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Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER3) Funded Expanded Learning Opportunities in NE Spokane

Year 2 Progress Report

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Background

The ZoNE (www.thezonespokane.org) leads an effort to bring expanded learning opportunities to students in five elementary and two middle schools in Northeast Spokane utilizing funding from both the 21st Century Community Learning Center (21CCLC) program and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER3) funds. These federal funding sources provide dollars for community partners to offer quality, academically focused programs in low-opportunity schools. The Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) administers the grant and monitors student progress at the state level.

Each local program works with an independent evaluator to track student outcomes at the district level. The ZoNE selected Urbanova, a nonprofit civic research center in Spokane Washington to serve as the local evaluator to assess student outcomes for participants in three schools – Bemiss Elementary, Stevens Elementary and Whitman Elementary. This report serves as a progress update for **Year 2** of the program, covering the 2021-2022 academic school year.

This report also is intended as a first step for school staff, program administrators and site coordinators to determine the ongoing reporting and assessment indicators that will be valuable for the initiative. The entirety of the 2021-2022 school year was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The year included school shutdowns mandated by the local health district as well as elective decisions by parents to keep children at home as each family and school building decided how to respond to new variants and community risks. The disconnection experienced with remote learning and the ongoing stress for young children watching the community respond to a public health crisis was profound. Thus, it is not realistic to think of student ‘progress’ in the same terms as we may have pre-pandemic.

The logic model was developed during Year 1 of the program that links program activities to expected student outcomes. Many of the assumptions (and data) that were built into this original logic model may not be ideal for examining the effectiveness of the program, given the COVID-related challenges experienced in the schools and communities (including attendance, health concerns, learning loss, program staffing issues to name a few). Consequently, this report takes two approaches to address unanticipated changes in the program landscape. First, we identify a comparison group of non-participating students with similar characteristics as program students. While both groups faced challenges during this period, we hope to assess if expanding learning programming may have reduced impact on participating students to some extent. Second, we also suggest new indicators and approaches that can be considered in the context of a formative evaluation. A formative evaluation is a process for working alongside stakeholders to address key questions with ongoing feedback and assessment that can be utilized by in a dynamic way to improve program effectiveness.

The progress report includes the following sections:

- I. Site Programming and Student Participation
- II. Student Outcome Measures
 - a. Academic Progress
 - b. Family Engagement and Wellness
 - c. Social-Emotional Learning and Positive Behavior
- III. Program Adaptations and Recommendations

In addition to navigating expanded learning programming during the pandemic, there is notable progress achieved as a result of this initiative that is not directly covered in this report:

- First, the ZoNE also oversees expanded learning programming in two middle schools and two elementary school locations in NE Spokane using 21st Century Community Learning Center grant funds (21CCLC). In the 2021-2022 school year, 21CCLC-funded programs served over 700 students. ESSER3 and 21CCLC funded programs are both staffed by site coordinators from Communities in Schools-Spokane. Outcomes for 21CCLC students in included in a separate report.
- Second, the ZoNE also applied for a received funding for a fourth year of private funding from the Steve and Connie Ballmer Foundation to support four community groups providing quality programming for students in this region. (Students participating in funded programming from these sources are not included in the comparison groups presented in this report).
- Third, during Year 2 the ZoNE and program partners worked with staff at Spokane Public Schools (SPS) to design and deploy an online community partner tracker (<https://webb.spokaneschools.org/CommunityPartnerTracking/>). This portal allows approved staff from community-based organizations to establish events and have students easily 'checked-in' for an activity. The integration of this system (in Year 3) will streamline reporting processes and provide useful ongoing feedback to site coordinators about student participation.

The following sections detail both the progress achieved in Year 2 and areas for improvement going forward.

I. Site Programming and Student Participation Levels

The ESSER3 programming and activity varied across supported programs in three elementary school sites.

