas, a white teacher would just let that slide. I can say: "No. No. I know that song. You're not going to sing that song here."*

*It's invaluable to have that firsthand experience and be able to bring up examples, good and bad, and direct them in a way that says, "I've been through this experience and I've gotten here because of it. And here is the way to do it successfully." Whatever their goal is, we can help. And sometimes, I can tell them when they're facing a problem that I've specifically been through what they're facing, and here are the things that I've learned along the way in my journey and here are some of the things that you will encounter. And I can point out some of the road blocks that have been in the way, that are still in the way, which is why they are encountering them. There is value in that to make those connections for people and students in our community.*

Knowledge of and connections to the community become important in dealing with challenges.

Again, here are insights from a staff member.

*The school system and white people will miss things happening to students and how to help them because they don't have that "in" within the community. But we have that "in" because we know their auntie. You know, their auntie is at our church. Or we went to school with their cousins and their moms. A couple of Project SPIRIT staff members went to Central High School so they know all of our parents that went to Central, or know their brothers or their cousins. So, we're able to say, "Don't act like that." And they say, "What you gonna do? Call my mom?" And I say, "No. I know your auntie and I know that she would expect more. You know what I'm saying. I know she would expect more from you." And they'll be like, "How do you know?" And I can say, "Cuz, I know. Cuz I go to that church." We can easily draw on that experience and bring it up and use it as leverage. And then they get right real quick, if you know that connection to their mom. That comes from being part of the community.*

*There will be times where a kid will act up and they'll look at you like, What are you going to do about it? I'm like, All right. I'm about to call your mama right now. You don't know my mama's number. Yes, I do, because I just talked to her about housing. I have it right here on my cell phone. Then they're like, No! Don't call my mom.*

*Regular school teachers don't have students' parents' number in their cell phone. I have those numbers stored in my cell phone. I can call right now or I can pull up a text message and I know where she works because she gave me her work phone number too.*

Having community connections is a hiring criterion for Project SPIRIT. The program director explains:

*One of the questions that we ask during the interview process is, "What is your connection to the Black community?" What are your thoughts about the Black community?" That question is really to get at what they think are the community's successes and what do they know currently about the Black community. Some people will*

*answer with negative, stereotypical images. That's a red flag. I need people to be able to articulate the strengths of our community. If you don't know those, that's problematic. You'll always revert to those negative things. I need for you to be able to draw on all the things that make us good and whole in our community.*

*But also, I've learned that in choosing staff, a lot of people want to work with kids. Tons of people want to work with kids. And they'll say that, articulate that. You know, I just love working with kids. Okay. I'll shake my head and write it down. Loves working with kids.*

*And then I realized that the real question that we should be asking is, but do you love kids when they're throwing up? Do you love kids when they flip over a table and are hiding and then run down the hallway? Do you love kids when their parents are belligerent and they curse you out because you were trying to do your job? Do you really love kids? Because if you only love kids that comply with your rules, and if you only love kids that run up to you and give you hugs and smile every day and ask you, what's next, Miss So-and-So, then you don't love Project SPIRIT and you won't love Project SPIRIT. You won't love our families and you definitely won't love working with our kids and you will hate working with these schools. So I learned that. There are tons of people that say, I love kids. Okay. But will you love our kids, my kids in Project SPIRIT? That's what I look for.*

#### **d. Poverty as both a cultural and an economic factor**

All Project SPIRIT students are from families that are below the 200 percent of poverty line. Former Saint Paul Public Schools superintendent Curman Gaines, the district's first African American superintendent, viewed poverty as the major challenge facing educators in the district. The devastating, traumatic effects of poverty, he argued, could not be overcome by schools alone. Project SPIRIT is, by the nature of the students and parents served, an anti-poverty program holding out hope to students that they can have a better life. But the program is not recognized as fulfilling this anti-poverty function or funded to do so. Still, the fact that the program serves students in poverty is a central part of the Project SPIRIT story. A staff member explained:

*We talk about poverty with the kids. We have to. It is real. But we talk about it as it relates to collective work and responsibility and making sure that if there's a need in our community, even if we don't have anything ourselves, that it's our duty to find a way to fill it. We tell them that not having money, economic poverty, doesn't mean a poverty of community spirit and or absence of caring.*

#### **e. Relationship to schools**

Project SPIRIT takes place in schools so the relationship with schools is critical. Contractually, Saint Paul Public Schools provides the space and a snack. Everything else is about relationships with school administrators, teachers, and support staff. The Director explains:

*We are well-integrated into the two schools we've been with the longest. The relationship with newer schools depends on our liaison contact there, a person who is our middle person between our connection to the school and to the families. The buy-in from each school is important. Where we have a long-term relationship, the school people know that no matter what bumps in the road we encounter, we will manage them. They know*

*the positive effects of our programming on their students. They know that we've become an integral part of the language and the culture of success of Black students. So, in those schools, they actively recruit for us. During conferences, they'll tell parents that this would be a great program for your student.*

*In those schools, we've become part of the language, the lexicon of each of those schools. They tell us that there are other programs where they feel like it's a hassle, it's a battle, and they vie for who gets the title of working to make students successful. For us, they know that it's not a competition. We're here to help, to assist. We don't want to take your job. We know the role and the importance of teachers. We need to be in conversation about the success of each student. And, where you may fall short, we are here to help. Where we fall short, we need your input.*

*My hope is to become an integral part of the conversation about students' success. It's hard for a part-time employee to do that, to have those conversations. When we're only getting paid from 3pm to 6pm, what would motivate them to have a conversation at 2 o'clock, or to stop by in a classroom and have deeper conversations about the success of specific students? Some have it intrinsically, but some don't. Principals vary. Teachers vary. Students vary. We vary. It's all about staying focused on what's important and adapting as needed.*

#### *f. Culturally appropriate and engaged leadership*

The Director of Project SPIRIT, whose voice you have heard in this report, has the responsibilities of a school principal, *and more*, without the salary, prestige, and authority of a principal. The Director has responsibility for and is in charge of:

