**United Way Grant for the 2022-2023 Panther Place Program**

**What Community Impact Area does this program address: Health, Basic Needs, Financial Stability, Education, Supportive Relationships, or Education- School Readiness?**

The Panther Place Program strongly aligns with the UWCK Community Impact area of Education-Supportive Relationships improving outcomes for at-risk students through supportive relationships. From its conception in the year 2000, the Panther Place Afterschool program continues to serve the most at-risk elementary students from the EIS District. We strive each day to help students improve academically and develop positive social skills to help them reach their full potential. Helping students becoming successful in school is of utmost importance. Our relationship with both elementary schools allows regular communication with classroom teachers and counselors to gain a better understanding on how to help individual students. We will help establish sound organization and study habits. Incentives are given to encourage students to set short-term and long-term goals. Awards are given to students who improve their grades, reach individual math facts goals and for good behavior. We improve the quality of our students’ early learning opportunity not only by providing homework assistance, but by also providing enrichment activities for all to participate in. Many of our students are way below grade level in reading. We not only try to help those individual students with our staff and resources but, also seek volunteers to tutor our lowest students and bring activities which might ignite an excitement for learning. We also implement physical activities into our program, focusing on team building activities and activities proven to help students learn to read such as cross-body movements, balancing and eye tracking activities. The article, “Learning in Motion: Bring Movement Back to the Classroom” states that studies show that children who are more active exhibit better focus, faster cognitive processing and more successful memory retention than kids who spend the day sitting still. The pandemic has created a huge problem with students not getting enough physical activity in their day. We hope to safely help with this problem.

Our teachers will all read, Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind by Eric Jensen. The book gives many practical strategies that we have tried to implement as we work with our students. Jensen emphasizes that children need reliable, positive adults in their lives who believe in them. He states, “Students who have positive relationships with their teachers experience less stress, behave more appropriately and feel more excited about learning.” He also confirmed for us that many poor children simply have not learned appropriate social-emotional responses necessary for school success. “It is easy to misinterpret low-SES students’ emotional and social differences as a lack of respect, poor manners or laziness. Yet it is more accurate and helpful to understand that …many simply do not know how to behave.” We at Panther Place realize that we need to help our students learn appropriate social and emotional skills and then expect them to exhibit that behavior which will in turn help them be successful. Once again, the pandemic has caused a lack of opportunity for students to learn these skills. Panther Place will provide opportunities to work on social and emotional skills.

At-risk intervention goes beyond providing basic needs and homework assistance. It involves investing time and letting each child know that they are valued and genuinely cared about. This makes a huge difference in a child’s attitude, academic outlook, desire to improve and self-esteem. Ultimately, these personal connections will help achieve United Way’s goal of helping youth stay in school, graduate, and reach their potential.

Panther Place also supports our students’ parents by providing a safe place for their children in the afterschool hours while they work. Panther Place enables parents to support their families financially or pursue higher education in order to better provide for their families.

**Please tell us about your program including the following information:**

Panther Place strives to serve the most “at-risk” students enrolled in the Elizabethtown Independent School district’s two elementary schools. There could be many factors that would contribute to students having challenges that may classify them as ‘at-risk’. Data of what experts classify as factors leading to at-risk youth can be found at Kids Count Data compiled by KY Youth Advocates. These may include single parent homes, latch-key students, grandparents or foster parents raising children, low income, homes where English is not spoken or as a second language, students with learning challenges or mild mental health challenges such as ADHD or anxiety, to name a few.

Our 2021-2022 enrollment is diversified with 62% African-American, 24% Caucasian, 3 % Hispanic and 1% Asian. 38% of our students qualify for special academic services and 53% live in a single parent/grandparent home. 55% of the EIS total elementary students are qualified for Free and Reduced meals, but 77% of Panther Place students qualify for free/reduced meals. Only 2 of those students are reduced while the remaining students are classified as free. In order to be effective and make a difference with at-risk students, it is absolutely necessary to maintain a low teacher to student ratio. This post Covid-19 year brought challenges with staffing and new challenges with classroom management. Therefore, we have kept our enrollment to 12 students per class with a total enrollment of 60 elementary students.

