



Build on summer success

BY RON FAIRCHILD

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 19, 2007

Not that long ago, summer programs for children didn't exist in many Baltimore neighborhoods. For far too many students in our city, summer was a dreadful waste, not a stimulating season of new experiences and opportunities.

But in the last three years, Baltimore has made dramatic strides in embracing and expanding high-quality summer learning opportunities. School district leaders have steadily increased funding for such programs - up from just a few hundred thousand dollars to about \$10.5 million this year. The district also has voluntarily enrolled more and more children each summer - from 12,492 kids in 2005 to 23,510 last year. While much remains to be done, the school system is to be applauded for its vision and hard-fought efforts to extend the promise of an enriching summer to more young people in the city.

This sort of commitment makes a profound difference. We know that high-quality summer learning opportunities have a positive effect on the education, health and safety of all children, especially those living in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Our research shows that children don't just stay in an academic holding pattern over the summer; they lose ground. Kids from low-income families lose nearly three months of grade-level equivalency over the summer, compared with an average one-month loss for children from middle-class families.

In fact, researchers have just completed a major study showing that 65 percent of the achievement gap between poor and affluent ninth-graders is a result of the unequal summer learning experiences they had as elementary school students. Johns Hopkins researchers studied 790 Baltimore public school children from the first grade through age 22, using test scores, school records and student reports and interviews to determine high school graduation and college attendance. The study traced the disparities between the two socioeconomic groups of children and found that the stark differences between their early summer learning experiences accounted for much of the significant achievement gap.

We must give low-income children experiences over the summer months that build academic skills, and high-quality summer programs offer such a solution. These programs increase students' motivation and improve their performance during the school year.

For the first time, the Baltimore school system has hired a nationally respected nonprofit group - the BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life) Foundation - this summer to do that. The district is spending nearly \$1.5 million to bring a comprehensive, high-quality national summer learning program to serve more than 1,900 elementary school students who need academic improvement. The program will run for six weeks, starting next Monday, in 12 low-performing elementary schools. In the mornings, BELL teachers will teach reading and math for nearly three hours. After lunch and recess, other instructors will lead structured enrichment activities, such as music, art, drama, dance, physical education and hands-on science. Fridays are reserved for guest speakers, field trips and community service projects. National education experts are closely watching this BELL partnership because it has the potential to produce meaningful gains in kids' lives and could be replicated elsewhere.

The school district also has been an active partner with SuperKids Camp, one of the nation's very best summer learning programs. The camp, run by the Parks & People Foundation, builds reading skills in 1,000 rising second- and third-graders while offering engaging enrichment activities. Not only does the school system help recruit students, but it also funds this exemplary program

The shift in Baltimore's approach was brought about by leadership on the Board of School Commissioners and at the top of the district, starting with its former CEO, Bonnie S. Copeland, and continuing with interim CEO Charlene Cooper Boston. Working with partners across the city, the district has made solid progress in recognizing the value of high-quality summer learning programs and in investing in those programs.

But there's still a long way to go. The district must enroll even more students in high-quality programs. And that will take more state and city funding to allow low-income families to take advantage of the same kinds of high-quality summer-enrichment programs that well-off families can afford. Without such a financial commitment from the public, summer will remain a time when the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Ron Fairchild is executive director of the Center for Summer Learning at the Johns Hopkins University. His e-mail is rfairchild@jhu.edu.

ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL



West Sections: [Home](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#)

Wednesday, July 4, 2007

Summer Classes Help Kids Keep Up

By **Dora Ortiz**

Dolores Gonzales Elementary School principal

All over Albuquerque, many public school students are sleeping late and cooling off at swimming pools.

For them, school has been out since May 25.

But weeks after other city schools shut down for the summer, our school in Southwest Albuquerque was still buzzing with activity— about 40 young children who are doing reading, math, social studies and hands-on science. And the best part is they love being here even though it's June and July.

For the past four years, we have been a Kindergarten Plus school. That means we offer an extra 40 instructional days during the summer for disadvantaged children.

Our kindergartners start school July 2— well before the regular calendar— and keep going until June 15, well after the school year is ended.

Those additional days extend the same kind of learning that occurs during the regular school year. The children eat breakfast in their classrooms. Many of the students are reading and solving basic math problems and do so in both English and Spanish. They take field trips, such as a recent one to the zoo to reinforce a lesson about habitats.

The flexibility afforded by summer learning also allows students to work on more innovative activities that spark creativity and can instill a love of learning that carries into the next school year.

As a former kindergarten teacher for 11 years, I have seen a big payoff for our students who receive these extra days during the summer.

Having the whole campus to themselves allows them to become more comfortable with school. Our students don't lose as much ground academically and are much better prepared for first grade. First grade teachers don't need to spend as much time reviewing material forgotten over the summer months.