- recruiting and orienting students and families
- hiring, training, managing, and evaluating staff
- curriculum development and implementation
- relationships with schools
- budget management
- help in proposal-writing and fund-raising
- liaison with the community
- crisis management
- public relations

The Director is an African American woman with deep roots in the community. She has a degree in African American Studies. She has done and continues to do most of the culturally specific curriculum development. This is not a personnel evaluation, but from a program model perspective, culturally appropriate and engaged leadership is critical. She exemplifies that effective leadership.

g. *Dominant community support: Nature and scope*

*“The moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped.”*

— *Minnesota’s U.S. Senator, Hubert H. Humphrey, 1977.*

*“The test of the morality of the society is what it does for its children.”*

— *Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), Protestant Lutheran Pastor, active in the German resistance to the policies of Hitler and Nazism.*

Project SPIRIT began in 1993. Throughout the subsequent years, funding has always been fragile and variable. From year to year different foundations supported parts of the programs, United Way funds came and went, as did other funding sources (churches, government, schools). Funding uncertainties and variability have affected what the program has been able to offer and undermined the effectiveness ideal of consistency in programming, staffing, recruitment of participants, opportunities for curriculum and staff development, and the size of the program. This funding insecurity is not a reflection on the program but on the larger community’s commitment to serve the needs of vulnerable African American youth.

One of the challenges of constant fund-raising is that the program must repeatedly reinvent itself to fit funders’ latest priority, strategy, and eligibility category. For example, Project SPIRIT obtained United Way funding in a Literacy portfolio that required reading achievement outcomes and assessment even though those are not appropriate outcomes for an after-school program and not the essence of what Project SPIRIT does. When United Way precipitously ended that support in the middle of a contract in 2017, the program was forced to significantly downsize the number of schools served, number of children served, and number of days of operation. The board of directors of Interfaith Action has determined that the 2017-2018 school year is the last school year that it will host Project SPIRIT. The future of the program is dependent upon relocating the program to another entity and on finding funding to support the program within that new entity.

The appropriate place for consistent funding would be from something like Minnesota’s constitutionally funded legacy programs for arts and culture that includes African American culture.

At any rate, as depicted in the Model graphic (Figure 1, p. 13), the nature and scope of dominant (white) community support is a foundational issue that determines the sustainability of a program like Project SPIRIT. The movement asserting that *Black Lives Matter* invites a special supplementary emphasis: *Black Kids’ Lives Matter*. Broad community support for Project SPIRIT would send that message powerfully and directly. Unfortunately, even tragically, the message currently being sent to the African American community is quite the opposite.

This evaluation provides evidence that an African American culturally specific after-school program can enhance the lives and prospects of Black children. The effectiveness case has been made: Project SPIRIT meets the criteria for effectiveness laid out in the model and supported by the literature. We could elaborate the moral argument, captured by the Hubert Humphrey

quotation that opened this section, that caring for and offering special opportunities to kids whose families face steep economic obstacles is the right thing to do. But making the moral argument is a different task than this evaluation assignment. We leave it at this, the conclusion articulated in legal arguments where the moral judgment should be clear:

*In research terms, it's called **interocular significance**: It hits you between the eyes. That's the experience of evaluating Project SPIRIT, of meeting the children and staff involved in the program, and seeing what is being accomplished with very minimal resources under very difficult circumstances. **Res ipsa loquitur** (the thing speaks for itself).*

#### **A closing story**

*The importance of long-term, stable funding for program sustainability is illustrated by multiple-generation involvement in Project SPIRIT. Here is the story from a participant:*

*At a Bringing Faith to Life breakfast in Saint Paul in 2015, Reverend Divar Kemp opened his remarks to the faith community with the story of his connection to Project SPIRIT.*

*Twenty-eight years ago I was in an after-school program called Project SPIRIT. I'm happy to say that the integrity, values, and morality at the heart of this program have not changed, but have increased. My son is now in that program and learning about African American culture, things that I believe he will carry throughout his life because it has had an influence on my own life.*

*As my wife says, "If we had to pay, we couldn't afford to pay, because you can't put a price tag on Project SPIRIT."*

*My son was sick the other day and didn't want to go to school but he knew if he didn't go to school, he couldn't go to Project SPIRIT and he didn't want to miss that, so he said, "Dad, would you give me some of that nasty medicine so I can go to school and go to Project SPIRIT."*

### **3. The model applied to American Indian Youth Enrichment program**

#### **a. Culturally specific after-school program model**

There are several features of the American Indian Youth Enrichment Program that exemplify how the program is culturally specific:

- (1) All Native American staff
- (2) Incorporating Indigenous language, culture, and traditions into the program:
  - Smudging
  - Providing instructions in Lakota or Ojibwe, as well as teaching and reinforcing Lakota and Ojibwe vocabulary
  - Sharing traditional Native American stories and incorporating activities, like plays and discussion, to promote deep understanding of these messages
  - Doing cultural activities and crafts like beading, drumming and singing, etc.

Reinforcing positive behavior and social interactions through traditional teaching (Lakota Virtues)

### *b. Parent engagement*

Although a few of the students we interviewed said their parents, grandparents, and other important adults in their lives had participated in the AIYE program by coming to an event and/or a field trip, many of the students indicated that they do not tell their families much about the program. The students who did tell their family about the program were happy and proud to do so, however. One student said, “Our dad, he hung our shields up [from a project they did in the AIYE program]. And we made new drums, and he put them on the table in the living room. . . . A project we made or the field trips we went on, I tell them about it.”

Although several of the parents/guardians in the focus group had participated in field trips or other activities with the AIYE program, a few also mentioned barriers to participating such as their work schedule. These parents/guardians suggested that activities on a Saturday or later in the evening might be more accessible for them.