Bemiss Elementary School – In 2021-2022, over 100 students participated in expanded learning at Bemiss with an average daily attendance of approximately 15 students per day. By the end of the school year (May), average daily attendance exceeded 20 students per day. Between October and May, there were 467 student-days of programming with activity related to soccer (Skyhawks), reading club, Girl Scouts and Multi-Cultural club.

Stevens Elementary School – programming at Stevens was less active during the 2021-2022 school year with a record of 28 students served. Stevens experienced staffing and programming challenges during the school year, with two site coordinators leaving mid-year. When programming was available, students at Stevens could engage in a number of activities with an academic (Zag study buddies, KSPS STEAM) leadership (Girl Scouts, leadership club), recreation/sports (dance club) or arts (ukulele club, drumming club) focus. Following the school year (June 2022), staffing issues had been resolved and 47 students were attending summer programming.

Whitman Elementary School – In 2021-2022, over 100 students participated in expanded learning at Whitman. Student attended 8 programming days on average and only two students attended for more than 30 days. Activities included volleyball, game club, and Girl Scouts. At the conclusion of the school year, new site coordinators were hired for summer programming, with 44 total students attending (and average daily attendance of 30 students).

II. Student Outcome Measures

As noted earlier, the assumptions underlying the program logic model developed in 2021 were tested to some extent during the course of the 2021-2022 school year. While the desired outcomes for the program remain the same, the formulation and measurement of indicators may be revisited moving forward. For now, we report on the following indicators in the three primary domains of program focus:

- **Academic Progress** – 60% of regular participants met SBA standard
- **Family Engagement & Wellness** – parents perceive strong connection to school community
- **Social Emotional Learning --**
 - 70% of participants with prior year discipline incidents demonstrate decrease in incidents in following year
 - Students with prior year chronic absenteeism increase attendance rate by 10%
 - at least 50% of participants demonstrate increased SEL self-perception (Fall-Spring) in one or more constructs

To evaluate the progress of students in these domains, we created a comparison group of students from area schools with similar characteristics. A data sharing agreement with Spokane Public Schools allowed us to receive de-identified records for all students in 11 public schools located in NE Spokane, including Garry and Shaw Middle Schools and Arlington, Bemiss, Cooper, Lidgerwood, Logan, Longfellow, Regal, Stevens, and Whitman Elementary Schools. We removed students participating in afterschool programming funded by other sources (see above) and used propensity score matching techniques to create a list of peer students according to grade level, gender, race/ethnicity, special education, English language learner, and free/reduced price lunch status, as well as level of attendance in the previous school year.

In total, we assess outcomes for **245** participating in ESSER3-funded activity and **210** non-participating students with similar characteristics. Exhibit 1 shows background information for both the program and comparison group of students.

Exhibit 1: Student Profile, Program and Comparison Students — 2021-2022 school year

Category	ESSER3 Students	Comparison Students
Grade		
Kindergarten	16	5
First	26	18
Second	36	17
Third	35	48
Fourth	50	21
Fifth	31	32
Sixth	51	69
Female	153	129
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	10	12
Asian	4	3
Caucasian	136	113
Hispanic	35	30
Multi-Racial	51	46
Native American	2	2
Pacific Islander	7	4
Free-Reduced Lunch	208	185
English Language	34	29
Special Education	211	178
Total	245	210

a. Academic Progress

Like many student outcome measures, COVID-related interruptions create difficulty evaluating progress in test assessment scores. The Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) tests, given to Washington students in grades 3-8, were not administered in the 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 school years. Even if prior year tests were available, for example, school shutdowns and shifts to remote learning during this period would make any year-to-year comparisons problematic.

Given these constraints, we decided to compare results for participating and comparison students taking the SBA test in 2021-2022. We examine the number of students that ‘met’ or ‘exceeded’ standards in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math. As shown in Exhibit 2, roughly the same percentage of ESSER participants and comparison students

met standard in the ELA assessment (35-36%). A higher percentage of ESSER participants met standard in math (27%) relative to comparison students.

