



Impact Report: Summer Literacy Collaborative

Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care Out of School Time Literacy and Learning Promotion Grant Executive Summary of Evaluation

LEARNING SHOULD NEVER TAKE A SUMMER VACATION

While summer time often represents a break from school and a carefree, playful time for youth, it is increasingly referred to as a time of loss in young people’s academic skills. *Summer learning loss* is the term used to describe the loss of knowledge and skills during the summer months, while school is not in session.

Research shows that summer is a particularly vulnerable time for low-income children’s educational success. They experience learning loss at a higher rate than their middle-class peers, who typically benefit from enriching summer programs and experiences. The result is an approximate three month gap in reading skills between the two groups of children.¹ By the time these youth reach middle school, the gap may account for two years’ worth of achievement.²

Early and sustained summer learning opportunities lead to improved outcomes for youth, such as increased academic achievement, self-esteem, confidence, motivation and higher graduation rates.³

“The activities were so effective the children almost didn’t realize we were teaching them.”

-Out of School Time Program Staff Member

“School-age programs can do a lot to support in-class learning.”

-School Literacy Coach

“The curriculum became a seamless part of the program.”

-Out of School Time Program Staff Member

Purpose:

To stem summer learning loss by integrating literacy into out of school time programs in underperforming school districts.

Intermediary Objectives:

- Maintain or increase youths’ reading skills during summer programming
- Build the capacity of out of school time staff to implement fun literacy curricula
- Enhance school, family, and community partnerships

Long-term Objectives:

To reduce the rate of children not reading proficiently by 3rd grade (62%) and keep youth reading at grade level as they progress through school in seven Massachusetts school districts (Boston, Lynn, Lawrence, Lowell, Worcester, Springfield and Holyoke) with Level 4 underperforming schools* designated by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Community	% of 3rd graders who score below proficient on 2010 MCAS – ELA
Boston	63%
Holyoke	75%
Lawrence	60%
Lowell	60%
Lynn	56%
Springfield	61%
Worcester	56%
Statewide Average	38%

*Underperforming schools are those that performed poorly on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System in both Math and English Language Arts over a four-year span without showing signs of “substantial improvement.”

“Out of school time programs have a key role to play in stemming learning loss that often occurs when children and youth do not have access to high-quality enrichment activities during the summer months. This initiative is a model of how summer programs, school districts, and community-based organizations can be an effective influence as a collective whole in delivering positive outcomes for our youngest citizens.”

— Dr. Sherri Killins, EEC Commissioner

A UNIQUE AND INNOVATIVE APPROACH

To prevent summer learning loss and ultimately maintain or increase student reading skills, the Summer Learning Collaborative sought to improve school partnerships, family engagement and the confidence and competency of OST staff to provide intentional literacy activities.

Key elements supported this strategy:

- **Forming a public-private partnership**

This grant from the Department of Early Education and Care brought together school systems, the United Way system, nonprofit organizations and intermediary organizations (“hubs”). The model demonstrates the power of public-private partnerships working together to achieve common goals and raise the bar for literacy indicators. Together, 21 program sites in seven school districts served a total of 1,822 youth ages 6-12.

3 Hubs	3 United Ways	7 School Districts/ Communities
BOSTnet DELTAS WestMOST	UW of Mass Bay and Merrimack Valley UW of Central Massachusetts UW of Pioneer Valley	Boston, Lawrence Lowell, Lynn Worcester Springfield Holyoke

- **Strengthening existing resources, aligning curriculum, connecting school and OST staff**

The project provided programs with curriculum resources, literacy supports and school educators as coaches to work alongside youth development specialists. By building the capacity and confidence of OST staff to implement learning activities, youth became more engaged, leading to improved outcomes. In addition, OST staff developed essential, long-lasting relationships with school personnel.

- **Making learning fun with an engaging summer curriculum**

The project introduced curricula centered around what youth want to learn and do, using fun and engaging themes drawn from reading, the arts outdoor education science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

- **Fostering family involvement, school/OST collaboration and community engagement**

We know from research that a child’s success in school is highly correlated to family involvement. Therefore, each site had a plan to increase family awareness of summer learning loss and provided tips, tools, and opportunities for parents/caregivers to take an active role in supporting reading and learning. With families supporting learning at home and school teachers coaching OST staff, we created a blend of in-school and out of school learning methodologies. In addition, programs offered opportunities for community engagement including field trips to places that enrich the thematic curricula topics, visits from community leaders, and access to libraries and library cards.

