

Cardinal Sheehan 21st Century Learning Center

Students in the 21st Century After-School program offered through Bridgeport’s Cardinal Sheehan Community Center participated in a service-learning program with a focus on literacy. Teachers and student interns from Sacred Heart University developed a project that included student decision making while working to include connections to academic lessons relevant to their grade-level. While brainstorming ideas to create a meaningful service project, teachers focused on the literacy development of their students. Teachers knew that the majority of their 2nd and 3rd grade students’ parents are foreign-language speakers.



21st Century After-School students participate in team building exercise during *YES* workshop (2006).

Recognizing how parents with English as a second language may struggle to help their children learn to read English; the staff sought to create a service-learning project that would help encourage English-language development for students and parents. Project brainstorming led to the idea to use sight words (words that students must learn through memorization in order to become more fluent readers) as the basis for playing “Sight-Word Bingo” during a family recreation night.

Students worked to create sight-word bingo cards for the game. The students learned the words by creating the bingo cards to be used for the family night. The family night was also designed to have the students show appreciation to their parents. Thus, the family night had multiple goals that included—student planning and service to host the family night activities, students and parents learning sight words to promote reading and a student-led activity to honor parents.

In the work to create sight-word bingo, the students readily learned their sight word vocabulary. The family night itself was noted to create a very powerful sense of community between the students, parents and the teaching staff at the Cardinal Sheehan Learning Center. Parents enjoyed themselves and learned about their children’s activities at the learning center. Families also received a list of the sight words in a take-home goodie bag.

Students learned numerous skills beyond mastery of the sight words. They learned to work together as a team, to take turns in generating ideas, to work through the details of completing a project and they learned letter-writing skills to solicit donations for the family fun night. The event was considered such a success that students, parent, and the Center’s teaching staff agreed to host the event three or four times again next year.