A couple of community stakeholders suggested ways that AIYE can improve family engagement. One said:

*A lot of times we [as parents] get sent pieces of paper and it just feels like people didn't even care, so that's why they just sent a piece of paper. And so for [AIYE] to show that they're actually showing interest in what our needs are, for them to actually physically be there, because we're very face to face people. We don't like getting a piece of paper. Even a phone call; a phone call is better than email.*

Another community stakeholder talked about the “digital divide” – the lack of access to the Internet and related resources among Native American families, which means that community-based organizations need to find other ways to reach these families. Finally, a third community stakeholder said:

*I think is valuable to continually provide programing that is shaped by participants and also takes parent preferences into account, as well and keeps the family up to speed on what the program is doing, what the goals of the program are and continually asking for parent or guardian or family feedback on how the program can best meet their needs.*

We suggest that the AIYE program could find more ways to help students share what they are doing in the program with their parents and family members. Perhaps, explicitly give students assignments to ask their parents or grandparents about different things and bring the info back to the program or suggest specifically at the end of the day that students might want to tell their families about whatever activity they completed that day. Or the program could send a list of suggested questions home that parents/guardians and other family members might ask their students so they can stay engaged and learn more about what their student is doing in the program.

### *c. Community connections*

The model sets forth that connection to community is important in that it provides a sense of place, a sense of belonging, community support, knowledge of community, support for dealing with racism and discrimination, and a valuing of culture. The narrative presented above is filled with examples of ways in which the AIYE program is deeply connected to community. We see

in the narrative examples of how AIYE staff members approach discipline of children in culturally appropriate and culturally rooted ways; of how staff members' engagement with students encountering difficulties show awareness of historical trauma and colonization; and in how staff members are deeply aware of ways in which racism and discrimination have affected American Indian families' ability to interact with the school system. We also see discussions above of how students are exposed to positive American Indian adult role models, which could fairly be attributed to the program's deep connections to community.

#### *d. Poverty and trauma*

The reality of poverty and historical trauma presents challenges to the AIYE program. Program activities are designed to support healing from historical trauma. As one community stakeholder put it:

*[Native Americans live in] a society that was not created by us or for us, but yet find ourselves forced to live within. Healing from generational trauma is still affecting our families and our students today.*

This stakeholder talked about the economic barriers of families to participating in any out-of-school time activities, as well as mental health issues that might make it more challenging for students and families to participate. He also described how Native Americans who live in urban areas also face an additional challenge of being removed from access (that is typically more readily available in reservation communities) to traditional ceremonies and other ways to foster spirituality. One stakeholder even indicated that a key purpose of AIYE is to empower kids who are dealing with historical trauma.

Here are examples of how the program encounters and deals with poverty-related trauma:

- One grandma said that her kids have severe emotional and behavioral problem so she lets them come to the AIYE program as a reward which helps with their behavior.
- A kid who was bullied (beat up) during school wanted to go to the AIYE program anyway because he felt so good about the program and felt safe there.
- One kid noted that if a student is hungry, Ms. Sue will bring them food.

#### *e. Relationship to schools*

In the focus group, parents/guardians talked about there being confusion between the "regular" after school program that is run by AIMS or SPPS vs. the AIYE program. Some of the parents/guardians weren't clear that these were two different programs and expressed a strong preference for the culturally specific AIYE program. One parent/guardian noted that Rebecca provided extra help to ensure her child could get enrolled in the AIYE program before the program started, after the parent had inadvertently enrolled her child in the other after-school program at AIMS.

The parents/guardians also complained that the AIMS school staff and the other after-school program staff do not know anything about the AIYE program or the status of their student while at the AIYE program, which sometimes causes frustration when they need to get information or

reach someone about a concern. The parents/ guardians all indicated that their solution to this problem was to have Rebecca's cell phone number and to contact her directly (which was only a solution after they knew about the AIYE program, actually got their student enrolled, and found out the hard way how to reach her). It is unclear if this is a sustainable solution from the AIYE program staff's perspective.

#### *f. Leadership*

It became clear from the community stakeholder interviews that there are a lot of caring Native American adults who make the AIYE program what it is. Two community stakeholders specifically mentioned the leadership and vision of the program's founder, Sheila White Eagle. Further, the experiences students have in AIYE contribute to their leadership skills and in some cases these students have turned into program and/or community leaders:

*I think [AIYE is] the best thing ever. As a child, one of my highlights of my summer was being in this program every year. And I'm just really happy that I'm allowed to be a part of it now, and keep doing what I got to experience with the youth.*

He also said:

*I think its building relationships with each other and with the community is the number one thing. I think [AIYE] gives the children a chance to become more comfortable with each other and build those relationships. All my peers when I was in the program, all of them have graduated high school and are off being productive adults, and I think that's something that's really cool because we can all go back and say that we were all in this program together at one point.*

Several parents/guardians observed improvements in how the program is organized and structured, and the communication they receive home from the program staff from this year as compared with last year (possibly due to a change in program coordinators).

#### *g. Broader community support and funding*

One community stakeholder succinctly described the gap between AIYE and other culturally based programs and the funders who support them:

*Funders—they only have one world view, and it's a western, Eurocentric worldview that places more value on commodities, money. An Indigenous worldview is more based on a relationship; it's a relationship economy.*

Community stakeholders suggested that funders need to actually meet some of the families served by AIYE to fully understand their needs and how to best serve them. One said:

*I think that funders need to understand the playing field isn't level; that some people start out far above others, and that some students start way in the hole, and we need to create programming that really empowers and lifts up people who have started out so far behind their peers. . . . So I think funders just really need to understand the historical context and the values of these communities and understand how our current systems aren't meeting their needs, and how we're failing so many of these children.*

Another said:

*I think with a lot of funders, they put out what they want, what they expect, you have to do by their rules without considering the fact of who they're allowing to apply for their grants. We do not always fit in to their box. We are a people of the circle. We are a circle people, and circles don't fit into squares.*

A few students and parents/guardians and a couple of community stakeholders commented that they wish the program extended to the older students at AIMS (6th-8th grade) and/or to offer it to other students who go to schools other than AIMS. The program may want to consider expansion, and to identify the additional funding and other resources would be needed to expand the program in this way. Other community stakeholders mentioned the program needs more funding to be able to serve more families or to hire more staff to support existing programming.

One community stakeholder suggested that funders need to be cognizant of the development time needed for staff to build and maintain a strong program. Therefore, funders should pay for non-programming time to promote staff development and reflection needed for continuous program improvement.

