ISFIS
Iowa School Finance Information Services

School Improvement Booster

An e-newsletter provided by
Iowa School Finance Information Services (ISFIS)

March 2014: The Summer Slide

The Summer Slide and How Summer Programming Can Help Your Students

"Summer reading loss accounts for roughly 80% of the reading achievement gap between more and less economically advantaged children (Allington and Mcgill-Franzen, 2013)."

Iowa Reading Resource Website

This startling quote by reading experts Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen corroborates the 30 years of research informing us that students of more disadvantaged backgrounds and lower socio-economic status experience larger degrees of learning loss during summer months than their more privileged counter parts. These counterparts, "…appear to rely on school for only a portion of their academic learning. Their [middle income and above students'] proficiency…is boosted by parents' instruction, extracurricular activities (e.g. private lessons, voluntary associations such as scouting or sports), and family activities," (US Department of Education, 1993 as quoted in Boss & Railsback, 2002). Further, research indicates that two- thirds of the 9th grade achievement can be explained by unequal access to summer learning during elementary years (Alexander et al., 2007).

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While these trends are troubling, they also suggest a course of action that schools can take to support all students. Preventative summer programming models help to alleviate some of the learning loss that three months of academic inactivity otherwise causes. Policy makers from the White House, to Congress, to the Iowa Legislature, to school board tables are discussing the importance of summer programs. The Iowa Legislature has mandated summer school as an alternative to retention beginning in 2017 for students leaving 3rd grade not reading on grade level. But we wonder if planning for 2017 is enough? Is traditional summer school enough? If a school doesn't have summer programming until then, will it be soon enough for struggling students, particularly students who are already disadvantaged, to reach the goal of being proficient readers by the end of third grade and to stay proficient throughout their school careers and into their adult lives?

Do students read enough in our school district and all year round, particularly in the summer? "It requires extensive practice to become skilled at any activity regardless of whether the activity is physical or cognitive in nature (Allington, 2009). In the case of reading proficiency, Literally hundreds of correlational studies find that the best readers read the most and that poor readers read the least. These correlational studies suggest that the more children read, the better their fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 12)."

Building a successful summer program is a daunting task, regardless of the size of the school district the summer program is to serve. There are considerations that school leaders must take into account from both theoretical and practical corners: What kind of program will it be? Who will it serve? How will we pay for it? What are the goals? How long should it last? Who will staff it? There are no easy answers, so in order to support school leaders in the process of getting ready for the summer programming season, we've laid out some of the research that can provide a basis to begin answering these questions.
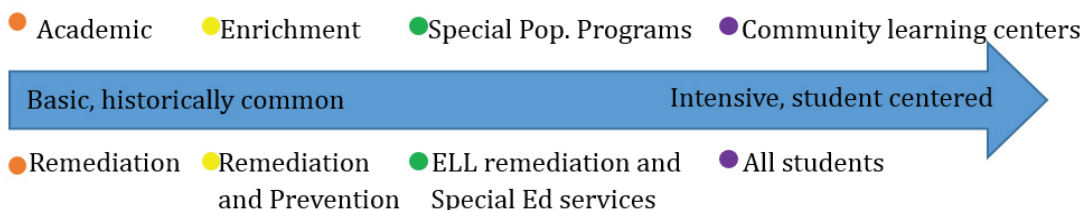
MODELS FOR SUMMER PROGRAMS

Remediation

Formal summer school that takes place in schools is most commonly designed for students not meeting proficiency on standardized tests or failing a class required for graduation. This experience is usually structured in a way very similar to the regular school year, and the focus is solely on academics. While the intent is noble - to remediate the learning that was missed - it is often a repeat of the very structure in which the student failed in the first place. And by summer; students, staff, and teachers are burned out by the cycle of the regular school day. This can lead to a lack of engagement for all involved, resulting in poor student attendance and a negligible impact on student learning.

Prevention The second primary category of summer school is based in providing preventative academic and social services for students in the summer months. These programs cover a wide variety of experiences and programs. Some limit services to special populations of students like students served in special education or students learning English. Programming varies from more non-traditional programs that offer field trips, specialized experiences (such as outdoor activities), art classes – all the sorts of summer experiences that families who are more affluent are able to provide for their children - to those that combine non-traditional experiences with ones that are more academic. Also included in this preventative model are programs like established reading promotions, ensuring students have access to books they can read and are interested in throughout the summer months.

Types of Programs

● Academic   ●Enrichment   ●Special Pop. Programs   ●Community learning centers

Basic, historically common   Intensive, student centered →

●Remediation   ●Remediation   ●ELL remediation and   ●All students
             and Prevention   Special Ed services

Purposes they serve

WHAT TYPES WOULD BEST SERVE OUR STUDENTS

The literature on summer experiences suggests that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly ill- served by purely remedial programs (as discussed previously). Many Iowa schools serve students at both ends of the economic spectrum in their summer programming plans and as such must plan accordingly. Supporting summer programming that offers effective academic intervention as well as a variety of experiences that build students' background knowledge would serve all students best. These programs can be organized exclusively through the school district, but often students are better served when summer experiences are the result of joint collaborative efforts among community partners such as the school district, Extension, United Way and other child-serving agencies. This also may help to reduce the cost that any one agency incurs and expands the benefits for children in the community.

