

Best Practices in Summer Literacy Programs

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In the following report, Hanover Research reviews effective practices in summer literacy programming. Our report examines methods for improving literacy achievement, identifies structural components of effective literacy programs, and provides a framework for program evaluation. The final section also examines three organizations that provide useful resources for summer literacy programs.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

There is growing concern among K-12 educators about the effects of “summer learning loss,” or “summer slide”— terms that refer to students’ decline in academic ability during summer months when they are away from school. Research shows that during summer vacation, students lose “too much of what they learned during the school year” and “typically score lower on standardized tests after the summer break than they did before it.”¹

All students are susceptible to summer learning loss, but low-income students are at greater risk, especially in reading. Findings from a 1996 meta-analysis of 13 studies on summer learning loss indicate that low-income students lose two to three months of reading ability during the summer, while their middle-class peers usually make slight gains.² Research also suggests that achievement loss is greatest during elementary grades.³ NSLA reports that “more than half of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities.”⁴ Different rates of summer loss, when repeated annually, contribute to widening achievement gaps as students enter middle and high school.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has described summer learning loss as “devastating,” and advises that summer learning gaps be addressed through the development of new summer programs.⁵ Research suggests that “high quality academic enrichment programs can decrease and perhaps eliminate summer learning loss for low income children.”⁶ Providing learning opportunities to children is typically viewed as the responsibility of school districts, but summer programs offered by traditionally non-academic organizations also appear poised to meet the challenge. The American Camp Association (ACA), for instance, explains that summer camps are “assuming a greater role in year-round education and youth development, recognizing that the same ‘fun’ activities and programs they have traditionally offered can be packaged as highly effective alternative

¹ Huggins, G. “Summer Learning can be a Game Changer.” Education Week, January 15, 2013.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/01/16/17huggins.h32.html>

² [1] “Know the Facts.” National Summer Learning Association.
http://www.summerlearning.org/?page=know_the_facts

[2] Cooper, H. “Summer Learning Loss: The Problem and Some Solutions.”
<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/8057/>

³ Burgin, J. and Hughes, G. “Measuring the Effectiveness of a Summer Literacy Program for Elementary Students Using Writing Samples.” *Mid-South Educational Research Association*, 2008, 15:2, p. 55.

⁴ “Know the Facts,” Op. cit.

⁵ Fairchild, R. and Smink, J. “Is Summer School the Key to Reform?” Education Week, May 10, 2010.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/05/12/31fairchild.h29.html>

⁶ Miller, B. M. “The Learning Season: The Untapped Power of Summer to Advance Student Achievement (Executive Summary).” Nellie Mae Education Foundation, June 2007, p. 14.
<http://www.nmefoundation.org/getmedia/17ce8652-b952-4706-851b-bf8458cec62e/Learning-Season-ES?ext=.pdf>

learning models.”⁷ This report is intended to support schools, camps, and other youth organizations in the development of their summer literacy programs.

The report is divided into two sections. Section I reviews effective practices in summer literacy programming. This section also examines methods for improving literacy achievement, identifies structural components of effective literacy programs, and provides a framework for program evaluation. Section II then provides brief profiles of three organizations that provide useful resources to summer literacy programs.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Independent reading, often the centerpiece of effective summer literacy programs, has been shown to improve student achievement.** Research indicates that increasing students’ reading time is crucial to improving literacy ability. In addition to allowing students ample time for independent reading, effective elementary literacy program educators:
 - Ensure students read appropriately complex materials
 - Read aloud to children
 - Model effective reading techniques
 - Tutor children one-on-one
 - Consider children’s reading preferences
 - Integrate reading into other camp activities
- **Speaking and writing activities are vital to improving students’ literacy achievement.** Though literacy programs typically emphasize reading, highly effective programs also facilitate meaningful discussion on relevant topics and ask students to write creatively.
- **Research suggests that a typical, 12-week summer program should provide students with at least four hours per week of literacy activities.** Scientific evidence indicates that out-of-school time (OST) learning programs must devote a total of at least 44 hours to literacy activities in order to improve student achievement. Researchers note that programs lasting fewer than 44 hours may not be long enough to fully engage students and affect learning outcomes.
- **Effective summer reading programs offer students a wide variety of high-quality reading materials.** Research suggests that offering varied reading materials to children increases their motivation to read. Furthermore, a range of materials is necessary to ensuring students read appropriately challenging texts. Many programs have addressed the need for reading materials by creating an on-site library and/or visiting community libraries.

