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# Report to Ballmer Group

*The ZONE Expanded Learning Initiative – Year Three Outcomes*

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## Background

**The ZONE** serves as Northeast Spokane's community hub, a collective impact initiative founded in 2017 through local neighborhood leadership and supported by the Northeast Community Center (NECC). Guided by residents, schools, and over 100 youth-serving partner organizations, The ZONE (thezonespokane.org) identifies and addresses disparities in education, health, and economic mobility through coordinated and community-informed strategies. As the backbone organization, The ZONE convenes partners, supports strategic alignment, and monitors shared outcomes.

Ballmer Group has supported youth development programming at The ZONE since 2019. The Ballmer Group-funded Expanded Learning Initiative (ELI) launched in 2024 and represents a three-year, $2.6 million investment to expand access to quality programming for students and families served by The ZONE. The purpose of ELI is to increase access to quality community-based expanded learning programming and health/other services, to meet the diverse cultural, learning, and whole-child needs of Northeast Spokane students

This report shares outcomes for Year Three, the final year of the initiative. Over the course of the initiative, this ELI funding stream has grown substantially in both scale and scope. Year One began with seven funded organizations reaching 503 students during the program year. Year Two expanded the network to twelve organizations serving 1,180 students. Year Three, covering the 2025-26 school year together with the summers of 2025 and 2026, reached 1,853 students through seventeen funded organizations, an increase of 57% over the prior year and more than three and a half times the Year One figure.[1]

In Year Three, we have left to report Summer 2025, 2025-26 academic year, and Summer 2026 reflecting 96,796 youth program hours [2] across 17 unique youth serving partners through this partnership. Family Engagement also increased from 1,070 to 1,420 adults/parents engaged in Year 3, a 32% increase from Year 2. With a combination of ZONE and grantee family engagement events, Year 3 collected approximately 46,889.5 hours of parent/adult family engagement.

Throughout 2025-26, partner organizations continued to integrate culturally responsive supports, academic enrichment, and wraparound services that respond

[1] Counts throughout this report reflect participation in Ballmer-funded ELI programming only. Earlier ZONE reporting combined ELI participation with students served through 21st Century Community Learning Center programming, and those broader totals are not directly comparable to the figures here.

[2] This number reflects Ballmer funded programming with grantees in The ZONE. The number does not include other free youth programming opportunities like 21st CCLC that is delivered to low income and underserved students at 4 schools within The ZONE.

directly to student and family need. This report highlights key developments and outcomes from Year Three across the following sections:

- **Grantee Progress & Innovations** -- Documenting how partner organizations adapted, scaled, or enhanced programming in 2025-26.
- **Program Activity and Results** -- Capturing measures that reflect student participation and engagement.
- **Student Characteristics and Outcomes** -- Summarizing participation trends, equity measures, academic and social-emotional indicators, and related student outcomes.
- **Family Engagement** -- Highlighting family-centered activities, outreach strategies, and impacts on school-community connections.

As the initiative concludes its third and final year, this report reflects on the cumulative impact of Ballmer Group's investment in Northeast Spokane and the enduring partnerships, systems, and community connections that will carry this work forward.

## SECTION 1 – Grantee Programs

Section 1 presents the work of community organizations that received Ballmer Group funding in Year Three of the Expanded Learning Initiative. Each grantee brings a distinct approach to serving students and families in Northeast Spokane, from culturally grounded heritage programming to college and career coaching, arts integration, and mentorship. Though their methods and populations vary, these organizations share a common purpose: creating consistent, trusted spaces where young people can grow academically, socially, and personally outside of the traditional school day. Grantee organizations are presented in alphabetical order, with additional program participation data provided in Section 2.

### Girl Scouts of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho (GSEWNI)

Girl Scouts of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho (https://www.gsewni.org), covering Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho, continued to grow its GoGetters program in Year Three through expanded school-year troops and a significantly expanded summer offering. GoGetters troops, driven largely by cookie sales proceeds that fund program activities, now operate at Northeast Spokane elementary schools including Lidgerwood, Bemiss, Holmes, Community School, Whitman, Regal, Cooper, and Logan.

A major highlight of Year Three was the merger of the GoGetters summer day camp program with Camp Ashwell, creating an expanded and more structured summer experience for girls in Northeast Spokane. This combination reflects significant growth over the course of ELI, with summer programming expanding from a single

week in 2024 to eight weekly sessions in 2026, each serving approximately 60 girls. The Camp Ashwell model offers theme-based programming each week, incorporating pool days, swim lessons, drama and performing arts, community speakers, outdoor adventures, and water activities, which this grant funded this year. Cookie sales remain the financial engine of the entire program, with proceeds reinvested directly to support participation, supplies, and transportation for girls who would otherwise face barriers to access.

## If You Could Save Just One

If You Could Save Just One (ifyoucouldsavejustone.org) is a grassroots organization founded in 2019 with the mission of providing free, high-quality programs, system navigation, and resources that help Hillyard youth and families build power, advocate for themselves, and create community change. Operating out of a converted garage that serves as a drop-in center in the heart of the neighborhood, Just One offers hands-on, creative, and skill-building activities including art, music, gardening, cosmetology, cooking, and games designed to help youth decompress and connect with caring adults after the school day. Programming runs seasonally, a deliberate shift from year-round operations that has allowed the organization to improve staff-to-youth ratios, reduce staff burnout, and provide more focused attention to participants. The program started with partnerships with Spokane School district, The ZONE, Better Health Together and staffing support from Gonzaga University students, has grown steadily over the three years of the initiative, with staffing support from all local universities and colleges and ongoing partnerships with TeamChild, Department of Commerce, and Waters Meet that extend the range of services available to youth and families

In Year Three, Just One continued to deepen its focus on social-emotional learning and community power-building, incorporating more interactive games, civic awareness exercises, and expanded parent engagement through surveys and direct outreach. A notable program addition was the return of sound baths after a multi-year hiatus, with most participants reporting an increased sense of physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing following the sessions, and the majority expressing interest in continuing activities that support their own de-stressing and healing.



Holiday events remained a centerpiece of family engagement, with the Thanksgiving gathering drawing 312 youth and the winter event serving 222. Together, these events included over 100 families, reinforcing Just One's role as a neighborhood anchor around food, celebration, and community connection.



Just One participation continues to be strong in Year Three with 459 program enrollments and 2,761 student-days of attendance.

*Testimonials from families reflect the program's impact:*

*"I just wanted to say thank you for your work and care for our kids during this summer break. They had a great time and gained invaluable life experience, especially in communicating in American society. This is very important for immigrant children who have recently been forced to come to America, and for their parents too."*

*"My son doesn't have a lot of friends and the only time he got to socialize was at school. I am a disabled parent so my son doesn't get to do after school activities like most kids... I really believe this program helped him in a huge way. He came home happier every time."*

## KSPS

KSPS PBS (ksps.org) is Spokane's public television station and a longstanding community education partner in Northeast Spokane. Through its Education Department, KSPS has used Ballmer Group funding in year three of the initiative to operate two core programming strands: Family and Community Learning (FCL) nights and the Scratch Junior after-school coding program. Both programs draw on PBS Kids media content as an educational framework, connecting hands-on activities to curriculum areas including literacy, science, engineering, and computational thinking for children in grades K through 3.

FCL nights bring together students and their caregivers for themed, activity-based evenings held at school sites, averaging approximately 50 participants per event. Each night features two or more hands-on stations tied to a PBS Kids character or show, such as a nature science experiment paired with Nature Cat or a literacy activity connected to a PBS story series. Activities are intentionally designed with multiple entry points so that families can self-navigate stations independently or

engage directly with volunteers, making events accessible regardless of language background or prior experience. The relaxed, creative setting atmosphere builds positive connections between families, and their schools and school principals have noted that these events draw in families and students who may carry negative associations with the school environment during the regular school day.



The Scratch Junior program places stipended classroom teachers at the center of after-school coding instruction, recruiting groups of approximately 10 students to work through a seven-session sequence focused on computational thinking and coding using the Scratch Jr app. Students create animated stories by coding PBS characters, building sequencing, logic, and problem-solving skills in the process. The stipend model has proven durable over five years, with teachers who transferred to new schools either recruiting colleagues to continue the program in their place or requesting that the program follow them to their new site.

**KSPS Program Activity**

*2025-26 School Year*

| SPS Event Name | Program Date | Students (unduplicated) |
|---|---|---|
| Lidgerwood Holiday Night | Dec 2025 | 24 |
| Regal Elementary Holiday Night | Dec 2025 | 39 |
| Yasuhara Middle School | Feb 2026 | 47 |
| Regal Elementary | Feb 2026 | 24 |
| Game Quest | Feb 2026 | 4 |
| Future Day – Spokane Community College | Feb 2026 | 804 (adults and students) |



A standout Year Three development was the continued growth of KSPS Future Day, a free career exploration expo for elementary-age children and families. Launched and conducted on the On Track Academy, NEWTech Skills Center, and Shaw Middle School campus, the event moved to Spokane Community College (also in The ZONE) to accommodate rising attendance, growing from 300 participants in its first year to approximately 600 in the second year and reaching 801 participants in 2026. The four-hour event featured 28 career exhibitors ranging from medical professionals and scientists to trade workers, radio stations, and city services, alongside appearances by PBS costumed characters. Families consistently stayed for the full event, and KSPS staff noted recognizing many attendees from school FCL nights, reflecting the cumulative reach of the program across the initiative.




