

Description of the Challenging Horizons Program After-School Program

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The Challenging Horizons Program (CHP) is a multimodal approach to improving academic performance, confidence, motivation, attendance, and discipline. The CHP has won state and national awards for innovation and excellence. In 2004, the largest “grass roots” organization on Attention Deficit Disorder, Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ChAADD), gave the CHP the “Innovative Program of the Year” award. In 2009, after a competition that included over 200 applicants and only 6 recipients, the National After School Alliance gave the CHP the MetLife After School Innovator Award. Also in 2009, the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee gave the CHP the Literacy Champion Award for excellence in service-learning the promoted literacy. In 2011, based on high-quality research results and feasible dissemination plans, the CHP was added to the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) for treatment of children and adolescents with ADHD.

For the past ten years, the CHP has successfully implemented as after-school and summer programs in schools in and around Columbia, South Carolina. Consistent with the mission of NREPP to disseminate evidence-based practices, we are trying to make the CHP available to other communities. To establish the CHP in a new community, Drs. Steven Evans and Brad Smith have developed a training and accreditation process. This includes intensive training prior to implementing the CHP, implementation support and accreditation review during the first year of program activities, and ongoing training and accreditation after the first year of implementation. In the sections below, we describe the major CHP activities and requirements of the CHP.

Strategies and Activities

The major CHP activities are designed to first provide a safe and engaging learning environment, and then provide intensive, highly individualized academic enrichment activities. Toward this end, the first thing students learn in the CHP is the positive behavior support system. After the behavioral expectations and supports are explained to students, the next thing they learn is the homework organization and planning system (HOPS). These skills are then developed in the context of assisted homework completion with intensive training in organization and study skills. To track performance and build academic confidence, we have weekly progress monitoring tests with personal and public recognition for passing to the next level, thus recruiting positive peer support for learning. We provide direct instruction in math and language arts specific to the needs identified by weekly progress monitoring that is linked with state learning standards. To provide for overall health and well-being, we provide enrichment with a focus on physical education, healthy living, leadership skills, and positive interpersonal behavior. Monthly parent meetings reinforce each of these activities and encourage use of

skills learned in the CHP at home. Details on the CHP strategies and activities and how they related to the needs assessment are given below.

Positive Behavior Support. The CHP Positive Behavior System creates a safe and engaging environment in the after-school program that promotes sustained participation and good behavior, thus addressing the attendance and behavioral goals that are a prerequisite for pursuing academic goals. Regular program attendance is encouraged through high rates of positive reinforcement in the program, and earning of participation points which can be exchanged for point store items or various “fun Friday” activities. Positive peer support is encouraged through group competitions for the most participation points, best attendance, and other goals that support attendance and full participation in the CHP.

To provide consistent behavior support in the after-school program, CHP staff learn a highly standardized set of rules and procedures. Behavior is tracked systematically and used to determine the level of supervision and support students need. Students receive daily feedback on their levels and they wear color-coded lanyards showing their levels. As they show consistency good behavior, the students earn freedom through responsibility and are placed on “honor level.” Thus, the positive behavior support system is initially external (like scaffolding on a new building), and then becomes internal (e.g., removing the scaffolding as the structure becomes solid).

To recruit parent and family support, there are weekly reports sent to parents featuring attendance, consequences in the program for missed days (due to missed points), and rewards for good attendance (more points and recognition at semester recognition nights). Parents are expected to sign and return forms, and discuss how to support participation at six scheduled parent meeting nights. Participation in parenting nights is usually over 80%. A family consultant works with students and their families to support participation when students are missing more than 80% of the program.

Homework Organization and Planning System (HOPS) and Assisted Homework (at least 45 minutes a day). HOPS is an intensive daily activity in which students are required to write down each individual piece of homework in the order in which the student plans to complete them, and with a time estimate for how long it will take to complete the homework. Then, during assisted homework time students are taught to prioritize their most challenging homework first and their least challenging last. This is to ensure CHP staff mentors would be present to help students accomplish homework they struggle with the most. It is also an effective method of teaching students to organize their homework that maximizes the success of homework completion.

