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Sewa International

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Beyond the Classroom: A Sewa Program Is Turning STEM Learning into Practice

Written by Radhika Sathe

ASPIRE-Lowell: A Unique Experiment and a Generous Gift for Promoting Hands-on STEM Learning in Lowell Public Schools

Lowell, MA, (April 22, 2026) As educators across the United States rethink how students learn beyond the classroom, a new after-school initiative in Lowell is building a model that combines academic rigor with hands-on exploration, mentorship, and access.

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LOWELL
Public Schools
Early Excellence, Engaged Learning

PROJECT LEARN

ASPIRE

Hands-On Science After School Program

Step into ASPIRE - an after-school experience where science becomes something you do, not something you memorize.

You'll run real experiments, build working models, explore the world around you, and tackle design challenges that make science feel exciting and real.

Bring your curiosity. Leave with something you created.

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Sewa's after-school initiative in Lowell, MA, ASPIRE

Sewa International USA, a Hindu faith-based charitable organization, in partnership with Project Learn and Lowell Public Schools, has launched the ASPIRE STEM Enrichment Program across middle and high school sites in Lowell. What began as a three-month planning initiative has evolved into a live program serving 67 students as of March 2026, with participation continuing to grow steadily.

In its first sessions, the program enrolled 25 middle school students and 11 high school students. Within weeks, participation rose to 38 middle school students and 29 high school students, driven by peer referrals and sustained engagement.

At its core, ASPIRE addresses a persistent gap in public education: access to consistent, hands-on STEM learning environments beyond standard classroom instruction. In a city like Lowell, where many students are first-generation and multilingual, such access can shape long-term academic pathways.

Learning by Doing

ASPIRE operates twice weekly across school sites, with sessions centered on applied learning. Developed in collaboration with Project Learn, the curriculum integrates engineering challenges, scientific experiments, and collaborative problem-solving.

Students design marshmallow tower structures to understand load distribution, explore material behavior through marble float challenges, and observe scientific processes through guided experiments such as carbon cycle demonstrations.

“ASPIRE has been really unpredictable,” said Phillip Keo, a Lowell High School student. *“When I joined, I expected it to be all schoolwork. But we get to have fun while learning.”*

“It is a great mix of hands-on learning and critical thinking,” said Kate Keefe, Community Schools Manager at Lowell High School. *“We’ve seen the program grow week by week because students are telling their friends to join.”*

“ASPIRE allows students to expand on what they are already learning and apply it in real-world situations,” added Mareena Sullivan, STEM Academy teacher.

Reducing Barriers to Participation

The ASPIRE–Lowell model is designed to address structural barriers that often limit participation in after-school programs. Transportation support and incentive-based participation help ensure consistent attendance.

“The ASPIRE program has been a huge hit,” said Chris Hickey, Community School Manager at STEM Academy. *“Students are excited to attend each week, and families appreciate the support systems built into the program.”*

A Funded Vision Led by Community and Philanthropy

This initiative is generously funded by a generous yet anonymous donor, whose commitment to educational equity and youth empowerment has made the Lowell ASPIRE initiative possible.

His vision for strengthening academic opportunity and fostering future-ready skills for underserved youth aligns closely with the goals of both Sewa International and Project Learn.

“Supporting programs that expand opportunity for underserved students is central to our mission at the Foundation,” said our generous yet anonymous donor. “We are proud to help Sewa International and Project LEARN build a strong, future-focused pathway for Lowell youth.”

The initiative has also been a long-standing priority for the Sewa Boston Chapter, led locally by Kumar Subramanian, Chapter Coordinator.

“Launching the ASPIRE program has been a long-standing goal of the Sewa Boston Chapter,” said Kumar Subramanian. “ASPIRE is more than an afterschool STEM program—it is a launchpad for middle and high school students to explore, build, and discover their potential to shape the future.”

Community partners have further strengthened the program’s ecosystem.

“Dharma Center of America has been serving the Lowell community with weekly nutritious food for over a decade,” said Dr. Suresh Jain, a member of the Sewa’s Board of Directors. President of the organization. “We have now extended our commitment to education by providing not only opportunities, but also incentives for them to succeed.”

Building the System Behind the Program

Behind the classroom experience is a structured operational model designed for consistency, compliance, and scalability.

The program has been architected and operationalized by Radhika Sathe, a Harvard-trained researcher working at the intersection of education, philosophy, and program design. Serving as Program Architect and Systems Lead, she led the transition from planning to execution across multiple stakeholders.

Her work included designing the program’s operational architecture across Sewa International, Project Learn, and Lowell Public Schools; establishing compliance frameworks aligned with district requirements; building audit-ready documentation systems; coordinating hiring and onboarding; and implementing tracking systems for attendance, evaluation, and financial processes.

“I was drawn to this work because it sits at the intersection of structure and impact,” said Sathe. “The goal was to build a model that is accountable, scalable, and responsive to student needs.”

A Collaborative Model with Long-Term Intent

Sewa International brings its ASPIRE framework, which has served over 3,400 students across multiple U.S. centers, focusing on STEM learning, mentorship, and holistic development. Project Learn contributes over three decades of experience working directly with Lowell Public Schools, ensuring strong local alignment and implementation.

Looking Ahead

With strong early participation and consistent growth, the program is moving toward its next phase. A larger public-facing event is planned for June 2026, bringing together students, families, educators, and community leaders.

The long-term objective is to develop a model that can be replicated across districts, supported by clear operational systems and measurable outcomes.

For now, its impact is visible in smaller ways: students returning each week, engaging deeply, and bringing others with them.

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About Sewa International

Sewa International (www.sewausa.org) is a 501 (c) (3) Hindu faith-based charitable nonprofit that works in the areas of disaster recovery, education, and development. Sewa has 43 Chapters across the USA and serves regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin.