

Summer Slide

The Need for Summer Intervention for Low
Income Elementary School Students

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Introduction to the Issue

Public Education in the United States is in a state of peril; too many students are not completing enough education, and those who do stay in public schools are not guaranteed a quality education. There is much discussion among policy makers about the kinds of reforms and policies that will have the most positive impact on the education system. Early childhood education and early elementary school have been targeted as the crucial windows in which to intervene with the greatest, positive, long term, results. If students experience quality education from the start, their likelihood of reaching higher levels of education increases. Much of the literature and policies aimed at elementary education focus on making improvements to the calendar school year; however, one of the most important areas of elementary education reform to consider is the loss of knowledge during the summer vacation months. This issue has a significant impact on the start of the next school year as many teachers are faced with a class that has fallen behind and must spend a few weeks reviewing material from the previous year. Some students never overcome the summer achievement gap, leaving them to fall increasingly further behind. The students most vulnerable are low income students, as the summer effect “exacerbates the well-documented achievement gap between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students.”¹ Policy makers need to understand that the summer break is a crucial window of time in which to implement policies aimed at closing the achievement gap. Summer programs have the potential to ensure that students begin the next school year ready to learn new material, and could make a significant impact on underprivileged students’ achievement in school.

¹ Denise A. Malach and Robert A. Rutter, “For Nine Months Kids Go to School, but in Summer This School Goes to Kids”. *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 57, no. 1 (2003) 50.

Why Summer?

Summer learning loss is a significant problem that is negatively affecting the American education system. A 2002 hearing before the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions specifically addressed summer slide. The speakers included then Senator Hilary Clinton and Harris Cooper, a professor from the University of Missouri who has published several influential papers on the topic. The session gathered on the first day of summer, a poignant nod to the discussion at hand. This meeting came on the heels of the passing of No Child Left Behind, a massive, bi-partisan, education reform policy with the goal of equalizing educational experiences and resources for all children enrolled in the public school system. The problem with the timing of this bill is that many school districts were, and still are, facing critical budget cuts. Summer school programs are often the first area where cuts are made because the importance is not fully understood. Many school districts have the mindset that summer school is a “fringe” service and is not as important or worth the money as programs that run during the school year. This line of thinking is detrimental to the achievement gap that is so prevalent. The Senate discussion was based around the importance of summer school and summer resources for low income students. The achievement gap between students from low income backgrounds and middle to high income backgrounds is significant and contributes to high dropout rates and underperformance in students that is never corrected. Most interesting is that during the school year, low income students participate on par with students from more financially stable backgrounds; the real difference happens over the summer.²

² Senate Hearing before the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, “Avoiding the Summer Slide: The Importance of Summer School to Student Achievement. One Hundred Seventh Congress. June 21, 2002.

The goal for many summer school programs is to maintain knowledge so students do not start the new school year behind. The data surrounding the issue of summer learning loss provides hard evidence for just how detrimental the summer months can be for a low income student, particularly in elementary school. In a 2007 study, low-SES students experienced a -1.90 change in reading comprehension test scores over the summer months during years 1 through 9 of schooling. This contrasts with high socioeconomic students who, over the same period of summer months, experienced, on average, a 46.58 point gain on their reading comprehension test scores. That is a 48.48 point gap between high and low socioeconomic students.³ These findings become more interesting when compared to the gains in reading comprehension during the school years. The difference in the winter gains between high and low socioeconomic students is -5.19, with high income students gaining an average of 186.11 points, and low income students 191.30.⁴ This shows that the time spent in school is hugely beneficial for low-SES students. They gain more in terms of test scores than high-SES students, a finding that can be largely attributed to their environments outside the classroom. This information comes from the first nine years of education for this group of students, reinforcing the importance of early intervention.

The same study followed this group beyond the first nine years, analyzing the connection between their reading comprehension scores during the first nine years, and how much secondary education they achieved. The study found that low income students who experienced the most summer learning loss (lost the most points on reading comprehension tests), were more likely to

³ Karl L. Alexander, Doris R. Entwisle, and Linda Steffel Olson, "Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap," *American Sociological Association* 72 (2007) 170.