**Exhibit 2: SBA Met/Exceeded Standard, Program and Comparison Students
2021-2022 school year**

Category	ESSER3 Students	Comparison Students
English Language Arts Met Standard	56 (35%)	57 (36%)
Total ELA Test Takers	159	159
Math Met Standard	41 (27%)	30 (19%)
Total Math Test Takers	151	157

ESSER-funded programming focuses primarily on building ‘love of learning’ with activities focused around reading enjoyment and increasing interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) subjects. The ELP curriculum does not necessarily address the objectives and benchmarks on standardized assessments. In addition, elementary students do not typically receive letter grades, so it is often difficult to track academic progress based on assessments from classroom teachers. The final section to this report discusses alternative measures of progress, such as formative assessments for evaluating the effectiveness of ELP supports.

b. Family Engagement and Wellness

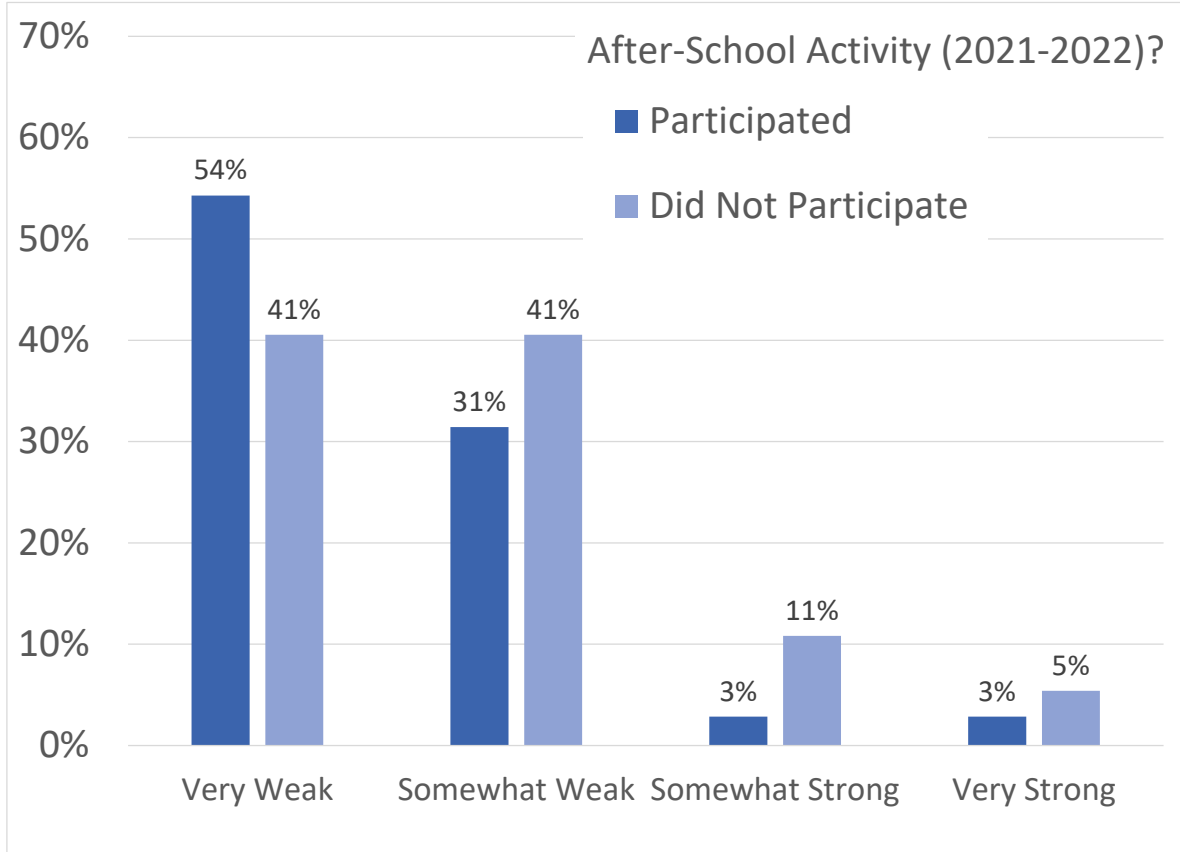
Parent and family programming was put on hold for 2021-2022 school year as a result of public health guidance on in-person gatherings, staffing challenges and other pandemic-related uncertainties. Family-related programming has resumed for the 2022-2023 school year. In addition to engagement in planned activities, one of the key outcomes for the program is that parents have a strong connection to the school community. To assess parent and caregiver perceptions around school programming, the ZoNE conducted a satisfaction survey following the 2021-2022 school year. The survey was fielded at evening welcoming events in all 11 schools and 293 parent/caretakers completed the voluntary survey.

