Learning Hubs Data Report

2020-2021 School Year

Motivation

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, forcing schools to close their doors and shift to remote learning models, parents and students struggled to adjust. Essential worker parents faced a child-care crisis – unable to work from home, many lacked a safe and affordable place for their children to learn while in-person school was not an option. The shift to a remote learning model introduced new economic and mental pressures to parents across the country during an already challenging time. Essential workers or not, numerous parents found themselves having to make a difficult decision between working to support their family or supervising and supporting their children's remote education. A COVID Experiences survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Fall 2020 found that parents of school-age children receiving virtual instruction were more likely than parents of children receiving in-person instruction to report loss of work, job stability concerns, child-care challenges, conflict between working and providing child-care, emotional distress, and difficulty sleeping [1].

The same CDC survey also indicated similarly concerning impacts of remote learning on children's mental health and well-being. Parents of children receiving virtual instruction were more likely than parents of children receiving in-person instruction to report that their children experienced decreases in physical activity, time spent outside, time spent with friends in-person and virtually, as well as worsened mental or emotional health [2]. Early in the pandemic, in May 2020, a Gallup poll of parents of students experiencing school closures found that 45% of parents cited being separated from classmates and teachers as a major challenge [3].

In addition to the economic and psychosocial challenges for children and parents, lack of access to reliable internet was a significant barrier in the transition to remote learning. Recent data indicates that nationwide, 16.9 million children lack the high-speed internet access necessary to support online learning at home [4]. Furthermore, the challenge of insufficient internet access disproportionately affects students of color; one in three Black, Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native families do not have high-speed home internet [5]. With 90% of school districts in Allegheny County starting the 2020-2021 school year fully or partially remote, high-speed internet was essential for facilitating and sustaining student engagement in remote learning activities.

[1,2] Jorge V. Verlenden et al, U.S. Ctrs. for Disease Control and Prevention, Association of Children's Mode of School Instruction with Child and Parent Experiences and Well-Being During the COVID-19 Pandemic — COVID Experiences Survey, United States, October 8-November 13, 2020 70 MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY WEEKLY REP. 369, 371 (Mar. 19, 2021), https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/pdfs/mm7011a1-H.pdf.
[3] Valerie J. Calderon, U.S. Parents Say COVID-19 Harming Child's Mental Health, GALLUP (June 16, 2020), https://news.gallup.com/poll/312605/parents-say-covid-harming-child-mental-health.aspx.
[4,5]Students of Color Caught in the Homework Gap, Alliance for Excellent Education, (Aug. 2020), https://futureready.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HomeworkGap_FINAL8.06.2020.pdf

What Are The Learning Hubs?

Responding to parents' and students' new needs, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS), Trying Together, and the United Way partnered with out-of-school time providers and community-based organizations to open Community Learning Hubs starting in September 2020. The Learning Hubs provided students access to a safe space to connect to school and reliable daytime care and supervision. For the 2020-2021 school year, DHS dispersed approximately $4.3 million in funding to 49 providers operating 75 Hub locations to provide free spots to children across Allegheny County.

The Learning Hubs provided a place for students to engage in virtual learning, including:
- Staff dedicated to keeping kids motivated to engage virtually, checking in on assignment completion, providing one-on-one support, and facilitating connections to teachers and other instructional supports
- Assistance with getting online and troubleshooting learning technology
- Enrichment activities to enhance student learning and skill-building and boost physical activity
- Access to Wi-Fi and high-speed internet access
- Meals and distribution of essential items

To ensure the health and safety of students, staff and their families, the safety precautions at the Learning Hubs included:
- Daily temperature and symptom checks for students and staff
- Spaces arranged to maintain physical distancing
- Children grouped into pods of 10 or fewer to spend the entire day
- Mask requirements for students and staff
- Following all safety guidance issued by the CDC, state, and Allegheny County

