

**Citizen Schools's Best Practices:
Staff Promote Youth Engagement & Thinking**
Interview with Stephanie LaJoie, Deputy Campus Director

Citizen Schools is a national nonprofit organization that partners with middle schools, typically in low income communities, to provide an extended learning day.



Photo Credit: Citizen Schools

Key Takeaways:

- Staff learn from one another to improve strategies for student engagement.
- Incorporating student voice helps engage the students.
- Trainings are offered to help staff learn how to engage students.
- The program offers hands-on and flexible activities to keep students engaged and offer individualized content.

Q: What are two or three best practices for staff members seeking to promote student engagement during the program day?

A: One thing we do is a lot of training workshops focused around student engagement practices. We learn from experts, teachers, and each other to discover what our strategies are. A big piece is having time consistently to learn from others who are doing the same work and their strategies. Additionally, we try to incorporate a lot of student voice. Students are included in the process of deciding what classes and enrichment activities they want to participate in, as well as what types of activities are used in the classrooms. Every staff member also has a manager who works directly with them and coaches them on these practices. This allows us to hold staff accountable on action steps, planning, and goal setting, and then go into the classroom and evaluate how these practices are working to engage students.

Q: Did your program conduct pre-program trainings? If so, how was student engagement addressed?

A: Yes. We do training workshops for staff and student engagement is definitely addressed. There have been times when we focus solely on how to engage students, and other days when we focus on other topics. But, student engagement is always a part of the conversation.

Q: What program design measures allowed staff members to effectively promote student engagement?

A: I think because we have a variety of program elements, such as our partnership model where volunteers come in and work with staff. Our classes are designed around different topics, such as science, sports, or building a robot. These classes are focused heavily on student engagement because we want them to be hands-on. There are also areas of our program that are flexible, such as our side core curriculum that teaches lessons on culture and diversity. This allows staff to incorporate individuality and creativity for the students. Doing so enables staff to really engage students in the content of what they are learning by focusing the lesson on what best suits their classroom needs on an individual basis.

Citizen Schools is a national nonprofit organization that partners with middle schools, typically in low income communities, to provide an extended learning day. The program works with school leaders to develop a program that supports the school and the school's means. The program typically occurs within the last block of the school day, which extends the school day by a couple hours. Citizen School fellows provide additional academic support in ELA or math, as well as overseeing other program elements. These elements range from the 8th grade program that focuses on high school, exploration activities, or working with the volunteers that come in. Overall, Citizen School provides an additional model and support for extended learning to help schools boost their academic achievement and provide additional opportunities for students and the communities.