As the Ballmer grant concludes, KSPS is actively building a diversified funding model to sustain and expand these programs. A new partnership with Spokane Public Schools' Department of Family and Community Engagement is piloting a Community Engagement and Belonging Nights model that would pair structured parent programming with concurrent children's activities, sharing costs and scaling the FCL framework across all 10 schools in the Northeast feeder pattern. Additional support from another regional foundation is helping KSPS explore bringing the program model to communities outside Spokane, extending the reach of an approach that has demonstrated strong family engagement across three years in Northeast Spokane.

## Manzanita House

Manzanita House (manzanitahousespokane.org) is a community-based nonprofit dedicated to creating inclusive spaces "rooted in welcome," where immigrants and refugees can fully participate in Spokane's civic, cultural, and social life. Entering the third year of this Ballmer-funded Expanded Learning Initiative, Manzanita House reflects a program that has grown steadily and thoughtfully since 2023, building a stable foundation for immigrant and refugee youth and families through heritage language instruction, family programming, and culturally grounded community connection.

In 2025, the organization made a deliberate choice to deepen rather than expand. Rather than adding a fourth heritage language, Manzanita House focused on strengthening its three existing programs in Arabic, Dari, and Spanish, working to ensure consistent attendance, track student progress over time, and build the kind of trust that only comes from a group of familiar faces gathering week after week. Heritage language classes for youth continue to be held alongside adult programming at the Northeast Community Center, with children ranging in age from

six to seventeen and spanning a wide range of abilities, including varying levels of English proficiency and students with developmental and physical needs. Volunteers and interns, including students from Gonzaga University, help teachers create spaces that are educational as well as build community.

### Heritage Language Classes

*"I like class a lot – I like the kids and I've made friends."*

*"I could understand Spanish but couldn't respond – it made me feel awkward. Now I know more words and know how to speak it pretty well. It's fun – I like speaking with my mom in Spanish and now I can contact my family members in Spanish."*

*"I can talk more to them, understand them, I get their jokes and I know how to answer to them."*

*"I would tell other kids to come to class so they could learn to speak Spanish because it's important to learn another language. It helps you understand people and help them too."*

*"There are not enough words to express our gratitude to Manzanita House for all the work, dedication, and support in offering Spanish classes to children in our community. As a bilingual homeschool family, these classes have given my children the opportunity to speak, learn, and make friends in their heritage language. This program is an invaluable contribution to our community and to my children's education."*

*– Emma, Spanish Heritage Language Class, 6th grade, family from Chile, 11 years old*

One of the most meaningful developments over three years has been watching the program's earliest participants grow into volunteers. Today, Manzanita House has at least one teenage volunteer helping in each of its three language classrooms. These are young people who participated as children, developed confidence and fluency, and chose to stay connected by taking on a new role in the program. It is a quiet but powerful marker of what community-rooted programming can build over time.

## Heritage Language Classes

*"We've been coming for a year now and it's very rare that we miss a day."*

*"When we come here, I get a break – I truly get a break. I get to talk to other adults, I laugh, and I leave lighter. Even my four year old gives me a break and will play with the toys until we're done. I really do enjoy coming to Cafecito Club."*

*"When I learned about Spanish Heritage Language Class I thought 'Yes, this is what we need'. I'd love for all of my family to improve our Spanish"*

*"A fun part of Cafecito is that we get to experience so many Spanish-speaking cultures."*

*"People at Cafecito have become like additional aunts and uncles. It's like family here in Spokane."*

*"I like that Spanish class teaches Luna more than the daily words. For example, she ordered for us at a taco truck – she wouldn't do this before. Coming to Spanish class has helped her to gain more Spanish. Even her school teachers have noticed it – this has been helping us. Even my four year old has now been playing and speaking more in Spanish."*

*"I like that my kids will be able to speak two languages because it makes them better, more well-rounded people."*

*"I like coming to Cafecito because you develop friendships. It's like a community – if you have a need you help each other. And you make friendships – you get to do stuff together outside of these two hours. We also get to try different arts, eat different desserts."*

*"We come, we make friends, we de-stress and my kids get to do the same thing. They come, make friends, have fun, and learn. And they actually use what they're learning. Luna is always excited to let me know what they did. This has caused her to have more confidence."*

*– Iris, Mexican-American, Cafecito participant, daughter in Spanish Heritage Language Class*

Adult programming has also evolved in response to what families are telling Manzanita House they most need. While early years included a heavier emphasis on informational workshops covering topics such as financial literacy and local services, staff noticed that participants were seeking something different: a safe space to be together, to talk through the stresses of daily life, and to be seen. In response, adult groups now center more regularly on art-based mental health activities, with artists from the community leading projects that invite participants to explore feelings, identity, and belonging through craft and informal conversation. For the Latino group, a cross-generational model has emerged organically, with adult and youth classes intersecting through shared projects. Children might present Day of the Dead artwork to the adults in Spanish, while adults share

handwritten recipe cards from their childhood with the youth class. These moments build language confidence and community pride in ways that a class structure alone cannot.

### Heritage Language Classes

*"I didn't believe that my kids would be so good at English that they are now. Schools here are amazing, the teachers are so good and put in a lot of effort."*

*"Before we came here my girls were never in school. This is their first time going to school and learning the language. They love the teachers and want to put in effort for the teachers. They don't even like it when it's summer or a vacation or a holiday because they want to be in school all the time."*

*"I don't want them to lose their Arabic, I want them to continue learning Arabic because it's good to know multiple languages."*

*"Since coming to the class they started to like speaking Arabic more because they came to the class and met other children and started to love their language more."*

*"In the morning they speak English with their American friends and here they speak Arabic with their friends – so both languages are getting strong."*

*"I'm very, very proud of them."*

*"I want them to continue learning Arabic because relatives back home – I want them to be able to communicate with their relatives. Back in Iraq they don't speak much English, so if my children don't speak Arabic they won't be able to communicate. My mom and dad don't speak any English and I want my children to be able to speak to their grandparents."*

*"I look forward to attending Teatimes because I'm from work to home and home to work and life is so stressful. Here I find my space to let go of the negativity and be social with the other women."*

*"I don't speak English well so when I meet with the ladies here I can speak in my own language and they understand me and I understand them so that makes me feel very relieved."*

Programming this year also extended beyond the Northeast Community Center for the first time through a pop-up model. A multilingual book fair at NECC, piloted in late 2024 and continued in 2025, provided families with books in their heritage languages and seeded the language classrooms with new reading materials. A volleyball program that grew out of Manzanita's earlier athletic offerings has since expanded into a separate, ongoing program for middle and high school-aged girls at the YMCA (located in The ZONE)

The Ballmer Group investment, which has covered approximately half the cost of Manzanita's community programming budget, has been central to the program's stability and growth. Manzanita has used consistent, flexible funding to support staffing for language teachers, program facilitation and supplies. The organization has navigated an increasingly challenging funding landscape, including declining government grants and conditions attached to federal and county funding sources that conflict with client safety and confidentiality. In response, Manzanita has built toward sustainability through community sponsorships, individual donors, and a new fee-based community language club, offered in partnership with a local school, through which non-native speakers can enroll in Arabic or Spanish classes. Revenue from those tuition fees is intended to help sustain free programming for immigrant and refugee families over time.

Organizationally, Manzanita House is entering its next chapter from a stronger footing than it has ever had. With a staff of approximately 23 and plans to grow to 25, the organization recently consolidated all its departments into a single shared office (except for the Heritage Language and Teatime program office at NECC). The move brings the community programs team and the immigration legal team under one roof for the first time, creating new opportunities for internal coordination and cross-referral. As the Expanded Learning Initiative continues into its fourth year at NECC/ZONE, Manzanita House has demonstrated that preserving heritage language and culture, providing safe spaces for difficult conversations, and investing in the whole family are not supplemental goals but essential ones for the youth and families it serves in Northeast Spokane.[3]

## Northeast Youth Center

Northeast Youth Center (neyc.org) has served children and families in Northeast Spokane since 1971, providing affordable, community-rooted care and enrichment for youth ages three through twelve. The center operates a school-age program with before and after school care, seasonal break camps, and a ten-week summer camp, alongside an on-site Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECEAP) serving children ages three to five. In 2025, NEYC extended its reach to its youngest community members by launching a toddler program in an adjacent space, bringing total enrollment to approximately 130 children across all programs.

With new executive leadership now in place, NEYC has sharpened its programmatic focus in ways that reflect the realities facing the families it serves. Nearly all participants come from low-income households, and staff have observed how the years following the pandemic deepened pre-existing challenges around mental

[3] The ZONE is funding Manzanita House, Just One, and SYSA for the school year 26-27

health, social development, and access to consistent adult relationships. The center's response has been both physical and programmatic:

- **Zen Zone** – A dedicated calm-down and sensory support room, stocked with weighted blankets, sensory materials, and tools for children with neurodivergent needs, where staff can provide one-on-one de-escalation support. Ballmer Group funding contributed directly to equipping this space.
- **Classroom integration** – Sensory and regulation tools are being embedded into everyday classroom settings, not reserved only for moments of crisis.
- **Staff training** – Teachers and program aides are receiving training in trauma-informed practices and coping skill instruction drawn from dialectical behavior therapy, with an emphasis on building teacher efficacy alongside student wellbeing.

Much of this work begins with the staff themselves. Many NEYC employees grew up in the same Northeast Spokane neighborhoods as the children they serve, and the training model reflects that: staff first learn to recognize their own triggers and stressors before they can effectively model regulation for children. The guiding principle is a shift in framing that shapes how the whole team approaches their work: these children are having a hard time, not giving adults a hard time.

The Ballmer Group investment this year supported supplies for the Zen Zone, classroom sensory materials, and the staff training needed to put these approaches into practice. NEYC is also working to bring a family services coordinator into the school-age program, a role that would help connect families to therapeutic resources, food access, clothing support, and other community services.

