

ADDRESSING SUMMER LEARNING LOSS THROUGH SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Research spanning a century provides evidence that students experience summer learning loss during the long summer vacation breaks. The time-off interferes with the rhythm of instruction that leads to forgetting and requires a significant amount of review when the next school year begins. On average, students perform one month behind where they were when the school year closed, and teachers spend a large part of the first two months of school reviewing material. A survey of teachers across 15 cities found that 90% spent anywhere from 3 to 6 weeks re-teaching the previous year's subject matter.

While all students feel the effects of summer learning loss, summer learning loss disproportionately impacts children from low income families. All students generally lose about two months of grade-level equivalency in math skills during the summer months. Children from families with fewer resources; however, often lose up to two months of reading achievement while their peers maintain or have even slight gains. Proponents of the "faucet theory" argue that during the summer, academic resources for low income families are effectively, "turned off". Middle class families, on the other hand, can provide the resources that their children may need for remediation, enrichment or acceleration activities during the summer months.

Moreover, the negative effects of summer learning loss are cumulative and contribute to an achievement gap that widens over time. By 9th grade, almost 2/3 of the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their peers can be attributed to summer learning loss in the elementary school years. Finally, the achievement gap has long term repercussions. Students most affected by learning loss are more likely to drop out of high school and less likely to enter college.

HIGH QUALITY SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS

Summer learning programs have emerged as an important strategy to address summer learning loss. Participation in high quality school and community-based summer programs that offer structured, intentional learning experiences can mitigate summer learning loss, contribute to gains in achievement, enable low-performing students to master material they did not learn in the previous year and build motivation for learning. Some longitudinal studies suggest that students benefit from the effects of quality summer learning programs for up to two years after participation.

Summer learning programs are offered by school districts or libraries, often in partnership with community-based agencies and may include reading intervention programs, summer school sessions, summer camps and programs that combine youth development with academic enrichment. Programs must be high quality for students to achieve benefits, however. High quality programs share a number of the following characteristics:

- Certified teachers to provide academic instruction
- Summer curricula that aligns with the school year -- to help students master content they didn't learn in the previous school year or to enable students to preview core concepts for the coming year
- Structured instruction in reading, writing and math that meets students' needs
- Rigorous, but engaging programming to accelerate learning and foster student participation
- Instruction that is sufficient in intensity and duration
- Small class sizes or small groups to allow for more individual student attention
- Enrichment activities such as music, art and community service to supplement academic instruction
- Parental involvement to help with student attendance and encourage learning at home
- Mechanisms to track effectiveness for continuous improvement

Finally, sustained student attendance is key. Programs should implement an attendance policy and adopt strategies to ensure students participate regularly. Providing transportation and offering daylong programs that align with the work day to suit the needs of employed parents are examples. Service learning projects, field trips

and other enrichment activities also foster student attendance. Experts caution, however, that program administrators and staff should not downplay the program's academic emphasis to boost attendance.

SHRINKING BUDGETS AND INCREASED DEMAND

Despite the increased awareness of the importance of summer learning in addressing the achievement gap, summer programs have not kept pace with demand. Millions of children in the U.S. and in the state are left without access to enriching summer learning environments according to *America After 3 PM Special Report on Summer*, a survey commissioned by The Wallace Foundation that found:

- 43 million U.S. children are not attending summer learning programs
- 56% of these children would be likely to attend a summer program based on parental interest
- Almost half of these children are from low-income families (as measured by eligibility for free and reduced lunch)
- The unmet demand is greatest among low income and ethnic minority families – those who are more likely to participate in summer learning programs
 - Approximately 3 million African-American children and 3.3 million Hispanic children participate in summer learning programs.
 - Parents of another 4.4 million African-American children and 5.6 million Hispanic children are interested in enrolling their children in summer learning programs

In Texas:

- An estimated 1.1 million children participate in summer learning programs
- Parents of 2.1 million children not enrolled in a summer learning program would be interested in enrolling their children in such a program

Finally, shrinking budgets and increased demand threaten to erode the ability of afterschool and summer programs to serve those most in need. A national survey representing almost 5,000 afterschool sites (80% of which offered summer programs) found that almost 1 in 5 programs instituted cutbacks or closed sites as a result of funding constraints. Those facing the toughest financial challenges were majority African-American and Hispanic afterschool programs serving students from economically disadvantaged households. More than 62% of these programs were unable to meet demand based on their current budget and more than 40% had waiting lists.

FUNDING IMPLICATIONS

To meet increased demand and ensure quality programs, experts recommend that policymakers and funders provide stable funding for summer learning programs. A significant amount of this funding should be aimed at math and reading instruction to take full advantage of opportunities to accelerate learning, although some funding should target efforts to foster student participation. Transportation, for example, is a barrier that often prevents students from attending summer programs. Funding to enable programs to transport students to and from summer programs is likely to help attract and retain students.

For practitioners -- when it comes to summer programs -- building and maintaining high quality programs costs money, but quality matters. Minimizing expenses often involves making tough choices and tradeoffs, but should not come at the expense of program quality.

MODEL SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS

Go Project – Five-week New York City summer program that offers reading, writing, math and enrichment in small classes. Students had significant gains in math and reading skills. - <http://www.goprojectnyc.org/>

The Summer Dreamers Academy – Free, five-week program run by Pittsburgh Public Schools that combines reading, writing and math instruction with enrichment activities. Aligns with, but differs from the traditional school day. Program partners with 27 local agencies and includes transportation. - <http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/>

United Way of Santa Barbara's Fun In The Sun – Collaborative seven-week program that emphasizes reading and writing. Students make a multi-year commitment. Program uses adult mentors and offers enrichment activities. In 2011, 82% of students had gains of 2.1 grade levels in reading. - <http://www.unitedwaysb.org/fits/>

SUMMER PROGRAMS IN SAN ANTONIO ADDRESSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Ella Austin Community Center Summer Enrichment Program - <http://ellaaustin.org/>

San Antonio Public Library Summer Reading Program - <http://www.mysapl.org/>

Girls Incorporated of San Antonio Glenda Woods Girls University Summer Camp - <http://www.girlsinca.com/>

YWCA San Antonio – After School Challenge Program – <http://www.ywcasanantonio.org/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Afterschool Alliance - <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/>

The Campaign for Grade Level Reading - <http://gradelevelreading.net/about-us>

The Expanded Learning & Afterschool Project - <http://www.expandinglearning.org/>

National Center for Quality Afterschool - <http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/>

National Summer Learning Loss - <http://www.summerlearning.org/>

Texas Partnership for Out-of-School Time (TXPOST) - <http://txpost.org/>

The Wallace Foundation - <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/>

ADDITIONAL READING

A Tale of Two Summers. Think Stretch. (2007) Available at: <http://www.thinkstretch.com/research/tale-of-two-summers/>.

Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success edited by T.K. Peterson. The Expanded Learning & Afterschool Project. <http://expandinglearning.org/expandingminds/article/promise-summer-learning> (accessed on December 2, 2013).

Getting to Work on Summer Learning: Recommended Practices for Success by Catherine H. Augustin, et. al. (2013) RAND Corporation study commissioned by The Wallace Foundation. Available at: http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR366.html .

Making Summer Count: How Summer Programs Can Boost Children's Learning by Jennifer Sloan McCombs, et al. (2011) RAND Corporation Study commissioned by The Wallace Foundation. Available at: <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1120.html>.

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<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/key-research/Documents/Knowledge-in-Brief-Calculating-the-Costs-of-High-Quality-Out-of-School-Time.pdf> (accessed December 5, 2013).