⁴ *Ibid.*

drop out of high school permanently. Low-SES students who dropped out experienced an average loss of -11.04 points, while low-SES students who completed high school lost an average of -1.85 points.⁵ These numbers support the belief that summer learning loss has a long term impact on the academic success of low income students. Over half of the 116.1 point difference between the “college track/high SES-non college track/low SES” groups (76.5 points, or 1.3 Standard Deviation) can be traced to “summer learning differenced carried forward from elementary school,” indicating that this is a serious issue that is worth devoting government resources to.

The literature on the effects of the summer slide approaches the issue from several angles producing different solutions. Despite their differences, there is a general consensus that elementary school students lose a significant amount of knowledge and school readiness during the summer months and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to struggle with the loss of knowledge over summer months than privileged students.⁶ The biggest difference in the summer slide for advantaged and disadvantaged students is access to quality summer programs. Students with economic advantages are typically exposed to a variety of educational summer programs ranging from camps to library or museum visits. Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson found that students from a higher socioeconomic status were more likely to take day or overnight trips, to take swimming, dance, and music lessons, and visit parks, museums, and libraries.⁷ It is this kind of exposure over the summer that keeps young students

⁵ Alexander, Entwisle, Olson, “Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap,” 172.

⁶Karl L. Alexander, Doris R. Entwisle, and Linda S. Olson. “Schools, Achievement, and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective”. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, vol. 23, no. 2 (Summer 2001). 171-191.

⁷ Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson. “Schools, Achievement, and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective”, 171-191.

engaged and aware of the learning process. Students who do not have these kinds of experiences during the summer are more likely to struggle not only in the next year of school, but also in their long-term academic achievement.⁸ Disadvantaged and low income students do not experience the same opportunities during the summer. Disadvantaged students are at a higher risk for suffering from the summer slide because these students come from families who lack the disposable income necessary for educationally enriching summer programs or any sort of educational exposure during the months away from school. Studies show that “children from higher socioeconomic families learn more over the summer than do their less-advantaged counterparts.”⁹ Without access to quality summer programs, elementary aged students are at risk of falling farther behind in the next year of school, potentially impacting their overall academic performance. Summer experiences may be a key factor in short- and long-term achievement gaps in students from a lower socioeconomic status.

Most elementary aged students from middle to upper socioeconomic backgrounds spend the summer attending camps, visiting the library, zoo, or local museum, reading books with their parents, traveling, etc. These activities, while not explicitly academically focused, contribute to their continuing knowledge outside of the classroom. It has been shown that children from disadvantaged families live in a home with fewer books than children who come from a family with more wealth, putting these children at a disadvantage in school because their reading and

⁸ Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson. “Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap”. 167-180.

⁹ Burkam, David T., Douglas D. Ready, Valerie E. Lee, and Laura F. LoGerfo. "Social-Class Differences in Summer Learning Between Kindergarten and First Grade: Model Specification and Estimation." *Sociology of Education* vol. 77 no. 1, (2004) 1-31.

verbal skills are behind those of their advantaged peers.¹⁰ Literacy programs and access to reading material is especially important during the summer months.

Compare this to the summer of a low income student who lacks these resources to continue education outside of school. Many of these students spend the summer in front of the television, shuffled between childcare facilities, or worst case scenario, hanging around with gangs in their neighborhood. The Senate meeting cited statistics that cutting summer programs for low income students makes recruiting easier for gangs “because thousands of students will have no place to go when the school year ends.”¹¹ The problems with summer learning loss extend well beyond the classroom and require the attention of the government and education reformers. Speakers at the Senate hearing spoke to the influence of summer learning loss on the achievement gap stating “the cumulative effect of summer slide over the years...will account for virtually all of the achievement gap at the end of high school.”¹²

The 2002 Senate hearing acknowledges the issue of summer learning loss as a legitimate concern for the American Education system. Their presentation of the issue meshes nicely with John Rawls’s theories about equality of opportunity and our social responsibility to provide all citizens with a chance to succeed. Equality of education is a critical aspect to someone’s ability to become a fully functioning member of society, and “the special importance and unequal distribution of... educational needs, are acknowledged by connecting the needs to institutions

¹⁰ John Schater and Booil Jo. “Learning when school is not in session: a reading summer day-camp intervention to improve the achievement of exiting First-Grade students who are economically disadvantaged”. *Journal of Research in Reading* vol. 28 issue 2 (2005) 158-169.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Hon. Christopher J. Dodd. Opening Statement, Senate Hearing. (2002) 1-3.

that provide for fair equality of opportunities.”¹³ Opportunity remains the primary social good, but education has become a large part of that, as it is needed to obtain high levels of success. Rawls is primarily concerned with the opportunity to pursue careers, an impossible goal without education. According to Rawls, as a nation we have a responsibility to provide those who lost in the so called, “social lottery,” and make up for the disadvantages they were born into. The argument is that “any birth advantages from the natural and social lotteries are morally arbitrary, because they are not deserved, and to let them determine individual opportunity, and thus reward and success in life, is to make the outcomes arbitrary.”¹⁴ It is up to those who are able to provide fair equality of opportunity, and access to quality education is a step towards promoting normal functioning.¹⁵ Providing all children access to academically enriching summer programs can be read in the vein of Rawls’s theory of equal opportunity, but does not “correct for all differences in talent and skill,” but rather “aims only to keep people functioning normally and thus to assure the range of opportunities they would have had in the absence of disease or disability.”¹⁶

Why Elementary School?

Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds suffer from a wide range of challenges that makes it difficult for them to perform as well in school as their classmates who come from a wealthier background. While the public education system in the United States is intended to provide students with an equal platform to succeed in education and life, the playing field is

¹³ Norman Daniels, *Just Health: Meeting Health Needs Fairly* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 57.

¹⁴ Daniels, *Just Health: Meeting Health Needs Fairly*, 58.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

hardly level. Low socioeconomic status students start school behind their higher-SES peers; “1.3 standard deviations lower than high-SES children in their kindergarten-entry math skills, nearly two-thirds of a standard deviation below in teacher ratings of attention skills, and one-fourth of a standard deviation worse in terms of teacher-reported antisocial behavior.”¹⁷ Starting behind makes it difficult to catch up, especially when the negative effects of a low SES environment outside of school is not accounted for. There are many education policies aimed at making low income student’s educational experience as productive as possible, but few that focus on the summer months when these students are not enrolled in school. The almost three months of summer have a huge impact on students, especially elementary aged students who are in the midst of a critical learning period. If a child has a positive and enriching early education they are more likely to complete more school, graduate from high school, attend college, and more fully participate as a fully functioning member of society. The summer learning gap is a serious problem in the American education system that is not getting the attention it deserves.

Summer school is not often praised as positive; in fact, it is often thought that the students attending summer school have either fallen behind in school and are sentenced to a summer of remedial education, or students who are gifted and want to spend the vacation months furthering their already advanced knowledge. While these stereotypes have some validity to them, the real purpose of summer school lies somewhere in between these two extremes. Every elementary school student needs some form of academic engagement over the summer, and the American education system had a duty to provide that. No Child Left Behind made a promise to

¹⁷ Greg J. Duncan and Katherine Magnuson, “The Nature and Impact of Early Achievement Skills, Attention Skills, and Behavior Problems” in *Whither Opportunity: Raising Inequality, Schools, and Children’s Life Chances*, ed. Greg J. Duncan and Richard J. Murnane. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011), 47.

provide the resources necessary for all students to achieve academically, and the summer vacation months need to be included as a part of this pact.¹⁸ The current state of the economy has forced school districts across the country to cut billions of dollars from education, including eliminating a good number of summer school slots, or even summer school programs all together. As of 2002, over a decade ago, New York City cut over 75,000 spaces in summer school programs.¹⁹ That means 75,000 children no longer have a plan or a place to spend the summer safely, and that number has only continued to rise in the decade since the Senate hearing. If school districts focused on summer learning loss as a potential to mitigate the socioeconomic achievement gap, they could repurpose or redistribute existing funds to create programs targeted at summer learning loss. Budgeting for the school year is difficult, but investing in the summer could lessen the amount of tutors and special programs aimed at getting low income students back on track during the school year. The need for adequate summer resources for all students enrolled in public school in the United States is critical. If this issue can be properly addressed, it has the potential to reduce the severity of many additional education woes, like dropout rates and narrowing the achievement gap.

The widening of the achievement gap resulting from the summer slide produces both short-term and long-term effects. Students who fall further behind over the summer start the next year unprepared to learn new material, thus falling even further behind. This cycle continues year after year until a student fails, drops out, or quits trying. The lack of affordable summer programming options available to disadvantaged students poses a serious threat to their overall

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

success in school. Literature supports the theory that that cross social lines learning gains are more equal during the school year, suggesting that a child's "out of school environment" plays a role in learning inequality when school is not in session.²⁰ That particular study goes on to conclude that summer learning differences in elementary school help explain the achievement gap in later years. Geoffrey D. Borman supports this conclusion noting that this information "may have tremendous implications for educational equality."²¹ These studies show that attention must be paid to summer inequality as it directly impacts equality in the classroom and academic success.

Causes of Summer Learning Loss in Low-SES Students

Summer Slide is not Just for Students

Negative effects of the summer slide are not experienced exclusively by students, many parents and guardians struggle with the dramatic schedule change. For most working parents, school doubles as daily childcare, so when their child is on summer vacation they are faced with the issue of finding an alternative, and affordable, source of childcare. Often, quality childcare is too expensive so parents leave their children with grandparents, neighbors, older siblings, or simply in front of the television. There are also many instances, especially in the case of single parents, where they are no longer able to keep their job while their child is out of school. This means risking the ability to provide food, rent, and other basic necessities.²² For many low-SES

²⁰ Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson. "Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap". 168.

²¹ Borman, Geoffrey D. "The Effects of Summer School: Questions Answered, Questions Raised." *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* vol. 65 no. 1. (2000): 123.

²² Ibid.

students, school serves as their primary provider of food, care, education, and nurturing. For example, students who receive free and reduced price lunch during the school year lose that resource in the summer. Even if a parent finds affordable child care, it is unlikely that it provides the necessary academic enrichment needed to maintain the level of learning a child ended the school year with.

The Neighborhood Effect

Academic success goes beyond the classroom and extends to all aspects of a student's life. Elementary aged children need the support of their school, classmates, teachers, family, and community in order to achieve their maximum potential in school. When these areas are lacking in support, the student's academic success suffers. The neighborhood and community a child grows up in has an important impact on her academic achievement; "life circumstances that undercut school readiness are ever present in young people's lives."²³ The contribution that parents and neighborhoods make when school is not in session influences the extent to which a child experiences the summer slide.²⁴ "Children are "in" their homes and communities year-round, but are "in" school only part time."²⁵ Advantaged students most likely live in safe neighborhoods with other children, and have access to summer programs that keep them mentally engaged. Low income students do not necessarily have the same safety net in their neighborhood. Many spend the summer in some form of low-cost childcare, and many times television is used as a babysitter. Children who live in low-income neighborhoods are more

²³ Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson. "Schools, Achievement, and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective". 172.

²⁴ Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson. "Schools, Achievement, and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective". 171-191.

²⁵ Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson. "Schools, Achievement, and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective". 172.

likely to be around adults who did not complete high school and therefore are not advocating for their children to graduate or go on to higher education. For them, school is often the safest and most stable location in their lives, but that stability is gone in the summer. Education reformers and policy makers need to recognize that the summer months are critical for closing the achievement gap. The summer slide can be attributed to more than a hiatus from school and school work. The environment in which students spend this time away from the classroom plays a significant role in how behind a child will fall during the break.

Suggested Methods of Reform: An Analysis of Two Policies

Summer School

Education reformers and policy makers have long understood that socioeconomic status significantly affects a student's educational opportunities and achievement level. One of the most common summer programs available for under-performing students is mandatory summer school. The students placed in these programs are those whose academic performance during the school year was below what was needed to move on to the next grade. Many of the summer school classes offered are considered remedial and are intended to "introduce accountability into public education" and have been adopted by public school systems in almost every urban area in the United States.²⁶ Students who fail year end tests are enrolled in summer classes for four to six weeks in order to promote them to the next grade level. Economist Jordan D. Matsudaira argues that there is "no credible evidence...supporting summer school's effectiveness in raising student

²⁶ Jordan D. Matsudaira. "Mandatory summer school and student achievement". *Journal of Econometrics* vol. 142 (2008) 829.