**School-Age Programming**

Daily programming for school-age youth pairs recreation with structured enrichment, giving students a consistent place to land before and after the school day:

- **STEM and project-based learning** -- egg drop challenges, maze building, and a spring seed planting project that introduced growth cycles and environmental stewardship
- **Arts and self-expression** -- drawing competitions, jewelry making, rock painting, clay work, and tie dye
- **Group games and outdoor exploration** -- team-based play, unstructured discovery time, and cooperative activities that build peer connection

- **Break camps** -- full-day programming during winter and spring break, with field trips to Mobius Science Center, West Valley Outdoor Learning Center, Manito Park, and the Ice Age Floods Playground
- **Summer camp –** Ballmer Group funding provided transportation and supplies for ten weeks of field trips and on-site activities, including North Bowl, Blue Zoo, Hillyard Pool, and neighborhood parks and libraries

Two spring events reflect NEYC's emphasis on connecting youth to the wider community. School-age students decorated and rode a bus in the Lilac Jr. Parade, carrying signs advocating for equitable access to care and education that featured quotes from participating children and families. Over Memorial Day, students visited Fairmount Memorial Park, reading veterans' names aloud and placing flags at gravesites.

The center also functions as a basic-needs hub for its families. During the 2025-26 school year, NEYC coordinated coats for every enrolled child through Coats for Kids and community donors, partnered with Grocery Outlet and Tom's Turkey Drive to provide Thanksgiving meals reaching 130 children and their families, and distributed holiday meals to 115 families in December. Looking ahead, NEYC has applied for an ELF capital grant that would add four classrooms and 60 additional early learning slots beginning in 2027.







**Program Participation**

School-age attendance held steady throughout the year, averaging roughly 1,110 students per month with no significant drop-off between the fall and spring

semesters. Participation peaked in March (1,222) and reached its low point in January (1,050).

**Monthly Participation: Northeast Youth Center**

*2025-26 School Year*

| | ECEAP Square Room | ECEAP Triangle Room | ECEAP Circle Room | School -Age |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| September | 184 | 178 | 182 | 1,099 |
| October | 184 | 178 | 182 | 1,099 |
| November | 195 | 203 | 186 | 1,141 |
| December | 227 | 215 | 218 | 1,074 |
| January | 224 | 224 | 256 | 1,050 |
| February | 209 | 198 | 229 | 1,136 |
| March | 277 | 238 | 270 | 1,222 |
| April | 213 | 208 | 212 | 1,139 |
| May | 267 | 236 | 257 | 1,083 |
| June | 219 | 201 | 244 | 1,067 |

## River City Youth

River City Youth (rivercityyouth.org) is a small but growing Spokane nonprofit whose mission centers on enrichment through community engagement, education, and job training for youth in West Central and Northeast Spokane. In the first year of the Ballmer-funded Expanded Learning Initiative, the organization focused on a single summer season of agriculture programming. By Year Three, it had reinvented its model into a multi-season operation serving youth from elementary school through high school across two distinct program tracks.

### Bike Bus at Holmes Elementary

The Bike Bus organizes neighborhood children into a rolling group that rides together to and from Holmes Elementary School. The idea came from a neighborhood resident who had seen similar programs in Portland, and it has grown

steadily through word of mouth and close partnerships with school staff and the family action committee.



The program runs on Mondays and Fridays, serving children from kindergarten through fifth grade. Volunteer adult mentors ride alongside the group, helping children build confidence, learn safety skills, and navigate the neighborhood together. On Friday afternoons, instead of riding directly home, the group travels to a local park to play, have snacks, and celebrate completing the week of school together.

Removing cost as a barrier is central to how the program operates. River City Youth distributes bikes, helmets, and locks to families who need them, drawing on community-donated bikes maintained in program storage. High school interns from the agriculture program have helped with distribution and basic repairs to ensure every interested child can participate. Participation has grown from roughly a dozen youth in the program's first spring season to a couple of dozen unique participants by the most recent spring, reflecting both the quality of the program and deepening trust from families in the neighborhood. Across seasons, more than 75 percent of Bike Bus participants reported feeling more positive about going to school on a daily basis by the end of the program. Older participants are beginning to take on leadership roles as experienced riders who help coach newer and younger children, and a parent stipend program is under development to support neighborhood adults who volunteer as regular riding escorts.

**Youth Agriculture Internship**

River City Youth's second program track serves high school students, primarily from Rogers High School and On Track Academy, through a paid agriculture internship running across spring and fall seasons. Interns spend more than 60 hours over a seven-week season at the organization's garden site, with roughly 60 percent of that time focused on agriculture and 40 percent on broader workforce skills.

On the agriculture side, participants care for greenhouse starts, transplant seedlings, harvest and wash produce for community distribution and learn beekeeping. On the workforce side, youth practice professional communication, earn food handlers permits, and each season plan and cook a full meal for 40 to 50 people alongside a community chef. Interns also work with partner organization Our Place on neighborhood food distributions. Youth are paid for their time, and the

program has helped approximately half a dozen graduates connect to employment, most of them in the restaurant industry, through relationships River City Youth has cultivated with local employers.

**Outdoor Adventure Programming**



During the 2025-26 program year, River City Youth also piloted an Outdoor Adventure series for middle school youth from Yasuhara Middle School, offering four half-day events in outdoor settings across Spokane. Events included a snow day at Riverside State Park with cross-country skiing, a wilderness skills day at the Spokane Conservation District focused on habitat restoration and native tree planting, a kite-building and hiking day along the Centennial Trail, and a fly-fishing day in Riverfront Park in partnership with a local community member who leads an informal urban fly-fishing network. Outreach expanded partway through the year to include Shaw Middle School.

The outdoor series drew modest numbers, and program leadership reflected honestly that weekend scheduling and transportation logistics created barriers that limited reach for the families most intended to be served. The club-based model that preceded the event series had also created friction by requiring sustained multi-week commitment. River City Youth does not plan to continue the Outdoor Adventure series in its current form but remains interested in middle school programming and is committed to finding an approach that better fits the realities of families in these neighborhoods.

**Program Evolution**

River City Youth is a team of two, building toward a more sustainable funding base and developing internship partnerships with Gonzaga and Whitworth universities to expand volunteer and staffing support. Its growth over three years, from a single summer season to a year-round program serving youth from kindergarten through high school, reflects the kind of steady community investment the Expanded Learning Initiative was designed to support.

## Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane (RICS)

Refugee Immigrant Connections Spokane (RICS – ricspokane.org) provides safe, welcoming after-school and summer programming for refugee and immigrant youth through its Kids Connect program. Now in the third year of the Expanded Learning

Initiative, RICS has deepened its presence across multiple Northeast Spokane school sites while navigating a funding landscape and political climate that have created real challenges for the communities it serves. The loss of seven years of United Way funding (Spokane County U.W. closed) affected the program's capacity at its Hillyard site, reducing transportation support and limiting the robustness of services there. At the same time, the broader environment facing immigrant and refugee families has been marked by fear and uncertainty. RICS leadership has been candid about this reality while pointing to the steady commitment of its staff, 85 percent of whom are immigrants or refugees themselves, as the program's greatest source of strength.

During the 2025-26 school year, Kids Connect operated across four ZONE-area sites: Logan Elementary, Hillyard Library, Rogers High School and Garfield Elementary, which serves as a newcomer center for recently arrived students. The newcomer program at Garfield began this year, serving approximately 20 students from Afghanistan, Iraq, Russia, and several countries in South America. Sessions run Monday through Thursday, each lasting 80 minutes, with curriculum tailored to each site's population. At the newcomer sites, programming centers on interactive English vocabulary building through games like Bingo, Charades, and Pictionary, with monthly hands-on activities and seasonal celebrations. At Logan Elementary, where many students were born in the United States and have stronger English skills, programming shifts to more advanced and social activities including karaoke, storytelling, and peer-led projects. Field trips to local parks, conducted in partnership with the Lands Council, have given students guided introductions to natural spaces in their community, including plant identification and the history of local lands.



Across all sites, sessions follow a consistent structure designed to build trust and routine:

- A short check-in over snacks where students can talk about their day
- Structured activities including literacy games, vocabulary work, creative crafts, and storytelling
- Active play to close each session, with soccer, four-square, jump rope, volleyball, and musical chairs among the favorites

The 2025 summer program served more than 100 students around Spokane with 18 NE students, including a three-day soccer camp that brought together over 45 students from different program sites. For many participants, organized sports are not financially accessible outside of Kids Connect, and the camp gave them the chance to play together across language and cultural lines, with each student receiving a soccer ball, water bottle, and backpack.

Beginning in January 2026, RICS implemented two new evaluation tools to deepen its understanding of program impact: the Child and Youth Resilience Measure and a RICS-developed Belonging and Connection assessment, which asks students to respond to simple, accessible questions about feeling safe, trusting an adult, belonging, making friends, and visiting new places. RICS also continues to utilize the healthy outcomes and positive experiences (HOPE) framework in regular programming. Program outcomes for the 2025-26 school year, drawn from staff observation and RICS-compiled metrics across approximately 34 weekly ZONE participants, reflect consistent progress across social-emotional and language development goals:

**Refugee and Immigrant Connections – Evaluation Measures**

*2025-26 School Year*

| Outcome | Students |
|---|---|
| Improved feelings of connection, less isolation | 30 (88%) |
| Learned new skills, increased confidence | 29 (85%) |
| Improved confidence speaking English in front of others | 32 (94%) |
| Increased pride in family culture and language | 32 (94%) |
| Demonstrated increased social-emotional skills | 28 (82%) |

These tools reflect the program's growing investment in hearing directly from youth about their experience, an evolution in evaluation that program staff describe as bringing their assessment up to the level of what they already observe in their students every day.