⁷ “Creating Camp-School Partnerships: A Guidebook to Success.” American Camping Association, p. 4.
<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CDEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.acacamps.org%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fimages%2Fcspg.doc&ei=pJ2TUdmCD7f-4APUsIHYCw&usg=AFQjCNEOLtFfJKXdMYKSqissSjL5zc4wA&sig2=B1oCXyCb6tDrIQj8kF3Djw&bvm=bv.46471029,d.dmg>

- **Effective camp-based summer learning programs often seek collaboration with local schools to facilitate staff development, align learning activities with school-year curricula, and attract more participants to the program.** Experts encourage summer learning programs to access educational expertise by cooperating with local schools. Teachers can provide opportunities for staff development and help make learning activities engaging and relevant. Youth organizations should approach partnerships with schools strategically by evaluating prospective partners, anticipating school personnel concerns, and marketing their summer learning program.
- **Program evaluation is an essential component of effective summer learning programs that strengthens program quality when conducted properly.** The suggested guidelines for a comprehensive assessment of summer literacy programming include quantitative data analyses and qualitative surveys or focus groups.
- **Summer literacy programs can obtain easy-to-use guides and other useful materials from web-based resources.** ReadWriteThink, Reading Rockets, and Reading is Fundamental (RIF) offer free, evidence-based resources that can help program staff improve student achievement.

SECTION I: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR SUMMER LITERACY PROGRAMS

This section reviews effective practices in summer literacy programming. It begins by examining effective methods for improving literacy achievement in elementary-aged children, including reading, speaking, and writing activities. Next, it discusses structural components of summer reading programs, including program duration, necessary materials, and school engagement. Finally, the section provides a framework for evaluating program efficacy.

ELEMENTARY LITERACY ACTIVITIES

READING

A large body of research evidence supports the use of independent reading time as a method for improving students' reading achievement. Research has consistently demonstrated that "the amount of free reading done outside of school" correlates to student growth in "vocabulary, reading comprehension, verbal fluency, and general information."⁸ For instance, in 1988, Anderson, Fielding, and Wilson compared students' out-of-school reading time with their scores on standardized assessments, and found that "among all the ways children spent their time, reading books was the best predictor of measures of reading achievement, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and reading speed, including gains in reading comprehension between second and fifth grade"⁹ The researchers also found that students who scored at the 90th percentile or above on the standardized reading test spent five times as many minutes reading books as students who scored in the 50th percentile, and 200 times as many minutes reading books as students in the 10th percentile.

The above conclusions demonstrate that reading is the centerpiece of literacy instruction. Below, we list several instructional methods that have been proven effective in enhancing students' reading achievement. As such, organizations considering implementing literacy programs should keep the following points in mind as they design key aspects of their reading-focused instructional time:

- **Ensure students read appropriately complex materials.** Research indicates that educators must provide children with appropriately complex reading materials to achieve improved academic outcomes. Rather than deploying a "one-size-fits all" approach, exemplary literacy programs supply children with different materials depending on their ability. Ensuring that students read grade-level texts is particularly effective in accelerating the literacy development of low-achieving students. When students fully comprehend what they are reading, their appetite for more reading grows.¹⁰

⁸ Cullinan, B. E. "Independent Reading and School Achievement." American Association of School Librarians, November 2000. <http://www.ala.org/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/slmrb/slmrcontents/volume32000/independent>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Allington, R. "The Six Ts of Effective Elementary Literacy Instruction." Reading Rockets, June 2002. <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/96/>

- **Read aloud to children.** Reading aloud is an instructional practice wherein adults read texts aloud to young children. Research indicates that “[r]eading texts aloud is the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for successful reading.”¹¹ Numerous studies support reading aloud as an effective method for developing students’ vocabulary, comprehension, speaking, and listening ability. Furthermore, reading aloud can increase students’ appetite for reading.¹²
- **Model effective reading techniques.** To maximize the positive effects of read-alouds, exemplary elementary teachers use modeling techniques to demonstrate useful reading skills. Rather than simply “assign and assess,” effective educators “model the thinking that skilled readers engage while they attempt to decode a word, self-monitor for understanding, summarize while reading, or edit when composing.”¹³ Modeling can target individuals, small groups, or the entire class. Cullinan (2000) emphasizes the importance of modeling to all children, explaining that effective elementary reading programs provide support for beginning, struggling and advanced readers.¹⁴
- **Tutor children one-on-one.** Research indicates that one-on-one tutoring can produce significant reading gains. Effective tutorial strategies include shared reading, word study, reading books, and writing stories.¹⁵ Tutoring can also develop the skills of program staff, as researchers note that “[t]utoring programs are often beneficial to the person doing the teaching as well as to the child being taught.”¹⁶ High-school students, college students, and retirees have all contributed to significant reading improvement in elementary students. Effective programs recruit volunteers from various community resources, including “businesses, churches, police officers, firefighters, civic groups, parents, retirees, and...high-school students.”¹⁷
- **Consider children’s reading preferences.** ACA found that effective summer reading programs considered camper preferences when selecting reading materials and activities. An impact report for the ACA’s 2011 Explore 30 Camp Reading Program (which encouraged students to read for 30 minutes per day) found, for instance, that campers felt that the following practices would help them continue reading:
 - Having more time to read (45.9%),
 - Being able to read with friends (15.9%),
 - Having grown-up help with reading (21.5%)
 - Having more books to choose from (31.5%)
 - Earning prizes (17.3 %)¹⁸

¹¹ Morrison, V. and Wlodarczyk, L. “Revisiting Read-Aloud: Instructional Strategies that Encourage Students’ Engagement with Texts.” *The Reading Teacher*, 63:2, October 2009, p. 111.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Allington, Op. cit.