49 providers
75 locations
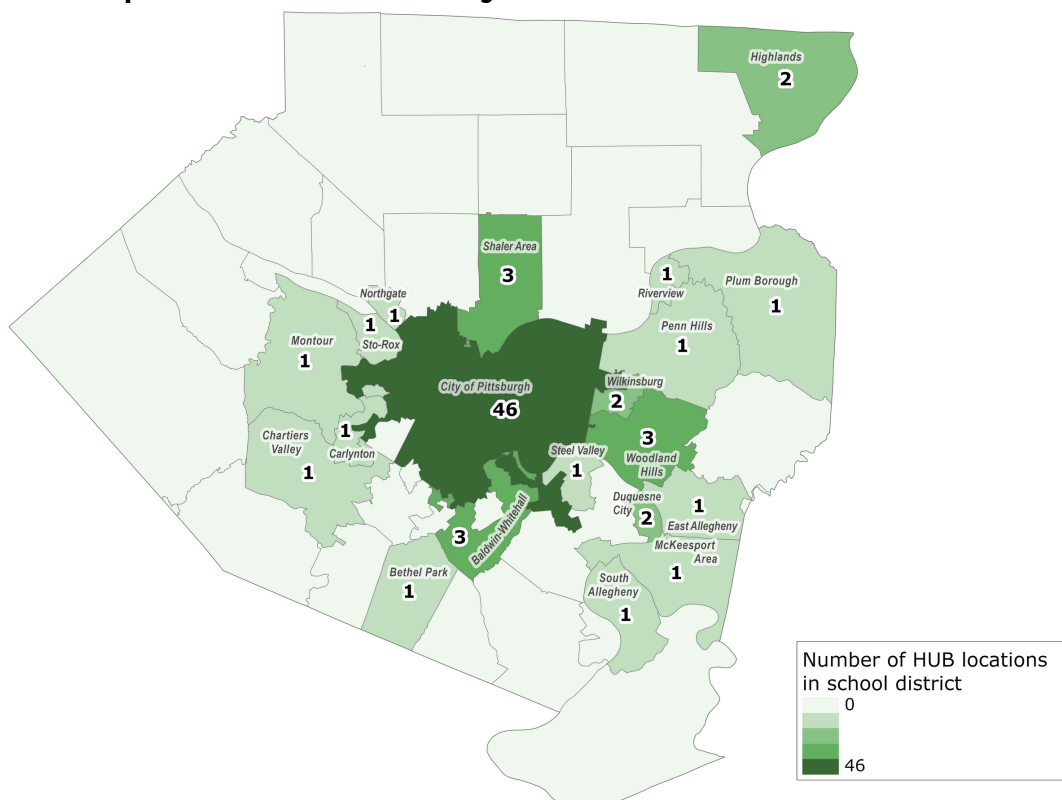
School Districts Served

Throughout the school year, the Learning Hub providers opened 75 locations across the county, spanning 21 school districts. As indicated in the Figure 1 map below, most of the Hub locations fall within the boundary of the Pittsburgh Public School district, the largest school district in Allegheny County serving over 21,000 students. Although most of the Hubs were physically located in the Pittsburgh Public School District, the Hubs often served students from multiple school districts – 69% of Hub locations served students from three or more different school districts during the school year.

Table 1: Top 10 school districts by number of students attended [1]

School District	Percentage and count of students
Pittsburgh Public SD	59% (1,506)
Charter Schools	7% (169)
Woodland Hills SD	6% (161)
Baldwin-Whitehall SD	5% (117)
Wilkinsburg SD	3% (78)
Chartiers Valley SD	3% (71)
Penn Hills SD	2% (53)
Shaler Area	2% (49)
Highlands SD	2% (41)
Duquesne City SD	2% (39)

Of the 2,595 individual students who attended the Learning Hubs in the 2020-2021 school year, the majority of the students were from Pittsburgh Public School District (59%), followed by Charter schools (7%), Woodland Hills School District (6%), and Baldwin-Whitehall School District (5%). The top ten school districts in Table 1 cover 86% of the students who attended the Hubs.

Figure 1: Map of Hub locations by school district

[1] If school district was not reported or not available in education records, school district was imputed using the student's address of residence (for 253 students).

Student Demographics

Most of the students served by the Learning Hubs were in younger grades. Kindergarten and Elementary school students represent 73% of the students attending the Hubs over the 2020-2021 academic year. Many of the Learning Hubs prioritized access for younger children because of their greater need for adult supervision and support to complete remote schoolwork. National trends regarding the impact of the pandemic on student learning has indicated that children in younger grades have been most impacted academically and have greater levels of unfinished learning than their older peers [1].