United Way Funding: The program has benefitted greatly by volunteers, but as much as we encourage it, volunteers are usually not consistent, dependable or experienced. We have been successful in making a positive difference in our students’ lives because United Way funds have made it possible to hire 1 teacher per grade-level class. Our teachers are compassionate and dedicated, working a very difficult and demanding job with a starting wage of only $10.50/hour. United Way funds have made it possible to hire 1 high school student per class to help homework and activities. Having a student worker in the classroom is critical for safety and makes it possible for each student to get more individual support. Student workers only get paid $7.25/hour.

UW funding is used to purchase supplies needed for students to complete homework as well as supplies for science, art, crafts and other enrichment activities. Students are given incentives such as pizza or ice cream parties for improving their grades and behavior and meeting math goals. These and other special activities such as birthday celebrations, popcorn with a movie, popsicles on hot days, etc will be provided with United Way funds.

UW funds will also be used to purchase basic office operating supplies and copy expenses for record keeping, communication between program, schools, parents, partnering agencies and the community.

Family Nights are a vital part of the program. Although funds for the meals are provided by the district, United Way funds provide family activities and speakers for these events.

Desired Outcomes and How Impact is Measured:

1. 50% of our 4th & 5th grade students with show academic improvement.

This is measured by tracking and comparing their progress report grades with actual quarterly grades. Other grade levels do not receive letter/percentile grades

2. 60 elementary students having Increased involvement in positive activities

This is measured by enrollment and daily attendance records

3. Increased Number of Caring adults impacting students’ success.

Staff members and Volunteers that are actively involved with students are tracked through employment records and volunteer sign-in sheets.

4. 8 Mentorship relationships formed and maintained through the school year.

The Big Brother Big Sister program makes matches with Panther Place students. “Bigs” meet with their “Littles” at Panther Place one hour per week. This is tracked with a sign-in binder.

**What else would you like us to know about your program?**

Not only have we been able to provide the desperately needed academic support to the district’s most at-risk students, but we have always supported the whole family, encouraging parent involvement with several family nights per year and providing community resource information to those in need. The program has developed into one that collaborates with many community agencies that bring enrichment opportunities to all our students. A few of these are Big Brothers Big Sisters, P.U.R.E., Hardin County Extension Service, KY Conservation Program, Nolin RCC education program, Family Resource Center, Etown Police and Fire Departments. Over the years, the program has been blessed by many talented volunteers who provide one-on-one tutoring, small group music, dance and art lessons. Because our approach is one that addresses the whole child: social, emotional, physical as well as academician and includes communication with parents and school staff, we have accomplished much success with our students.

The effects of the pandemic have caused a greater need for programs such as Panther Place. Many after school child care facilities have shutdown in our community. We have seen a greater number of students that are below grade level academically and a tremendous increase in behavior, emotional and social issues with our students. If we as a community don’t recognize and address these problems, our community will suffer as these students approach adulthood.

**List other current funding sources and amounts for this program.**

Due to the financial burden that the COVID-19 pandemic put on the school district, it was not been able to fund the program monetarily for the 2020-2021 school year. In every prior year since 2006, the Elizabethtown Independent School District has paid for the wages of the program director and a part-time program secretary as well as the student transportation expenses and family night food expense. It is expected that the District will once again fund the program in this way. The district food services provides student snacks daily with a value of $3287 for the current 2021-2022 program and an estimated $4435 for the 2022-2023 program year. The program also receives a great deal of in-kind support from the district, such as space, utilities, technology support, custodial services, financial management, student transportation, etc. The District’s monetary contribution to fund the program is projected to be $50,788.00 for the 2022-2023 school year. Many services and programs are provided to Panther Place by volunteers and individuals, free of charge, who donate their time and expertise. We are always open to receiving other monetary and volunteer help when available. We do not have staff available to pursue and write other grants. With our families’ inability to contribute financially, it makes it very difficult to do traditional fund raisers where students would have to sell items, etc. We do pursue small donations for specific projects and events, but we find it harder and harder to obtain donations from local businesses. We were fortunate to obtain a Heels Together Grant from the Central Kentucky Foundation during the 2021-2022 school year. This provided funds for Anna Randall to work with our 4th & 5th grade girls twice a month using The Girls Guide to Growth Mindset: A Can-Do Approach to Building Confidence, Courage, and Grit by Kendra Coates, D.ED. I do not expect to receive funding from this organization in the 2022-2023 school year. We have done a Classic Movie fund raiser at Crowne Pointe Theatre in past years. I will pursue this again, but that business has suffered from the pandemic, so we cannot rely on funding from this source.