¹⁴ Cullinan, Op. cit.

¹⁵ Miller, et al., Op. cit.

¹⁶ Cullinan, Op. cit.

¹⁷ Power, M. A. and Cummings, K. “The Effectiveness of One-on-one Tutoring in Elementary Reading.” *Washington Educational Research Association*, March 14, 2011, p. 4. http://www.wera-web.org/activities/WERA_Winter11/2.8%20Final%20Read%20%20Me%20Research%20Report%204-28-2011.pdf

¹⁸ Garst, B. A., Morgan, C., and Bialeschki, D. “2011 Explore 30 Camp Reading Program Impact Report.” American Camp Association, 2011, p. 14. <http://www.acacamps.org/sites/default/files/images/education/explore30/2011-Explore30-Impact-Report.pdf>

- **Integrate Reading into Other Camp Activities.** The ACA’s Explore 30 report further found that some staff found it helpful to integrate “reading into other pre-existing programs and activities, as opposed to having a stand-alone reading program.”¹⁹ For instance, camp counselors might have students read materials about an upcoming field trip location to better prepare for the trip, or have a student read instructions about a camp activity out loud to their peers.

The instructional techniques listed above are not meant to be a comprehensive listing of all techniques available to summer reading program counselors. However this list may serve as a starting point that organizations in the early stages of program design might draw from in order to incorporate evidence-based practices into their program design.

SPEAKING AND WRITING

Despite the tremendous value of reading activities, literacy is a complex skill that cannot be achieved simply by increasing reading instruction quality and time. Annenberg Learner, a teacher professional development and classroom resources provider, has identified 11 “essential components” of literacy development (listed left to right in order of development):

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ■ Oral language | ■ Phonological awareness |
| ■ Phonemic awareness | ■ Word study |
| ■ Phonics | ■ Word identification |
| ■ Composition | ■ Comprehension |
| ■ Vocabulary | ■ Fluency |
| ■ Automaticity ²⁰ | |

Notably, the foundational elements of literacy achievement, oral language and phonological awareness, relate closer to audio tasks than reading tasks, and several elements—such as word study, word identification, and composition—relate closely to writing ability. As such, while a focus on reading in literacy instruction is appropriate, effective literacy programs will also emphasize speaking and writing development.

Effective literacy programs raise student speaking achievement levels by **facilitating meaningful discussion**. Exemplary elementary literacy instructors “encourage, model, and support lots of talk across the school day.”²¹ Researchers emphasize that appropriate and effective discussions focus on problem-solving related to relevant content, and is more conversational, rather than interrogational, in nature. Educators and students discuss

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Essential Components of Literacy Development.” Annenberg Learning.
<http://www.learner.org/libraries/readingk2/front/components.html>

²¹ Allington, Op. cit.

“ideas, concepts, hypotheses, strategies, and responses with others.”²² Although this research, has, to this point, been primarily limited to classroom settings, summer programs can emulate effective methods by facilitating relevant discussions among campers.

Research indicates that exemplary summer reading programs also **“incorporate writing and/or journaling”** into camp activities.²³ Journaling, which allows students to express thoughts, feelings, and reactions, encourages children to make explicit connections between reading and writing.²⁴ One experimental study found that assigning journaling to kindergarteners can significantly improve their story comprehension and retention. In this study, children were simply asked to write about a story after it was read aloud to a group. Although the resulting journal entries were rudimentary, children that participated in journaling demonstrated greater retention of basic story elements (such as settings, theme, and resolution) when asked to “retell” the story at a later date.²⁵ Further, students’ recall of story components improved the longer they participated in the journaling sessions. This study suggests that by simply encouraging students to journal about the books they read, organizations can encourage students to engage more critically with texts and can “enhance the learning experience”.²⁶

The American Camp Association’s (ACA) Explore 30 program evaluation found that effective programs demonstrated considerable commitment to writing activities. Indeed, some programs even piloted creative writing and poetry classes. The ACA suggests that a simple way for camps to integrate writing activities is through a “Summer Slam,” in which children are provided with three writing prompts, and the best camper response in each category is read aloud to the group.²⁷ Figure A.1 in the Appendix provides a list of appropriate writing prompts for elementary school-aged children that can be adapted to fit the needs of organizations seeking to integrate a literacy component into summer programming.

SUMMER LITERACY PROGRAM COMPONENTS

To ensure literacy achievement gains, summer program providers must also consider the program’s structural components. Key questions include: How long must children participate in literacy activities to improve their reading ability? What materials are required to build and sustain a successful reading program? What type of engagement with students’ schools is shown to increase program effectiveness? These questions are addressed in detail in the following subsections.

²² Ibid.

²³ Garst, et al., Op. cit., p. 14.

