



MAGIC (Making Academic Gains In Children) After School!

After the last bell rings at Burnsville Elementary School and East Yancey Middle School, the kids in the MAGIC After School program are just getting started! Serving about one-hundred students through this program, the teachers and staff can see a big difference in the students' progress now from where they were at the beginning of the program. Each site has a coordinator and a dedicated staff who works with the students on a regular basis.

Currently, the program is funded by grants from 21st Century Community Learning Centers, with assistance from partners like S.O.S. (Support our Students), and the 4-H program through the County Extension Office. S.O.S is working with students at both Burnsville Elementary School and Cane River Middle. 4-H offers programs to all the schools in the county.

The emphasis at Burnsville Elementary and East Yancey is to offer academic enrichment through hands-on activities to help students bring up their grades and EOG test scores. However, the afternoon is anything but three more hours of school! These students are engaged in activities that are designed to get them out of their desks and working together on projects and experiments that they don't get to do during their regular school day. Even though the curriculum goes hand-in-hand with the NC Standard Course of Study, the students are enjoying themselves so much, that they forget they're learning.

Each afternoon, the students are assembled for MAGIC After School, are fed healthy snacks and have homework time. Tutoring during homework time is offered and then students get to participate in the planned activity for that day.

This past week, both groups went on a field trip to The Wolf Sanctum just outside Bakersville. The students had a great time walking around the sanctum, observing the wolves and listening to Director, Liz Mehaffey spin the story of each wolf. Even though the activity was part of their lesson on endangered animals and loss of habitat which is tied to the NC Standard Course of Study, the students were lost in the excitement of their field trip and once again, they were learning without even realizing it. This is just *part* of the magic of the after school program.

The statistics with regard to the three hours after school dismisses each day are startling. The hours from 3-6 p.m. are when students are most "at risk" for self-supervision, which can result in juvenile crime, increased sexual activity, teen pregnancy, unhealthy eating and behavioral issues. "The best-case scenario for our students who are going home after school with no adult supervision for several hours, is that they will spend those hours watching TV or playing video games and eating junk food," says Phillips. "Of course we don't want them to do that, but when you think in terms of the statistics, there are a lot worse things that can happen. That's why we need a program that can meet the needs of all our students and give them a safe, supervised place to be."

Because of the terms of the 21st CCLC grant, next year, they will only be able to serve those students in need of raising their EOG test scores. “It is my goal, and the goal of our staff, to work toward getting additional funding to support those students who need the MAGIC After School program for reasons in addition to raising test scores,” says Director, Debbie Phillips. “I would like to see this program offered across the county for every student who needs it, but we need additional funding and community partners to make it happen.”

The program is designed to help students increase their academic scores in testing as well as the classroom. The program will maintain the same schedule, even after funding is secured to add additional students and sites within the county. The emphasis will still be on academic enrichment, in a fun, engaging, hands-on approach to learning.

“It is my hope that when we get the word out about what we are trying to accomplish with an after school program that serves the needs of all students, we will add to our community-partners network. The community stands to gain from a program like this where we are actively working to decrease the drop-out rate. We want to help increase the numbers of students who graduate and give back to their own community,” adds Phillips.

There are many ways in which you can partner with the after school program. The cost per student per year is \$1,000. You can sponsor a student, or simply make a donation. Healthy snacks are always needed, so you can become a partner by donating snacks. Volunteers are always needed to help in the program. If you have ideas on ways you can help, or would like more information, you can reach director, Debbie Phillips at 828-284-5077. Debbie is also available to speak on behalf of the MAGIC After School program at your next meeting or club gathering.