

Cohort IX/Project Dream - Lake County School District

2024-2025 EVALUATION SUMMARY

21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) Grant



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Program Description

Project Dream through the Lake County School District (LCSD) encompasses afterschool, Friday, and Summer programs for the Leadville/Lake County area. Programs are mainly funded through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) Grant Program, along with other local grants, regional foundations, and donations. Project Dream afterschool programs take place Monday-Thursday, with Friday programs filling the youth programming gap left by LCSD's four-day school week. Summer programs are offered in collaboration with local youth programming partners. All programs include social-emotional learning, academic enrichment, athletics, club programs, and activities with local partner organizations.

LAKE COUNTY
PANTHERS



Lake County is nestled in the heights of the Rocky Mountains, surrounded by the resort economies of the Vail valley and Summit County. Lake County is considered the affordable county to live in. As such, many caregivers commute out of the county for work. In any given year there are between 900-1,000 students enrolled in the school district. The population is split about 60/40 between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking households. Project Dream began afterschool programs in 2010 in response to community need for safe and enriching programs for students during afterschool hours. Project Dream soon took on summer programming that has since expanded to a yearly day camp carried forward by local program partners. Current Project Dream summer programs have an academic enrichment focus. In the fall of 2020, Lake County School District moved to a four-day week calendar. In response to this shift, Project Dream began a full day of Friday programming so students would again have a safe place to be on this day. Project Dream aims to continue adapting to the needs of Lake County students and families.

Program Vision

Working together with community partners, we will create a healthier, safer, more prosperous Leadville where children are empowered to learn, encouraged to explore, challenged to grow, and inspired to lead.

Program Mission

LCSD challenges students to reach their fullest potential through personal, engaged and rigorous learning in the classroom and beyond. Through Project Dream we engage families, school staff, and our community to provide students with a variety of enriching activities, positive relationships in a Crew-like setting, and tools for greater social-emotional and academic success, all designed to complement the students' school day.

Program Beliefs

- We believe that LCSD can work alongside strong community partners to enrich the lives of our students.
- We believe that we can create an inclusive environment to engage and empower students and their families.
- We believe that through engagement and empowerment, we can create opportunities that enhance the experiences of students in Lake County.

Program Goals and Objectives

- **Academic Achievement:** Provide opportunities for academic enrichment to help students meet state and local academic standards.
- **Essential Skills:** Offer students a broad array of additional services, programs, and activities designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program of participating students.
- **Commitment to School:** Support increased attendance rates and overall commitment to school.
- **Family Engagement:** Offer families of students served by opportunities for active and meaningful engagement in their children's education.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Research Question 1: For LCIS Friday programming, will reducing the duration of free programming reduce attendance as compared to the 2023-2024 school year?

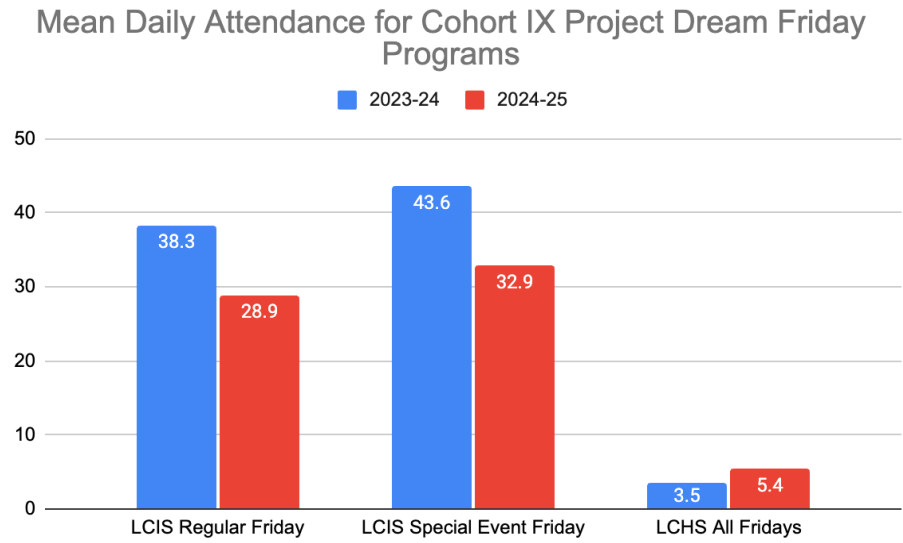
Research Question 2: For LCHS Friday programming, how will promoting field trips for Friday programs impact attendance as compared to the 2023-2024 school year?