Characteristics of Effective Summer Programs

If you are building a summer program, here are practices from several studies to consider:

Wallace Foundation

In *Effective and Promising Summer Learning Programs and Approaches for Economically Disadvantaged Children and Youth*, a Wallace Foundation publication from 2009, these recommendations related to effective summer programming practices were highlighted:

- **Make learning fun**. Supplement academic instruction with enrichments activities that are relevant and engaging to children, i.e. current events, field trips, improvisational comedy, art, etc.
- **Ground learning in a real-world context.** For instance instead of just teaching students about recycling, take them on a field trip to the local landfill or recycling center.
- **Integrate hands-on activities,** i.e. field trips to historic sites, nature expeditions, and others.
- **Content should complement curricular standards,** so planners and implementers need to understand the school curriculum.
- **Hire experienced, trained teachers to deliver the academic lessons**. Wallace research revealed that in the programs with the highest effects, teachers with at least bachelor's degrees delivered the academic content.
- **Keep class sizes small**.

The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA)

The NSLA did a literature review on summer learning practices for middle and high school students. They note, "With the transitions and developmental changes it brings, middle school is a vulnerable time for all youth, particularly those who are low-income. Harvard researchers have concluded that students moving into middle school show a precipitous drop in math and language arts achievement that can persist through 10th grade, and another, smaller dip as students transition from middle school into high school (Schwerdt and West 2011). High quality summer learning programs can ease these transitions as well as prevent learning loss. Attendance in summer learning programs may also decrease juvenile delinquency among older youth during the summer and improve students' diet and level of exercise (McCombs et al. 2011). They found these practices effective:

- Set high standards for both participants and staff.
- Continually assess and observe so changes can be made when the programming isn't working.
- Be intellectually challenging.
- Be relevant.
  - o Relate to youth's lives and interests.
  - o Expose youth to technology , careers, and college, as well as honor the culture and community of the participants.
- Embody respect, fun and enthusiasm.
  - o Establish a program culture that is fun and supportive.
  - o Promote a "culture of success" through "activities, ceremonies, and celebrations (that) encourage students to participate in and identify with the goals of the program."
- Build relationships between students and also between staff and students.
- Promote attendance and retention by being accessible and affordable, recruiting through peer networks, staying knowledgeable about students' lives, being flexible about attendance requirements, tracking attendance and responding immediately and with energy when problems surface, and recognizing and rewarding good attendance.
- Provide extra help to those who need it.

Northwest Regional Education Lab (NREL)

Suzie Boss and Jennifer Railback found in 2002 in Summer School Programs: A Look at No Implications for Practice, and Program Sampler for NREL that regardless of the kind of summer school program you choose, it is important to note that the most successful summer programs share a number of characteristics:

- Small group/individualized instruction
- Involvement of parents and the community
- Attention to program fidelity
- Program evaluation
- Cultural sensitivity
- Staff engaged in professional development
- Positive behavior encouraged
- Teach problem solving strategies
- Hold high expectations for participants
- Provide sufficient support for students to meet the high expectations

Buildin A Summer Reading Program For All

For some students, summer school on location in the district or community isn't an option - older children might be expected to work or take care of younger siblings. Students of all ages face the issue of transportation to and from summer school programs. Schools might not have all the resources they need to provide on-site summer school, as well as field trips for all students. These reasons and others ask districts to consider how they can supplement all readers over the summer months- even those that might not be able to participate in a structured summer school program.

Richard Allington and Anne McGill Franzen released Summer Reading: Closing the Rich/Poor Reading Achievement Gap in 2012. This short, engaging read offers advice for schools hoping to stem the summer reading loss which has been identified in the literature as an issue for decades. Allington and McGill Franzen note that any child who doesn't read in the summer will most likely suffer from summer learning loss. Sadly, summer learning loss is nearly universal for low income children. However, studies have shown that students in well-structured, voluntary summer reading programs show an average of 2.5- 4 months of growth, data that is hard to ignore.

Children from low-income families have less access to books in the summer than others and therefore are less likely to read. In their book, Allington and McGill Franzen offer advice and give examples of schools that have made sure all of their students have access to books in the summer. They suggest these parameters:

- Make sure students are provided at least eight books for the summer.
- These books should be related to student interest and of their own choosing.
- The books should be at an appropriate level of difficulty (primarily at the independent level, a level at which students are faced with very little or no frustration while reading)
- Parent should be engaged in their child's reading though book logs and surveys.

Allington and McGill-Franzen go on to describe several programs that districts can use to ensure students get books over the summer. You might want to check this book out – it has many resources.

QUESTIONS LEADERSHIP TEAMS CAN START ASKING AS SUMMER PROGRAMMING DEVELOPED

Summer program planning should start right now. The experts recommend summer planning at least a year in advance, but it's not too late for the summer of 2014.

- Do we need summer programming? Why?
- What are the goals?
- Who will it serve?
- How will we make sure the kids who enroll attend regularly?
- How will we pay for it?
- How long should it last?
- Who will staff it?
- What will we do for our most struggling students?
- How can we build a summer program for all of our students?
- Is there someone in the community we can partner with to provide a comprehensive system of academics and social experiences like field trips?
- How will we know if our summer programming is successful?

QUOTES

"The first known report about summer learning loss came in a 1906 New York Times article by William White. He tested students in math before and after the summer and a found loss of skills. So for more than a hundred years, we've been trying to stop the summer knowledge leak." - Jim Roope, CNN

"Most children, regardless of socioeconomic status, lose two months of grade-level equivalency in math computational skills during each summer months. Low-income children also lose more than two months in reading achievement, while middle-income peers make slight gains in reading. This learning gap widens over time so that by ninth grade, low-income students are years behind their peers in reading. The same students most affected by summer learning loss also were more likely to drop out of high school and less likely to attend college (Alexander et al. 2007)." - National Summer Learning Association sharing information from research done at Johns Hopkins University

"Learning is more effective when it is an active rather than a passive process." - Euripedes

"Education isn't a recital." - Ben Milne, Dwolla

If you have any questions about the School Improvement Booster or suggested future topics,
please contact Susie Olesen at susie.olesen@isfis.net.

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