²⁴ Carr, C. L. “Journaling as a Tool to Improve Story Comprehension for Kindergarten Students.” East Tennessee State University, August 2003, p. 10. <http://dc.etsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1957&context=etd>

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 1-35.

²⁶ Ibid., 29.

²⁷ Garst, et al., op. cit., p. 14.

PROGRAM DURATION

Even small changes to children’s daily reading schedules compound over time and contribute to major differences in achievement. The National Reading Panel found that “increasing the time that children spend reading is the single most powerful strategy for improving literacy skills in fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.”²⁸ A study by Nagy and Herman (1987) emphasizes the importance of increasing daily reading time. Figure 1.1 compares long-term differences in achievement based on the amount of time a student spends reading:

Figure 1.1: Daily Reading Time’s Relation to Vocabulary Achievement

TIME	20 MINUTES DAILY	5 MINUTES DAILY	1 MINUTE DAILY
Minutes	Reads 3,600 minutes in a school year	Reads 900 minutes in a school year	Reads 180 minutes in a school year
Words	Reads 1,800,000 words in a school year	Reads 282,000 words in a school year	Reads 8,000 words in a school year
Achievement	Attains vocabulary achievement in the 90th percentile	Attains vocabulary achievement in the 50th percentile	Attains vocabulary achievement in the 10th percentile

Source: Nagy and Herman (1987)²⁹

While Nagy and Herman’s study illustrates the importance of daily reading, other studies have illustrated the effects of out-of-school time (OST) program duration on student achievement. A meta-analysis by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) examined 27 OST programs that served low-achieving students and were administered during the summer and/or school-year. The study found that “[t]he ideal program length for improving reading achievement appears to be between 44 and 84 hours.”³⁰ McREL’s conclusion refers to the *total amount of time* that students participate in literacy activities during the course of the program. When comparing programs by duration, McREL found that students who participated in between 44 and 84 hours of literacy activities across a program attained significantly higher reading achievement than students in other programs.³¹ Researchers noted that programs “that last fewer than 44 hours might not be long enough to fully engage students and influence achievement in reading.”³²

²⁸ Miller, B. M., Op. cit., p. 9.

²⁹ Nagy and Herman (1987) as cited in Greencastle-Antrim Middle School (2012-13). See:

[1] Nagy, W., and Herman, P. “Breadth and Depth of Vocabulary Knowledge: Implications for Acquisition and Instruction.” *The Nature of Vocabulary Acquisition*, 1987, pp. 19-35.

[2] “Why Can’t I Skip My 20 Minutes of Reading Tonight?” *GAMS*, Winter 2012-13, p. 1.
<http://www.greencastle.k12.pa.us/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=2KGSWXbDIAU%3D&tabid=58>

³⁰ Miller, K. Snow, D., and Lauer, P. “Effective Out-of-School Time Reading Programs.” Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2004. <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/15046/#programs>

³¹ Lauer, p., et al. “The Effectiveness of Out-of-School-Time Strategies in Assisting Low-Achieving Students in Reading and Mathematics: A Research Synthesis.” Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, October 31, 2003, p. 37. <http://sspw.dpi.wi.gov/files/sspw/pdf/ostfullsum.pdf>

³² Miller, et al., Op. cit.

Research by Child Trends supports McREL’s conclusion that at least 44 hours of literacy exposure is necessary to influence student achievement. In a scientific evaluation of 11 summer learning programs, Child Trends identified two programs that improve reading achievement in elementary students: Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL) and Read to Achieve Summer Day Camp. Students in both programs participate in over 44 hours of literacy activities. BELL students participate in approximately 48 hours of literacy activities over the course of six weeks.³³ Read to Achieve Summer Day Camp students participate in approximately 70 hours of literacy activities over the course of seven weeks.³⁴ Interestingly, findings linking the duration of tutoring programs to student outcomes also mirror McREL’s findings. Research indicates that tutoring programs with at least 45 hours of implementation are more effective.³⁵

The above findings suggest that programs that devote less than 44 hours to literacy instruction may not effectively produce reading achievement gains for participating students. Assuming a typical summer camp duration of 10 to 12 weeks, students should ideally spend at least four hours per week on literacy activities in order to approach the 44 hour threshold indicated by scientific research.

READING MATERIALS

As discussed briefly earlier, effective literacy programs not only devote sufficient time to literacy instruction, but also provide students with a **variety of high-quality reading material**. The importance of varied reading material is two-fold. First, research suggests that a variety of materials will appeal to a greater number of students, thereby increasing the popularity of the program overall. Second, reading material that ranges in difficulty enables students to select appropriately challenging texts.

The ACA’s Explore 30 evaluation found that successful programs leverage diverse reading material to gain student support. The study explains that “[a]n important theme that emerged from the data was utilizing a wide range of materials to inspire interest and a sense of accessibility.”³⁶ Indeed, a large body of research evidence supports the use of varied material for elementary reading programs. In a research synthesis of independent reading programs, for instance, Cullinan (2000) concluded that successful programs for primary and intermediate grade students offer “materials to interest students of differing reading abilities and interests.”³⁷

³³ [1] “The BELL Summer Experience.” Building Educated Leaders for Life.

