

Celebrating
30
Years of Service



SUMMER 2024 IMPACT REPORT

 **ENERGY EXPRESS**

FROM THE

Director's Desk

Friends and Partners,

In my first year as Director of Energy Express, I have been energized by the transformative power of the work we do. Seeing thousands of children strengthening their reading and writing skills, building confidence and finding their voices not only fulfills me personally but also drives the work we do every day. In celebrating the 30th anniversary of Energy Express, I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity to both reflect on our progress and look forward to what's ahead.

Since its inception, the program has reached more than 84,000 children across West Virginia and delivered more than 1,747,000 nutritional meals to children who depend on them. More than 13,600 AmeriCorps members have devoted their summers to serving with us, contributing to an enduring legacy of learning and service. It's a proud milestone and one we could not have achieved without the dedication of our community.

In the past year, we have also aligned with the WVU Center for Community Engagement, strengthening our ability to meet the evolving needs of West Virginia's children, educators and families. With school districts facing new challenges and teachers seeking additional support, Energy Express is focused on delivering data-driven services that will improve student achievement and broaden opportunities for children.

This past year brought transition and new beginnings, as we welcomed new leadership while honoring those who helped shape Energy Express's continued success. Our team is committed to building upon this legacy, working to deepen our impact across the state. Our heartfelt thanks goes out to everyone who has made this work possible. Together, we will grow our impact as we continue to empower children to learn, inspire AmeriCorps members to lead, and work toward a brighter, more equitable future for all.



In Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa Calabrese".

Melissa Calabrese,

Director, WVU Energy Express

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Energy Express is dedicated to cultivating education and nutritional skills in children and community members throughout West Virginia.



Energy Express strives to:

- /// Enhance family and community engagement
- /// Elevate local partnerships
- /// Strengthen literacy outcomes
- /// Increase child attendance
- /// Amplify program benefits

OUR MISSION

Children living in West Virginia's rural and low-income communities that participate in our summer literacy enrichment program will improve their reading skills and increase enjoyment of and confidence in reading by the end of third grade, thereby decreasing the achievement gap with their peers. Better reading skills and increased confidence will lead to increased engagement and success in academics so that low-income youth have equal opportunities for post-secondary education and more career choices.

ENERGY EXPRESS

30 YEARS OF IMPACT

Since our inception in 1994, Energy Express has inspired creativity and passion for education in the hearts of children and community members. As our program looks towards the future, we promote a culture of literacy throughout West Virginia and beyond. With the gracious support of AmeriCorps and West Virginia University, Energy Express will continue to provide summer literacy education and nutritional support for years to come.



OUR HISTORY

Pilot Program

1994

Dr. Ruthellen Phillips and Dr. Belle Zars of WVU Extension saw a need for children in West Virginia to experience a safe summer learning environment that supplies healthy meals. The first Energy Express pilot program was implemented in two counties with 13 college student mentors and 85 children in 1994.



National Spotlight

1997

Energy Express was featured as a model program on the U.S. Department of Education's Satellite Town Meeting on summer reading, and also received the 1997 Council of State Governments Innovation Award.

1996

1st Class of AmeriCorps

2001

Superior Service Award

The USDA presented Energy Express with an Award for Superior Service for remarkable success in elevating the academic and nutritional status of West Virginia children.

2009

Excellence in Summer Learning

The Energy Express model received the Excellence in Summer Learning Award from the National Center for Summer Learning from the John Hopkins University School of Education.



National 4-H Recognition

2012

Energy Express received recognition from the National 4-H council as a program of distinction, setting the bar for summer programming across West Virginia.

2016

Red Wagon Award

Energy Express received the Red Wagon Award from the WV's Promise Youth Alliance for creating a legacy of civic engagement in youth through our summer literacy programming.

2024

Celebrating 30 Years of Energy Express

2024 year marks the 30th anniversary of Energy Express, a milestone in our mission to promote educational equity and combat childhood hunger in West Virginia. Over the past three decades, Energy Express has provided thousands of children in rural and under-served communities with invaluable summer reading programs, nutritional meals, and mentorship, all aimed at improving literacy and building community.

By facilitating a love for learning and promoting literacy through community engagement, Energy Express has become a cornerstone of West Virginia's educational landscape, helping to shape brighter futures for generations. Our lasting impact is a testament to the dedication of countless volunteers, AmeriCorps members, and community partners who have made this program a resounding success.



