

NCC After-School Program Provides Enrichment To Thirteenth Avenue School Students



Dance instructor Kimberly Thomas, left, leads second-graders in a dance class as part of a free after-school enrichment program at Thirteenth Avenue School that New Community operates.

Second-graders at Thirteenth Avenue/Dr. MLK, Jr. School in Newark enjoy a free after-school enrichment program that New Community Corporation operates. Children enjoy a variety of activities meant to engage them academically and socially.

Currently there 35 children enrolled in the program, which runs from 3 to 6 p.m. each school day. A portion of the afternoon is dedicated to homework and tutoring, both group and individual. There are different activities throughout the week, including sports and fitness, nutrition classes, dance and piano. A chess club and theater classes are planned

in 2019. The program focuses on STEAM, which stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics.

“All children should get creative activities for their holistic brain development. Our goal at NCC has been to expose children to theater, piano and art by collaborating with specialized quality professionals in the field,” said New Community Director of Health and Human Services Arti Kakkar. “Art education teaches teamwork, analytical and creative skills along with providing youth with skills to express themselves. From the feedback that we are getting, we are happy that the activities in the program are being enjoyed by children and families.”

In addition to the academic help and activities, the students receive a light dinner and snack provided by the Newark Public Schools. The program also provides occasional field trips for students. Past trips have been to Medieval Times, Soul Circus, the Newark Museum and the Bronx Zoo. There is no charge to families for the trips.

Parental involvement is also an important part of the program, with family support services offered. The program has parent workshops, which have included topics like Effective Communication with the Child, Positive Discipline and Loving and Supporting Our Sons. Parent/child activities, such as family nights, are encouraged. Children in the after-school program are also invited to attend the annual NCC Father Daughter Dance.

“We provide a number of activities that promote and encourage family engagement,” said New Community Director of Youth Services Edward Morris.

Program staff members also work with school personnel, collaborating on parent workshops, checking in with teachers and getting feedback from Principal Simone Rose.



Students in the Thirteenth Avenue after-school program run by New Community enjoy a game of Jenga, which helps them hone their problem solving and engineering skills.

Rose said the program is having a positive impact on the children.

“It’s great to have New Community Corporation working with the students of Thirteenth Avenue School again,” she said. “Our students have been making progress with fractions. Math is a subject that some students shy away from, but NCC has offered opportunities that have students racing toward math problems and activities. A love for mathematics will lead to higher performance and student achievement is always the goal for all of our students. We certainly could not achieve this goal without the support of NCC.”

Called the Family Friendly Center, the program is funded by the New Jersey Department of Children and Families under the Family and Community Partnership Office of



Priscilla Faustini from The Piano School of NYC teaches piano to one of the Thirteenth Avenue second-graders who is part of the after-school program operated by New Community. Photo courtesy of Edward Morris.

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“This program is one of many after-school programs in elementary schools throughout the state of New Jersey to provide constructive, academic, recreational and social enrichment activities to the students and their families,” Morris said.

The NCC program has been in place since 2001, initially at Newton Street Public School. When that school closed three years ago, the program relocated to Thirteenth Avenue School.

Three Thirteenth Avenue School staff members run the after-school program for New Community on a daily basis: Sharlene Jackson, Abdul Carter and Jaleel Ritchwood. They meet with Morris twice a month to discuss the program.

Assessment of the after-school program is ongoing with Morris receiving feedback from staff, the school principal, teachers and parents.

“We also monitor the students’ performance in school,” Morris said. “We work with the teachers, we check test scores. We see where they’re lacking and where the help is needed.”

Staff members can also refer students to Family Service Bureau, an affiliate of New Community, if they’re having behavioral issues.

FSB also does work at Thirteenth Avenue School.

In addition to working locally, Morris attends a statewide meeting with all family friendly centers in April and October.

“We meet twice a year to discuss the program, discuss ideas, concerns and issues,” Morris said. “There’s always something another program is doing that you may want to implement in your program.”

Morris said the students enjoy and benefit from the after-school program. “The kids really benefit from the program. Not only do they get supportive services after school, they’re also eating a nutritious meal after school,” he said.