<http://www.experiencebell.org/programs/summer-learning>

[2] Chaplin, D. and Capizzano, J. “Impacts of a Summer Learning Program: A Random Assignment Study of Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL).” The Urban Institute, August 2006, p. 4.

http://www.urban.org/uploadedPDF/411350_bell_impacts.pdf

³⁴ “Read to Achieve Summer Day Camp.” Child Trends.

<http://www.childtrends.org/Lifecourse/programs/readcamp.htm>

³⁵ Power, et al., Op. cit., p. 7.

³⁶ Garst, et al., Op. cit., p. 14.

³⁷ Cullinan, Op. cit.

Similarly, research indicates that libraries, on-site and off-site, add value to literacy programs by increasing students' motivation to read. For example, the ACA found that many administrators of effective reading programs "suggested the development of a camp library or partnering with a local library." Staff further recommended creating a library and letting older campers run the program so that other children view it as "cool."³⁸ Similarly, in a separate, experimental study on elementary classrooms, researchers established "library centers" that featured picture books, short chapter books, humorous stories, informational books, and magazines. Books were placed with the cover, rather than spine, facing out to welcome potential readers. Even after the experiment concluded, substantially more students selected independent reading as a free-choice activity, illustrating that children's access to varied material can increase their desire to read.³⁹

Establishing an on-site library may require financial investment. However, several national organizations provide free or low-cost books to schools, families, and community organizations for the purposes of literacy instruction, including:

- **First Book** provides new books, or book grants, to community-based literacy programs serving low-income children. Programs must register at the First Book website to become eligible.
- **Heart of America Foundation** operates Book from the Heart, a literacy program that engages students, corporations, and other organizations to collect and donate unused books to elementary schools serving low-income students. Programs must register at the Heart of America Foundation website to become eligible.
- **Kids Need to Read** provides books from its selection of over 350 titles to literacy programs serving underprivileged communities. Programs must request donations through an online application on the Kids Need to Read website.
- **Scholastic Book Grants** is a corporate, in-kind initiative that provides high-quality reading materials to children, families, and organizations. Non-profit organizations can apply for grants of 500-1000 books by completing a Book Grants application on the Scholastic website.
- **Reading is Fundamental** operates Books for Ownership, a distribution program that provides books and book grants to families and community organizations. Programs must request services via telephone or email (See Section II).⁴⁰

If establishing a library on-site is not feasible, partnerships with or trips to community libraries are viable alternatives. By simply exposing children to libraries, educators can increase their motivation to read. For instance, one study found that students in classes that take trips to libraries are more likely to check out library books afterward.⁴¹ Additionally, local libraries often have programs that can be incorporated into camp's programming.⁴²

³⁸ Garst, et al., Op. cit., p. 14.

³⁹ Cullinan, Op. cit.

⁴⁰ Walker, R. "In Search of Free Books." Reading Rockets. <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/57/>

⁴¹ Cullinan, Op. cit.

⁴² Ibid.

SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Effective summer learning programs often **seek collaboration with local schools** for access to educational expertise. Research by Child Trends found that summer programs that hired certified teachers with multiple years of experience were more likely to improve academic outcomes.⁴³ Independent organizations may be unable to *employ* certified teachers, but can nonetheless *cooperate* with school personnel to improve their educational initiatives. By partnering with representatives from local school district, summer program coordinators can facilitate staff development, align activities with school-year curricula, and attract more participants to the program by marketing the program through school teachers and administrators.

Teachers from local school districts, can, for instance, provide valuable professional development to summer program staff. According to Katie Breckenridge, program director at the Partnership for Children and Youth, teachers can help “staff understand how to promote learning and cognitive development” and demonstrate “how to make learning fun.”⁴⁴ Some school districts have embraced this model: San Francisco Unified School District, for instance, offers free professional development days for summer staff.⁴⁵

Schools can also help summer programs make educational activities more relevant. The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), an educational research initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education, advises summer program staff to collaborate with district officials to align their programming with local school district curricula. The WWC further recommends that program staff collect relevant information from local school districts, including student data, academic standards, and student improvement plans,⁴⁶ which will also facilitate program evaluation. Enhanced collaboration between summer programs and school officials allows summer program staff members to be more cognizant of students’ learning preferences, styles, and areas that have been targeted for growth.