## Skyhawks Sports Programming

Skyhawks (skyhawks.com) is a national youth sports organization that has delivered grant-funded after-school programming at Logan and Longfellow Elementary Schools during the 2025-26 school year. The Ballmer Group investment has allowed the organization to offer free school site sports programming. Each site runs weekly sessions of approximately 90 minutes, with basketball as the primary sport, and each session cohort serves up to 24 students. The Logan site in particular has filled its roster consistently, a result that program leadership credits to the determined work of an on-site coordinator who navigated school district administrative requirements to get the program up and running for the first time through a direct school partnership.

**Skyhawks Program Activity**
*2025-26 School Year*

| Measure | Logan Elementary | Longfellow Elementary |
|---|---|---|
| Number of Program Sessions (20 days per session) | 4 | 3 |
| Total Participants | 96 | 72 |
| Programming Hours | 3168 | 1764 |

Skyhawks brings coaches, equipment, and curriculum to each site, with the explicit goal of giving students access to organized sports instruction and mentorship during the after-school hours. For many students at both schools, the program provides a structured physical activity option that their families could not otherwise afford.

## Slingshot

Slingshot (helloslingshot.org) is a Spokane-based nonprofit dedicated to helping students discover their potential and navigate postsecondary pathways through its IDEAS Framework: Identity, Discovery, Exploration, Adaptability, and Service. Now

in its fourth year of partnership with The ZONE, Slingshot continues to anchor its work at Rogers High School, where program staff are on site three afternoons a week working alongside school counselors and college access partners to support students across all grade levels and postsecondary pathways.

Programming at Rogers follows Slingshot's tiered model, blending schoolwide college and career readiness lessons with small group workshops and one-on-one coaching for juniors and seniors navigating FAFSA, scholarships, college applications, and career planning. Slingshot staff work closely with the two former College Success Foundation advisors at Rogers, and the College Navigators who transitioned to Launch NW following CSF's statewide closure. That partnership has allowed the school to maintain continuity of college access support despite significant disruption to the broader regional landscape, including the end of federal Gear Up funding that had supported several area schools for seven years.

The most significant program development this year is **Familia Sumas,** an alumni initiative that brings Rogers graduates back to the school in structured and meaningful ways:

- **Cohort dinners** gather recent graduates from college or university, giving alumni a chance to reconnect, share hard-won campus knowledge with incoming freshmen, and work through challenges like financial aid errors, transfer credit disputes, and scholarship appeals. The Gonzaga cohort alone now includes 39 Rogers graduates enrolled simultaneously.
- **Winter break return visits** bring approximately 80 alumni back to Rogers during the week before winter break to meet with current seniors, underclassmen, and teachers, and to travel to feeder elementary and middle schools for lunch visits with younger students.
- **Dream Big Peer mentorship** connects younger students with alumni pursuing a wide range of paths, from four-year universities to trades to professional athletics, reinforcing the program's message that postsecondary success takes many forms.

The Familia Sumas pipeline reflects a core Slingshot belief: young people respond differently to near-peers who have walked in the same halls and faced the same choices than they do to adult advisors alone. Rogers alumni are becoming champions for the school's college-going culture, and the program's momentum is visible in the growing number of graduates who return not because they are asked to, but because the connection still matters to them.

## Spark Central (STAR Program)

Spark Central (spark-central.org) continues to advance its mission of empowering youth through arts, literacy, and mentorship through its STAR (Storytelling, Teaching Artists, Arts Integration, Resilience) program. What began in Year One as a two- and three-day-a-week offering at Holmes moved to a free, four-day-a-week, two-hour model in Year Two, when Garfield Elementary was added as a second site. Year Three maintained that expanded schedule at both schools.

The shift in format reflects a core insight from the program's evolution: after a full school day, students engage most readily through visual and performing arts with literacy instruction woven in through SEL techniques like journaling or illustrating their week in comics. The STAR curriculum is built around that reality, with three interlocking components:

- Teaching artists from the Spokane community lead multi-day projects once a week, with staff providing supplemental activities that reinforce the same themes across remaining sessions
- Arts projects included trash puppet making focused on sustainability, animation, comics, dance, and youth-driven murals.
- Social-emotional learning is woven throughout each week through a structured curriculum that helps students transition from the school day, regulate emotions, and build skills that connect directly to their creative work

Student leadership is a deliberate feature of the model. Children regularly lead breathing exercises, SEL activities, and daily show-and-tell sessions for their peers, with the goal of keeping programming as student-driven as possible.

Throughout 34 weeks of programming, the two STAR sites each served 18 students at Garfield and 17 students at Holmes during the 2025-26 school year and have developed somewhat distinct approaches in response to the needs of their student populations. At Holmes, which serves higher-needs students, daily outdoor recess time is built into the schedule to help students decompress before engaging in creative work. At Garfield, students arrive with strong familiarity with SEL techniques and often take the lead in teaching peers about the strategies they already practice at home. Spark Central reported 130 youth involved in 2025-26 participation, including Summer 2025 and Summer 2026.

**Spark Central Program Activity**

*2025-26 School Year*

| Program | Youth | Program hours |
|---|---|---|
| Holmes STAR | 17 | 1724 |
| Garfield STAR | 18 | 1747.5 |
| STAR Day Camp | 8 | 112 |
| **Total** | **43** | **3583.5** |

## Spokane Youth for Christ (YFC)

Spokane Youth for Christ (https://spokaneyfc.org) operates a drop-in after-school program serving youth ages 11 to 19, primarily drawing students from Rogers HS and Shaw MS and the surrounding Hillyard neighborhood. The program has no formal referral process or parental sign-up requirement, relying instead on peer networks and proximity to draw a steady stream of participants. Average monthly attendance during the current school year has been approximately 145 students, with daily attendance ranging from 50 to 80 youth depending on the day. The organization recently expanded from its longtime Hillyard location to add a new downtown facility, though the new space is still being built to match the amenities of the original site, which includes a gymnasium, music studio, and workout facilities.

Programming follows a holistic, five-pillar model encompassing financial literacy, moral development, educational support, physical activity, and outdoor experiential trips through a partnership with Peak 7. Mentorship occurs organically rather than through formal matching, with relationships forming as students attend consistently over time. Academic support is offered informally, as staff have found that structured homework time has limited uptake among participants. The organization also hosts seasonal resource fairs and monthly enrichment workshops, such as financial literacy sessions with Canopy Credit Union and a recent carpentry skills workshop. Staffing includes eight to nine team members, split between full-time and part-time roles, supported primarily by private donor funding and, as of this year, Ballmer Group funding tied to The ZONE.



## Strong Women Achieving Greatness (SWAG)

SWAG (https://www.strongwomenachievinggreatness.com) is a grassroots mentorship and empowerment program dedicated to equipping, empowering, and mentoring young women in Northeast Spokane. Operating under the core philosophy of "prevention over intervention," the program provides a vital, culturally responsive space for young women to build identity, communication skills, and community connections.

**Program Transition and Mentorship**

In the 2025–26 school year, SWAG transitioned its regular club meetings from the school day to an after-school format following district-wide structural changes. Despite the logistical hurdle of shifting to after-school hours (where many participants face competing demands from jobs), the program maintained a steady roster of 57 active participants, alongside a growing list of drop-in attendees.

A defining evolution of SWAG's model in Year Three is the formal cultivation of a multi-generational mentor pipeline. Former program participants currently attending regional institutions, including the University of Washington, Eastern Washington University, Whitworth University, and Spokane Falls Community College, now return to serve as paid college-level "SWAG Ambassadors". These ambassadors assist with workshops, facilitate smaller peer breakouts, and coach the affiliated Rogers High School step team, utilizing their near-peer status to bridge relational gaps with younger students.

**Community Impact and Financial Equity**

The program's curriculum continues to expand its reach outward, actively funding equity initiatives across the district. In November, SWAG organized and funded a district-wide Equity Summit debrief, providing meals for 150 students from five local high schools so student leaders could present their equity work. SWAG also stepped in with critical equity funding during the fall, contributing $500 to support eight DECA students who would have otherwise faced financial barriers to competing at the state level.

### Experiential Learning and Mutual Aid

The program year was anchored by intensive experiential learning trips, community outreach, and critical responsive care.



- **Civic Engagement:** In February, SWAG chartered a bus to Olympia for its annual "Girls on the Hill" trip, taking 30 participants and two ambassadors to practice lobbying at the state capitol.
- **Community Building:** SWAG executed its 6th annual "You Deserve Roses" Valentine's initiative, delivering custom bouquets and chocolates to 40 participants.
- **Civil Rights Education:** In April, SWAG collaborated with the Black Student Union (BSU) on a historic Spring Break civil rights tour to Atlanta, Georgia, touring historic campuses like Spelman and Morehouse Colleges.

Beyond structured activities, SWAG increasingly functioned as a frontline provider of emergency mutual aid. When a devastating residential fire on the north side caused multiple participants to lose their home and possessions, the program immediately mobilized, voting to distribute $500 emergency relief stipends to aid the families. Similar responsive funding was deployed in January to assist a participant's family with burial and meal costs following the passing of a parent.

**SWAG Program Activity**
*2025-26 School Year*

| Program Activity | Detail | Participation Level |
|---|---|---|
| Core Participation | Active roster (Final Forms registered) | 55 Students |
| Ambassador Program | College-level mentors (Paid) | 2–5 Ambassadors |
| Equity Support | DECA Competition Sponsorship | $500 (8 students) |
| Civic Engagement | "Girls on the Hill" (Olympia) | 32 Attendees |
| Community Outreach | District Equity Summit Debrief | 150 Students |
| Student Recognition | "You Deserve Roses" Initiative | 40 Participants |
| Emergency Aid | Mutual Aid / Family Relief | $500+ per incident |

## Spokane Youth Sports Association

The Spokane Youth Sports Association (https://sysa.com) after-school sports program delivers an engaging and safe educational sports experience to bridge the opportunity gap for underserved children in Title I schools. Operating with a strict tenet that no child is turned away for financial reasons, the nonprofit program removes barriers like cost, lack of transportation, and parental availability.