Since LCSD transitioned to a four-day school week, Project Dream has worked to implement effective programming at each school site funded by CCLC. The past few years have seen Project Dream exceeding the ten or twelve hour weekly program requirements of the CCLC program, supported by grant funding from state and federal Covid-19 relief grants and small foundation grants. Multiple iterations of all-day programming were provided by Project Dream on Fridays over the past few years using these funds. However, much of the supplemental funds that Project Dream relied on to expand Friday programming has expired, and the 2024-2025 budget for Project Dream did not support the program profile to retain free all-day programming on Fridays at each site. As a result, two program structures were changed for the 2024-2025 school year. At the Lake County Intermediate School Site, free programming was only available from 12:00-3:30 pm on Fridays for the 2024-25 school year as compared to 9:00 am-3:00pm for the 2023-2024 school year. A partner program operated with fees in the morning. At the Lake County High School site, Friday programs were offered about every other week with a focus on field trips to outdoor sites and out-of-town activities for the 2024-2025 school year as compared to every Friday for credit recovery support. Would these reductions in program hours result in decreased enrollment?

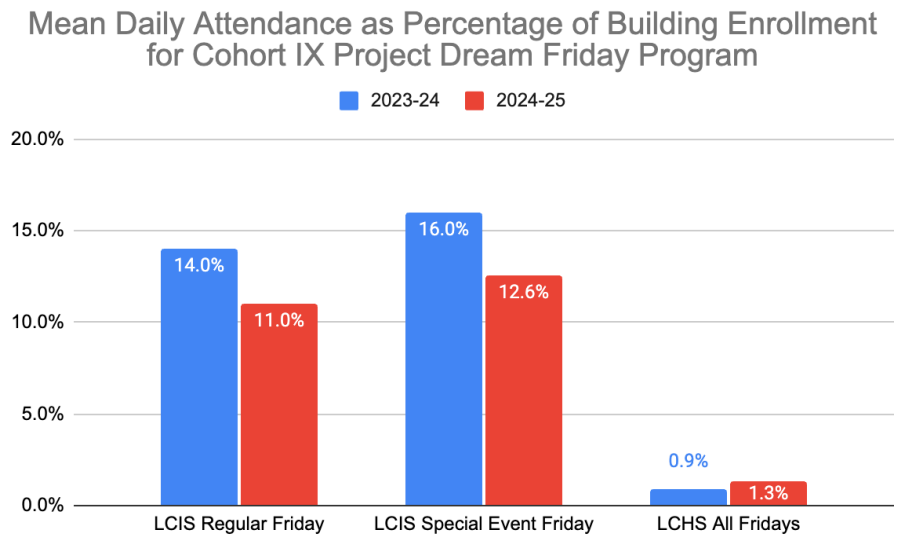
To understand the impact of changes in free programming on Friday attendance, we analyzed daily attendance data for both the LCIS and LCHS sites. We pulled daily attendance data for both the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 school years from the EZReports system. This daily attendance data was analyzed for all students at each school site: at LCIS 273 students in '23-'24 and 262 in '24-'25; at LCHS 402 students in '23-'24 and 404 '24-'25. We then calculated average (mean) daily attendance on Fridays reported as a raw number of students, as well as as a percentage of students in the school day building from published pupil counts. Considering daily attendance in raw numbers helps to show the resources (such as staffing) needed to facilitate this type of programming, while daily attendance as percentage of students in the school day building helps to compare attendance corrected for change in enrollment. At the LCIS site Friday daily attendance was analyzed for "Regular" site-based program days that take place at the school building distinctly from "Special Event" field trip programs. All LCHS site Friday programs were analyzed together due to less consistency in program types.