We filtered the survey responses and selected cases where a parent reported that their child attended an ESSER3 school (Bemiss Elementary, Stevens Elementary, or Whitman Elementary). For the 72 parents with children in these schools, 37 reported that their child *did not* participate in after-school programming, while 35 (49%) reported that their child was involved.

As Exhibit 3 shows, 85% of parents with children in after-school programs and 82% of parents with non-participating children reported a ‘very weak’ or ‘somewhat weak’ sense

of belonging to school. There is clearly additional work to be done to build parental engagement in the current school year.

**Exhibit 3: How would you describe your sense of belonging to your child's school?
2021-2022 school year**



The survey also asked parents and caretakers about the type of evening programs they may like to attend. The top two choices involved activities for the whole family, with additional interest in programming related to household and parenting support. These responses will guide program planning for the 2022-2023 school year.

Some evening programs will also be provided for parents (childcare available). Which of the following would you be likely to attend?

1. Family-student learning activities and projects (45)
 2. Cooking classes/access to healthy food (39)
 3. Parenting classes (20)
 4. Parent support groups (20)
 5. Finances/Family budgeting support (19)
 6. Community resource fair (18)
 7. Housing assistance (15)
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c. Social-Emotional Learning and Positive Behavior

A student's sense of connection and belonging to school, as well as social and emotional well-being is an important goal for the ESSER3-funded programming and initiatives supported by the ZoNE in general. The initial outcomes established by ESSER3 schools and partners in NE Spokane focused on three outcomes related to school connection and well-being:

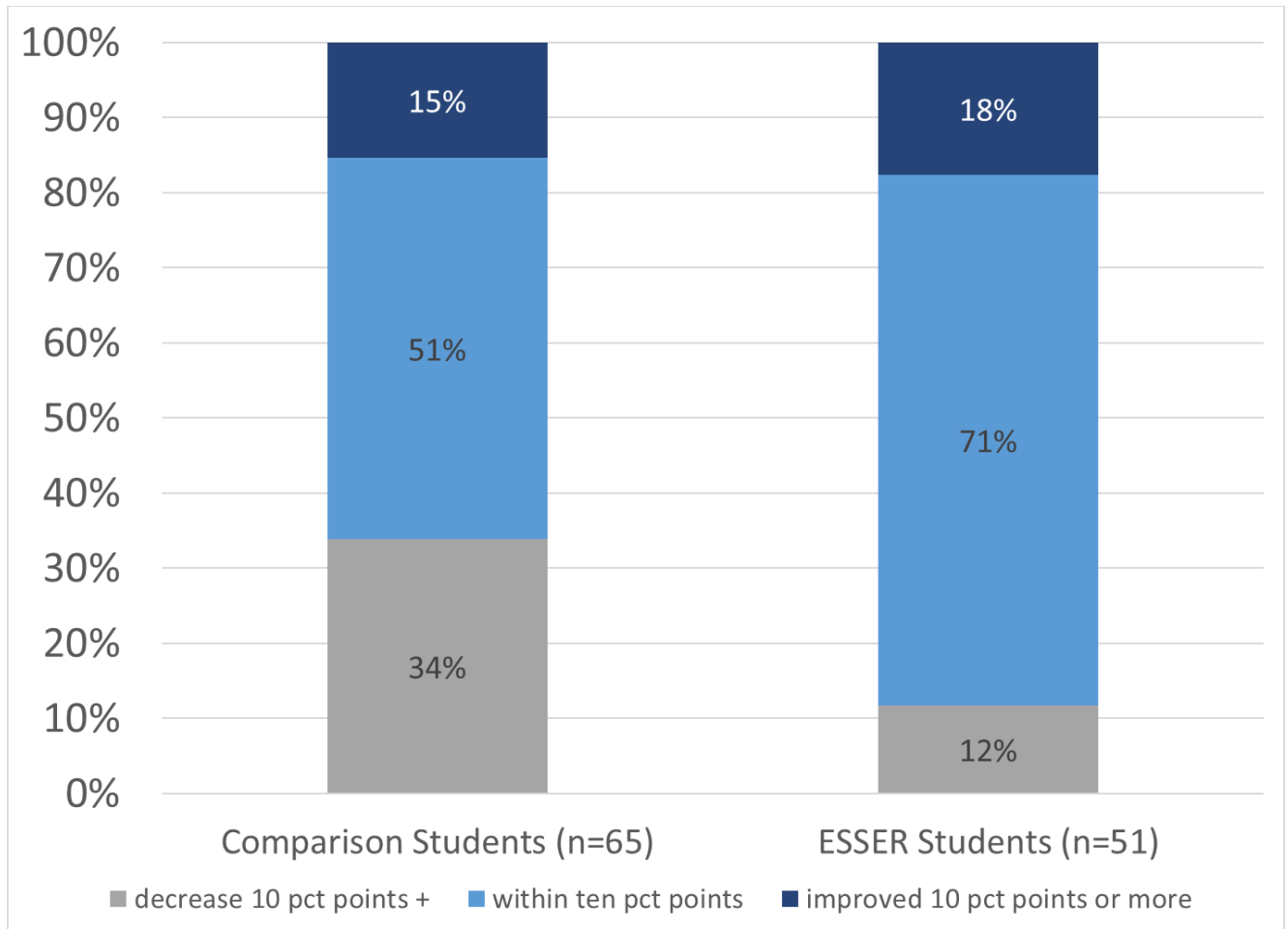
- Students with prior year chronic absenteeism increase attendance rate by 10 percentage points
- 70% of regular participants with prior year discipline incidents demonstrate decrease in incidents in following year
- At least 50% of regular participants demonstrate increased SEL self-perception Fall-Spring in one or more constructs

Like the situation with standardized assessment testing, the 2-year long interruptions that occurred as a result of COVID also make analysis of longitudinal changes in attendance and discipline incidents problematic. Absenteeism rates across both years were unpredictable and the uncertain school environment for students make it difficult to truly gauge progress in behavior-related incidents. Nevertheless, we present both figures as a way to assess the status of students during this period and determine how best to evaluate these outcomes going forward.

Absenteeism

For the analysis of school attendance, we selected students that were absent (excused or unexcused) for more than 10 percent of available enrollment days or periods (chronic absenteeism) in the previous school year (2020-2021). We then examined how absenteeism levels changed for both ESSER participants (n=51) and comparison students (n=65) in the school year of interest (2021-2022). As Exhibit 4 shows, there was little difference between the students in the ESSER and comparison groups for improved attendance in the 2021-2022 school year (10 percentage points or more). However, a lower percentage of ESSER participants had reductions in attendance (12% vs 34%) the next year, and seven out of ten (71%) showed no significant shifts in absenteeism over the two school years. While hybrid learning environments and public health-related shutdowns over this period make assessments of absenteeism difficult, the connection and attendance levels of ELP participants should continue to be tracked.

Exhibit 4: Students with prior year chronic absenteeism, change in 2021-2022 school year



Discipline

Only seven percent of ESSER participants (n=17) had a recorded discipline incident in the prior school year (2020-2021). It is difficult to assess changes in disciplinary incidents with such a low base number of students. Nevertheless, we looked at subsequent disciplinary referrals for both ESSER and comparison students (n=26) with previous incidents. About 50% (n=8) ESSER students had a reduction in discipline, relative to 42% of comparison students. About the same percentage of ESSER students had increases in discipline (compared to peer students), although the low number of students makes conclusions for this outcome difficult. The recommendations section at the end of this report suggests options for evaluating efforts to address student disciplinary issues.

Social Emotional Learning

Spokane Public Schools students in fourth grade and above take an annual social emotional learning (SEL) assessment, developed by [Panorama Education](#). The survey measures a number of factors related to social-emotional factors, including grit, growth

mindset, learning strategies, school belonging and engagement, teacher-student relationships, self-management and valuing of school. The 21CCLC and ESSER partners determined a desired outcome would be for students to improve increased SEL scores in one or more of these constructs over the course of the school year (Fall to Spring).

The administration of this survey, however, is not a required activity from SPS teachers, and only 15% of students in grades 4-6 completed both the Fall and Spring SEL surveys during the 2021-2022 school year. While we found improvements in SEL perception among middle school students (see 21CCLC report), there were not a sufficient number of SEL assessments completed for ESSER participants to evaluate this outcome. We suggest working with school principals and administrators in ESSER funded schools to ensure that students take the Panorama tests in the 2022-2023 school year.

III. Program Adaptations and Recommendations

During the formative adolescent years, students living in high-poverty neighborhoods often fall behind in learning – both in school and in the opportunity to experience learning outside the classroom. Quality expanded learning programming (ELP) is meant to provide academic assistance and developmental activities, like sports and music lessons to students that may not otherwise receive these types of supports. While ELP activities take place during a short window during the before and after school hours, these programs can meaningfully work alongside teachers, community members and parents to support student growth and development.

Given limited time and resources, it is worthwhile to periodically examine progress and determine what is working and what may need adjustment in ongoing ELP efforts. This report provide an assessment of progress in three ESSER sites offering expanded learning programming in NE Spokane. After a turbulent, often unpredictable year, it is clear that many of the previously established growth measures should be reconsidered. While there were notable gains in student growth observed in Year 2, it would be worthwhile to think about additional ways to assess the effectiveness of ELP efforts. Potential measures include:

- ***Short term academic assessments*** – standardized tests represent a longer-term gauge of student learning. For shorter measures of growth, formative assessments (like [STAR assessment](#)) could be adopted to track student progress on a daily or weekly basis.
- ***Functional behavior assessment*** – measurably reducing student disciplinary incidents over the course of the school day and year may be an outsized expectation for ELP efforts operating voluntary programs during the before and after school hours. A more suitable measure could be for ELP staff to work together with school teachers and administrators and contribute to functional behavioral assessments ([MTSS plans](#)) that identify problem behaviors and develop interventions to improve or eliminate those behaviors. Progress could be tracked for identified students where ELP staff are playing a role in behavioral supports.

- ***Expand family programming*** – it is clear from the survey of student parents and caregivers that there is a high level of interest in family programming. While pandemic-related considerations made planning family activity difficult in 2021-2022, planned events should be more feasible this coming year. The ZoNE has committed to a ‘two-generation’ approach to supporting students and it would be worthwhile to follow student outcome measures based on family participation levels.
 - ***Follow students that disengage*** – A student’s decision to participate in expanded learning programs raises the question about whether these programs are attracting the most motivated youth. The students that may have infrequent (or no) engagement with the program should be a population of interest. In this third year of funded activity, an expanded effort could be made for outreach and enrollment for students with limited participation in Year 2. Following the outcomes for these students would provide additional learning about how to truly extend expanded learning opportunities.
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