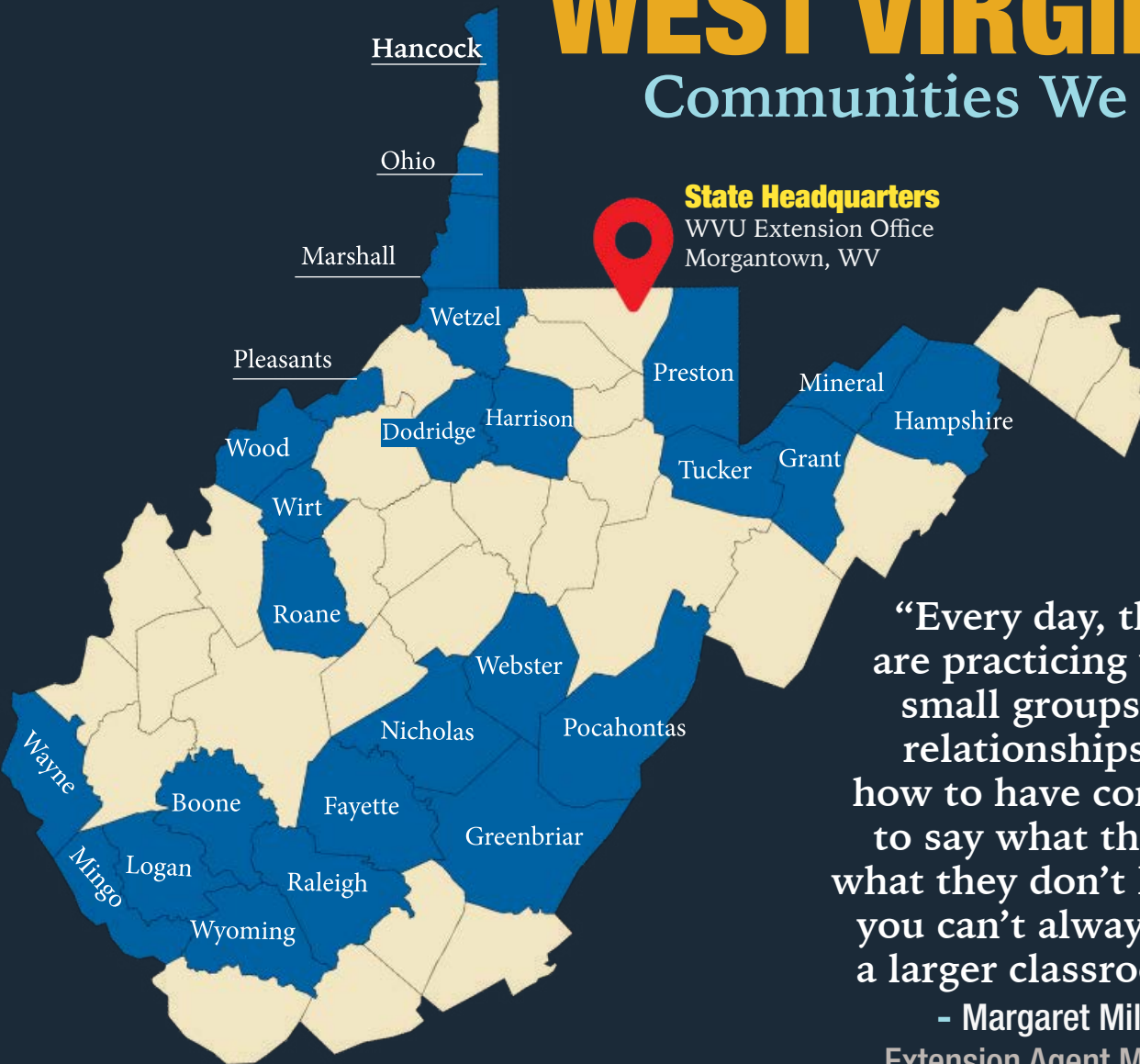


/PROGRAM BENEFITS



WEST VIRGINIA

Communities We Serve



“Every day, the children are practicing working in small groups, creating relationships, learning how to have conversations, to say what they like and what they don’t like, whereas you can’t always do that in a larger classroom setting.”

- Margaret Miltenberger
Extension Agent Mineral County

48

Total Energy Express sites statewide

26

Sites in rural and low-income counties

14

Volunteers per site, on average

LITERACY IMPACT



Bridging the summer education gap through literacy instruction

In 2023, only 44% of West Virginia students were proficient in reading, according to end of year assessments.

Children in low-income families have less exposure to books and academic enrichment experiences when they are not in school, and although they make up some of the achievement gap during the school year, they continue to fall behind each summer.

Children who are unable to read at grade level by third grade tend to lag behind their peers throughout the rest of their school years and are less likely to receive a high school diploma. Energy Express is dedicated to combating the summer slide by providing reading enrichment opportunities to children in grades first through sixth grade.

88.2%

**of children
maintained or increased
their reading level**



“

My son has become more interested in writing... it's built his confidence, as well as his social and academic skills.