Along with simply writing down homework assignments, students track their academic progress by recording the grade they get on each homework activity, quiz, test, or other assignment. This requires students to be accountable and aware of they grades they receive throughout the year. If students receive a poor grade, CHP staff can work with the student, teacher, or parents to address the issues and improve performance. In these cases, individual academic improvement plans are developed for students struggling in particular subjects.

Math games (at least twice a week) is an academic enrichment program that teaches math skills by using games. The students use games such as get back jack, busted, and monopoly, they also do timed math activities. On Mondays the students take a times math test during snack. They have 4 minutes to do 100 problems in multiplication and division. If they score 90 or above on a test they advance to the next level, otherwise they take the same test until they are able to pass it. During math games we work with the students that are not able to pass a certain level to help them gain the ability to pass the level. The math game procedures are designed to address basic skills, math problem solving, and confidence in doing math—thus addressing the affective motivational as well as the academic growth goals of the project.

Literacy Training and Project-Based Learning. (At least twice a week). This aspect of the CHP curriculum follows a literacy learning hierarchy beginning with reading fluency and comprehension, then progressing to writing sentences and essays, and then developing research and presentation skills in the context of project based learning. Reading fluency and comprehension is developed in a program called PALS, which is an evidence-based approach to partnered reading. In PALS students read with a coach (a peer or staff member) and learn importance of not only reading the words on the page, but also actually understanding what they mean and how they help to build a story. The partner reading allows the students to build their skills, confidence, and enjoyment in reading. They are also taught how to paragraph shrink, which helps them to retain the information that they have read, and do a prediction relay, which helps to build excitement with following the plot of the story.

Writing is taught using the award-winning Writing and Reading Achievement Program (WRAP). The WRAP writing curriculum involves students in planning, drafting, and formatting quality compositional writings. Participants begin with pre-writing assignments incorporating brainstorming, outlining, and summarizing the main focus of a paper before the drafting phase. After constructing an effective first rough draft, trained staff members evaluate students' progress based on the state standard scoring rubric along with WRAP assessment requirements. Students consistently examine their development through the program by graphing weekly writing and reading scores. Within the final editing and revision phase of the program, mentors assist their assigned students with formulating topic sentences, supporting details, and grammatical structure.

Project-based learning gives the students a possibility for individual expression while also a having a shared sense of purpose with peers. Every 4 to 8 weeks in the CHP there is a project theme, such as breast cancer awareness, family heritage, or personal health. Students plan projects, conduct research in the library or computer lab, share outlines and drafts with mentors and family members, and then complete a series of drafts for their portfolio. At the end of the project, success with project-based learning is celebrated at family literacy meetings that also include food and activities for parents and siblings.

Recreation is a wellness and motivational program that focuses on fun, sportsmanship, teamwork, and basic sports skills. The students attend recreation at

the end of each program day. This is a highly motivating activity and they must be up to date with HOPS and homework before participating in recreation.

Healthy Eats is an enrichment program that focuses on nutrition and wellness. The students usually participate in healthy eats one day a week for 35 minutes. During this time they learn about the food pyramid and the food groups; basic nutrition facts; how to read a nutrition label; vitamins and minerals and basic anatomy. Healthy eats teaches students about basic anatomy of the circulatory system, digestive system and the respiratory system. They are also taught the importance of wellness and how nutrition ties into exercise and overall healthiness.

Fun Fridays is a time when the students get to participate in recreation or point store, after completing their homework and other assignments due that week. Every Friday the students get to use their earned points to purchase items from the point store. The students run recreation on Fridays, they get to choose the game that is played by vote, this allows them to have a say in their Friday activities. Students who have missed assignments during the week or need to re-do assignments receive extra supported study time on Fridays.

Description of appropriate participants (Target Population)

The CHP after-school program is designed to serve older elementary school, middle, or junior high students with learning or behavior problems, particularly students diagnosed with ADHD.

Qualifications required for implementers/interventionists (CHP staff)

The success of the Challenging Horizons Program (CHP) is based on having program leaders who strongly value evidence-based interventions and have the skills to implement the CHP faithfully. Furthermore, the CHP depends on having a highly motivated, intelligent staff and a low student to staff ratio.

The CHP after-school program can be implemented by a variety of individuals who can work successfully with schools and organize a staff committed to implement the CHP. Historically, the CHP has been accomplished with partners in higher education that support community-based service-learning. However, school psychologists, counselors, or other individuals who can provide the resources and organization to maintain the 3:1 student to staff ratio can run at CHP after-school program.