Figure 2: Percentage of students by grade level

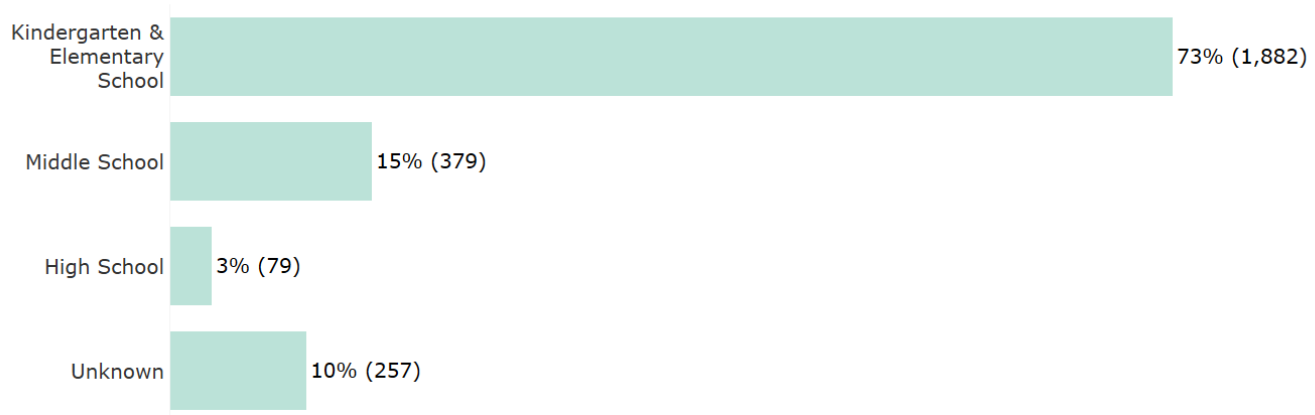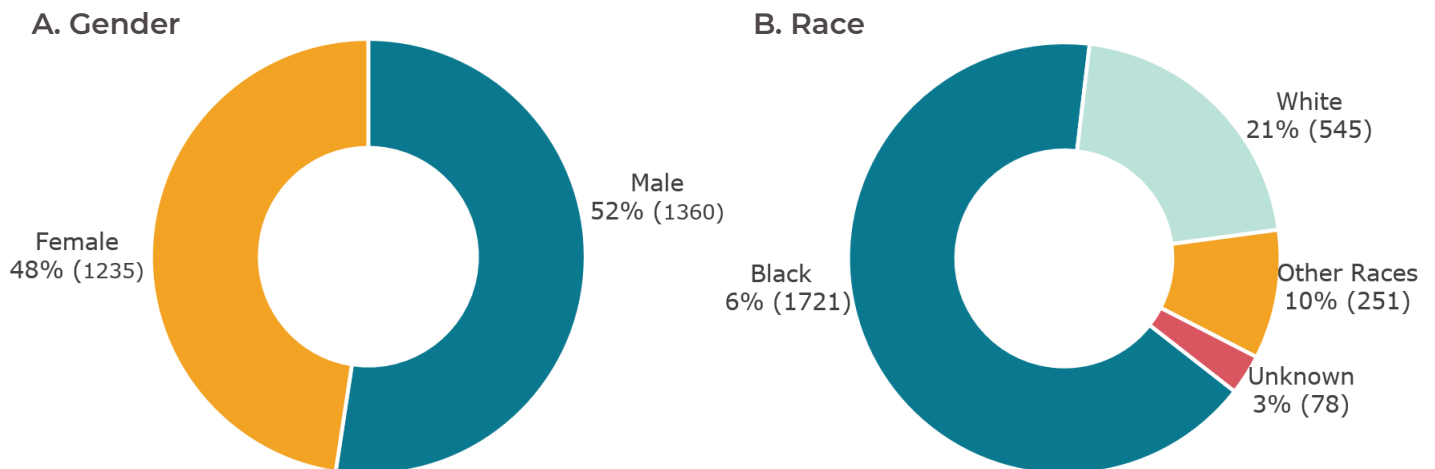| Grade Level	
Kindergarten & Elementary School	73% (1,882)
Middle School	15% (379)
High School	3% (79)
Unknown	10% (257)

Figure 3 below describes the gender and race of the students attending the Hubs. Male and female students attended at similar rates, with slightly more male students attending. The majority of students who attended the Hubs were Black (66%); 21% of students were White and 13% were other races or unknown.