Sessions run four days a week after school, with staff on-site from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM and students participating from 3:30 PM to 5:00 PM. To keep instruction developmentally appropriate, kindergarten through second-grade students typically meet on Mondays and Wednesdays, while third through fifth-grade students meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Each site is staffed by a head coach and an assistant coach, maintaining a tight one-to-ten coach-to-student ratio. Behavioral specialists and site coordinators provide additional on-site management and transition support.

### School Sites and Participation

The program operates across select pilot and expansion schools within the Northeast Spokane footprint, serving multiple ZONE schools including Cooper, Regal, Stevens, highlighting:

- **Lidgerwood Elementary**: A returning continuous site known for exceptional after-school participation and highly active attendance
- **Bemiss Elementary**: A new expansion pilot that implemented a structured station system rotating through homework, crafts, and sports. Regular attendance rapidly grew from twelve to thirty-five students.

### Curriculum and Sport Progression

The curriculum maps out intentional five-week developmental progressions tailored by age group, granting coaches flexibility to adjust drills based on student energy. A typical five-week skill progression moves from hand-eye coordination and basic dribbling, to passing drills, striking or shooting fundamentals, serving techniques, and final live scrimmages. Every standard session follows a strict format: a five-minute icebreaker, a ten-minute warm-up, technical drills with water breaks, and a final twenty to thirty-minute scrimmage.

### Partnerships, Funding, and Safety

Program sustainability relies heavily on professional and higher education pipelines. The hiring pipeline is integrated into the Gonzaga University Sport Management syllabus, funneling college students into paid coaching roles. Programs also partner

with local high schools like Gonzaga Prep and Mead High School for volunteer and assistant coaching help.

In SY26-27 this partnership will continue with The ZONE for a fully underwritten, free five-week spring soccer league acting as a feeder system for seven elementary schools heading into Rogers High School, providing equipment for sixteen teams through corporate sponsorships from The ZONE, the Avista Foundation, and local banks.

## SECTION 2 – Program Activity and Results

Year Three represented the initiative's largest year of direct service. Seventeen organizations received Ballmer Group funding during 2025-26, delivering over 15,000 student-days of programming. A student-day represents one student attending one day of one program, and this measure captures both how many young people were reached and the level of programming actually received.

Growth across the three-year grant period has been substantial. The partnerships expanded through this ELO funding stream from seven organizations in Year One to twelve in Year Two and seventeen in Year Three. Participation grew alongside that network, from 503 students in Year One to 1,180 in Year Two and 1,853 in Year Three, a 57% increase over the prior year and more than three and a half times the Year One figure.

**ELI Students Served**

*2023-2024 to 2025-26 School Years*

| Program Year | Organizations Funded | Students Served | Changed from Prior Year |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Year One (2023-24)** | 7 | 503 | |
| **Year Two (2024-25)** | 12 | 1,180 | +135% |
| **Year Three (2025-26)** | 17 | 1,853 | +57% |

Counting across all three years, 2,326 different students have participated in ELI programming at least once. Most of these students engaged in a single year, though 433 participated in two years and 68 took part in all three. Of the 1,493 students served in 2025-26, 357 (24%) had participated in at least one earlier year, suggesting that roughly a quarter of the Year Three cohort represents sustained engagement.

**ELI Participation Across Years**

| Participation | Student (percentage) |
|---|---|
| Participated in one year only | 1,825 (78%) |
| Participated in two years | 433 (19%) |
| Participated in all three years | 68 (3%) |
| **Total unduplicated students ever served** | **2,326** |

In Year Three, grantees varied widely in how they delivered programming. For example, Youth for Christ operated a single program that accounted for 4,211 student-days, while Girl Scouts ran ten separate troop meetings and day camps totaling 2,019 student-days. At the other end, KSPS PBS reached 219 students across nine family nights and community events, each of which lasted a single evening. Neither model is better than the other, but they answer different questions about what the initiative is doing, and reporting only student counts would obscure the distinction entirely.

**ELI Participation by Organization**

*2025-26 School Year*

| Organization | Programs | Students (unduplicated) | Student-days | Mean days per student | Median days |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Just One | 1 | 368 | 2,761 | 7.5 | 2.0 |
| YFC | 1 | 297 | 4,211 | 14.2 | 5.0 |
| SYSA | 9 | 226 | 2,901 | 12.8 | 5.0 |
| KSPS | 9 | 219 | 228 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Girl Scouts | 10 | 165 | 2,019 | 12.2 | 8.0 |
| Spark Central | 3 | 116 | 2,382 | 20.5 | 4.0 |
| Slingshot | 1 | 97 | 334 | 3.4 | 2.5 |
| River City Youth | 6 | 52 | 570 | 11.0 | 7.0 |
| SWAG | 1 | 55 | 55 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| **All organizations** | **54** | **1,493** | **25,541*** ** | **8.0** | |

** Note, 102 students participated with more than one grantee*

***Not included in chart above: Skyhawks, NEYC, RICS, and MH*

****The total number of student days reflects all grantees funded in SY 25-26 (including Skyhawks, NEYC, RICS, and MH*

The grantees not included in the data above did not utilize the Community tracker and thus had duplicated student records for 2025-26 school year. That being said, Skyhawks, NEYC, RICS, and MH collectively logged over 10,080 student-days and 6,235 hours of programming throughout 13 programs.

The individual student experience also varied across funded programs in Year Three. More than a third of participants (529 students) attended exactly one day, most often a family night or a single-session clinic. At the other extreme, 132 students attended thirty or more days, and the most engaged participant logged 117 days across the year. These two groups sit at opposite ends of what the initiative offers: the 35% attending a single day account for 3% of student-days, while the 9% attending thirty or more days account for 49%.

**ELI Program Participation Variation**

*2025-26 School Year*

| Total days attended | Students | % of students | Student-days | % of student-days |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Exactly 1 day | 529 | 35% | 529 | 3% |
| 2 to 5 days | 342 | 23% | 1,047 | 7% |
| 6 to 15 days | 343 | 23% | 3,262 | 21% |
| 16 to 29 days | 147 | 10% | 3,025 | 20% |
| 30 or more days | 132 | 9% | 7,598 | 49% |
| **All students** | **1,493** | | **15,461** | |

## Summer Participation

Summer programming continued across Northeast Spokane in both 2025 and 2026, with a mix of returning organizations and new or expanded programming. In 2025, the organizations included in summer reporting collectively served **983 students** across thirteen funded organizations. In 2026, nine organizations reported summer programming: Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane (RICS), Spokane Youth for Christ (YFC), If You Could Save Just One, Manzanita House, Spark Central, Girl Scouts of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho, Slingshot, Northeast Youth Center, and Inland Northwest Youth Boxing. Based on 2026 figures, these organizations served over **1,900 Northeast students** and provided **6,829 hours of student programming** between June and August. The 2026 reporting also documented **385 Northeast families or parents engaged through over 8,970 hours of adult/parent engagement.**

**Summer Program Activity**

*2025 and 2026*

| Organization | 2025 Students | 2025 Hours | 2026 Students | 2026 Hours | 2026 Family Engaged |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Girl Scouts of Eastern WA/Northern ID | 53 | 224 | 35 | 315 | 72 |
| Girls on the Run (only funded Sum 25) | 25 | 350 | | | |
| If You Could Save Just One | 325 | 5721 | 1386 | 4158 | 50 |
| Inland Northwest Youth Boxing | 14 | 140 | 6 | 32 | 8 |
| Manzanita House | 66 | 132 | 55 | 110 | 31 |
| Northeast Youth and Family Services (only funded Sum 25) | 12 | 360 | | | |
| Northeast Youth Center | 140 | 684 | 140 | 492 | 47 |
| Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane | 18 | 72 | 53 | 80 | 10 |
| Skyhawks (only funded Sum 25 and SY 25-26) | 73 | 2250 | | | |
| Slingshot | 92 | 412 | 86 | 325 | 119 |
| Spark Central | 44 | 360 | 43 | 717 | 43 |
| Spokane Youth for Christ | 115 | 460 | 125 | 600 | 5 |
| Ubuntu Fly Anglers (only funded Sum 25) | 6 | 216 | | | |
| **Total** | **983** | **11,381** | **1,929** | **6,829** | **385** |

Several organizations used the summer to test new approaches or deepen existing programming. Girl Scouts merged its GoGetters day camp into Camp Ashwell for the first time, expanding from a single week of programming in 2024 to eight weekly sessions serving about 60 girls each. Manzanita House piloted its first virtual heritage-language class for Afghan women and students and added a pop-up class on the South Hill for Arab families who could not travel to the Northeast Community Center. Spark Central extended most of its camps to full days, five days a week, and served its most diverse group of campers to date, including 39 percent BIPOC and 27 percent neurodiverse participants. Spokane Youth for Christ sent seven students on a five-day backpacking trip on the Olympic Peninsula, which staff described as one of the summer's most significant experiences for the group. Not every plan held: Northeast Youth Center's field trips and outdoor learning time were repeatedly disrupted by the Spokane Complex Fires during the June-to-August period. Sustainability plans varied by organization and funding source. Girl Scouts and Manzanita House both plan to carry summer participants directly into year-round programming without a gap. YFC expects attendance to increase once the school year resumes, consistent with its year-round, relationship-based model.