All CHP staff must complete background checks and be approved to work with youth by the School District or other responsible agency. All program staff must successfully complete 15 hours of CHP training, pass all CHP training tests with scores of 90% or better (100% for verbatim knowledge of rules), and maintain scores greater than 90% on tests of program policies and procedures.

A wide range of leaders may be qualified to implement the CHP after-school program. The leaders should be educators or professionals with experience working with youth. The Program Director should have a graduate degree or commensurate experience (e.g., a BA or BS and 2 or more years in a leadership position in a youth serving organization). Experience consulting with parents, collaborating with teachers, and supervising others is a plus.

A wide range of staff may work directly with youth in the program, including service-learning students in higher education, community volunteers, and teachers. These staff will be selected at the discretion of the CHP provider, with input from the CHP trainer.

Organizational Readiness

The CHP will only be offered to providers who are prepared to go through a rigorous accreditation process. This includes 15 hours of training. Part of the training involves working with the CHP provider to consider issues of institutional readiness. This is particularly important for the after-school program. Therefore, the after-school module will address the following considerations related to readiness.

1. Establishing safe and secure facility available during after-school hours that provides adequate space for meeting as a large group, rooms appropriate for instruction or study in small groups, and recreation areas, such as a gym, computer lab, or playing fields. Pros and cons of working in schools will be discussed.
2. Getting commitments from parents, schools, or other groups to provide safe and dependable transportation to and from the program.
3. Recruiting, training, and compensating enough staff to maintain the maximum 3:1 student to staff ratio.
4. Obtaining sufficient social and material support to successfully implement the CHP.
5. How to establish a leadership team with clear responsibilities but overlapping expertise with some redundancy to cover absences or crises.

Core components required to implement the CHP are:

- A low student to staff ratio, thus allowing for a great deal of individual attention. A maximum 3:1 student to staff ration is required in the After-School Program.
- A safe and engaging environment rich in social reinforcement, tangible rewards, and clear and consistently enforced rules.
- Training in enabling skills, such as organization.
- Training in specific educational skills, such as math and reading.
- An emphasis on improving social skills.
- Goal setting and improving self-regulation of behavior.
- Parent involvement through group parent training and weekly reports.
- Continuous quality improvement assisted with manuals, pre-service training, on-site supervision and feedback using fidelity forms, and empirical evaluation of CHP activities.

Essential Program Materials:

1. Comprehensive Staff Manuals: The After-School Program Manual has information specific to schools, as well as policies and procedures that are used in all CHP after-school programs. Manuals are updated at least annually and updates are made available to accredited programs as part of the annual accreditation process.
2. Brief manuals: The brief manuals are used to orient youth, parents, and others to the program. These manuals are tailored to specific sites and applications. These are NOT comprehensive manuals, because they do not include detailed procedural descriptions or fidelity tracking information.
3. CHP adherence and quality of implementation tracking materials: These considerations are built into the Comprehensive Staff Manuals. For example, in the CHP After-School Program Manual, the “Keys to this intervention” and “Quick Reference Guide” provide procedural fidelity steps that can be pasted into forms for staff to complete as self-checks or supervisors to use in fidelity monitoring. Furthermore, to promote adherence, there are examples of common problems and problem solving ideas when there are difficulties with implementation. There is also an “Accreditation Checklist” that is developed collaboratively with the start of a new program, and is used to demonstrate if minimum standards of implementation have been met.
4. CHP planning schedule: The CHP planning materials are customized to each site, and provide a comprehensive list of tasks to be completed, who is supposed to do the tasks, what product will come from the task, and when the task should be completed. We have provided a sample “CHP start-up tasks and timeline” to use as an example for starting new after-school programs. Furthermore, the CHP After-School Program Manual prompts assignment of staff responsibilities and description of the administrative hierarchy of the program.
5. Staff training activity materials or presentations:
 - a. History and Research Summary on the CHP- Power Point presentation
 - b. “Behavioral Kernel” implementation guides.
 - c. Training quizzes
 - d. Training activities
6. Weekly parent report from a CHP after-school program. These vary by school, and may also include information on progress in CHP activities.

