

“After the Bell”

A free opportunity for middle school youth to participate in enrichment activities through the support of community organizations and businesses, Merrill Area Public Schools and Lincoln County UW-Extension 4-H Youth Development.



Need:

UW-Extension 4-H Youth Development staff were approached by T.B. Scott Library staff in the spring of 2004 about the flood of middle school students at the library after school and some of the issues this created. To assist in identifying what the needs of Merrill students were after-school, UW-Extension 4-H Youth Development staff developed and conducted a survey of students who were present at the T.B. Scott Library, Skateboard Park, Homework Assistance Program and park area after school during the week of May 24, 2004. This initial survey indicated that 50% of students surveyed (86 out of 171 students) go to the library or skate park after school. Of these same students, 44% (76 out of 171 students) indicated that there is no adult at home right after school. Key individuals in the community were then contacted to participate in an initial meeting on July 7th to begin discussing how as a community we can meet the need for after school programs targeted at middle school age youth. This included representatives from T.B. Scott Library, Prairie River Middle School, Merrill Park and Recreation, Child Care Connection, Boys and Girls Club committee, Merrill Forward Together Healthy Community Initiative, Homework Assistance Program, local church, 4-H and the After School Book Club, Social Services and the Merrill Police Department. To get an even larger perspective of needs for after school programs, we decided to conduct another survey during student lunch hours in September of 2004 at the Prairie River Middle School. Of the students surveyed, 65% of students surveyed (226 out of 348 students) indicated that there was no adult at home right after school some time during the week.

Response:

Utilizing information from both of these surveys, a steering committee composed of adults and middle school youth planned and launched the “After the Bell” program on November 29, 2004. The “After the Bell” program is intended to provide a safe place for middle school students after school to learn new skills. UW-Extension 4-H Youth Development staff has taken the lead role in organizing this program.

“After the Bell” operates from right after school to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday at the Prairie River Middle School. If PRMS is closed because of a holiday, severe weather, or vacation then the program is closed. Students do not need to attend the program each day to participate. Students and their parents/guardian must complete a program agreement form. The program is supervised each day by one-two adult supervisors with assistance from high school students involved in 4-H, the Octagon Club and National Honor Society who come on assigned days of the week.

Each day the program offers students a place to play board games, do homework, make crafts, visit with friends and have a snack. In addition, community volunteers (youth and adults) provide special programs. Programs have included learning to knit and crochet, sign language, nutrition and cooking, walking club, book club, sewing club, crafts, yoga, environmental education, special programs where a llama and therapy dogs visited the program and individuals sharing their travel experiences to other countries/cultures. Some adults come on a weekly basis or monthly basis to offer programs. For example, the 4-H Ambassadors come once a month to lead 4-H projects with the group.

Outcomes for 2004-05 Program (Year One):

During the 2004-05 school year, 68 different youth participated with an average of 12 students each day. Nineteen youth who participate in the program on a regular basis completed a participant evaluation. Some highlights of the results include:

- 90% of participants (17 out of 19) rated the “After the Bell” program as good to excellent
- On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not at all to 5 being great deal, an average rating of 4.3 was given by participants to rate the extent the “After the Bell” program provided them with a safe place to go after school
- 100% of participants indicated that the program provides an opportunity to do new things, do creative activities, encouraged them to work as a team with other youth, felt welcomed to participate by staff and youth, and felt there are enough activities to choose from sometimes to always
- 100% of participants indicated the program provided support where volunteers/youth trust each other and they have time to make friends with each other sometimes to always

Funding for the 2004-05 program was received from the Safe and Stable Families grant through the Department of Social Services (\$620 for 2004 start up and \$1,100 for 2005 through June). In addition, Social Service provided funding to hire a staff person through the Family Resource Center to assist in supervising/coordinating the program (7 hours per week at approximate cost of \$2,050). Without this staffing and funding for supplies the program would not have been possible. In addition, the school and their staff have been very supportive of the program taking place at the Prairie River Middle School.

