

Request to: Nonprofit Giving Course at Framingham State University
Attention: Professor Ira Silver and Ms. Shannon Tuttle

Organization Name: BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life)
Project Name: BELL Summer 2015 and BELL After School 2015-2016, Boston

ORGANIZATION AND PROGRAM INFORMATION

Goals and How You are Achieving Them

BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life) is a nonprofit organization that exists to transform the academic achievements, self-confidence, and life trajectories of children living in under-resourced, urban communities. Based in Dorchester, MA, BELL is a leader in the field of expanded learning time. Here in Boston, BELL partners closely with Boston Public Schools to provide expanded learning experiences during summer and after school. These experiences blend intensive academic instruction and enrichment activities for students in grades 1-8 who are at risk of academic under-performance or failure. BELL recognizes our students as “scholars” from the day they enter the program because we believe in the tremendous potential of all children to succeed.

The BELL model responds to a body of research documenting the disproportionate affect that lack of access to high quality learning opportunities outside the school day has on children from low-income homes. For instance, summer learning loss (2 months average for low-income students) alone is documented to contribute to more than half of the achievement gap between children from lower and higher-income families. In 2013, 54% and 59% of 5th grade students from low-income households failed the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) in reading and math, respectively. Students of color had failure rates that were even higher. When these early setbacks go unaddressed children fall further behind with each passing year, resulting in an on-time graduation rate of only 60% and a drop-out rate that is 19%, double the state average. Failure in school ultimately consigns children to a life of unequal opportunity by increasing their likelihood for unemployment in adulthood, dependence on public assistance, and incarceration in prison.

We aim to help schools and districts turn around school performance, and reverse a history of educational inequality. Our ultimate benchmark for success will be realized when all children read, write, and perform math at or above grade level, have access to high-quality expanded learning time in their communities, and fulfill their potential as scholars and leaders.

BELL utilizes Summer and BELL After School dynamic learning experiences that blend 1) intense, individualized academic instruction in reading and math delivered at a 2:20 instructor to scholar ratio using data-driven, research-based curricula, 2) enrichment experiences designed to expose scholars to new subjects and build self-confidence and social skills, and 3) pathways for parent engagement. BELL targets scholars with the greatest need: low-income and performing, on average, below grade level. In Boston, most of our scholars are Black or Latino children from the East Boston, South Boston, Jamaica Plain, Chinatown, Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, and Allston/Brighton neighborhoods. Over 90% of children are on free or reduced lunch. Approximately 35% of BELL scholars come from limited English or non-English speaking households.

Metrics Indicating Success

Goal #1: Provide remediation and skill practice to help students gain grade level proficiency, with 65% of scholars showing increases in scaled scores in after school, and on average scholars showing at least one month gain (in addition to avoiding 2 months of learning loss) in summer.

Indicator(s): Using the STAR computer-adaptive assessment as a pre- and post-program tool, BELL scholars will show an average increase in grade level equivalency of at least 2 points.

Goal #2: Re-invigorate family engagement in school and in supporting students' academic success, with 80% of parents reporting that they are more engaged in their child's education as a result of BELL.

Indicator(s): Using the BELL end-of-program survey instrument, at least 80% of parents and scholars indicate high satisfaction with BELL, and increased interest and engagement with school.

Goal #3: Provide students with a college-bound culture, social/emotional support, positive behavior norms that support self-management, goal-setting, and community building, and mentors with whom they can relate, with 80% of scholars reporting that they have increased interest in school, and 80% average daily attendance among scholars.

Indicator(s): Using the BELL end-of-program survey instrument, at least 80% of parents and scholars indicate high satisfaction with BELL, and 80% of scholars reporting that they have increased interest in school as a result of BELL. Using daily attendance data as a measure, average daily attendance meets or exceeds 80%.

Each year BELL meets and exceeds these targets. During Summer 2014, BELL provided math, literacy, and enrichment programming to 1,665 scholars in grades 1-8 who, on average entered BELL Summer performing below grade level in math and reading. We are excited to report that our Smarter Summers Partnership with Boston Public Schools saw scholars achieve more than an average 1.4 months grade-equivalent gain in English/Language Arts and more than 3.8 months grade-equivalent gain in math during the 5-week program. And for the most at-risk scholars – the 75% of scholars who started summer in the lowest quartile – the gains were 3.1 months in ELA and 5.9 months in math. 87% of parents reported increases in their child's self-confidence, 91% reported that they are more engaged in their child's education because of BELL, and 88% of parents would recommend BELL to other parents.

During the 2013-2014 school year, 409 scholars in grades K-5 participated in BELL After School. 77% of scholars made scaled score gains in reading, and 81% of scholars made scaled score gains in math. This school year we are serving 260 scholars in BELL After School at 3 schools in Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan.