## SECTION 3 – Participant Characteristics and Outcomes

The ZONE Expanded Learning Initiative is designed to increase access to high-quality, community-based expanded learning programs that meet the diverse cultural, learning, and whole-child needs of Northeast Spokane students. In Year Three the initiative continued to focus on the following goals:

- **Equitable Access & Participation** – Ensure that the percentage of students served reflects the demographics of The ZONE, including students of color, English language learners, students receiving free and reduced lunch, and students with special needs.
- **Expanded Community Partnerships** – Increase the number of community-based service providers offering after-school and summer enrichment programs.
- **Social-Emotional and Academic Growth** – Improve SEL survey scores, attendance, and course performance for student participants.
- **Family & Caregiver Engagement** – Increase family engagement and strengthen the connection between home, school, and community.

This section summarizes measurable progress toward these goals, including participant characteristics, school attendance, academic indicators, and social-emotional survey results. Year Three offers a vantage point that was not available in the first two reports. Program participation records now span all three years of the initiative, making it possible to follow the same students over time and to examine whether sustained involvement is associated with different outcomes than a single year of participation.

Of the 1,853 students served by ELI grantees in 2025-26, this section reports on the 1,493 participants whose program record could be matched to Spokane Public Schools student data. For privacy reasons and concerns, some students remain unidentified. Looking only at students who could be matched to district records, which allows participation to be followed across years, 432 students took part in Year One, 970 in Year Two, and 1,493 in Year Three. The table below shows how many of these students participated in one, two, or all three years of the initiative.

**ELI Students with Outcome Records**
*2023-2024 to 2025-26 School Years*

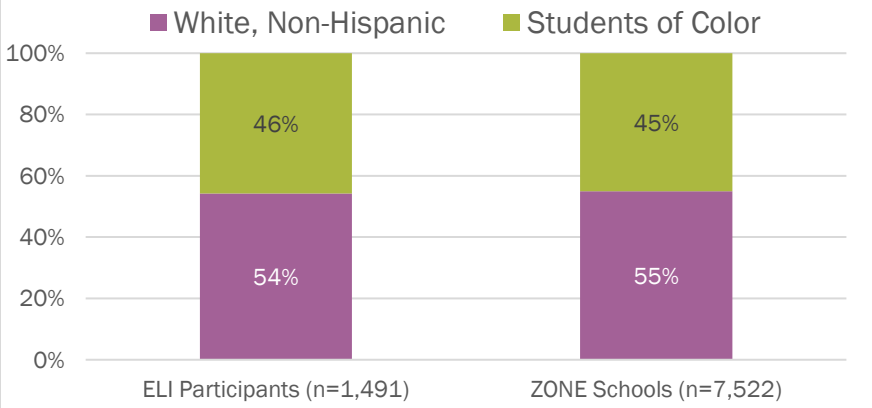
| Program Year | Matched to District Records | Organizations Reporting Records |
|---|---|---|
| **Year One (2023-24)** | 432 | 6 |
| **Year Two (2024-25)** | 970 | 4 |
| **Year Three (2025-26)** | 1,493 | 9 |

Where it is meaningful to do so, results in this section are also reported by level of program participation. Program intensity varied widely across grantees, as described in Section 2.

## Participant Characteristics

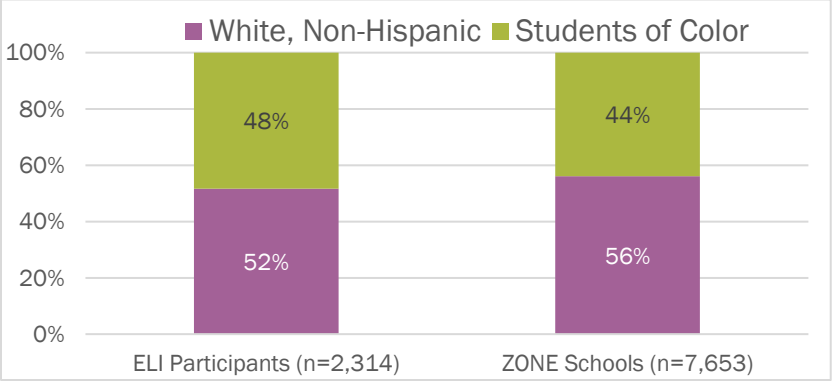
Expanding access for students who have historically had fewer opportunities is the first goal of the initiative, and race and ethnicity provide one measure of whether programming is reaching the students the grant was intended to serve. In 2025-26, 46 percent of ELI participants were students of color, closely matching the 45 percent share of students of color enrolled in ZONE-area schools.

**Percent Students of Color: ZONE Students and ELI Participants**
*2025-26 School Year*




Across the full grant period the margin is slightly wider. Of the 2,314 students (with race/ethnicity record) who participated in ELI programming at least once between 2023-24 and 2025-26 and could be matched to district records, 48 percent were students of color, compared with an average of 44 percent in ZONE-area schools over the same three years.

**Percent Students of Color: ZONE Students and ELI Participants**
*Three-Year Total*




Individual programs vary considerably in the populations they reach. As shown in the table below, the percentage of students of color served by each organization submitting demographic data ranged from 29 percent to 71 percent. While all programs are open to and serve students of all races and ethnicities, several organizations design programming specifically to support students of color in a culturally relevant way. SWAG (71 percent), Youth for Christ (62 percent), and Slingshot (61 percent) served the highest shares, each working primarily with students at Rogers High School and in the surrounding Hillyard neighborhood. Programs with a broader neighborhood or school-site draw, including Spark Central (29 percent), Girl Scouts (34 percent), and River City Youth (38 percent), served populations closer to the composition of the elementary schools where they operate. Manzanita House and RICS do not report student level demographics, although their programming is targeting immigrants and refugees. Their students of color demographics are not reflected below.

**Percent Students of Color: ELI Participants by Program**
*2025-26 School Year*

| Program | Students of Color | Student Participants |
|---|---|---|
| **Just One** | 154 (42%) | 366 |
| **YFC** | 184 (62%) | 297 |
| **SYSA** | 91 (40%) | 226 |
| **KSPS** | 90 (41%) | 219 |
| **Girl Scouts** | 56 (34%) | 165 |
| **Spark Central** | 34 (29%) | 116 |
| **Slingshot** | 59 (61%) | 97 |
| **SWAG** | 39 (71%) | 55 |
| **River City Youth** | 20 (38%) | 52 |

Socio-economic status of students is typically reported based on families that meet federal income qualification criteria for free and reduced-price school lunches. Northeast Spokane represents one of the areas in the city with the highest low income households. More than four in ten residents (43%) have incomes under 200% of the federal poverty level, compared to 27% of households in other areas of the city (US Census American Community Survey, 2024). Three of every four ELI participants (75%) qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in 2025-26, somewhat below the 81% rate across ZONE-area schools (although we are missing this information from our immigrant refugee populations who participated). The rate is highest in the elementary grades (84%) and declines through middle school (83%) and high school (77%), a pattern that reflects both family income and the lower rates of household income reporting typical of secondary buildings.

**Percent Low Income (Free/Reduced Lunch): ZONE Students and ELI Participants**
*2025-26 School Year*

| | Free & Reduced Total | Total |
|---|---|---|
| ELI Participants | 1,125 (75%) | 1,493 |
| ZONE Schools | 6,117 (81%) | 7,523 |

One in four students (26%) in ZONE-area schools qualify for special needs services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP), compared to 20% of ELI participants. An IEP is a legal document that outlines a student's specialized instruction and services. In contrast, a Section 504 plan focuses on accommodations rather than specialized instruction and supports students with physical or mental impairments that substantially limit major life activities such as learning, walking, or speaking. Five percent of ELI participants have a Section 504 plan, a higher share than the 1% reported across ZONE-area schools. Taken together, one in four participants (25%) receives either specialized instruction or formal accommodations, close to the combined 27% rate in ZONE schools.

**Percent Special Needs (Individual Education Plan): ZONE Students and ELI Participants**
*2025-26 School Year*

| | Specialized Instruction (IEP) | Accommodations (504) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| ELI Participants | 306 (20%) | 68 (5%) | 1,493 |
| ZONE Schools | 1,927 (26%) | 60 (1%) | 7,523 |

Programs also continue to reach students learning English alongside their coursework. Multi-language learners made up 13% of ELI participants in 2025-26,

similar to the 15% share in ZONE-area schools. This figure covers only those grantees reporting student-level records and does not include Manzanita House or Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane, both of which work almost entirely with immigrant and refugee families. Together, these participation patterns describe a Year Three cohort that continues to grow and also closely mirrors the students enrolled in ZONE-area schools across income, special needs, and language.

**Percent Multi-Language Learners: ZONE Students and ELI Participants**
*2025-26 School Year*[4]

| | Multi-Language Learners | Total |
|---|---|---|
| ELI Participants | 187 (13%) | 1,493 |
| ZONE Schools | 1,132 (15%) | 7,523 |

## Social Emotional Learning Outcomes

Spokane Public Schools administers its Student Attribute Survey each fall and spring to students in grade 4 and above. Twelve items are grouped into three domains relevant to expanded learning.

- **Belonging** draws on items such as "People at my school care about me" and "My teachers make me feel like I belong."
- **Coherence** asks whether students understand the purpose of their work, including "I know why we are doing our assignments" and whether teachers help them see how what they learn is useful outside of school.
- **Consistency** measures whether expectations hold across classrooms, anchored by items like "All my teachers believe I can do hard work in class."