Outcomes for 2005-06 Program (Year Two):

- The 2005-06 program started on Tuesday, September 6th and operated Monday-Thursday from right after school to 5 p.m. each day school was in session (138 days). The program started out in room 110 (same room used in 2004-05), however due to increased numbers moved to the Auditorium Lobby area on January 2nd. This new space allowed for continued growth of the program and more flexibility in programs offered. A total of 110 different students participated with an average of 20 students per day (ranging from a low of 8 per day in September and a high of 26 per day in March and April). Seven of these students also provided input to the overall program as members of the "After the Bell" Steering Committee.
- On Tuesday, November 8th a new tutoring component was incorporated creating "After the Bell Plus". Students involved in the tutoring component (two days a week) came to the Auditorium lobby for a snack and then went to a separate room from 3:30 – 4:30 p.m. for their tutoring session. Students then came back to the lobby area to participate in enrichment programs until 5 p.m. or signed out for the day. Students involved in the tutoring program were encouraged and many did participate in the enrichment program on days not involved in tutoring. The tutoring component was added through a grant that the Merrill School District received for the 2005-06 school year. Forty-four students participated in the "After the Bell Plus" tutoring program. Through the grant, thirteen teachers served as tutors during the "After the Bell Plus" program. In addition, 29 high school students volunteered during the year to assist with tutoring and/or the enrichment activities.
- Through the resources provided by the tutoring grant, we were able to hire one-two additional adult supervisors each day to the program. Having two-three adults present each day was essential to maintaining the safe, positive environment with our growing number of participants. Eight parents/guardians were trained and served as supervisors for the program during the year.
- To support the "After the Bell" enrichment program \$5,138 from various community organizations and businesses in the Merrill area was raised to provide funding for a staff person to provide daily supervision for the program and to purchase supplies for the enrichment programs offered, including a snack. In addition, an additional \$21,000 through the Merrill School District After School Tutoring grant was used to fund the staffing for the "After the Bell Plus" tutoring component of the program (coordinator for tutoring component, tutors and one-two additional adult supervisors). In addition, we received donations of snacks from an area grocery store, refrigerator from a local appliance store and activity supplies from community members.
- Eighteen youth who participated in the program on a regular basis completed a participant evaluation and 25 parents/guardians completed an evaluation.

The majority of participants who responded to the participant evaluation indicated that the "After the Bell" enrichment program provided them with a place to go after school where they felt a sense belonging (i.e. positive relationship with adults involved, feel welcome and safe while at the program), provided them with opportunities to learn new skills (i.e. learn new skills, be creative and share what they have learned with others), develop more independence (i.e. opportunities to choose and plan activities in the program) and allowed them to participate in service to others (i.e. community service projects, helping others in the program).

A majority of parents/guardians of program participants responding to the parent/guardian evaluation also indicated that the "After the Bell" enrichment program provided these same items for their child.

- Some quotes from Parents/Guardians about the program:

"This is a good program for all kids. I hope this will continue in fall."

"Thank you for all you do to make "After the Bell" enjoyable and engaging for kids. It's the most difficult time of day for kids. They're tired, hungry and antsy. You provide a way to meet their needs in a positive way."

- Some quotes from Middle School Staff about the program:

“From my perspective as a teacher/tutor in the program this has been an invaluable experience. It has allowed me to work one-on-one with students. In addition, it has afforded me the opportunity to develop a bond with struggling students. Those students especially need that positive contact with an adult. It has also enriched me as a teacher in getting to know the students on a more personal level.”

Ellin Fisher, 6th Grade Teacher

“The After the Bell program has caught a few of our students that could otherwise, very easily have fallen through the proverbial “crack”. Not having anyone at home to involve them in worthwhile, fun and engaging activities, those students are having a crucial need fulfilled. More importantly, you have provided the “PLUS” to the After the Bell this year. Students who had very little support academically are coming with homework completed. I even have a student who has labeled himself the “Come Back Kid,” as now he is getting his work done on time.”

Jill Seaman, 7th Grade Teacher

“The PRMS After the Bell program is one of the best after school programs I have ever seen in operation. The students just love it! It has been growing by leaps and bounds! Our own staff tutors the students and have made unbelievable bonds! Kudos to Lincoln County Extension service for the vision to make this happen for our kids!”

Jan Fortmann-Fanning, Principal of PRMS during 2005-06 School Year

What is Needed to Continue the Program in 2006-07:

The “After the Bell” Steering Committee is beginning plans to offer the program from September 11, 2006 through June 7, 2007 (142 days the program would be offered).

In order for the “After the Bell” program to be offered the following funding/support is needed.

- \$2,700 - Snack supplies and program supplies
- \$5,200 - Hire an individual to provide daily supervision and coordination from the program (10 hours per week for 36 weeks)
- In-kind - Use of the auditorium lobby and additional rooms as needed at the Prairie River Middle School
- In-kind - UW-Extension 4-H Youth Development Agent will continue to serve as the overall coordinator of the program.

Total Funds Needed for the “After the Bell Program” equals \$7,900

** The Merrill Area Public School After School Tutoring grant will again be utilized to fund a coordinator, tutors and additional daily supervisors for the “After the Bell Plus” tutoring program during the 2006-07 school year.



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