

## **ASPIRE - A different kind of after-school program**

Many school districts offer after-school programs. But on the campus of Shelby Public Schools, the Aspire Program offers the district something special and rare.

While many after-school programs operated by non-profit organizations simply use the space provided by the schools, the Aspire Program has a unique relationship with SPS.

It is funded by a federal grant – but it is actually a Shelby Public School's Program.

"We are fortunate to have amazing collaboration and coordination with our schools," said Heather Baffi, elementary site coordinator.

"All of my Aspire staff also work at the school during the day," Heather said. "This is a huge benefit. We're like a small family."

The Aspire Program is designed for students in grades 1-12 during the school year and K-12 during the summer.



*Heather Baffi & Kolleen Lenon*

According to Aspire Project Director Kolleen Lenon, there are about 120-125 students who participate in the program daily, with most in the lower grades.

"Aspire provides academic, enrichment, and movement opportunities," Kolleen said. "We have a high quality and friendly frontline staff."

The elementary and middle school sites are state-licensed childcare facilities.

Students get a hot meal, have recess time, and focus on academics.



There's arts and crafts, hands-on STEM activities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), cooking, physical recreation, and organized games. A recent project for 2nd graders involved assembling a birdhouse.

The Aspire summer program features field trips such as outings to Michigan Adventure and other places, based on themes. For example, K-5 students went on a train trip in Marne to coincide with its theme of "All-Aboard."

High school students can even take credit recovery courses during the summer.

As you can imagine, the Aspire Program is a supportive partner for working parents. Along with free childcare and the focus on student learning, Aspire helps reduce truancy and other issues which may be holding kids back in school.

"It's a joy to serve Shelby students and their families," Kolleen said.

It's a good thing Kolleen enjoys what she does because she's been doing it for about a dozen years.

She became the Aspire Program Director in 2012 after obtaining a degree in public administration.

Kolleen was attracted to Aspire because it delivered a positive program to help students prosper by providing a safe environment that helps kids with their academics while also providing opportunities for social and emotional growth.

"I immediately came to realize how a program like ours can assist with meeting a variety of student and family needs in our community, " said Kolleen. "It's wonderful to be a part of the good things happening in Shelby Schools."