Of the 1,493 students served by Ballmer-funded grantees in 2025-2026, 973 were enrolled in grade 4 or higher and eligible to take the survey. Among those eligible, 451 students (46 percent) completed the fall administration and 475 (49 percent) completed the spring administration, with 285 (29 percent) completing both. To test whether more time in programming was associated with stronger scores; participants were divided at 16 days of attendance. The table below shows domain averages for each group in both administrations.

[4] This graphic excludes student data from Manzanita House and Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane (RICS)

**Student Attribute Survey Scores by Level of ELI Participation**
*2025-26 School Year*

| Domain | Fall 1-15 days (n=358) | Fall 16+ days (n=93) | Spring 1-15 days (n=379) | Spring 16+ days (n=96) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Belonging | 3.94 | 4.13 | 3.90 | 3.94 |
| Coherence | 3.89 | 4.07 | 3.89 | 3.91 |
| Consistency | 3.89 | 4.20 | 3.84 | 4.02 |

Students who went on to attend 16 or more days scored higher than their lower-attending peers in the fall on all three domains, with the largest gap on Consistency at 0.31 points. By spring, 16+ students still scored higher, but the gaps had narrowed, to 0.04 points on Belonging, 0.02 on Coherence, and 0.18 on Consistency. These figures describe an association between participation and scores, not an effect of participation on scores. The initiative's stated benchmark compares participants to a set of nonparticipating students, and the student records available for this analysis include only ELI participants. Comparing higher-attending to lower-attending participants is the closest available substitute.

It should be noted that median participation among survey-eligible students was 4 days. Measurable change in how a student answers questions about belonging and classroom expectations may be limited with this amount of program activity, and the flat results should be read in that light rather than as evidence that programming did not impact the students it reached.

## Attendance Outcomes

Regular school attendance remains one of the clearest signals that a student is connected to their school community, and the Expanded Learning Initiative (ELI) was designed to support youth's connection to school. Spokane Public Schools classifies each student's yearly attendance into five categories based on the share of enrolled days attended:

- Satisfactory attendance, 95 percent or more of school days
- At-risk attendance, 90 to 95 percent of school days
- Minor chronic absenteeism, 85 to 90 percent of school days
- Moderate chronic absenteeism, 80 to 85 percent of school days
- Severe chronic absenteeism, less than 80 percent of school days

Program participation records now cover three school years, and daily attendance counts for 2025-26 permit a look at whether the amount of programming a student received relates to how consistently they came to school.

### Students with Chronic Attendance Concerns

The table below follows ELI participants who missed enough school in 2024-25 to fall into the moderate or severe chronic categories, meaning they attended less than 85 percent of enrolled days. For primary (elementary and middle school) and secondary (high school) participants separately, it shows how many remained in those categories the following year and how many moved into higher attendance.

**Moderate and Severe Chronic Attendance**
*ZONE ELI Participants 2024-25 and 2025-26*

| | Students | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| **Moderate-Severe 2024-25 (n=61)** | | |
| Continued 2025-26 Moderate-Severe | 42 | 69% |
| Improved to 85%+ | 19 | 31% |

Sixty-one participants entered 2025-26 with a recent history of moderate or severe chronic absence, and 19 of them, or 31 percent, attended at least 85 percent of school days during the program year.

### Attendance by Level of Program Participation

Turning from year-to-year change to patterns within 2025-26, the table below groups participants by days of programming attended and shows how each group is distributed across the five listed attendance categories.

**School Attendance by Level of ELI Program Participation**
*2025-26 School Year*

| Attendance Category | 1 to 15 days (n=1,178) | 16 or more program days (n=277) |
|---|---|---|
| Satisfactory (95%+) | 32.5% | 33.6% |
| At Risk (90-95%) | 25.9% | 30.0% |
| Minor Chronic (85-90%) | 18.3% | 16.6% |
| Moderate Chronic (80-85%) | 8.0% | 5.4% |
| Severe Chronic (<80%) | 15.3% | 14.4% |

Students attending 16 or more days of programming were less likely to fall into moderate chronic absence, 5.4 percent against 8.0 percent, but only slightly more likely to reach satisfactory attendance, 33.6 percent against 32.5 percent. Grade level explains much of this small overall difference. Attendance rates in The ZONE participant population fall from roughly 92 percent in the elementary grades to 86 percent in middle school and 84 percent in high school, and elementary students also accumulate more program days than their older peers. Nearly two thirds of the higher-participation group is enrolled in elementary school, compared with about half of the group attending fewer days, so the students receiving the most

programming are concentrated in the grades where attendance is strongest to begin with.

**Mean School Attendance Rate by Grade Level and Level of ELI Program Participation**

*2025-26 School Year*

| | 1 to 15 program days | | 16 or more program days | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grade Level | N | Mean attendance | N | Mean attendance |
| Elementary (K-5) | 602 | 91.7% | 174 | 92.3% |
| Middle (6-8) | 241 | 86.5% | 49 | 84.6% |
| High (9-12) | 335 | 83.7% | 54 | 81.9% |
| All students | 1,178 | 88.3% | 277 | 88.9% |

Comparing students within their own grade level highlights the imbalance. Elementary participants attending 16 or more days attended school slightly more consistently than those attending fewer, 92.3 percent against 91.7 percent. The difference is small but runs in the expected direction, and it is the one place in this analysis where more time in programming coincides with better school attendance. Among middle and high school students the comparison runs the other way by about two points, though with only 49 and 54 students in the higher participation groups, those differences are within the range expected by chance.

It should be noted that the student records available for this analysis include only reported ELI participants, so there is no way to establish whether these students' attendance held up better, worse, or about the same as their peers over the same period. School attendance across the district and the state has been under pressure since the pandemic, and attendance differences among participants may represent a smaller decline than the surrounding population experienced.

## Behavior Outcomes

Another indicator of student connection to school relates to referral for behavior incidents. Spokane Public Schools records both less serious and more serious incidents, and the figures below combine the two into a single count of behavior-related referrals. Among the 1,493 students participating in ELI programming during 2025-26, most had no referrals at all during the program year. Three-quarters (74%) of elementary and middle school participants and roughly two-thirds (65%) of high school participants had no referrals, while 17% of primary students and 22% of secondary students had two or more referrals.

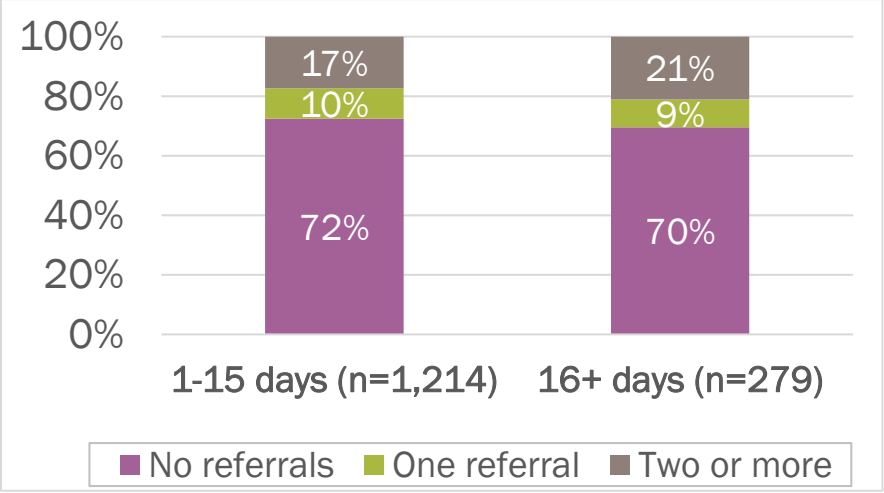
**Distribution of Behavior-Related Referrals – ELI Participants**
*2025-26 School Year*

| | None (0) | One (1) | Two or more | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elementary/Middle School | 781 (74%) | 95 (9%) | 180 (17%) | 1,056 |
| High School | 266 (65%) | 55 (13%) | 89 (22%) | 410 |

Grouping participants by total days attended across all ELI programs, we found no relationship between program activity levels and referral rates. Students attending 16 or more days were somewhat more likely than those attending one to 15 days to have two or more referrals, 21% compared with 17%, and averaged 1.32 referrals against 1.10. The share with a more serious incident was identical at 11% in both groups.

While disciplinary referrals were comparable between the two groups, other differences and distinctions should be noted. Students in the higher activity (16+) group were more likely to qualify for free or reduced-price meals, 84% compared with 73%. Activity levels are also reflective of program design. Organizations running weekly or season-long models (YFC, SYSA, Girl Scouts) account for roughly three quarters of students in the higher activity group, while single-event and short-series programming accounts for most of the lower one.

**Behavior-Related Referrals by Program Dosage: ZONE ELI Participants**
*2025-26 School Year*




A clearer picture emerges among the 338 students who participated in ELI programming in both 2024-25 and 2025-26. Of these, 82 entered the second year with at least one behavior referral on record from 2024-25. For this higher-risk group, the average number of referrals fell from 3.84 in the base year to 2.88 in 2025-26, a reduction of nearly one full referral per student. The decline was

strongest among elementary and middle school participants, whose average dropped from 4.36 to 3.22. Two-thirds of the group (66%) had fewer referrals than in the base year, and 40% had none at all. Some improvement is expected among any group selected on a high starting value. However, a sustained reduction of this size among students already showing behavioral risk represents meaningful progress, and it suggests that continued engagement across multiple years may matter more for these students than the volume of programming in any single year.

**Change in Behavior-Related Referrals (1+): Two-Year ZONE ELI Participants**
*-2025 to 2025-26 School Year*

| Grade Level | Students | Base Year Mean Referrals | 2025-26 Mean Referrals | Fewer (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Elementary/Middle** | 55 | 4.36 | 3.22 | 38 (69%) |
| **High School** | 27 | 2.78 | 2.19 | 16 (59%) |
| **Total** | 84 | 3.84 | 2.88 | 54 (66%) |

## Assessment (SBAC)

Students in Spokane Public Schools take the Smarter Balanced (SBAC) assessment in English language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and again in grade 10. Achievement is reported on a four-level scale, with levels three and four indicating that a student met or exceeded standards. Among ELI participants in tested grades during 2025-26, 35% met standard in English language arts (n=744) and 25% met standard in mathematics (n=466).