The Director's Level of Commitment to the Cause

Susan Bonaiuto, EdD., joined BELL as Executive Director for Massachusetts in the Fall of 2012. Bonaiuto's commitment to education was evidenced in her 15 years experience in public school leadership at the Needham Public Schools in Needham, Mass. where she was responsible for the quality and growth of out-of-school time programs, district strategic planning and communications, external funding and special projects. She has a passionate commitment to positive change and social justice, a creative approach to problem solving, and an adaptive ability to lead and be effective in a range of circumstances. She has applied these skills to develop the strategies and relationships within the region that help fund the BELL's ongoing operations and to ensure the long term sustainability of BELL's mission and impact. In Bonaiuto's first two years, Boston Public Schools commitment to BELL Summer and After School has more than doubled – the number of scholars in Boston has increased from 1220 in FY12 to 2540 in FY15. In addition, she has increased philanthropy by 30% to support this growth.

Prior to her work in public schools, she was the Director of a state agency, the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, for ten years. Bonaiuto earned her Ed.D. from Boston College, M.A. (M.B.A.) from the University of Wisconsin School of Business, M.A. in Political Science from Boston College, and B.M. in Music Education from Bucknell University.

Past Recipients' Ongoing Involvement in the Organization's Work

BELL scholars recite the BELL pledge each day at the beginning of the program. The pledge reads:

“I am the future. I am intelligent. I am unique. When the time comes, I will be a leader. When there is injustice, I will take a stand. And to make a difference, I will learn, because, I am, and always will be, a BELL educated leader for life!”

BELL is fortunate to have many of its past scholars take this pledge to heart. For example, David is a 25 year old former BELL scholar who is currently a program coordinator at MGH Institute of Health Professionals. David started as a shy eight year old whose single mother recognized the opportunities for success that David’s participation in BELL could offer. David attributes BELL as providing him with the foundation that laid the way for his path to prep school, a college scholarship and earning a Bachelor’s degree. However, David cites the most important opportunity that BELL gave him as the chance to confidently give back to the community. After college, David returned to BELL as a Teaching Assistant, feeling some of the same shyness of his eight year old self. This time, however, he had gained confidence through his trust of the BELL community to accept this new challenge. David is proud to be an “educated leader for life,” and he is just one example of the many scholars and families who choose to remain involved in supporting BELL, through fundraising, speaking on behalf of the organization, joining a scholar alumni group, and volunteering.

Other Sources of Funding

BELL raises philanthropic funding from local and national sources to cover a portion of program expenses. This year, approximately 45% of program-related expenses were covered by Boston Public Schools (BPS), 35% by local contributions to BELL, and 20% from national contributions. BPS contributions included cash and in-kind resources, drawing from such sources as Title I and III, and in kind contributions such as classroom space, utilities, janitorial services, and breakfast and lunch. Other local Massachusetts funders include: Bain Capital Children’s Charity, The Baupost Group, Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation, Reebok Foundation, State Street. For a complete list see the attached BELL Impact-Expanded Learning in MA- 2014 report.

How Your Organization Has Addressed Challenges

Challenges are a given. BELL uses a robust continuous improvement approach to anticipate, identify and address challenges as they occur. This includes a cycle of data analysis, problem-solving, action, and reflection. In addition, BELL prides itself on staying up-to-date with current research-based best educational practices. For example, one recent challenge is the shift to Common Core State Learning Standards. Recognizing the need to shift instructional practices, BELL was an early adopter of Common Core built curriculum and a Common Core aligned computer-adaptive test in reading and math from Renaissance Learning. To help our teachers and teaching assistants develop their professional practice to effectively deliver Common Core instruction, BELL also developed in-person, teleconference, and web-based training modules to coach our teachers and teaching assistants on how to get the most out of the curricula. Taking these affirmative steps has allowed BELL to ensure that BELL Scholars are being prepared to meet future mandated Common Core assessments.

Mention Any Legal Troubles the Organization Has Had

BELL has not had any legal troubles.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Amount Requested and for What Specific Purpose AND Project Overview

BELL respectfully requests a \$10,000 grant to support its Boston 2015 Summer programming. BELL will serve approximately 1,400 4th-8th grade scholars through Smarter Summers and 880 1st-8th grade scholars through our Office of English Language Learner (OELL) partnership, for a total of approximately 2,280 scholars. Grant funds will provide support and deliver impact. Smarter Summers serves the students most at risk of being retained at grade level (and therefore at increased risk for dropout) and the OELL partnership delivers culturally relevant learning experiences that combine instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL) with literacy, mathematics, social studies and science, enrichment activities, and field trips. BELL is honored by the deep trust Boston Public Schools has extended to us to help its struggling scholars achieve academic success.

In addition, we are continuing and expanding a successful pilot from summer 2014. We are expanding our 8th to 9th grade bridge program, called Rising Scholars, with a robust career readiness programming focusing on tangible job skills and inspiring field trips to Boston-area businesses.

