

Foothills Innovation Block

Foothills Elementary School

Lakewood, CO



During the 2018-2019 school year, students at Foothills Elementary School participated in the Foothills Innovation Block. The Foothills Innovation Block is a 45-minute window of elective time that takes place at the end of the day on Friday afternoon. It originated from the collateral alignment that we have committed to as an articulation area with the Green Mountain High School Academy Program, which gives students the opportunity to discover their love of learning through the pathways of Arts and Humanities, STEM, Health and Human Services, and Business and Global Studies.

Near the end of the 2017-2018 school year, teachers and staff were asked to identify their passion. Next, they were asked if they had the opportunity, how they would make an elective out of that said passion. The result of asking that simple question equated into the vast amount of elective opportunities for students during their Innovation Block. Examples of activities included: Purposeful Play, Maker Space with Recycled Materials, Wood Making, Coding Kids, Blocks Rock-Legos, Communication Technology, Board Games, Garden/Aquaponics, Sphero Hero's, Yearbook, Learn Japanese, Ping-Pong, Beginning Guitar, Gymnastics, Chess, Engineering/Construction, and Foothills Foodies Foodbank.

Planning and implementing the Innovation Block was a community-wide effort. Partners in Education (PIE) families and the PTA participated in the organization and decision-making about electives. In January, Foothills hosted an Open House to highlight all of our innovations in an expo style showcase. Families, community members, alumni, and even Lakewood's mayor attended the event. The PTA provided dinner for the occasion.

This method of exploratory learning has proven to have a direct impact within the Foothills Elementary culture and climate by providing a collaborative, creative, and social-emotional outlet for students to work together as a team and put the power of education in their hands. The School-Wide Information System (SWIS) Data has shown that discipline referrals on Friday afternoons has gone down significantly from 34 referrals to only two within one school year. Staff attribute this to providing students with a variety of opportunities to experience deliberate and purposeful ways to lead their own learning.

Another positive impact that Foothills staff have identified is that students who may have an economic disadvantage now have opportunities to participate in club-like activities that they would have not had the ability to do so if the Innovation Block was not offered. The Innovation Block provides programs where student talents can be nurtured and allowed to flourish beyond just the classroom also including at home in their community and globally. By defining each elective and categorizing them into the four Academies (Arts and the Humanities, STEM, Health and Human Services, and Business and Global Studies), the Foothills Innovation Block is laying the foundation for students to enter middle school, high school, and beyond with confidence, preparation, and experience that will cultivate their abilities in whatever career pathway they choose to pursue.