The ACA has published a guidebook on camp-school partnerships, which explains that partnerships “represent a tremendous opportunity for camps to re-establish themselves as an integral part of America’s educational reform movement.”⁴⁷ The ACA suggests that camp-school cooperation can improve organizational performance by attracting more participants and strengthening credibility. To this end, the ACA has identified numerous advantages to camp-school partnerships:

⁴³ Terzian, M. and Moore, K. A. “What Works for Summer Learning Programs for Low-Income Children and Youth: Preliminary Lessons from Experimental Evaluations of Social Interventions.” *Child Trends*, September 2009, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Frey, S. “Cities and Schools Collaborate on Summer Programs.” *EdSource*, March 3, 2013.
<http://www.edsource.org/today/2013/cities-and-schools-collaborate-on-summer-programs/27717#.UZOLerXvvs4>

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ “Connecting High-Quality Expanded Learning Opportunities and the Common Core State Standards to Advance Student Success.” Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011, p. 16.
<http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/Connecting%20Expanded%20Learning%20Opportunities%20and%20the%20Common%20Core%20State%20Standards%20to%20Advance%20Student%20Success.pdf>

⁴⁷ “Creating Camp-School Partnerships,” *Op. cit.*, p. 1.

- A revitalized image of camping among educators and in the community at large
- Greater revenue streams during the summer and in non-peak times
- A regular source of business
- Greater opportunities for long-term growth and stability
- Opportunities for staff development and enrichment
- A built-in recruitment tool to increase the number of summer campers
- Greater diversity among the children camps serve
- Increased credibility stemming from camps' relationship with local boards of education⁴⁸

Initiating partnerships with schools can be challenging, as educators are often concerned with program quality, time constraints, liability management, and keeping parents happy.⁴⁹ The ACA advises summer programs to approach partnership initiatives strategically. Organizations should thoroughly evaluate the proposed partnership and seek answers to well-defined questions. For instance: "Is the proposed partnership consistent with [the organization's] mission?" and "How will [the proposed partnership] impact other programs?"⁵⁰ ACA's guidebook recommends that program administrators do their best to anticipate schools' concerns, and develop methods for overcoming potential roadblocks. For instance, principals may contend that they do not have time to deal with a new program. The program, then, can respond by emphasizing the minimal time commitment required. Figure A.2 in the Appendix provides additional methods for addressing the concerns of various school personnel.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Program evaluation is an essential component of effective summer learning programs. Evaluation has been proven to strengthen program quality when conducted properly.⁵¹ Effective evaluations usually seek the answers to well-defined questions relating to **program implementation and program impact**.⁵² The impact of summer learning programs, for example, can be assessed using indicators of student outcomes such as:

- Increased knowledge
- Changes in attitude
- New and improved skills
- Changes in behavior⁵³

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

⁵¹ McCombs, J. S., et al. Op. cit., p. 34.

⁵² Paulsen, C. A., and Dailey, D. "A Guide for Education Personnel: Evaluating a Program or Intervention." American Institutes for Research, 2002, p. 7. <http://www.air.org/files/eval.pdf>

⁵³ "Summer Program Evaluation Support Project: Introduction to Program Evaluation." Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, May 2008, pp. 13-17. http://www.hfpg.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Public/1Evaluation_Toolkit_Overview.pdf

Initially, evaluations typically derive descriptive statistics from existing data, such as demographics of students and baseline student achievement. Demographics can be used to identify sub-populations of students that the program is helping, not affecting, or harming. Evaluations typically rely on **assessment data** to measure performance levels before and after an intervention. In order to better understand the types of assessment data typically used in summer program evaluations, Hanover examined program evaluations conducted by four summer programs operated by the Urban Institute,⁵⁴ Virginia Beach City Public Schools,⁵⁵ Austin Independent School District (AISD),⁵⁶ and the American Camp Association (ACA).⁵⁷ Our analysis found that summer program evaluations typically use one or more of the following quantitative assessments to gauge program effectiveness:

- **Pre- and post-testing** – Administer the same test to students at the beginning of the program and at the conclusion of the program. This will simply show if students improve their skills during the program.
- **Standardized test scores** – Observe participants’ standardized test scores during the subsequent school year. Administrators can determine if a higher proportion of students meet grade-level standards after completing summer school.
- **Report cards** - Observe participants’ report cards during subsequent school year. Administrators can determine if students grades improve from the prior school year and determine if students’ grades improve compared to their peers.

In addition to quantitative assessment data, qualitative data, such as **surveys and questionnaires** quickly and easily obtain information about program effectiveness from key stakeholders. Surveys should:

- Be easy to read and understand;
- Ask one question at a time;
- Ask relevant questions that the respondent will be able to answer;
- Ask open-ended questions for more in-depth information; and
- Be piloted before full implementation⁵⁸

Evaluators can administer surveys to any or all groups involved with the summer program, including students, parents, teachers, and administrators. By administering surveys to different groups, evaluators can gain insight about the program from a range of different perspectives. In order to gain the most accurate insight into program effectiveness, programs should include a mix of qualitative and quantitative assessments in their evaluation design.

⁵⁴ Chaplin, D. and Capizzano, J. Op. cit.

⁵⁵ “Summer School Program Evaluation Update Regarding Program Recommendations and Outcomes.” Office of Research and Evaluation, Virginia Beach City Public Schools, February 24, 2011.
http://www.vbschools.com/accountability/evaluation_briefs/EB4.pdf

⁵⁶ “Summer School Evaluation Summary Report 2010.” Austin Independent School District, November 2010.
http://archive.austinisd.org/inside/docs/ope_09-69_SummerSchool_Report.pdf

⁵⁷ Garst, et al., Op. cit.