BELL Summer offers intensive, individualized academic instruction in reading and math delivered at a 2:20 instructor to scholar ratio using data-driven, research-based curricula. BELL Summer scholars receive academic and social enrichment for up to 6 hours per day, 5 days per week, for 5 weeks. In sum, the program expands learning time by up to 150 hours. BELL Summer includes the following core elements:

Breakfast and Community Time: Every day at BELL Summer starts with a nutritious breakfast, followed by community time. This lays the foundation for strong peer and staff relationships and positive behavior expectations.

Literacy and Math Instruction: Certified teachers and teaching assistants deliver literacy and math instruction, Monday – Thursday, using curricula from Pearson and a leveled reader’s library of multi-cultural titles. Curricula are aligned to the Common Core and the Standards for Mathematical Practice.

Lunch and Recess: Scholars eat a healthy lunch and engage in organized physical activity during recess.

Enrichment Courses: After lunch, scholars rotate through a series of enrichment courses each day, Monday – Thursday. Activities are designed to foster critical 21st Century skills like teamwork and leadership, increase self-confidence, and expose scholars to new subjects and opportunities in science, technology, creative arts, fitness, and character development.

Field Trips: On Fridays, BELL brings the classroom into the community as scholars visit cultural institutions, universities, regional landmarks, and science centers.

Generous funding such as the \$10,000 requested in this proposal provides resources to operate BELL Summer for as many eligible scholars as possible. Financial support creates valuable summer opportunities for the maximum number of scholars to gain core competencies in literacy and math skills while helping them to cultivate the confidence, social skills, and positive attitudes that are indicative of educational persistence and achievement, as well as combating “summer learning loss.”

How This Project Stands Out as Distinct

The BELL model has been recognized as the gold standard of summer programming. A November 2014 study by Rennie Center and MassBudget concluded that BELL is an exemplar of quality summer learning practices that achieve positive results. BELL is a Priority Partner as determined by both the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Boston Public Schools. BELL is the only Summer partner awarded this distinction. Distinguishing characteristics include:

Return on Investment. BELL works with principals to enroll the students who most need additional time on learning. This means that the BELL program can target resources where return on investment is highest.

Parent Enthusiasm for BELL. BELL enjoys a great reputation with parents. End of program surveys indicate very high levels of satisfaction. The BELL model generally appeals to parents, with extensive parent communication, a solution to finding a safe environment for their children during the after school hours, and teachers and teaching assistants who often speak their languages or come from similar backgrounds. Parent demand for BELL exceeds the numbers of schools currently offering a BELL after school program.

Professional Teaching Staff. One of the key elements of the BELL model is an experienced, professional teaching staff. Every classroom includes a certified teacher (some BPS teachers and some non-BPS teachers) or a teacher with equivalent experience (e.g. certified in another country, on leave, a paraprofessional who has proven effectiveness as a teacher in BELL, a recent college

graduate with extensive experience but a pending license, a teacher in graduate school.) Every classroom is also staffed by a teaching assistant who leads instruction for small groups and mentors scholars.

Evaluation and Assessment and Evidence-Based model. One of BELL's key strengths is evaluation and assessment. BELL programs have been independently evaluated by the Urban Institute. A two-year, random assignment study of the BELL Summer program found statistically significant evidence regarding the ability of the BELL Summer program to improve the reading skills of low-performing children, and evidence of positive impacts on the degree to which parents encouraged their children to read and the degree to which they read with their children.

Future Directions of the Project

First, with additional resourcing BELL can continue to grow in the Boston Public Schools to provide an increased number of potential future scholars with the same opportunities and advantages of former and current BELL scholars. Secondly, BELL hopes to be able to expand our regional footprint and continues to have discussions with other school districts in Massachusetts (e.g. Lawrence, Lowell, Framingham, Holyoke, Pittsfield, New Bedford) about achieving this.

Metrics Indicating Local Impact

In addition to the measurable program outcomes described in the Organization and Program Information section, and the independent evaluations of the BELL model also described above, BELL measures local impact through the stories of every scholar and every family every day, the joy and excitement in a BELL classroom, and the feeling of success and possibility in the future expressed by BELL scholars.

BELL also measures local impact through the support of individuals, corporations and foundations who believe in BELL and annually support the costs of one or more BELL classrooms. Each BELL classroom of 20 scholars in either after school or summer requires approximately \$10,500 in local philanthropy.

Local impact is also supported by a Massachusetts Leadership Council, chaired by Harvard University Professor and former Secretary of Education for MA, Paul Reville. The Leadership Council is charged with supporting the achievement of BELL's impact and sustainability goals at a local level. The attached report BELL Impact-Expanded Learning in MA- 2014, lists the Leadership Council members as well as funders.