”



/LEARNING STRUCTURE

The focus of the Energy Express learning model is the child and their connections to people and places.

During our six-week literacy program, AmeriCorps Mentors and volunteers guide children through enriching experiences that make reading meaningful in their lives. These experiences allow children to appreciate themselves, their individual experiences, and their place in the world.



INSTRUCTIONAL THEMES

The six weekly themes for Energy Express include Myself, Family, Friends, Homeplace, Community, and Making My World a Better Place, each focusing on personal growth, relationships, and contributing to a better community.



PRINT RICH ENVIRONMENTS

Our program offers children the opportunity to explore text through creative, original book-based art projects. They express language and explore meaning through theater instruction and hands-on literacy activities.



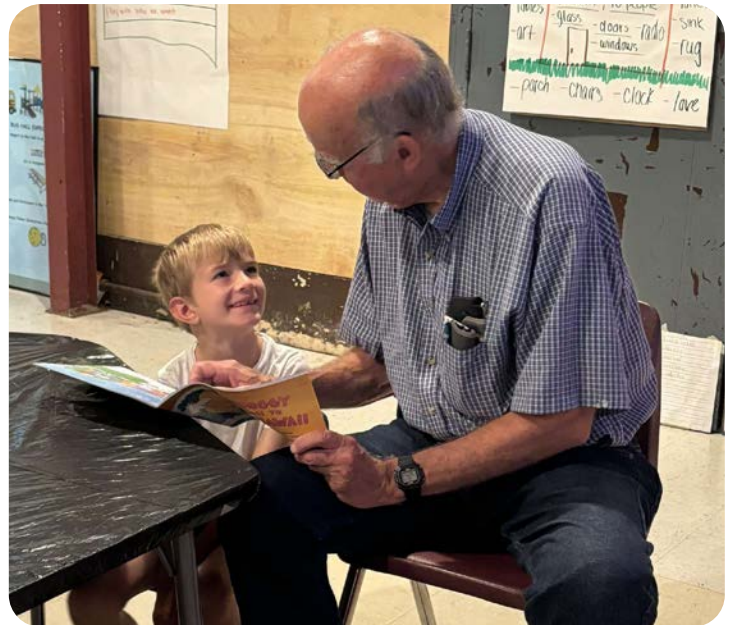
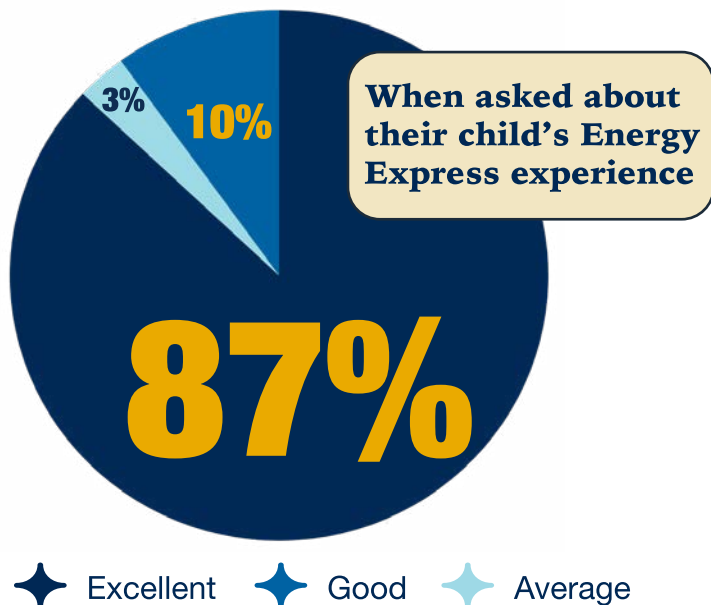
SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

Groups of eight children are placed in vertical-age groups spanning three grades. We promote a noncompetitive environment, free from negative comparisons, ability grouping, and competitive recreation.

HEAR FROM OUR FAMILIES

Families involved with Energy Express find their children are more engaged in reading and literacy instruction.

By involving families in literacy education, Energy Express helps develop a culture of reading at home. In 2024, families listed literacy assistance as the most valued benefit of Energy Express. Through mentorship and intentional peer involvement, parents also reported that their children showed enhanced social skills and confidence.



Parents reported their children's independent reading increased from **2.8 days per week** before the program to **4.6 days per week** after completing the program.



2024 Service Impact

279 AmeriCorps members

690 Community volunteers

4,360 Literacy support hours

9,843 

Volunteer hours served

HEAR FROM OUR MENTORS

To be honest, this program has been the most amazing experience of my life.

Since the first day of this job I've been excited, and at the end I will shed a tear for each child I will miss. This program, in my opinion is the best for a kid's summer. It may not be ideal to spend your summer in a school, but here at Energy Express it's more than school; it's fun, excitement, crafts, fun books, play time, and delicious meals! I have to say, I will look forward to serving here again.