In our community, many families don't have the opportunity to go on extended vacations or send children to summer camps. Too many of our

students slide backwards over the idle summer months.

My firsthand observations are backed up by the Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University, which highlights research showing that children from low-income families lose nearly three months of grade-level equivalency over the summer, compared to an average one-month loss for children from middle-class families.

A major new study by Johns Hopkins researchers shows that 65 percent of the achievement gap between poor and affluent ninth-graders is due to unequal summer learning experiences they had as elementary school students.

Kindergarten Plus is the kind of high-quality summer learning that has a positive effect on the education, health and safety of our children, especially those living in low-income neighborhoods.

What began as a three-year pilot in 2003 at 15 high-poverty schools in four New Mexico districts has been so successful in advancing children's literacy and social skills that the state has expanded the program twice— most recently agreeing to spend nearly \$8 million for extra days for children entering kindergarten through third grade. Our state leaders are to be commended for this major policy development.

Kindergarten Plus, now renamed K-3 Plus, is a worthwhile first step, but more is needed.

I applaud a major new initiative called New Mexico Integrated Services in Schools Initiative being developed by the New Mexico Community Foundation. NMISSE will begin this fall in five New Mexico middle schools: Gadsden, Pueblo of Laguna, Grant, Wilson in Albuquerque and the Native American Community Academy. It aims to ensure that middle school students succeed by providing them with multiple supports, including summer learning opportunities.

Summer learning opportunities increase student motivation and performance during the school year. Summer learning opportunities have a positive impact on working families, work-force development and delinquency prevention.

It's in all of our interests to continue creating ways for children to learn during the summer months and continue to be engaged.

Perspectives

Keep kids learning through the hazy summer daze

Children lose a lot of ground if they don't study or do anything creative while out of school

Wednesday, July 25, 2007

By Ron Fairchild

Many young people are now enjoying a summer filled with lots of nothing, after leaving behind reading, math, science and art until school begins in the fall.

That is a profound mistake.

While summer should provide a relaxing break for kids, it is also the right time to offer high-quality learning programs that stimulate children in new and important ways.

Ron Fairchild is the executive director of the Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University
(rfairch1@jhuadig.admin.jhu.edu.)

At the Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University, we have analyzed the many benefits of summer enrichment. We know that high-quality summer learning opportunities have a positive effect on the education, health and safety of all children, especially those living in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Such programs give children the chance to be creative and innovative, critical needs in the new global economy. These programs increase students' motivation and improve their performance during the school year.

Research shows that children don't just stay in a holding pattern over the summer; they lose ground. Kids from low-income families lose nearly three months of grade-level equivalency over the summer, compared to an average one-month loss for children from middle-class families.

All too often, kids spend summers sleeping late and parked in front of TVs and computers, which can lead to weight gain and other problems. Lolling around takes a toll.

Good summer programs keep students engaged in learning, teach them new skills and allow them to develop previously unseen talents. They allow children to form

relationships with caring adults, away from the pressures of school. They help children stay fit and active.

A high-quality summer experience can be life-changing. Just ask Charity Glass, who attended Summerbridge Pittsburgh, a two-summer enrichment program for middle-school students from disadvantaged families and one of our three national 2007 Excellence in Summer Learning Award winners.

The painfully shy Charity was bored with the rote learning of her middle school, but loved the challenge of the Summerbridge program, which was free to her dad, who was raising six kids alone.

While other kids in the neighborhood were hanging out all summer, Charity was learning Spanish, French and Shakespeare at Summerbridge, and her teachers prompted her for the first time to actually analyze subjects such as American history, not just recite facts.

The summer experience gave her the confidence to speak up in class and raise her hand when she didn't understand something. Before long, she was leading skits and classroom discussions.

In short, she recalls: "It re-ignited my passion for learning."

We should be doing all we can to ignite that innate love of learning in many other students, but it will take a new commitment -- stronger support from parents, schools and policy makers, and the creation of new programs that challenge kids' minds, bodies and spirits.

And it will require more public and private investment to allow low-income families to enroll in the same kinds of high-quality summer-enrichment programs that well-off families can afford.

In Washington, lawmakers can make progress by endorsing a proposal by Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., that would provide scholarships for youngsters for 30 days of high-quality summer programs. Without such a financial commitment from the public, summer will remain a time when the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Given the complex social and educational problems confronting children in poverty, we can not afford to allow summers to go by filled with nothing.

So what happened to Charity Glass?

She became an outgoing leader in high school and eventually taught for two summers at the Summerbridge program in Cambridge, Mass. She went on to graduate from Harvard and begins medical school there in the fall.

Like Charity, every child has enormous potential to learn and grow. Tapping that potential must not end when schools close for the summer.