Out-of-School Time Stories

BOOST Grantee Spotlight: Odyssey Atlanta

G·san
GEORGIA STATEWIDE AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK

Odyssey Atlanta delivers STEAM enrichment programming to all grades through its afterschool and summer programming. BOOST funding is used specifically for Odyssey Atlanta's six-week summer enrichment program. Odyssey provides accelerated learning opportunities around grade-level curriculum themes that culminate in events, field trips, and projects to bolster the education of Atlanta's youth. **With BOOST funding, Odyssey expanded staff, reduced transportation barriers, provided mental health support, and expanded program offerings for the students in Atlanta Public Schools.**

The Odyssey summer site, supported by BOOST funding, serves predominantly students of color from underserved communities across Fulton County. In the summer of 2023, this Odyssey program provided 338 students with accelerated learning, targeted academic support, and exposure to "real-world" academic enrichment experiences that prepare them for college, careers, and life.

Youth Served in Year Two:
338

Ages Served:
Elementary, Middle and High School

Counties Served:
Fulton

Programming Offered:
Summer

BOOST Grant Purpose:
Reduce Barriers
Increase Quality

Website:
www.odysseyatlanta.org

Odyssey
A quest for knowledge | A path through college

Real World Learning

"Math isn't just math; science is not just science. It demonstrates to the children how math, science, public speaking, and reading all work together for real-world application".
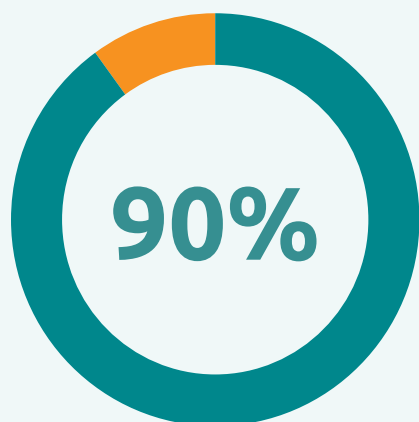
– Odyssey Parent

Odyssey's enrichment program boasts culminating field trips for all grade levels as part of an experiential STEAM curriculum. Their project-based learning design uses a separate STEAM curriculum theme according to grade level, each rich with events, guest speakers, and final products or projects. This class also took field trips to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and Emory College genetics lab. One grade even took a trip to Delta Airlines, where they assisted with piloting a plane.

For students, the key to their engagement with these experiences is the hands-on nature of their learning. Each curriculum component includes an age-appropriate, high-interest topic and culminates in an authentic experience, such as a mock trial or designing and selling fashion to real customers. One student shared that their "best day was the mock trial," recalling it as "really fun." Through their engagement with authentic learning experiences, students in Odyssey form connections between the school day and their life outside of school. As one parent noted, "When it comes to learning, I can again see how [my kids] start talking about it more. Like when something happened at Odyssey, and it's connecting now with their current school." Odyssey not only builds confidence in students' academic skills through these program-school connections, but the program also motivates student interest in STEAM by demonstrating the engaging projects and experiences that result from STEAM topics.

Parent Satisfaction with Character Building Curriculum

90%

Successes

"This program allowed me not to be in debt and have my girls be exposed to so much. And to me, I don't know the words to fully express my gratitude and appreciation for that".

– Odyssey Parent

Integral to Atlanta's summer education scene, Odyssey makes high-quality academic enrichment financially possible for underserved communities. As pointed out by an Odyssey administrator, "Transportation is a major barrier [to participation] because our kids are coming from all over the metro Atlanta area." In response to that need, Odyssey directed BOOST funds to provide no-cost transportation and cover staff expenditures. The BOOST funds thereby freed up the funding the program needed to ensure that all grade levels had field trips, which are integral to Odyssey's

experiential learning model. Expanding field trips had serious benefits for students. An Odyssey administrator reflected on students' piloting experience at Delta Airlines, commenting, "It was absolutely amazing. We couldn't have done that without funding."

New to the second year of BOOST funding, Odyssey offered weekly group personal well-being sessions for every grade and individual mental health referrals. The new emphasis on mental health also resonated outside of the program, with 90% of Odyssey parents reporting appreciation for the character-building curriculum in Odyssey's six-week program. In fact, 100% of families reported now having regular conversations about mental health with students. Odyssey also responded to the academic impacts of COVID-19 by providing youth with accelerated learning support and one-on-one tutoring in the summer of 2023. Like all Odyssey programming, this support is integrated into the project-based curriculum. As a result, Odyssey staff recognized academic gains from pre-tests to post-tests in math and reading. Still, they also noted growth in skills to prepare for the future: "We give them the strategies and the tools to help them get acclimated into high school, and… you can tell the difference."

> *"There are a lot of leadership opportunities in Odyssey that we give our students. They take on that ownership, and that's a success story in itself."*
>
> *– Odyssey Administrator*

These signs of student development are testaments to Odyssey's whole-child approach. Parents attribute their students' increased appreciation for STEAM careers to Odyssey curricular offerings as well as the relationships youth build with other students who share their interests. Field trips provide opportunities to engage with peers, guest speakers, and career figures, resulting in increased confidence in embracing STEAM careers. Program administrators and parents observed growth in student leadership, public-speaking abilities, and character development. One parent reflected on the importance of these gains, stating that "academics matter, but at the same time, the socialization means more, and the empathy means more."

Satisfaction

Odyssey Atlanta uses pre- and post-program youth and family surveys to measure participant satisfaction. 338 students responded to the surveys, with 254 young people (75%) indicating satisfaction with the Odyssey curriculum. In addition to their grade-specific curriculum, students expressed satisfaction with their well-being in the program. Odyssey youth were able to interact with students who shared similar interests in STEAM concepts, creating a social environment where they "liked going because people were fun."

Parents echoed the Odyssey learning environment's advantages, sharing that their children felt more comfortable being interested in STEAM subjects because of the program. Because of their hands-on exposure to STEAM in real-world scenarios, Odyssey students can picture themselves engaging with STEAM in high school, college, careers, and life.

Youth Satisfaction with Odyssey Curriculum

75%
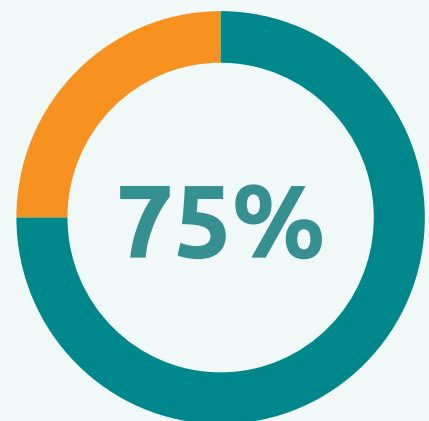
SPOTLIGHT DATA SOURCES

- Case study interviews & focus groups with deep center youth, staff, and administrators
- End-of-year grantee report – Odyssey