

**City Year, Trotter's Best Practices:
Program Space**
Interview with Abe Fox, Program Manager

City Year's role within the Trotter School is to serve students in grades 3-6 in classrooms to provide attendance, social-emotional, academic, small group, and one-on-one support.



Photo Credit: City Year

Key Takeaways:

- The program space was planned early.
- The program space is always respected. Classroom materials are not used and the space is always left how it was found.
- Having a break before the start of the program helps students transition out of their school-time mentality and get ready for the program.
- Student work is displayed to personalize the program space.
- The space is manipulated to fit the needs of the program, such as grouping desks together to create a collaborative atmosphere.
- Teachers are consulted to ensure the space is conducive to learning.

Q: What planning goes into the program space prior to the start of the program?

A: One of the big things that goes into the planning is myself, the program manager, meeting with the liaison, who is really my point person for the after-school space. In the case of the Trotter School, it was me touching base with the Community Fields Coordinator. She was the person who organized a lot of what happened in the after-school space. I sat down with her and went over the goals and expectations of the program, and what we are trying to do within the Trotter School. We talked about the kind of stations City Year would need to achieve this. Ideally I would be meeting with her over the summer and touching base about those expectations, so we wanted to start the conversation really early on. This allowed the coordinator to think of spaces that we could use early on, as well. I would definitely recommend to programs that the earlier the better to start this process.

Q: How is the program space maintained throughout the program?

A: One of the big things that I emphasize to my volunteers and core members is to respect the space that we are utilizing. We use classrooms within the school, where sometimes my core

members serve in general during the day, but sometimes they do not. The understanding is that we are not using any of the materials in the classrooms that we are working with students in. We try to provide as much of the materials as we can. If we do ever need to use the materials already in a classroom, we make sure to put them back exactly how we found them or even better. We also always keep open lines of communication with the teachers who work in those classrooms, so we can inform them about what kinds of activities we will be doing. Keeping the teachers informed about what happens in that after-school space ensures that there are no surprises. The teachers really appreciate being informed.

Q: How is the program space individualized to the youth participating in the program (i.e. to reflect their work, interests, or cultures)?

A: I think this happens by allowing the students to lead the spaces during our snack time. For City Year, snack time occurs right after dismissal in pod, or communal, areas throughout the school. This allows students to transition out of the school mindset, have a bit of relaxed time in the snack space, and then re-enter into a classroom. Even if students are going back to the same classroom, this allows them to switch their mindset and feel like it is a different space. We also set up different expectations for the classrooms during our program time, such as that it does not have to be quiet. Ultimately we want the space to feel engaging.

During the enrichment block, when we are partnering with the Trotter teachers, students are usually focused on one specific subject. For example, the third grade cohort last year focused on oceans. So, their final project was a 10 foot mural of different fish species, based on all of the research the students had done. We displayed this project outside of the school cafeteria.

Q: What steps are taken to ensure the space is conducive to learning?

A: An important step is to understand how the space we are in is going to work for whatever subject is being taught during the enrichment block. Often this time is dedicated to group work. So, if we are in a classroom with individualized desks, we find a way to manipulate that space so the students are in groups and facing one another. We do this to spark collaboration and group work.

Before we start the program each day, we also have a strong circle. This entails the students standing in a circle and discussing what we want to accomplish during the program day. This helps everyone get on the same page and focus on any announcements.

Particularly in the 3rd and 4th grade space at the Trotter School, we were able to collaborate with teachers from the Trotter. This is somewhat of a unique situation. But the ability sit down and discuss what do we want to accomplish in this after -school space, and leveraging the experience of teachers and the enthusiasm of my core members ensures that it is really a great space for the students. If there is any opportunity other programs have the ability to connect the teachers and invest them into that after-school space, all the better. It helps create a seamless transition from the school day to the extended learning time.

City Year's role within the Trotter School is to serve students in grades 3-6 in classrooms to provide attendance, social-emotional, academic, small group, and one-on-one support. In the after-school space, for grades 3-4, the program partners with the Trotter School to provide an

enrichment block where students learn about specific subject in a less formal environment. After the enrichment period, the students transition into various clubs. These clubs include sports, arts, newspapers, and others.