**Smarter Balanced Assessment Results: ZONE ELI Participants**
*2025-26 School Year*

| Grade band | Students tested | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 | % Met standard (3-4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **English Language Arts** | 744 | 306 | 180 | 148 | 110 | 35% |
| **Mathematics** | 466 | 205 | 144 | 71 | 46 | 25% |

Grouping participants by total days attended; we found no association in either ELA or Mathematics SBAC results. Among students attending one to 15 days, 36% met standard in English language arts and 25% in mathematics. Among those attending 16 or more days, 31% met standard in English language arts and 25% in mathematics. Neither difference is statistically significant, and students in the higher attendance group were younger on average, which further limits what a direct comparison can show. This result is not unexpected. Much of the programming is enrichment and mentoring rather than academic instruction, and

classroom exposure would be expected to drive most of the variation in assessment results.

**Smarter Balanced Results by Program Dosage: ZONE ELI Participants**
*2025-26 School Year*

| Activity Level Days Attended | ELA Tested | ELA % | Math tested | Math % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1-15 days** | 562 | 36% | 363 | 25% |
| **16+ days** | 182 | 31% | 114 | 25% |
| **All tested** | **744** | **35%** | **477** | **25%** |

## Bright spotting – Telling Youth Stories

Below is an account of Michaela's perseverance, as told by Jaime Stacy, Executive Director of SWAG.

> "SWAG exists to equip, empower, and mentor young women, and Michaela truly embodies that mission.
>
> My first introduction to Michaela was during her freshman year at Rogers High School, when she was on a journey of self-discovery, exploring her identity and how she wanted to show up in the world. Through SWAG, Michaela gained confidence that affirmed who she is as a Black young woman. Her continued participation empowered her to use her voice against racial injustice, a journey she highlighted through her winning performance at the 2026 Miss Juneteenth Pageant.
>
> Michaela has grown into a mentor, encouraging other young women to discover their voices and embrace their potential. SWAG also encouraged her involvement in Rogers Black Student Union and supported her decision to attend Howard University, a historically Black university in Washington, D.C.
>
> Michaela's journey reflects the transformative power of mentorship, belonging, and purpose. She continues to inspire others through her leadership, courage, and commitment to uplifting young women. She reminds us that dreaming big is not only the destination—it is one of the most meaningful parts of the journey."

Also included are some words from Michaela:

> "SWAG has been a catalyst in my exposure of civic engagement and racial equity by introducing me to opportunities to engage and support the Rogers and surrounding community… Learning about Racial Equity in one, if not the

most diverse high schools in Spokane, has been so supportive because I was able to pinpoint what has happened in previous school or society that had been detrimental to my mental health as a Black woman…SWAG is something that this world needs. SWAG gives girls of color a chance to speak up and find their truth in a world that tries to silence their voice. “

## SECTION 4 – Family Engagement

Family engagement continues to be a cornerstone of the Expanded Learning Initiative (ELI), strengthening the connection between home, school, and community. In Year Three, this work ran along two tracks: family-facing activities built into grantee programming, and events and services coordinated by The ZONE at partner school sites. Across the funded network, grantees reported approximately 46,889.5 hours of parent and adult family engagement and 1,420 parent/adults engaged during 2025-26, a 32% increase from 1,070 parents/adults served in Year Two.

Family programming took different forms depending on the organization and the families it serves. KSPS PBS hosted nine Family and Community Learning nights and community events reaching 219 students and their caregivers, with roughly 50 participants at a typical evening, and its Future Day career exploration expo at Spokane Community College drew 804 adults and students to a single February event. Just One anchored its year around two holiday gatherings that drew 312 youth at Thanksgiving and 222 in winter, together involving more than 100 families. Manzanita House shifted its adult offerings away from informational workshops toward art-based mental health groups and cross-generational projects in which children and parents share language, food, and artwork. Northeast Youth Center functioned as a basic-needs hub for its families, coordinating Thanksgiving meals that reached 130 children and their families and holiday meals for 115 families in December. Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane continued to build family participation into field trips and summer experiences, with staff describing family return visits to parks and museums as a marker of program impact.

These events also explain part of the participation pattern described in Section 2. More than a third of Year Three participants attended exactly one day of programming, and a family night or single-session community event often that day. Those events serve a purpose that student-days alone do not capture. They introduce families to what The ZONE and its partners offer, and they frequently become the entry point for deeper engagement later.

## Family and Community Connection Survey

To understand how families experience connection to school and community, The ZONE administered a short three-question survey at community events during 2025-26. Respondents rated how connected they feel to their school and to their community, and how important they consider after-school and summer programming. A total of 151 surveys were collected across two administrations, including 110 at the Back-to-School event. Results below are reported as a percentage of families who answered each question.

### Family and Community Connection Survey Results

*2025-26 School Year*

| How connected do you feel to your SCHOOL? | Families | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Very connected | 51 | 40% |
| Fairly connected | 39 | 31% |
| Neutral | 14 | 11% |
| A little connected | 6 | 5% |
| Not at all connected | 17 | 13% |
| **Total responding** | **127** | |

| How connected do you feel to your COMMUNITY? | Families | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Very connected | 40 | 30% |
| Fairly connected | 37 | 27% |
| Neutral | 18 | 13% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A little connected | 12 | 9% |
| Not at all connected | 28 | 21% |
| **Total responding** | **135** | |

| **How important is after-school and summer programming?** | **Families** | **Percent** |
|---|---|---|
| Very important | 54 | 57% |
| Somewhat important | 20 | 21% |
| Neutral | 14 | 15% |
| A little important | 4 | 4% |
| Not important | 3 | 3% |
| **Total responding** | **95** | |

Two findings stand out. First, families report stronger connection to their school than to their neighborhood. Seventy-one percent described themselves as very or fairly connected to their school, compared with 57 percent for their community. Second, families place clear value on expanded learning. Nearly four in five rated after-school and summer programming as very or somewhat important, and more than half selected very important.

Read together, these results point toward where the next phase of this work sits. Schools remain the most reliable point of contact between families and institutions in Northeast Spokane, and ELI grantees have used that connection well. Community connection is the weaker link, and it is the one that expanded learning partners, most of whom operate in neighborhood spaces rather than school buildings, are positioned to strengthen. The survey is cross-sectional and has no baseline, so it describes where families stand rather than how they have changed over the course of the initiative. Repeating the same three questions at the same events in future years would allow The ZONE to track that movement directly.

## Conclusion

Over three years, the Ballmer Group investment increased both the access to and the quality of extended learning opportunities in Northeast Spokane. Through this funding, the network grew from seven organizations to seventeen, and participation rose from 503 students in Year One to 1,853 in Year Three, with more than 15,400 student-days of programming delivered in the final year alone. The students reached closely mirror the schools the initiative was designed to serve, matching ZONE-area enrollment on race and ethnicity, income, and multi-language learner status. Nearly a quarter of Year Three participants had taken part in an earlier year, and returning students engaged more deeply, averaging 15.8 days of programming in their third year compared with 9.6 days for first-year students. Partners also built structures meant to outlast the grant, including alumni mentor pipelines at SWAG and Slingshot, teenage volunteers stepping into leadership roles at Manzanita House, a diversified funding model at KSPS, and a fully underwritten spring soccer league that carries into 2026-27.

Program duration and intensity varied across organizations. Some offerings were single-day or one-time sessions, while others met weekly over a full season. Because of that variability, findings for the cohort as a whole are more measured. Across social-emotional survey scores, school attendance, behavior referrals, and Smarter Balanced (SBAC) results, the amount of programming a student received showed little consistent association with how that student fared. Two results stand out. Among two-year participants who entered with a prior behavior referral, average referrals the following year fell from 3.84 to 2.88. And 31 percent of participants who had been chronically absent the prior year returned to attending at least 85 percent of school days.

Three years of Ballmer Group funding expanded reach, created consistency of access, and strengthened a network of organizations now more capable than when the investment began. Measuring academic and behavioral impact will require both deeper participation and an extended follow-up period. At the conclusion of the grant funded work, the investment has achieved a set of trusted programs, stronger partnerships with schools, and a shared commitment that will keep opening doors for students in Northeast Spokane for years to come.

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**Gratitude to Ballmer from Executive Director Jene Ray:**

As we reflect on 10 years of coordinating free youth programming in The ZONE, I'm pausing to express deep gratitude for our Ballmer Group partnership.

In 2017 we launched ZONE youth programming with a pre-K-10th grade summer program located at Shaw Middle School serving 400 students. This past school year and summer 2026 we had 6,626 student program enrollments.

Over this decade we have grown from 100% school-based, to school and community-based programming, catalyzed 21st CCLC funding at 8 schools, and developed youth community leadership programs connecting and supporting youth civic platforms including the Chase Youth Commission, City of Spokane Human Rights Commission, Spokane Transit Authority volunteer team, ZONE Resident Steering Committee, WA State Board of Education Youth member, United Way Emerging Philanthropist Awardee, and students traveling to Olympia advocating for youth mental health- to name some standouts.

The measurable benefits of this OST programming for students and families has now become a school district wide initiative with the goal of every student, every day participating in an after-school activity.

Youth serving partners have grown in capacity through Ballmer funding and supported training, and are ready to braid new funding and expand to continue serving low-income youth in our community.

-Jene Ray

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