## **G. Research basis for culturally specific after-school programs**

Full citations to the sources noted in this section are provided in the References section of this report.

### **1. Research on culturally specific after-school program characteristics and processes**

It is well-documented that children do better in school when curriculum and instruction are culturally relevant and responsive (Gay 2013, 2010; Howard and Terry 2011; Franklin et.al. 2001). In *Culturally Relevant Teaching*, Gay asserts, “teachers must learn how to recognize, honor and incorporate the personal abilities of their students into their teaching strategies.” Furthermore, Janice Hale, author of *Learning While Black*, suggests that “the instruction should be so delightful that the children love coming to school and find learning to be fun and exciting” (Hale, 2001). Research has shown that “African American children and adolescents who learn that others have negative perspectives on African Americans but who have these messages mediated by parents, peers, and other important adults are less likely to have negative outcomes and more likely to be resilient in adverse conditions.” (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008, p. 3.)

The research literature on quality after-school care and positive youth development is less explicit about cultural relevance and more focused on the importance of “positive emotional climate,” “supportive relationships,” and “opportunity to belong” (Bodilly & Beckett, pp. 65-68) as key components of quality after-school programs. These terms fall short of specifying culture as an influencing factor. However, the basis for including these dimensions in culturally specific programming is that traditional programs fail to achieve these three characteristics because they do not explicitly address marginalized students’ culture.

In their summary of factors that contribute to positive youth outcomes in quality after-school programs, Bodilly and Beckett identify “appropriate content and pedagogy relative to the children’s needs and the program’s mission, with opportunities to engage.” (p. 73). The strategy of offering culturally specific programming is one key way to achieve this goal.

In *Making Play Work: The Promise of After-School Programs for Low-Income Children*, Robert Halpern examines case studies of several after-school programs, which he views as exemplary. In both programs, he finds that staff “made an effort to connect activities to children’s lives. For instance, a mural might use historical figures that were important to children’s ethnic or racial group” (p. 131).

Most evidence for the importance of culturally responsive after-school programming comes from evaluation reports of specific programs. In *The Impact of After-School Programs That Promote Personal and Social Skills* (2007), Durlak and Weissberg discuss the importance of after-school programs being aligned with the needs and values of the community. They note, “For example, several successful programs have offered programs that are culturally tailored to the racial and ethnic composition of their target population” (p. 27). (See also Belgrave et al., 2000; Chase, 2000; Fuentes, 1983; Vincent & Guinn, 2001)

In their 2002 paper, *Using culturally sensitive theories and research to meet the academic needs of low-income African American children*, Tucker and Herman discuss the success of “the Model Program,” which is “a community-based effort to alter the educational outcomes of African American children that is grounded in *culturally sensitive theory* (SET) and research.” Their evaluation of the program found that it positively impacted students’ GPAs as well as built confidence. They conclude, “It is clear from the success of the Model Program that one way to promote the academic and social success of socioeconomically disadvantaged African American children is to provide them with culturally sensitive, multidimensional education. . . .” (p. 769). They go on:

*African American children, like other youth, want to be successful in school and in life; however, many do not have the skills, the behavioral repertoires (knowledge of success behaviors), and the parent, teacher, school, and community support needed to achieve this goal. Enabling African American youth to experience academic and social success requires not only the active effort of their families, schools, teachers, and communities but also academic and social training that is intense and that is culturally sensitive”* (Tucker & Herman, 2002, p. 771).

Another study by Mason and Chuang (2001) examined the impact of participation in Kuumba Kids, an arts-based cultural enrichment program, on student development and behavior. The Kuumba Kids program engaged students for two hours per week in a theater and dance curriculum highlighting African culture. The researchers used a survey designed to assess student behavior that was administered to students, parents, and teachers. The researchers then compared outcomes for seventeen students participating in the Kuumba Kids program with outcomes for sixteen students not involved with the program. The researchers found that children in the Kuumba Kids after-school arts program demonstrated significantly higher growth in self-esteem, leadership ability, and social skills compared to similar students who did not participate

in the program. Furthermore, the researchers found that over the course of the semester in which students were engaged in the program, parents perceived improvements in their participating children's attention, adaptability, as well as social and leadership skills.

Finally, and very important, a strong cultural identity has been found to be *a protective factor* for students, helping mitigate the effects of poverty, reduce societal alienation, and help prevent risky behaviors (Brook, 1998; Chase, 2010; Cherry, 1998; Harris, 2000; and Miller, 1999).

## **2. Research on parent engagement**

Parent engagement is discussed in much of the literature on after-school care, though what is meant by parent engagement varies significantly by program. In *Making Out-of-School Time Work*, Bodilly and Beckett explore a 2001 RAND Corporation synthesis of elementary after-school-care literature "to identify the key structures and process factors shown or upheld by experts in the field to be associated with high-quality after-school programs or positive child outcomes (education attainment, emotional development, health, etc.)" (p. 66). Family involvement was one of the 15 quality indicators identified by the RAND Corporation in this study.

In Tucker & Herman's (2002) evaluation of the Model Program discussed above, they found that the program went beyond parent engagement to promote parent trainings to promote "positive parenting behaviors that have been found to be significantly associated with higher academic achievement, higher adaptive skills, and/or lower maladaptive behaviors among low-income African American children" (p. 768). More recent literature from the Search Institute also highlights the important and often overlooked role of families in children's development (Pekel et.al., 2015).

While the parent engagement discussed above is part of programming, or an input, it has also been found to be the result of programming, or an outcome. Bodilly and Beckett (2005) discuss a study of 21st Century Learning Centers that found "a higher degree of parental involvement by participants' families compared to comparison families" (p. 49). Specifically, the findings show that "parents of elementary school participants were more likely to report that they helped their child with homework at least three times last week" (Bodilly & Beckett, p. 49).

## **3. Research on community-based characteristics and dimensions**

In the same study from RAND Corporation cited above, community contacts is a broad category that contains family involvement as well as use of volunteers and community partnerships. In their summary of indicators of high-quality after-school programs, Bodilly & Beckett (2005) cite integrated family and community partners as one of nine core characteristics of quality afterschool programs (p. 73).