Figure 3: Percentage of students by gender and race

A. Gender

Male 52% (1360)
Female 48% (1235)

B. Race

White 21% (545)
Black 6% (1721)
Other Races 10% (251)
Unknown 3% (78)

[1] Academic Achievement at the End of the 2020-2021 School Year: Insights after More Than a Year of Disrupted Teaching and Learning, Curriculum Associates Research Report No. 2021-09, (June 2021) https://www.curriculumassociates.com/-/media/mainsite/files/i-ready/iready-understanding-student-needs-paper-spring-results-2021.pdf
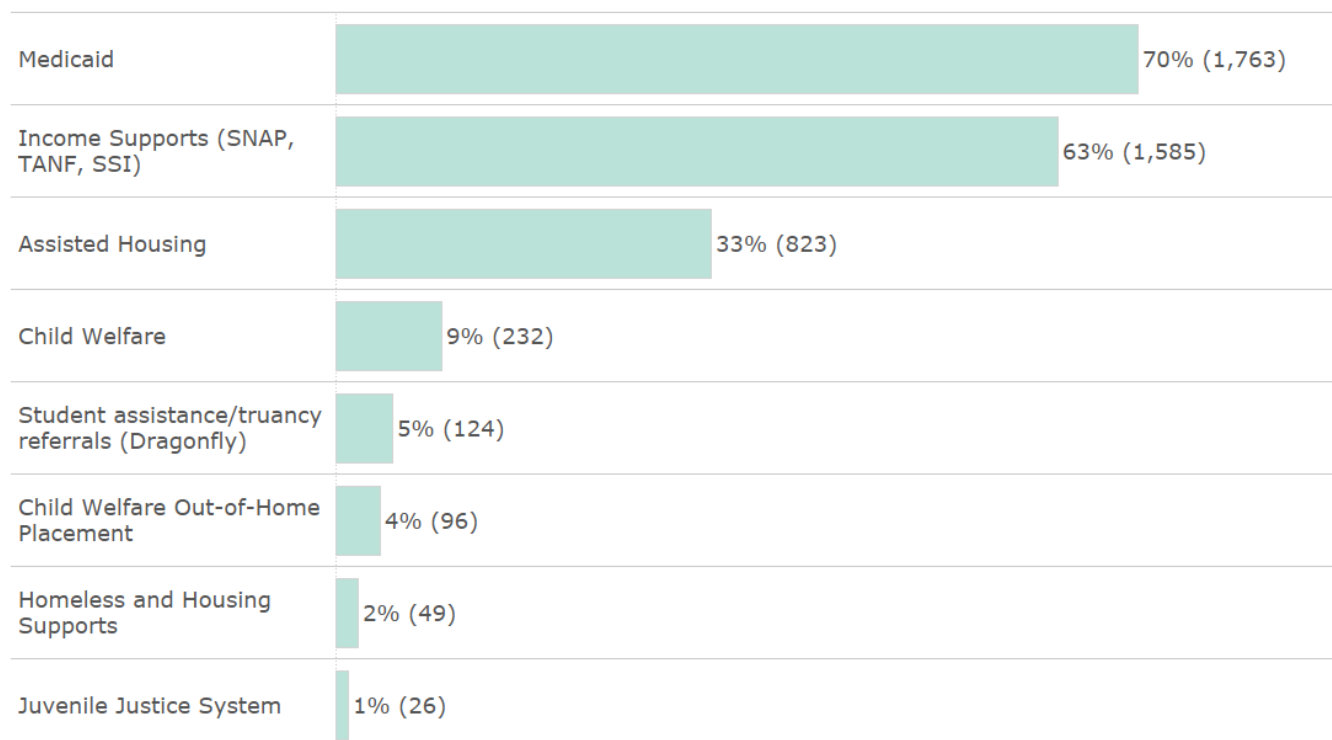
Students who attended the Hubs represent a more vulnerable group of children given the neighborhoods they live in and their human services involvement. Most students who attended the Hubs (59%) live in an "extreme" or "high need" community according to the DHS Community Needs Index [1]. The most common "extreme" or "high need" neighborhoods that Hubs students live in are the Hill District (251 students), Homewood (227 students), and Wilkinsburg (150 students).