Description of training available to implementers

Trainings will be held at approved sites under the direction either Dr. Smith or Dr. Evans. One month prior to starting training, the trainee will be sent a manual and support materials to study (i.e., items 1-4 in the “essential materials section” listed previously). Training totals 15 hours and can be offered during two consecutive days, or spread across a longer period of time. Training focuses on the manuals, but includes a mixture of multimedia presentation, interactive discussion, and behavioral rehearsal with self-monitoring and feedback. The training participant packet will include research on the CHP and a list of readily available resources that may bolster understanding of the CHP procedures.

Implementation Support resources

The trainees will be assigned a coach who will help with initial implementation and steps toward accreditation. Once trained, the CHP site leader and coach participate in weekly telephone calls or site visits with the CHP trainer to facilitate accurate implementation. After one month of successful implementation, the frequency of the calls or site visits changes to bi-weekly. Prior to each phone call the new provider will submit completed adherence tracking forms that are faxed to the trainer at least 24 hours prior to the phone call. These tracking forms, plus emergent logistical issues will be the focus of each call. With regard to the after-school program, it will not be feasible to discuss all aspects of the CHP implementation in each call. Consequently, the calls will rotate through activities including: arrival, primary counselor meetings, interpersonal skills group, recreation group, academic skills group, transitions, consultations with teachers, and coordination with parents.

Quality assurance requirements

At the end of six months, the CHP trainer will make a site visit to assess adherence, provide additional training, and determine if there is a continued need to telephone consultation. If the CHP provider meets criteria for independent practice of the CHP consulting or after-school model, then the monthly telephone calls are reduced to once every three months to provide additional support and reduce the risk of drift away from adherence. However, if the site visit reveals that the CHP provider has not met criteria, then the bi-weekly calls are will be implemented and another site visit is scheduled after another six months. If criteria are not met at this visit, then the site is decertified and not considered to be providing the CHP. Accreditation expires annually, so programs must complete annual quality assurance to maintain accreditation status.

Outcome monitoring

The minimum measures that should be used by the implementers are:

1. At baseline students should be assessed using the Disruptive Behavior Disorder Rating Scale and the Behavior Assessment Scale for Children (or similar comprehensive measure) at baseline. These measures should be repeated annually.
2. School grades should be tracked with HOPS and collected quarterly
3. Social Functioning measured by the impairment rating scale (self, parent, and teacher report) at baseline, then quarterly thereafter.
4. Academic Functioning measured using the Homework Problems Checklist and the Academic Performance Rating Scale at baseline and quarterly by parents and teachers.
5. Weekly data on performance in the program, including rule violations and progress on group activities. These are summarized in weekly report to parents.

6. Behavior violations are tracked on a daily basis by primary counselors (see behavior tracking card in CHP after-school program manual), summarized weekly by program director, and described in a report sent home to parents (See Parent Weekly Report).
7. Individual goals are evaluated by the primary counselor (see CHP After-School Program Manual) and progress is summarized in the weekly reports.

In the after-school program, each youth is assigned a primary counselor who will be responsible for collecting baseline, daily, and quarterly measures. The CHP provider will review data and discuss it with the trainer as part of the support phone calls, or on an as needed basis. Students who are deteriorating or not making progress on goals will be targeted for additional support and problem solving.

Implementation fidelity/process monitoring

Training for the CHP centers on the implementation checklists and adherence measures. In the after-school program, there should be one supervisor for every group of 12 students, and three staff for each group (not including the supervisor). The supervisor should gather implementation checklists from each activity and formally assess each of the primary counselors weekly. Supervision results should be discussed individually with counselors, and discussed weekly at staff meetings. Counselors should be taught to recognize what they are doing well, and increase these activities. Counselors should self-monitor or accept feedback about things that need improvement based on adherence monitoring.

Summary and Conclusion

Taken together the strategies, activities, and materials of the CHP make it possible for students with learning or behavioral challenges to improve and succeed in school. Research on the CHP has shown that students in the CHP not only improve grades and behavior; they also report more self-confidence and personal life satisfaction. The success of the CHP depends on ongoing attention to quality and improvement based on innovation and research. Accredited programs share in this ongoing development through training and implementation support.

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