EVERY PARTNER PLAYED A ROLE

United Way	Served as fiscal agent; led “learning community” to share, problem-solve, and coordinate across hubs; oversaw evaluation; and provided fundraising, public relations and marketing.
Community Literacy Coordinator (hubs)	Oversaw community and program sites; partnered with principals and superintendents; provided specialized training; purchased group materials, books etc.; and collected evaluation data.
School Literacy Coach	Attended coaches training; linked to school personnel and curricula; modeled instructional techniques; mentored OST staff; and conducted pre-post tests.
Out of School Time (OST) Program Staff	Championed program philosophies; attended staff trainings; provided regular intentional literacy activities; supervised children and promoted engagement; and partnered with families, schools and the community.

“As the African proverb states, it takes a village to raise a child. This is definitely true in Lawrence, where partnerships are essential to ensure that all children are able to continue to improve academic skills through coordinated after school and out of school time programs, which allow our students to accelerate their achievement growth, so they are able to compete with other students across the state and country.”

— Dr. Mary Lou Bergeron, Superintendent of the Lawrence Public Schools

OUTSTANDING RESULTS

For Out of School Time Staff:

- Hubs offered 68 hours of professional development on curricula (i.e. KidzLit, Reading Street, Watershed, Quirkles; kids@fterschool, ThinkFun) and universal literacy strategies such as:
 - read-alouds
 - reader’s theater
 - shared and choral reading
 - buddy reading
 - book clubs
 - journal writing
 - literacy centers
- At most of the sites, 100% of staff agreed that they gained confidence and proficiency in developing and delivering creative literacy techniques such as:
 - role playing
 - group games
 - “cool words”
 - writing and drawing
 - drafting science hypothesis
- At the end of the summer staff supported this more intentional approach to literacy, despite being skeptical in the beginning .

For Literacy Coaches:

- Summer literacy coaches provided 2,080 hours of coaching.
- Most coaches said they would be eager to continue their collaboration with OST staff.
- Coaches reported that they had a newfound respect for OST staff and that they were bringing back lessons learned from the OST programs.

For Youth:

- 85% of youth avoided the typical three month learning loss described in research.
- Of the 85%, 72% maintained or increased reading skills with the vast majority (68%) increasing skills and only 4% maintaining skills.

TURNING LEARNING LOSS INTO SUMMER LEARNING GAIN

Formula for Success:

Outstanding Results for Youth:



SUCCESS FACTORS

The following factors were key to success:

- Programs should have an overall level of quality as a prerequisite for this work.
- The motivation and overall commitment from program leadership is essential in order to model the importance to direct service staff.
- Coaches should have experience working in schools.
- Coaches should see their role as building the capacity of OST staff rather than implementing programs themselves.
- Activities are most engaging for youth when the literacy strategies are interwoven into fun, thematic curricula.
- Youth have better results when they have regular attendance.
- Schools should take an active role in referring youth most in need to these summer programs.
- This is a cost effective model.

“For children to succeed, literacy programs must begin before kindergarten and extend beyond schools into early childhood centers, summer programs and other out of school time programs.”

-Maryellen Coffey, Executive Director
BOSTnet

“There’s a clear role that out-of-school-time programs can play in helping children develop the skills they need to succeed in schools. By better aligning these programs with schools and creating more opportunities for literacy education, we can help close the achievement gap across the state.”

-Michael K. Durkin, President
United Way of Massachusetts Bay
& Merrimack Valley

Information on Evaluation

The Out of School Time Literacy and Learning Promotion grant was for summer literacy programming during the Summer of 2010. The evaluation, completed in February, 2011 was conducted by MaryLu Love from the University of Massachusetts-Boston’s Institute for Community Inclusion. To measure change in literacy skills among children the sites used DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) specifically Oral Reading Fluency, a sub-test of the DIBELS for pre- post- comparison. Instruments for OST staff/coaches/program directors and hubs included surveys, interviews and focus group debriefing sessions.

References

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- ² Miller, B. (2007) *The Learning Season: The untapped power of summer to advance student achievement.* Executive Summary. Nellie Mae Education Foundation.
- ³ Allington, R., A. McGill-Franzen, G. Camilli, L. Williams, J. Graff, J. Zeig, C. Zmach, and R. Nowak. 2003. Ameliorating summer reading setback among economically disadvantaged elementary students.
- ³ Kim, J. (n.d.). National Center for Summer Learning. 2007 How to make summer learning effective? Retrieved from: http://www.summerlearning.org/resource/collection/CB94AEC5-9C97-496F-B230-1BECDFC2DF8B/Research_Brief_03_-_Kim.pdf

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