⁵⁸ “Summer Program Evaluation Support Project.” Op. cit., p. 10.

SECTION II: RESOURCES FOR SUMMER LITERACY PROGRAMS

This section profiles three organizations devoted to improving childhood literacy: ReadWriteThink, Reading Rockets, and Reading is Fundamental (RIF). The organizations provide several valuable resources that organizations can use to improve their summer reading programs. All three organizations offer web-based resources that leaders can implement directly in camp sessions, such as research-based activities to improve reading achievement.

READWRITETHINK

ReadWriteThink is a non-profit organization that distributes high-quality instructional materials for reading and the language arts. ReadWriteThink's content is authored by "a diverse group of educators" and "is reviewed and approved by literacy experts who understand best practices and know what works."⁵⁹ Its website contains a searchable library of resources for teachers, parents, and afterschool professionals. Many materials are designed to be implemented by non-teachers, and include:

- Activities and Projects
- Games and Tools
- Tips & How To's
- Printouts
- Podcasts⁶⁰

Users can sort materials by resource type, grade level, learning objective, and/or theme (e.g., arts). For each resource, ReadWriteThink provides an easy-to-use guide for activity leaders. It includes a preview (often with video of the activity in action), required materials, related resources, and instructions on how to lead the activity.

ReadWriteThink also hosts a collection of classroom resources, including lesson plans. Though lesson plans designed for in-school instruction may be beyond the scope of some summer reading programs, it is worth noting that each resource in this section is aligned to state standards. Users can select any state from a drop-down menu, and ReadWriteThink will return every standard for which the activity applies to.⁶¹

⁵⁹ "About Us." ReadWriteThink. <http://www.readwritethink.org/about/>

⁶⁰ "Parent & Afterschool Resources." ReadWriteThink. <http://www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/>

⁶¹ "Classroom Resources." ReadWriteThink. <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/>

READING ROCKETS

Reading Rockets is “a national multimedia literacy initiative offering information and resources on how young kids learn to read, why so many struggle, and how caring adults can help.”⁶² The organization provides evidence-based practices in literacy education for teachers, parents, caregivers, and “anyone else involved in helping a young child become a strong, confident reader.”⁶³ Reading Rockets is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and led by researchers and experts in reading education.

Reading Rockets disseminates information through television programs, professional development, and two websites. All three modes can add value to reading programs, but its websites are the most accessible and easy to use. Reading Rockets’ primary website features news, research-based articles, tips for parents and educators, an online store, and other useful resources.⁶⁴

READING IS FUNDAMENTAL

Reading is Fundamental (RIF) is the “largest children’s literacy nonprofit in the United States.”⁶⁵ RIF’s mission is to motivate young children to read. The potential value of RIF is two-fold: its book distribution program provides free or low-cost books to community organizations and its website provides useful resources for OST reading programs.

RIF’s flagship program, Books for Ownership, distributes 15 million free books annually to students in schools, shelters, and community centers. RIF also supplies funding to purchase books and volunteers to assist with implementation.⁶⁶

RIF also hosts a collection of literacy activities “for readers of every age group and every skill level.”⁶⁷ Its activities extend beyond reading and cover a variety of educational, recreational, and other topics including:

- Alphabet Learning
- Cultural Heritage
- Games
- Math
- Science
- Vocabulary Building
- Arts and Crafts
- Drama
- History
- Music
- Seasonal Activities
- Writing⁶⁸
- Celebrations and Holidays
- Exploring Nature
- Ideas for Every Season
- Reading
- Travel Adventures

⁶² “About Reading Rockets.” Reading Rockets. <http://www.readingrockets.org/about/>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ “About RIF.” Reading is Fundamental. <http://www.rif.org/us/about-rif.htm>

⁶⁶ “Books for Ownership.” Reading is Fundamental. <http://www.rif.org/us/about/programs/books-for-ownership.htm>

⁶⁷ “Activities.” Reading is Fundamental. <http://www.rif.org/us/literacy-resources/activities.htm>

⁶⁸ “Activities,” Op. cit.