Hayleh Flemings

Logan, West Virginia





AMERICORPS PROGRAM

Nationally recognized service initiative for college students

Our program sets the standard for service in West Virginia by providing in-depth training for AmeriCorps members to learn to create a fulfilling learning environment for each child in Energy Express. By serving as mentors and community coordinators, AmeriCorps members gain valuable life and professional skills while making a difference.

264 AMERICORPS MEMBERS

enrolled in 41 different colleges in Fall 2024.

\$399,837 TOTAL

in educational awards provided to mentors to cover college tuition and fees.

48 COMMUNITY PROJECTS

organized by AmeriCorps members for various service initiatives.

44 AMERICORPS MEMBERS

served as community coordinators, connecting children to local mentors.

PROGRAM BENEFITS

Each member receives 300 service hours per term.

Two AmeriCorps terms equates to a free semester at West Virginia state institutions.

An education award of \$1,459.26 toward university tuition and fees.

\$3,726 living allowance over 8 weeks.



DURING SUMMER 2024 TERM

55,288

meals served to children participating in the program



2,962

meals served to other community youth

“

I have seen family style meals change the lives of students.

Some kids are used to being fed low-nutrition meals and eating by themselves. Family style meals let students and mentors get to know each other better and shows the care shared between them. My role as a mentor is to make sure my kids feel comfortable and are eating correctly. I witnessed the need for nutrition met this summer.

Katelynn Marie Dryer
Energy Express Mentor



AmeriCorps

”

COMMUNITY NUTRITION



Without meeting basic developmental needs, children lack the tools to be successful in learning.

Energy Express fuels our literacy program by supplying each child with adequate nutrition to create a healthy learning environment. The two meals served at Energy Express help children avoid summer nutritional loss, while increasing their literacy success. During summer 2024, each child received **60 nourishing meals.**



1 in 5 children in West Virginia experience food insecurity.

58%

58% of a child's nutritional needs are met by receiving two nutrient-dense meals per day through Energy Express.



FAMILY STYLE MEALS

Our meals are served in a family-style format, where children learn to share and socialize with others. AmeriCorps Mentor's serve as role models, while encouraging children to have healthy eating habits.

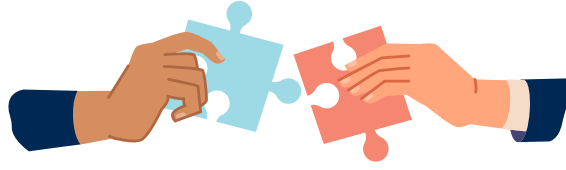
Benefits of Social Meals

Builds self-esteem and confidence

Encourages healthy eating habits

Shows value of responsibility

COLLABORATION MODEL



Energy Express is deeply appreciative to community members who contribute to the success of our summer program.

The collective efforts of families, volunteers, community groups, and partnering organizations are pivotal in enabling us to deliver high-quality educational services to children across West Virginia. This support—whether through volunteer hours, organizational resources, or collaborative partnerships—has a profound impact on literacy development and the overall well-being of the youth we serve. Our team at Energy Express is grateful for our continued partnerships and look forward to building on this shared success in the coming years.

OUR COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

- / Support youth mentorship
- / Perform read alouds
- / Prepare materials
- / Assist with drama and art activities
- / Staff site offices
- / Organize special events
- / Serve as writing partners
- / Support service projects

STATE AND FEDERAL PARTNERS



West Virginia DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION



West Virginia University
CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

volunteer
WEST VIRGINIA



EXTENSION
4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



HOW TO GET INVOLVED



Whether you're a college student seeking hands-on experience, a community member eager to give back, or someone passionate about education, there's a role for you at Energy Express.



Donate

As a nonprofit organization, Energy Express relies on generous outside support to continue serving West Virginia children each summer. Your donation helps provide books, meals, and educational activities that prevent summer learning loss and build brighter futures.



Become a mentor or volunteer

Join Energy Express as an AmeriCorps member, volunteer, or community supporter and help children thrive. Whether mentoring young learners or giving back to your community, you'll play a vital role in supporting West Virginia youth.



Partner with us

We aim to develop new partnerships with school districts and community organizations interested in adopting WVU Energy Express in their area. If you believe Energy Express can help your community inspire a love of learning and improve literacy for children, please contact us at **304-293-3855** or email us at **energy.express@mail.wvu.edu**.





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/SHARE YOUR STORY

We want to hear from our members!
Share photos or experiences from Energy Express using #WVUEnergyExpress on all social media platforms.

FOLLOW US @WVUENERGYEXPRESS



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