



Students focused on cataloguing things that delight them with summer enrichment course instructor Bill Healy.

Virtual Summer Enrichment and Fall Extended-Day Programs Engage Students

With families facing a summer of physical distancing, canceled camps, and closed playgrounds due to COVID-19, Big Shoulders Fund's academic programs team wanted to find ways to engage students. The result: Big Shoulders Fund's first-ever virtual summer enrichment program series.

During two four-week sessions, more than 500 students participated in nearly 50 courses, ranging from piano and guitar lessons to adventure world travelers, from medical career exploration to film studies. Students from 100 schools in the Big Shoulders Fund Chicago and Northwest Indiana (NWI) network gathered online to share their interests, and high-performing teachers reached more children across the region. To design and implement the program, Big Shoulders benefited from the expertise of Antoinette Greengard, a Big Shoulders instructional coach who provided summer enrichment courses for gifted students at Northwestern University's Center for Talent Development and taught elementary school for nine years.

Some examples:

- Mesirow Financial Managing Director Leo Harmon, a teacher in Big Shoulders Fund's Stock Market Program, led a new course on starting a business.
- Veterinarian Dr. Gery Herrmann and his colleagues at the Wildlife Discovery Center of Lake Forest offered an intimate look at animals and nature.
- While studying the American Girls series, students wrote books about themselves as American students in 2020, played historical games, and made historical crafts.
- Mary Casey, lead teacher for Big Shoulders Fund's Brush Creek Ranch Summer Enrichment Program and science teacher at St. Bede the Venerable School, piloted resources from the John G. Shedd Aquarium to expose elementary school students to aquatic and marine mammals.

"I taught daily trumpet and German," said Ryan Knott, a teacher at Academy of St. Benedict the African. "Big Shoulders helped families rent trumpets

so we could cover history, theory, and playing some basic songs. German students excelled at practicing conversational phrases and comparing/contrasting German and American culture."

St. Ann School teacher Kathleen Fox shared, "Big Shoulders Fund students teamed up with Capital One Coders to learn how to program a whack-a-mole app. Students loved working in small groups and building the app in real time. They were even able to publish it and play!"

This fall, the Big Shoulders team reimagined their longstanding support of school extended-day programs; fortunately, the summer enrichment programs provided a model, inspiring Big Shoulders to offer free virtual extended-day programming to help Chicago and NWI network schools meet families' needs. Nearly 50 clubs are available to almost all grade levels, led by the schools' teachers and outside professionals, including members of the Big Shoulders Fund Next Generation boards.

Most clubs reached their capacity within a couple of days, welcoming nearly 630 students. Course topics include improv, dance, coding and robotics, college prep, art and illustrating, STEM projects, women's empowerment, reader's theater, chess, books by diverse authors, and more. In the Careers & Life Skills club, Magnolia Capital CEO Max Peek and Director of Acquisitions Justin Maturo talked about leadership, confidence, and self-advocacy, encouraging students to live their most authentic lives and pursue their goals.

"Our Mad Science class is covering chemical changes, kinetic and potential energy, and engineering," Fox described. "Weekly experiments use supplies students can find in their kitchens. This week, students made oobleck, a non-Newtonian liquid, out of cornstarch and water and noted how it changed from one state of matter to the next."

The fall virtual clubs are offering even the youngest students an opportunity for powerful enrichment. And the silver lining of engaging virtually has been connecting students from across Chicago to share their unique insights and diverse life experiences. ■