



Tabletop Session Summary

June 10, 2021

Creating a Collaborative Site Climate

Presenters: James Adams, [Big Thought](#)

This tabletop discussion explored strategies for creating a supportive climate for summer learning and enrichment for students of different ages.

Session Highlights

- » Big Thought is a nonprofit that works to close the opportunity gap for youth in marginalized communities. Their Thriving Minds afterschool program for elementary and middle school students is built on creativity, social wellbeing, and respect for cultural assets.
- » Creating a collaborative climate starts with creating a welcoming and supportive environment for staff which can then be applied to students and families.
- » The COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of about a third of afterschool programs in Dallas, and programs that remained had fewer seats to allow for social distancing. At the same time, essential workers were in immense need of childcare. In response to this need, Big Thought created an emergency childcare center.
- » While there were growing pains and challenges in terms of new partnerships, safety protocols, expenses, and risks associated with operating during the pandemic, having a collaborative team was key.
- » Creating an effective team dynamic required thoughtful planning, regular team building and staff development, and opportunities for recurring feedback.

Shared Resources

- » [Big Stories: Kendall Pidgeon](#)

Questions and Answers on Creating a Collaborative Site Climate

For a state wanting to replicate this process, could you share the timeline for community assessment, planning, and partnership that led to aftercare?

The survey was conducted over a two-week period. Partnering with Dallas Afterschool was instrumental, as they have a database that was useful for surveying families and getting quite a bit of feedback. Over a six-week period there were a lot of simultaneously moving pieces including preparing facilities, implementing health and safety protocols, training staff, and obtaining emergency childcare licensing (which happened in 48 hours). Partnerships were essential to this effort. In fact, a partner organization was pivotal to getting a nurse on staff.



How did you approach all the planning and infrastructure that was needed?

The largest task was to articulate all the needs. The greatest asset was convening all the partners in one space and having conversation. Numerous leaders would be in a room and needs would be informally shared. Organizations would, in turn, respond with what they could do. It's important to ensure that you have the right people at the table. When discussing the lack of masks, for example, Ford stepped in and offered to contribute as well as the local health systems.

Do you think there is anything specific about Dallas that contributed to the success?

Existing relationships helped contribute to the success, as there was already a sense of respect that had been established. Organizations came willing to work cooperatively, think creatively, and to try different things. If they had instead brought preconceived notions, there may have been barriers that could have hindered what they were trying to accomplish.

What was attendance like during this highly stressful time?

Attendance was great. There were around 60 students enrolled, with 45 students attending regularly. There was a cap on enrollment to align with funding and expenses. (Additional costs were associated with having students spaced out, to have a nurse on staff, and to consider dietary restrictions and other student health needs.) Many of the children didn't know each other because they were not a part of a cohort. Calming corners were created to help students feel safe. Some success and buy-in can be attributed to children switching from being at home alone to being in a space with other children, having a teacher presence, and a designated area set up for virtual learning.

In hiring additional staff for this program, what qualities did you look for in potential hires and what additional training did you provide?

Working with a staffing agency to hire a nurse and to initially determine the type of nurse was helpful. For instructional staff, hiring staff with an understanding of the risks involved and with knowledge and experience with social emotional and project-based learning, as well as experience working with a trauma informed model was important. Being able to model empathy was also critical. During the interview process, applicants were provided the opportunity to demonstrate their skills (e.g., in the performing arts).

How long was the training provided?

A week was spent in training. There were some half-days. It was about preparing for the task at hand.

