

For 21 years, Welchester Elementary has provided students with a day of enrichment called Welchester University. This day is held at the end of the school year and creates enrichment opportunities that allow students to apply their learning in authentic settings. Community partners support the University, including the Elks, local stores, restaurants, and other organizations.

These partnerships provide classes such as: Backyard/Open Space Bird Watching, Basketball, Bug Hunters, Circus Arts, The Craft of Cooking, Drums Alive, Fix a Bike, Fly Tying, Fun with Food, Friendship Bracelets, Green Bag Lady, Grow Garden, Golf, Home Depot craft kits, Hydrogeology, Improv, Jewelry making, Keyboarding, Kid Coders, Knot tying, Lacrosse, Math class, Mindfulness, Mystery Science, Origami, Quilting, Secret Messages, String Art, Space Camp, Tech Class, The Life of Trees, Violins, Voice Over/Production, Yoga, Robotics, and 4-H classes. Each year the classes may change in order to meet the interest and needs of the current student population.

Many of the classes provide cross curricular connections in various contents. For example, during The Craft of Cooking, students use technology standards to research and find recipes. When measuring the ingredients, students will use fractions, addition, and multiplication. Students are reading step-by-step instructions which ties to expository writing. Lastly, students are able to identify food groups and nutrition while cooking and sampling the food.

Planning Welchester University involves teachers, staff, students, PTA, community partners, and district personnel. Teachers work with their students to identify interests and needs, as well as align activities with current grade level standards. The Family Engagement Liaison works with families, community members, district personnel, and the PTA to support the event through resources, financial contribution and instructors.

With any event this big, there are always some challenges. Scheduling, space, and weather often present last minute changes or cancellations. Sometimes presenters arrive late, don't always have enough materials, or cancel a few days before the event. Therefore, constant communication is key to having a successful back-up plan. Another challenge is finding consistent instructors to facilitate classes that students have interests in and instructors that will donate their services.

For those hoping to replicate Welchester University, event organizers recommend identifying a purpose and vision early in the process. Work with teachers and students to align activities with standards, interests, and needs. Create a committee early with various stakeholders to form schedules, request donations, make calls to community partners and presenters.

One community partner states: "We always love working with your students for Welchester University. You have such a great habitat for birds that teaching and engaging your students is as easy as getting them outside. Thank you for this opportunity to inspire future bird and nature lovers!"

Standard 6—Collaborating with the Community