



Agency Happenings

CAC of Portage County Receives 21st Century Learning Center Grant

The Community Action Council of Portage County along with the Ravenna School District recently received an \$850,000 21st Century Learning Center Grant to provide after-school activities at an area middle school and high school.



A student and her tutor at the middle school 21st Century Learning Center

The five-year federal grant is a program that supports the creation of community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and

low-performing schools. The program helps students meet state and local standards in core academic subjects, such as reading and math; offers students a broad array of enrichment activities that can complement their regular academic programs; and offers literacy and other educational services to the families of participating children.

According to David Shea, CAC of Portage County's executive director, their program is designed to serve children in Grades 6–12 and provide a wide range of academic and youth development services for up to 150 students in an after-school environment, four days per week for three hours per day. The primary emphasis of the program is math and reading, but the program will also offer many other activities that will go beyond just academics. "We have always believed that education is the so-called silver bullet in the war on poverty and we hope that we can show substantial performance outcomes in our community that lead to an increase in grades and test scores, and improvements in college and post-secondary attendance, and other tangible results," Shea said. "We implemented the program in early October and we've already enrolled 75 kids

at both sites. It's been really challenging, but if we can help just a handful of kids break the cycle of poverty, it's worth it. We have a great staff, most of whom are current or former district employees. The school district loves the program because it gives them an additional tool to help their students, and we're fortunate to be able to be involved and help."

The Portage County program is coordinated by Amy Adams, a retired teacher from the Ravenna school district. She said students who are low income and at-risk academically will be targeted, but students cannot be turned away because of income and higher-performing students might want to enroll to be better prepared for college. "This is an excellent opportunity for students," she said. "Hopefully it's going to have a huge impact."

A typical 21st Century day begins at each school as soon as school dismisses for the day. Each child receives a snack, followed by at least one hour of study help and one-on-one tutoring. The second hour will be generally spent on one of the new curricula in math and reading. Both are online, and all students will be benchmarked to determine their specific needs. By end of the school year, each student will be assessed to determine improvements. The third hour will be used to offer various youth development activities so that students can receive additional skills and information regarding a wide range of areas, from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) to occupational information, ACT assistance, as well as presentations by outside groups and program partners.

The agency has partnered with Kent State University, the Ohio College Access Network, the Portage County College Access Network, the Northeast Ohio College of

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Medicine, Upward Bound, and other organizations to assist in the program. Kathy McIntyre, fiscal officer for CAC of Portage County explained that the Portage County College Access Network is an integral piece to the 21st Century Learning Center program to encourage youth and provide the support system and resources for them to further their education after high school graduation. “This is a new and exciting venture for us and will hopefully be the beginning of some new education programs that will encourage, empower and assist our youth with their education,” McIntyre said. Another goal of the program is to make it sustainable after the grant funds end.

The superintendent of the Ravenna School District, Dennis Honkala, expressed hope that the program will help the district improve its graduation rates and “close the gap” to provide better services to low-income students. “The Ravenna School District is excited to partner with the CAC and these fine universities to expand learning opportunities for our students,” Honkala said.