Research and fieldwork show that parent-school-community partnerships improve schools, strengthen families, build community support, and increase student achievement and success.

[www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB11\\_ParentInvolvement08.pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB11_ParentInvolvement08.pdf)

#### 4. Research on socio-economic factors: The traumatic effects of poverty

Over the last 15 years, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have received increasing attention as an important factor to address in any program working with at-risk youth. Literature on ACEs has led to trauma-informed approaches to working with low-income and minority children and youth in school and in out-of-school time. A report published by the Family Informed Trauma Treatment Center summarizes the connection between poverty and trauma:

Families living in urban poverty often encounter multiple traumas over many years. Further, they are less likely than families living in more affluent communities to have access to the resources that may facilitate the successful negotiation of their traumatic experiences. Thus, many families have difficulty adapting (p. 2).

*In Robert Halpern's 2003 book, Making Play Work, he spends an extensive amount of time reviewing the emergence of after-school programs as a way to address some of the many challenges facing low-income students. Specifically, he describes how after-school programs have the opportunity to address the "social dimension of children's learning," which is often missed during in-school time focus on academics (p. 116). He also raises the opportunities that after-school programs provide for children to have "the social space they need, for spontaneity, physicality, and unrestricted movement." (p. 116). He goes on to note that, "Taken together, these attributes make after-school programs a compelling institution – at least in ideal terms. This inherent attractiveness is reinforced by the sense that low-and-moderate income children are not getting developmental needs met in other settings" (p. 116).*

Yet, in his exploration of the quality of the programs, he does not address poverty head-on except when describing the rise of after-school programs as one way to address the needs of kids in poverty. In terms of how they could do this, Halpern is less direct. He finds that the high-quality programs he studied had a clear mission with well-trained staff who took the time to build relationships with the participants. He also noted that "staff recognized the importance of affirming for children that they have something to contribute" (p. 131). Yet he fails to link this directly back to poverty or socio-economic status.

In their research on "the Model Program," Tucker and Herman highlight "the economic and social barriers to the academic and social success of many African American children." They go on to note:

*These realities provide impetus for developing community-based partnership education programs designed to self-empower African American children for academic and social success under any socioeconomic conditions that exist in their lives.*

#### 5. Research on the relationship with schools

In *Summer Learning Programs: Investigating Strengths and Challenges*, Hall discusses the importance of partnerships between schools and community organizations, including after-school programs:

*Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have emphasized the value in harnessing meaningful school-community partnerships to promote enhanced development and*

*learning among youth (Anderson-Butcher, 2004; Doll & Lyon, 1998). One of the major strengths of school-community partnerships for youth learning is the opportunity to leverage family, school, and community resources to ameliorate nonacademic barriers to learning and healthy development that schools alone are not equipped to assume responsibility for (e.g., family conflict and instability, poor or unsafe neighborhood conditions, aggression, antisocial attitudes and behaviors, poor peer relationships; Anderson-Butcher, 2004 ;Steen & Noguera, 2010; Warren, 2005).*

Research has suggested that the most effective partnerships enable new interpersonal relationships, including cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among diverse, once-separate stakeholders (Anderson-Butcher, 2004; Lawson, 2004) (p. 6).

## **6. Research on engaged and supported leadership**

In their summary of indicators of high-quality after-school programs, Bodilly & Beckett (2005) cite stable, trained personnel as one of nine factors associated with positive youth outcomes from the literature (p. 73).

In *Making Play Work*, Halpern (2003) raises issues of leadership and training as key to improving after-school activities. Specifically, he calls out accreditation or licensing and technical assistance as two ways to strengthen programs with external accountability. He also raises the importance of staff training and ongoing support for staff through in-service training and observation, as well as ways to reduce turnover, professionalize and diversify the after-school workforce.

The Model Program studied by Tucker & Herman (2002) also included teacher training (p. 768).

## **7. Research on dominant community support**

A 2014 report of the school-focused Reform Support Network looked in-depth at the importance of dominant community support as a factor in overall school effectiveness.

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/implementation-support-unit/tech-assist/strategies-for-community-engagement-in-school-turnaround.pdf>

The National Education Association has concluded:

*Research and fieldwork show that the **whole community** has an essential **role** to play in the growth and **development** of its young people.*

[www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB11\\_ParentInvolvement08.pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB11_ParentInvolvement08.pdf)

In *Making Play Work*, Halpern (2003) addresses the need for “more adequate, stable and flexibly structured funding” (p.150) for after-school programs. This is a core issue of dominant culture support (or lack thereof).

## H. Overall recommendations for culturally specific after-school programs and their stakeholders

1. *Reconceptualize, support, and fund programs as culturally based, community-connected, youth development programs.* Categorizing and funding these programs as “after-school” programs simply describes when they occur (after school) and positions them as a continuation of the school day, with the same goals, approaches, and outcomes. While these culturally focused, community-connected, student-centered, and trauma-informed programs help students with homework and support academic development, they are more comprehensive in supporting all dimensions of healthy youth development, including strong cultural identity, which is positively related to academic outcomes.
2. *Connect programs to the University of Minnesota’s Institute for Child Development and Center for Youth Development.* A formal relationship with programs at the university would ensure that the programs continue to be research-based. Additionally, this relationship with the university and with other colleges would provide a consistent source of graduate student volunteers to enrich the program.
3. *Position community support and funding as ongoing legacy commitments.* Minnesota has made a sustainable, tax-based commitment to preserve Minnesota’s history and cultural heritage, which includes support for culturally specific initiatives. The year-to-year challenge of fundraising and financial uncertainty creates a stressful environment for these programs and their staff, which is felt by students and families. Funding insecurity is not a reflection on the programs or their demonstrated effectiveness, but rather on the larger community’s lack of commitment to serve the needs of vulnerable African American and American Indian youth. The nature and scope of dominant (white) community support is a foundational issue that determines the sustainability of these programs. The evaluation shows the programs are effective, and therefore, the decision to support them is a moral issue.

### 1. Project Spirit program development recommendations

Project Spirit has been making efficient use of very scarce resources, but that has meant operating at a basic level of effectiveness providing minimal services, which limits impact. With more comprehensive funding, the program could be made more effective in four priority areas.

1. *More individualized attention for students.* The first priority would be to hire more, better-paid staff to provide a smaller staff-student ratio that would allow for more individualized and personalized attention for students. Research shows the significant results achieved with smaller student-staff ratios, including fewer discipline problems.
2. *Volunteer recruitment, support, and coordination.* To take advantage of college student, high school student, church, and other volunteers, the program would benefit from having an experienced and knowledgeable recruitment and volunteer coordinator. This position could include outreach and recruitment of students as well as recruiting, monitoring, training, and supporting volunteers in the program. This would also provide more individualized attention to students and a deeper connection to the community.

3. *Attendance support to enhance dosage.* The greatest impact of the program comes from regular, consistent attendance. This increases the program “dosage,” which means a greater degree of engagement with students on a consistent basis, which yields better results for students. However, attendance is not as consistent as desirable, which affects school performance as well as program potential for impact. A staff position dedicated to working with families, students, and schools to enhance attendance would make a difference in cumulative and sustainable impact.
4. *Curriculum development.* The Project SPIRIT director and staff have been creatively developing and adapting a variety of curriculum materials, exercises, and student engagement processes that are unique and innovative, especially related to the *Kwanzaa* principles. With appropriate curriculum development support, these materials could be more professionally packaged to be available for future program use and for other programs throughout the world to use. There is a vibrant commercial curriculum-sharing platform on the Internet. The curriculum, properly packaged and evaluated, with intellectual property rights protected, could become a source of revenue for the program as well as supporting greater effectiveness and impact with consistent use, evaluation, and improvement over time.

## **2. American Indian Youth Enrichment Program Recommendations**

Based on the observations and information gathered from students and parents, there are a few suggestions for how the American Indian Youth Enrichment Program could increase its impact:

1. *Clarify relationships between AIYE and SPPS.* Many of the parents expressed concerns or frustration about issues with the transportation and some were also confused about how the AIYE program interacts with the school site and other programs (e.g. Flipside) that operate out of the site during the same time period. The AIYE program staff could proactively reach out to SPPS, AIMS, and the other programs to inform families of their options and recruit the right families to the right programs. Additional attention on how to improve the reliability of transportation is also warranted. On a similar note, one community stakeholder suggested that the AIYE program has a role in helping other, non-culturally specific out-of-school time programs learn more about how to better serve Native American students.
2. *Continue emphasis on staff establishing good relationships with families.* We understand that there will be a new program coordinator hired for next school year. Many of the parents and students spoke about the deep trust they feel for Ms. Rebecca (the current program coordinator), Mr. D (the program instructor), and the other staff. Participants really believe that the staff care about them. The adults who work for the AIYE program serve as strong, culturally relevant role models for students. It is critical that the program hire someone as the next program coordinator (and maintain/fill the other staff roles) to build these trusting relationships by providing proactive and clear communication, attending to the individual needs of students and families, connecting students to resources they need, and maintaining a positive, cheerful, and supportive climate during

the program. Importantly, one community stakeholder noted how allowing time for staff development activities and training, as well as making space for reflection and program improvement efforts, are critical.

3. *Maintain the cultural focus of the program.* Students and parents alike appreciated the culturally based stories, activities, and Indigenous language that are key parts of the AIYE program. Also, the messages and values behind the stories resonated with students. The program should continue to find creative ways to incorporate culturally based practices into activities that also support social-emotional learning and academic skills development. This could also extend into the “self-actualization” arenas of career and personal values exploration. Community stakeholders also suggested more focus on Indigenous foods and medicines (e.g., natural remedies for common ailments), physical activity, powwow regalia making and drumming/dancing, Indigenous environmentalism, Indigenous sciences (e.g., “why a canoe floats,”), Indigenous pedagogy (“Native Americans are left-brain learners – we need to watch, then try it out ourselves”). On the other hand, one community stakeholder also encouraged the program to support other aspects of the students’ identities and interests, too:

*I do think making sure staff are really youth centered in each engagement with young people [is important]. So really taking the time, I think is a challenge for programs and there is the piece about their cultural identity, but every individual is unique in the fact that that might be only one of their identities.*

4. *Strengthen youth mentoring opportunities.* Some of the older students who we interviewed really enjoyed helping out the younger students and felt honored to have that role. The AIYE program should consider creating more opportunities for older youth to get involved with the program as mentors for the younger students. The AIYE program recently added a AmeriCorpsVista volunteer from the Minnesota Literacy Council to develop a program with youth alumni from Harding High School (which hosts Saint Paul’s American Indian Studies program). This school year (2017-18) was used for planning and next school year the program will be implemented. The Vista volunteer is developing curriculum for the AIYE program that incorporates Ojibwe stories and values and emphasizes social-emotional learning for middle school students. Community stakeholders supported this suggestion and one also suggested that AIYE students do more community volunteering, such as at Elders’ Lodge. Another community stakeholder suggested that the AIYE program focus on intentionally connecting youth who “age out” of the program with other culturally appropriate after-school and summer opportunities.
5. *Find more ways to help students share what they are doing in the program with their parents and family members.* Perhaps, explicitly give students assignments to ask their parents or grandparents about different things and bring the info back to the program or suggest specifically at the end of the day that students might want to tell their families about whatever activity they completed that day. Or the program could send a list of suggested questions home that parents/guardians and other family members might ask their students so they can stay engaged and learn more about what their student is doing

in the program. One community stakeholder suggested events like evening programming where students and families could watch an educational film together. Parents/guardians in the focus group also indicated an interest in more family events, although they also expressed lots of barriers, especially their work schedules, that might prevent them from participating. The AIYE program received a grant from Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) in 2017 to increase parent engagement, which has allowed the program to host activities such as a family trip to the Science Museum of Minnesota. Parent engagement is also a focus of the Americorps Vista volunteer from Minnesota Literacy Council. Anecdotally, although families may struggle to participate due to other life obligations, they do express enjoyment in these opportunities.