achievement.”²⁷ While these mandatory classes may allow a student to move on to the next grade, there is little proof that participation in the program will have any long term effect on their academic success or in closing the achievement gap. Another thing to consider is that the students who participate in mandatory summer school are already the bottom performers in their grade level. Regardless of the effectiveness of end of grade tests, if a child fails a section of it, that indicates a significant gap in their education level as compared to other students in their school district. In his research, Matsudaira finds the effects of summer school to be heterogeneous but small, “the measured impacts of summer school range from a low of -.03 standard deviations for 3rd graders...to .24 standard deviations for 5th graders.”²⁸ These findings are at odds with previous studies about summer school, and Matsudaira acknowledges that more research needs to be done in order to determine the truest effects of summer school on summer learning loss. He concludes that older students benefit from summer school more than those in early elementary school, suggesting that this method of summer intervention may not be the most beneficial for under-performing students.²⁹

While summer school may seem like the most obvious choice for under-performing students, it does not necessarily provide a supportive community that promotes comprehensive learning. Students enrolled in these classes are taught the subject they failed on the test with the goal to learn just enough to then pass the test at the end of the summer. By focusing solely on the standardized test, this program eliminates necessary aspects of a comprehensive summer experience. Think of the advantaged students who spend their days and weeks visiting museums

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Matsudaira. “Mandatory summer school and student achievement”. 848.

²⁹ Ibid.

and going on trips. Their summer experience will be shaped by events that engage, interest, and foster learning; while the failing children are required to relearn a specific subject until they can pass the standardized test. While it is important for a child who is failing at the end of the year to master that information before moving on to the next grade, mandatory summer school is not necessarily the most effective solution. Policy makers and school districts prefer this method because it is cost effective and is facilitated by its own selection process. The end of grade test serves as a filter for students who do and do not need to attend summer school, making it easy for a school to pick out the exact students who need to relearn an exact subject. This process does not consider the students who pass the end of grade test but do not have access to any summer programs, including students who barely pass and are at a greater risk for falling behind the next year. This type of student spends the summer without academic stimulation and will suffer the most at the start of the next school year. Mandatory summer school for failing students has a deliberate purpose in the public school system, but it does not provide quality summer programs to all disadvantaged students.

Changing the Academic Calendar

Another form of intervention that has been studied is the year round schooling calendar. The main argument for this drastic form of intervention is that it eases many of the problems currently plaguing the public education system. These issues include overcrowding, teacher shortage, and declining test scores.³⁰ Much of the research in this area, including the Gandara and Fish study, concentrates year round schooling in a small targeted area and has yet to be

³⁰ Patricia Gandara and Judy Fish. "Year-Round Schooling as an Avenue to Major Structural Reform". American Educational Research Association vol. 16 no. 1 (1994) 67-85.

tested on a large scale. The belief is that a year round school will eliminate the detrimental effects of the summer slide and increase accountability of both teachers and students.³¹ The program completely restructures the school year calendar in order to eliminate long stretches of time away from the classroom. Teacher pay was increased by twenty percent to accommodate for additional hours. This change proved to be one of the most successful aspects of the program, resulting in waiting lists for teachers who wanted to teach at these schools.³² The overarching goal of this program was to “enhance the education of the most ‘at risk’ learners without compromising the education of the total student body”; essentially to establish a year-round system of educational equality.³³

While this program experienced success, the reality of restructuring the school calendar in a single school district, let alone an entire state, is unrealistic. A year-round school calendar does eliminate the problem of the summer slide, and in a perfect world schools would operate this way. However, it is already difficult to make small changes in the public school system. A radical change, such as this one, would be nearly impossible to implement. The specificity of the calendar used in the study allowed teachers to control and customize their time in the classroom ensuring the most effective use of their time. This study represents an ideal system that maximizes efficiency of resources and provides quality education to all students who participate. While not realistic for large-scale use, new charter and magnet schools could use this system in order to attract students. The year-round schedule also benefits parents who work as it decreases

³¹ Gandara and Fish. “Year-Round Schooling as an Avenue to Major Structural Reform”. 67-85.

³² Gandara and Fish. “Year-Round Schooling as an Avenue to Major Structural Reform”. 82.