RIF's activities can be browsed by age group, type (e.g., indoor), materials needed, participants (e.g., large group), and time of day. Many activities are quite simple and can be implemented with relatively little investment of resources. In "Climb the Beanstalk," for instance, students create a leaf for each book they read from green paper and add it to their "beanstalk" to demonstrate reading achievement⁶⁹

In addition to activities, RIF provides booklists, articles, and brochures that may be useful to camp leaders. Booklists provide topic suggestions, useful for developing an adequate collection of reading materials. Articles explore literacy topics such as read-aloud and creating libraries. Brochures offer how-to guides on literacy issues, such as choosing the right book for children.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ "Climb the Beanstalk." Reading is Fundamental. <http://www.rif.org/us/literacy-resources/activities/climb-the-beanstalk.htm>

⁷⁰ "Literacy Resources." Reading is Fundamental. <http://www.rif.org/us/literacy-resources.htm>

APPENDIX

Figure A.1: Writing Prompts for Elementary-aged Children

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|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Imagine that you can become invisible whenever you wanted to? What are some of the things you would do. ▪ I am very proud because... ▪ If I were President I would... ▪ If I were a turtle living in a pond, I would ... ▪ I am afraid to _____ because ▪ Name on thing you do really well? Give lots of details telling why. ▪ What is your favorite room in your home and why? ▪ Describe what it means to be a good neighbor? ▪ What is your favorite time of day? Why? ▪ Describe your best day ever? ▪ How do you deal with people who bug you? ▪ What excites you? ▪ Describe your favorite hobby. ▪ What is your favorite quote by a famous person? Why? ▪ What is your favorite song and why? ▪ Climbing trees is... ▪ I wish trees could _____ because.... ▪ I want to be a _____ when I grow up. Then I will.... ▪ I wish there were a law that said..... ▪ I wish I could forget the time I _____ because.... ▪ I wish I could do _____ because..... ▪ Older people are... ▪ Younger people are... ▪ The perfect place in the whole wide world is _____ because ... ▪ What makes you feel sad? Why? ▪ What makes you feel happy? Why? ▪ What can you do to help you feel better when you're feeling blue? ▪ Name your favorite book and why? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If I were a raindrop, I'd ... ▪ What I know about rabbits is that ▪ If I were an Easter egg... ▪ For lunch today... ▪ Pretend that you can fly whenever you wanted. Where would you go? ▪ Pretend that there is no such thing as television, Internet, or video games. What do you do with all your time? ▪ My favorite stuffed animal or toy is... ▪ Imagine if cows gave green juice instead of milk! What would the world look like? ▪ Imagine that all the streets are rivers? How do you get around? ▪ What would happen if it really did rain cats and dogs? ▪ If I were a snake, I'd ... ▪ Use descriptive words like amazing, incredible, outrageous, super-fun or mind-blowing in your journal entry. ▪ If I could choose a different name, I would choose... ▪ Let's go _____. Describe your adventure. ▪ Write a letter to your Mom, Dad, friend, cousin, classmate. ▪ What would happen if animals could talk? ▪ What questions would you would like to ask animals and what would their answers be? ▪ What would you do if you were in the middle of the lake and your boat springs a leak? ▪ What would you do if you suddenly woke up in another country and no one could understand a word you said! What would you do? ▪ Write a poem about your favorite person, animal, or place. ▪ What is your dream vacation? |
|--|---|

Source: Journal Buddies⁷¹

⁷¹ Schoenberg, J. "Elementary Writing: 49 Ideas and Story Starters for Kids." Journal Buddies. <http://journalbuddies.com/teacher-parent-resources/48-thought-provoking-elementary-writing-prompts/>

Figure A.2: Addressing School Personnel Concerns

SCHOOL AUDIENCE	CHIEF NEEDS AND CONCERNS	HOW TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES
Teachers	Lack of understanding of experiential education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide examples tied to school’s learning objectives. ▪ Use testimonials from other programs. ▪ Provide educational research materials (articles, books, etc.)
	Need to get support from the school’s administration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide clear, comprehensive proposal that addresses all known issues. ▪ Offer to make joint presentations. ▪ Offer to connect teacher with others who have been successful in selling school camp programs.
	Summer school pays more.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emphasize change of venue and ability for teacher to acquire new experiential education techniques that can be applied in the classroom.
Principals	No time to deal with a new program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emphasize limited time principal needs to spend.
	Cost is too high. Substitute teachers will be needed. Transportation will be expensive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss fund raising options and strategies to share some or all of the cost with parents and others. ▪ Assist in identifying local foundations and corporations that may help fund the program.
	Program is a “luxury.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stress how curriculum is tied to state standards of learning. ▪ Use testimonials from other programs. ▪ Look for outside funding sources. ▪ Gather data comparing the cost of camp vs. the cost of summer school.
School Board	Concerns over liability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepare statistics citing relative safety of camping programs. ▪ Document everything in a written contract. ▪ Emphasize availability of nursing staff. ▪ Stress adherence to school district rules and regulations.
	Program is a “luxury.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stress how curriculum is tied to state standards of learning. ▪ Line up teachers and parents to advocate for the program. ▪ Look for outside funding sources. ▪ Gather data comparing the cost of camp vs. the cost of summer school.
Parents	School camp safety, cleanliness, range of activities, supervision, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make presentation on school camp details to reassure parents. ▪ Provide telephone number they can call with questions. ▪ Use teacher to help deliver information to parents since she is known and trusted. ▪ Hold a Parents’ Camp Sampler Day so parents can be campers for a day and get a taste of what their children will experience.

Source: American Camp Association⁷²

⁷² “Creating Camp-School Partnerships,” Op. cit., pp. 17-19.

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