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## Appendix B — Methods

Dr. Nicole MartinRogers (*Anishinabe*) and her colleagues from Wilder Research completed the following evaluation activities for the American Indian Youth Enrichment (AIYE) Program:

- One-on-one in-person interviews with 12 students who are current or former participants of the American Indian Youth Enrichment Program in fall 2017
- One focus group with seven parents/guardians of AIYE students in fall 2017
- Interviews with five community stakeholders including the director of the Saint Paul Public Schools Indian Education program, a partner from a literacy program that provides a Vista volunteer to the AIYE program, a staff member from a partner organization in the community, a volunteer and partner/grandparent of AIYE program participants, and a representative from a local out-of-school time program network.
- Three observations of the program, including a field trip to Central Library, in spring 2017
- A review of program materials and documents that are shared with families in spring 2017

The purpose of this report is to illustrate the ways in which the AIYE program exemplifies a culturally specific after-school program, and the impact of the program on students and families. The results of these evaluation activities were analyzed within the culturally based out-of-school-time evaluation framework developed by Michael Quinn Patton and colleagues. Throughout this report, we include several suggestions for how the framework might be modified to match what was observed in the program.

The conclusions reached by the Project Spirit evaluation are derived from several sources, including: (1) direct observations of the programming; (2) interviews with students; (3) interviews with program staff; (4) interviews with parents; (5) interviews with community key informants; and, (6) review of program documentation, including curriculum and lesson plans. Detailed reports were written presenting the results of classroom observations and students' interviews. Those more detailed reports provided the basis for the data and findings about Project Spirit in this synthesis report.

**Appendix C —  
A model for evaluating culturally specific after-school programs**

**Evaluation questions by dimension**

<b>Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs</b>	<b>Culturally specific after-school program outcome criteria</b>
<i>Self-actualization</i>	10. Students are encouraged to aspire to live a fulfilling life.
<i>Self-esteem</i>	9. Students develop positive self-esteem grounded in their individual strengths and qualities.
<i>Belonging:</i> Social ability, sense of connection	5. Students feel cared about, valued, and important. 6. Students engage with culturally appropriate and stimulating learning resources and develop a strong connection to their cultural heritage and identity. 7. Students are exposed to positive role models and build positive relationships as part of a culturally specific community. 8. Students develop interpersonal skills.
<i>Safety/security:</i> Health, family	2. Students are safe. 3. Students get help, as needed, completing their homework. 4. Students get help solving personal problems.
<i>Basic needs:</i> Food, shelter	1. Students get fed.

**Culturally specific program characteristics and processes with evaluation questions**

**Premise:** Culturally specific programs should be evaluated using a culturally responsive evaluation model. Here are the kinds of questions that should guide a culturally responsive evaluation:

- a. What is the culturally specific orientation of the program? How is that orientation manifested in the program’s values, principles, philosophy, vision, mission, and goals?
- b. What is the culturally specific nature of the program’s curriculum? What activities are culturally specific? What processes, exercises, and materials are culturally specific? How are they used and incorporated into the children’s experiences?
- c. What culturally specific outcomes for children does the program aspire to achieve?
- d. To what extent and in what ways are program staff appropriate for and well-matched to the culturally specific approach of the program? For example, are staff from the cultural group that the program serves?
- e. To what extent are there culturally specific rituals, observances, interactions, and events that support the culturally specific nature and goals of the program?
- f. To what extent and in what ways do children in the program achieve the culturally specific intended outcomes of the program? What outcome data are appropriate and are they culturally sensitive?
- g. To what extent are evaluators culturally competent to conduct the evaluation in accordance with the American Evaluation Association’s cultural competence criteria?

## **Culturally specific evaluation framework for evaluating after-school programs for American Indian and African American students**

### *Setting the context*

The evaluation begins by setting the context for the program.

- (1) Describe the community, particular characteristics of the community that are relevant to the after-school program, and the history of the program in the context of and in relationship to the community. Identify important community characteristics that shed light on any aspects of the after-school program. Describe ways in which the community has been changing in the past and appears likely to be changing in the future.
- (2) Describe the relationship with the schools and school district.
- (3) Describe how the program is funded, including a description of the stability of the funding.
- (4) Describe student and family characteristics.
- (5) Describe other factors that are important for understanding the program's context.

### *Parent engagement*

- (1) In what ways and to what extent are parents involved in the after-school programming?
- (2) How, if at all, are parents engaged in program advising?
- (3) What are communication patterns between staff and the parents?
- (4) What are parents' experiences with and perceptions of the program?
- (5) How does the program deal with family problems and challenges that affect students?

### *Community-based characteristics and dimensions*

- (1) Does the program explicitly address the children's relationship to the community?
- (2) How, if at all, does the program incorporate volunteers from the community? If so, in what ways and in what capacities? What are the volunteers' perspectives of the program?
- (3) What community resources are used to support the program? How is the program funded? How does that funding stream, or streams, affect the program, student participation, staffing, and resources?

### *Socio-economic characteristics and factors: Poverty*

The socioeconomic status of children in the program is a critical aspect of understanding the program and the outcomes targeted by the program for the children. In particular, programs serving families in poverty, as these programs do, are affected by the trauma of living in poverty. The cumulative evidence is that poverty is a source of toxic stress for families and children. How an after-school program addresses that toxic stress is a core element of this culturally specific evaluation model.

- (1) What are the socioeconomic characteristics of the children served by the program?
- (2) How do socioeconomic characteristics of the students and families affect how the program is operated, the services offered, and any other program elements?

- (3) How, if at all, do the socioeconomic characteristics of students and families affect the nature and degree of their participation in the program? For example, attendance? Resources available?
- (4) How does the socioeconomic status of students and families affect program staff roles and responsibilities?

#### *Relationship to the school system*

- (1) What is the nature of the relationship between the program and the students' school?
- (2) How do staff communicate with students' teachers, if at all?
- (3) To what extent and in what ways does the program involve doing homework?
- (4) What academic offerings beyond homework does the program offer? How are those determined? How do they relate to the culturally specific model for after-school programs?

