

Office of the Mayor Health and Human Services

Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity | December 2021



Photo credit: Michael Appleton/Mayoral Photography Office

Learning Bridges

Supporting Families and Engaging Children
in Learning and Healthy Development During
COVID

Agency: **Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD)**
Department of Education (DOE)

Context

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020-2021 DOE schools operated on a blended learning schedule, with students participating in school remotely, or a mix of in-person and remote (blended learning) for the school year. Many families, including essential workers, needed childcare during the workday and sought an in-person environment conducive to learning and to connect their children with school activities on days when they were scheduled for remote learning.

Response

Learning Bridges offered childcare and a learning environment to support children ages 3-K to 8th grade on weekdays when DOE schools were closed and operating on a blended learning schedule in response to COVID-19. The City developed approximately 400 community-based Learning Bridges sites where students were provided with a free, safe, and supported location where they could connect to remote school classrooms and engage in other group activities. Students were provided with teachers, support staff, meals, technology, and class materials, and the opportunity to connect with peers and caring adults during the day while their parents worked. Sites operated from 8am to 3pm generally, with many sites offering after school services from 3pm to 6pm. Priority enrollment was given to: children living in temporary housing, children of essential workers, families residing in NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments, families receiving child welfare services, students with disabilities, children of DOE school and program personnel. Families were able to utilize the services on an as-needed basis.

Results

- The City developed roughly 400 learning sites to support students during the 2020-2021 school year.
- Over 58,000 families were connected to the Learning Bridges program while schools were operating on a hybrid model
- An average of 5,000 families utilized the program each week, with families moving in and out of Learning Bridges programs as District Schools were able to increase their in-person services.

Beneficiary Stories

We have heard from many families about how the Learning Bridges program served as a critical piece of their family's child care during the 2020-2021 school year. One parent told us:

“I wanted to send an email thanking you for your assistance with this program this year...The program ended up being a saving grace to get us through COVID with childcare where my daughter was engaged, learning and LOVED GOING! It was an absolute blessing until her school opened up 5 days a week. Thank you!”

Next Steps

Learning Bridges served a critical purpose for families and was key to uninterrupted learning for children when DOE schools were operating blended learning for the 2020-21 school year. It also served as a critical basis of partnership between DYCD and DOE and laid the foundation for a successful Summer Rising program.

Relevant Publications

- **Mayor De Blasio Updates New Yorkers About Free Childcare Options For The Fall** (July 16, 2020)
<https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/525-20/mayor-de-blasio-free-childcare-100-000-students-the-fall>