Table 2: Level of community need in students' neighborhood of residence

Community Level of Need	Percentage and count of students
Extreme need	39% (907)
High need	20% (469)
Moderate need	21% (491)
Low need	16% (370)
Very low need	3% (77)

During the year the Hubs were open, 83% of students were involved in at least one DHS service or were receiving at least one public benefit. Most students were receiving state benefits, with 68% on Medicaid and 61% receiving some form of income support such as SNAP, TANF or SSI. Approximately one third of students attending the Hubs were receiving some form of housing support during the past year.

Figure 4: Human service involvement in the past year (July 2020 - July 2021)

Service	Percentage (count)
Medicaid	70% (1,763)
Income Supports (SNAP, TANF, SSI)	63% (1,585)
Assisted Housing	33% (823)
Child Welfare	9% (232)
Student assistance/truancy referrals (Dragonfly)	5% (124)
Child Welfare Out-of-Home Placement	4% (96)
Homeless and Housing Supports	2% (49)
Juvenile Justice System	1% (26)

*Percentages are out of 2,508 students – the number of students who were able to be matched to an MCI Unique ID in the DHS data warehouse

[1] Using the provided home address for the students, 89% (2,314) of Hubs attendees were matched to a neighborhood of residence, which are assigned a level of need according to the Allegheny County Community Need Index. The Community Need Index was designed by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services to identify communities that are in greater need relative to others. For more information on the Allegheny County 2014-2018 Community Need Index, view the most recent report here.
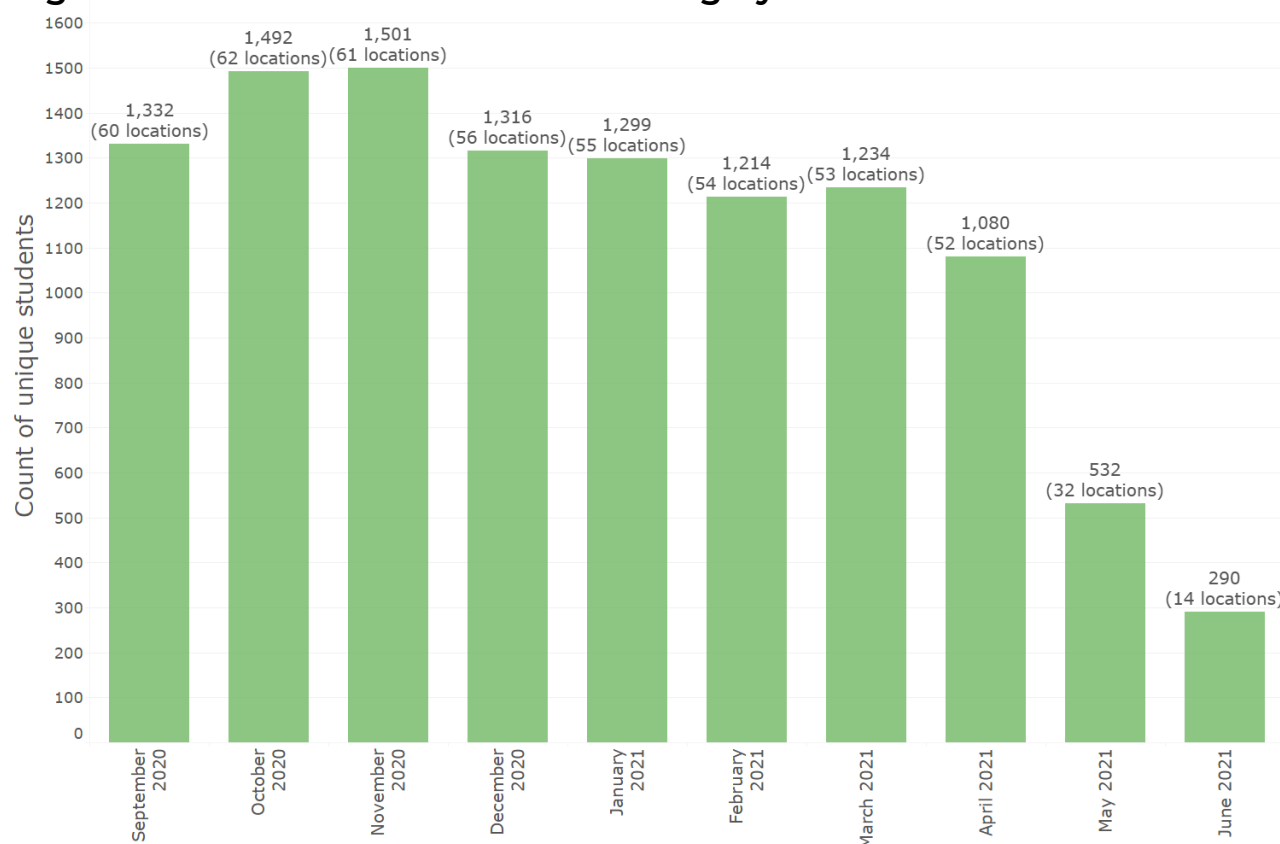
Attendance