#### *Culturally appropriate and engaged leadership*

- (1) What leadership characteristics are needed in directing and managing a culturally sensitive programming model?
- (2) What tensions need to be managed between the dominant culture and the culture represented by the program? How do the following factors affect how the program is managed: institutional racism; marginalization of people experiencing poverty; marginalization of minority groups; inequalities in access to knowledge and technology; prejudiced stereotypes; and low expectations?
- (3) What role must the program leadership play in fostering and engaging in collaborative efforts with both educational and nonprofit organizations?
- (4) Budgeting challenges: What particular challenges are there in raising funds to support a culturally specific program? What is the role of the program leadership in fundraising, pursuing funding priorities that may not be well-matched to the program, and dealing with limited resources?
- (5) What are the consequences of unstable funding, year-to-year scrounging for money, changing priorities among foundations, and challenges related to funder-mandated reporting processes and results?
- (6) What opportunities are there for program directors to collaborate with other organizations? How does that fit into the organization's mission and networks?
- (7) What special interpersonal skills are needed for supervising teachers, working with school teachers and principals, and for representing the program to funders, other nonprofits, and community groups?

#### *The nature and scope of dominant community support*

- (1) How consistent and sustainable is program funding?
- (2) How appropriate is program funding, categorically and substantively? That is, to what extent are program funds provided for culturally specific after-school programming versus other outcomes and priorities?
- (3) What are sources of dominant community political, institutional, and cultural support?
- (4) How do larger societal and community issues affect the program?

## **Appendix D — Culturally appropriate evaluation**

In considering a culturally appropriate evaluation model for after-school programs, it is helpful to contextualize this model within the general field of program evaluation where cultural sensitivity has become a core principle of professional practice and evaluation theory (American Evaluation Association, 2011).

The American Evaluation Association (AEA) has taken an official position affirming the significance of cultural competence in evaluation. Cultural competence is a stance taken toward culture, not a discrete status or simple mastery of particular knowledge and skills. A culturally competent evaluator is prepared to engage with diverse segments of communities to include cultural and contextual dimensions important to the evaluation. Culturally competent evaluators respect the cultures represented in the evaluation.

Several core concepts are foundational to the pursuit of cultural sensitivity. Culture is central to economic, political, and social systems as well as individual identity. Thus, all evaluation reflects culturally influenced norms, values, and ways of knowing—making cultural sensitivity integral to ethical, high-quality evaluation.

### **What is culture?**

Culture can be defined as the shared experiences of people, including their languages, values, customs, beliefs, and mores. It also includes worldviews, ways of knowing, and ways of communicating. Culturally significant factors encompass, but are not limited to, race/ethnicity, religion, social class, language, disability, sexual orientation, age, and gender. Contextual dimensions such as geographic region and socioeconomic circumstances are also essential to shaping culture.

Culture is dynamic, fluid, and reciprocal. That is, culture shapes the behaviors and worldviews of its members and, in turn, culture is shaped by the behavior, attitudes, and worldview of its members. Elements of culture are passed on from generation to generation, but culture also changes from one generation to the next.

Culture not only influences members of groups, it also delineates boundaries and influences patterns of interaction among them.

### **Evaluations reflect culture**

Culture shapes the ways in which evaluation questions are conceptualized, which in turn influence what data are collected, how the data will be collected and analyzed, and how data are interpreted. The universal influence of cultural values and perspectives underscores the importance of evaluations that are culturally competent. To draw valid conclusions, the evaluation must consider important contributors to human behavior, including those related to culture, personal habit, situational limitations, assimilation and acculturation, and the effect of those on what is being evaluated, in this case, after-school programs. Without attention to the

complexity and multiple determinants of behavior, evaluations can arrive at flawed findings with potentially devastating consequences.

Some impacts of programs, services, or products may be culturally specific and not obvious to persons unfamiliar with the context. Thus, an evaluation conducted in a culture-based after-school program must consider how the curriculum is grounded in the values, norms, knowledge, beliefs, practices, experiences, and language that are the foundation of participating students' culture. In this environment, cultural identity is viewed as essential to the development of young people whereas, in mainstream public schools, cultural identity activities are often considered enrichment, if offered at all.

Cultural sensitivity is not a state at which one arrives; rather, it is a process of learning, unlearning, and relearning. It is a sensibility cultivated throughout a lifetime. Cultural sensitivity requires awareness of self, reflection on one's own cultural position, awareness of others' positions, and the ability to interact genuinely and respectfully with others.

### **Why cultural sensitivity and appropriateness in evaluation are important**

The importance of cultural competence can be viewed from the perspectives of ethics and validity.

Cultural competence is an ethical issue that represents the intentional effort of the evaluation team to produce work that is valid, honest, respectful of stakeholders, and considerate of the general public welfare. Culturally sensitive and appropriate evaluation emerges from an ethical commitment to fairness and equity for stakeholders. Insufficient attention to culture in evaluation may compromise group and individual self-determination, due process, and fair, just, and equitable treatment of all persons and interests. Effective and ethical use of evaluation requires inclusiveness, learning across cultural boundaries, and respecting different worldviews.

Evaluators have an ethical obligation to ensure that stakeholders in all aspects of the evaluation process fully understand their rights and any inherent risks. In many minority and Indigenous communities there is a history of inappropriate use of research or evaluation in ways that violated basic human rights. Vigilance to securing the well-being of individuals and their communities is essential. This includes practices that protect participants and their communities, such as attention to how and with whom data are shared and unintended consequences of the data reported.

### **Validity demands cultural sensitivity and appropriateness**

Validity is central to evaluation. It marks the extent to which an evaluation "got it right" regardless of approach or paradigm. Valid inferences require shared understanding within and across cultural contexts. Shared understanding requires trust that diverse voices and perspectives are honestly and fairly represented. Cultural competence fosters trustworthy understanding. Evaluating with validity therefore requires cultural competence, sensitivity, and appropriateness.