PROGRAM RESULTS

Our attendance analysis saw that Friday average daily Friday program attendance declined in 2024-2025 at the LCIS site, while it increased at the LCHS site. Below are charts that represent the analysis:



For the LCIS site, the 2024-25 program year saw a decrease in average daily attendance of 9.4 students for “Regular” Fridays and 10.7 students for “Special Event” Fridays. However, the LCHS site saw an increase in average daily attendance of 1.9 students.



The above described trends are confirmed when considering average daily attendance as a percentage of the whole cohort of students in the school day building. Average daily attendance as a percentage of building enrollment at LCIS decreased by 3.0% points for “Regular” Fridays, and 3.4% for “Special Event” Fridays. These decreases represent a roughly one-fifth (21.4%) drop from the 2023-24 school year to the 2024-2025 school year. Average daily attendance as a percentage of building enrollment at LCHS increased by 0.4% points, an almost 50% increase.

CONCLUSION

Changes in attendance for Friday programming after modifications to program structures offers key insights that help direct Project Dream to further program strategies. It is likely that funding for out-of-school time (OST) programs will continue to diminish as we move further away from funds available for the Covid-19 relief efforts. In this resource and funding environment decisions will have to be made about what types and configuration of programming best leverages resources. One critical indicator of resource management is program utilization demonstrated through program attendance. By comparing the attendance outcomes between LCIS and LCHS we can learn more about how to promote utilization through program configuration.

The analysis for the LCIS site likely demonstrates that offering a half-day of free Friday programming will result in lower utilization than a full day of free Friday programming. Project Dream aims to fill the gap in child care that a four-day school week creates for families without a caregiver at home on Fridays. It is important to consider that the LCIS site serves students in grades 3-6, students must be registered for programs, and students are expected to attend consistently. As such, the LCIS program requires a high degree of commitment from caregivers. Our conclusion is that a half-day of free Friday programs works well for less families than a full day of free programs. Very few families chose to drop their student/s off in the afternoon for our free programming only, instead electing to pay fees for our partner morning program that allowed for a combined full day of programs. Some families were deterred by costs of alternative Friday morning programs, and chose not to enroll their students in any programming at all on Fridays. Other families enrolled their students in other OST programs in Lake County that meet once or twice a month on Fridays. It is important to consider other factors that likely contributed to the enrollment decline, such as staffing changes, program changes, and changes in caregiver attitudes towards school programs in a threatening political environment for immigrants. To the Project Dream staff working closely with students and families, it was clear that the reduction in free programming forced many difficult decisions in Lake County households of LCIS students that was the key driver of lower attendance.

The analysis for the LCHS site likely demonstrates that offering fewer Friday programs in a school year and a focus on field trip style experiences can result in higher utilization of free Friday programming. The Friday program focus for the 2023-24 school year was individualized tutoring and credit recovery. With funding for Friday programs becoming more scarce, it will be difficult to provide programs with high student to staff ratios every week of the school year. The change to field-trip style experiences on Fridays for the 2024-25 engaged a higher average number of students, while reducing staffing costs by not providing programs every week. Credit recovery and tutoring support has been retained in the afterschool program, and expanded through a new program partnership for summer 2025, and may not be a cost-effective program focus for Fridays.

All said, our Friday programs remain a critical service for students and families in Lake County. Through the partnership with Project Dream and the school day, Lake County School District is able to provide enriching and impactful programs on Fridays that help meet the needs of children, youth and families. In a community where the majority of the workforce commutes over mountain passes to neighboring resort economies for employment, offering extended learning and enrichment opportunities allows caregivers to not compromise their students' growth and learning at the expense of their job. As a Project Dream caregiver put it this year:



*We could not afford to live in Lake County and
do right by our kids without Project Dream.*

This analysis provides clear direction for Project Dream to pursue the resources that support as much free, all-day Friday programming as possible.

Website <https://www.lakecountyschools.net/outofschoolatlcscd/>

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