Over the academic year, the Learning Hubs provided a safe space to learn to 2,595 individual students. The average monthly attendance from September to June was 1,100 students; and if May and June are excluded, when there was a drop off in attendance due to return to some in-person instruction, the average monthly attendance was 1,310 students. Attendance was strongest in Fall 2020, was fairly consistent from December to March, and then began to decline in the Spring as school districts began rolling out in-person and hybrid instruction models.

2,595 students served

Notably, Pittsburgh Public Schools started their return to some in-person instruction for groups of high priority students in April, and all students were eligible to receive hybrid instruction in May. The two school districts with the second and third largest numbers of students who attended the Hubs, Woodland Hills and Baldwin-Whitehall, started hybrid instruction in March and mid-January/February, respectively. On average, a Hub location served 36 unique students over the school year. Many of the Hubs recorded daily attendance; of all students who attended, 2,268 have attendance data (87%). On average, students attended the Hubs 10.5 days per month. October and March had the highest average days of attendance, with an average of 12.4 and 12.7 days attended, respectively.

Figure 5: Number of students attending by month

*The number of locations refers to the Hub sites that were open and had students attending that month

Conclusion

At the start of the school year, the Learning Hubs providers quickly transformed themselves from "out-of-school time" programs to remote school sites operating in the context of a global pandemic. Although they faced many logistical challenges such as procuring necessary equipment for remote learning, adding new staff, transforming spaces to accommodate social distancing, and managing children with different schedules, the Hubs sites were able to rapidly set up environments where students of various ages and from different schools could engage academically. Through their commitment to filling an urgent need for students and their families in the community, the Hubs achieved their goal of providing a safe place and structured environment for over 2,500 students to be, learn, and play.

> " Even though the students were learning virtually, they had a lot of time each day when no teacher was in front of them... We wanted that time to be productive as well. So we hired retired educators, not just people to make sure the kids were logged in. We obtained additional learning materials, set up classrooms with dividers, and purchased computers and iPads in case a student forgot theirs or it wasn't working. "
>
> — Denise Head
> Executive Director
> Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center

> " The schools appreciate the Learning Hubs too, because they have relationships with our staff and know whom to contact if a student doesn't turn in work. "
>
> — Jessica Lausch
> Associate Director of Youth Enrichment
> YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh

Hub providers

A Giving Heart	Hug Me Tight Childlife Centers, Inc.
A Second Chance (ASCI)	Infinite Lifestyles Solutions
ACH Clear Pathways	Kingsley Association
Allegheny Center Alliance Church (ACAC)	Little Hearts
Allegheny Youth Development (AYD)	Love and Care Educational Child Care Center
ARYSE	Methodist Union of Social Agencies (MUSA)
Bible Center Church	Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center
Boys & Girls Club of Western Pennsylvania	Neighborhood Learning Alliance
Bright and Early Leaning and Childcare Center	Project Destiny
Brothers and Sisters Emerging	Providence Connections, Inc.
Casa San Jose	Riverview
Center of Life (COL)	Salvation Army - Westside
Center that CARES	Sarah Heinz House
Church Union	Schenley Heights Community Development Program
Community Empowerment Association	South Hills Interfaith Movement (SHIM)
Earthen Vessels	The Open Door
Elizabeth Seton Center	The Red Balloon
Family Resources/ BJWL	Thomas Child Care and Learning Academy
Foundation of HOPE (FOH)	Urban Impact Foundation
Greater Valley Community Services	Wilmerding Community Center
Heritage Community Initiatives	Wright Childcare Solutions
Highlands Partnership Network	YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh
Homewood Children's Village	Youth Places
Hope for Tomorrow	YWCA Greater Pittsburgh
Hosanna House, Inc.	