³³ Gandara and Fish. “Year-Round Schooling as an Avenue to Major Structural Reform”. 67-85.

the need for childcare. Support for year-round schooling remains relatively small, but there are several considerable benefits from the system, and it is something for policy makers to consider.

Policy Suggestions

Literacy Based Summer Program for all Elementary School Students

The problem of summer learning loss is clearly plaguing the American education system. There is some attention directed towards the problem and a few policies that are making headway, but there has yet to be any real force behind a nationwide federally funded summer program. Evidence shows that reading comprehension and literacy levels are the most likely to suffer over the summer break, which makes a literacy based policy a strong starting point.³⁴

Year-round schooling and mandatory summer school are both intense approaches to closing the summer achievement gap. Year-round schools drastically alter the current system, while mandatory summer school is based off of the failures of the students enrolled. Researchers have studied a less invasive, more positive method of engaging all children during the summer months: a literacy focused summer program that is available to all students, regardless of their academic performance or socioeconomic status. Several of these programs have been instituted in small areas, but the potential to expand the program over a large area makes it an attractive option for a state to consider. The idea is that these programs are “supplemental rather than fundamental,” meaning they are not geared towards a test or school curriculum, but rather a way to engage students academically over the summer months.³⁵ In elementary school, reading is the

³⁴ Alexander, Entwisle, Olson, “Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap,” . 171-191.

³⁵ Denise A. Malach and Robert A. Rutter. “For Nine Months Kids Go to School, but in Summer This School Goes to Kids”. *The Reading Teacher* vol. 57 no. 1 (Sept. 2003) 51.

foundation for learning, and if a child struggles to read, he is guaranteed to struggle in virtually every aspect of school. Students who begin elementary school with a lower level of reading tend to finish elementary school with below average reading skills.³⁶ It is for these reasons that a literacy based program would benefit all elementary school students. It would allow students who are behind in reading level to catch up and strengthen their skills, while allowing more accelerated students to read independently of a class and explore what interests them. All students, regardless of socioeconomic status, experience some level of summer reading loss.³⁷ Creating a summer literacy program for all public school students would help lessen that loss, ensuring students return to school in the fall with the same, if not better, reading skills than they had at the beginning of the summer.

Anna's Arts for Kids is an example of a literacy based summer program for disadvantaged and underperforming students in New Orleans, Louisiana. The program runs for four weeks, two in June and two in July and primarily serves children from the Seventh Ward, a low-income neighborhood that is still reeling from the effects of Hurricane Katrina. Anna's Arts serves as an extension of the after school program run by St. Anna's Episcopal Church. During the school year students enrolled in the program spend every weekday afternoon and all day Saturday at the church getting help with homework, reading books from the library, and spending time in a safe environment. Many of these children come from families in distress and often times are exponentially better off spending these hours in a cramped classroom in an old

³⁶ Ellen Edmonds, Cathleen O'Donoghue, Sedra Spano, Robert F. Algozzine. "Learning When School Is Out". Thesis. University of North Carolina, Charlotte, 2008. (Heldref Publications, 2008), 213-221.

³⁷ Shater and Jo. "Learning when school is not in session: a reading summer day-camp intervention to improve the achievement of exiting First-Grade students who are economically disadvantages", 158-169.

church than at their own homes. Students who participate in the afterschool program are highly encouraged to enroll in the summer program and receive a discounted rate of twenty-five dollars for the entire program. Often times the payment is never received, but the child is still accepted and welcomed. In the summer, the program relocates to the Tulane and Loyola campus in uptown New Orleans. For many of the students in the program, this is the first time they have ever stepped foot on a college campus. The summer program splits the day in half, focusing on reading and academics in the morning and arts and enrichment activities in the afternoon. This system strikes a balance allowing the students to not only make academic progress, but also to experience exposure to information and activities they would not have access to at home. The morning classes are first broken up by age and grade level and then adjusted for skill. Each class is limited to ten students, some having as few as six. Such small class sizes allow for significant individual attention, something most of these children do not receive at school or at home. The classes read one book a week taking time to thoroughly evaluate the characters, vocabulary, and historical significance of the story. The books chosen hold some sort of significance to the students, for example, one book told the story of Louis Armstrong's childhood growing up in poverty in New Orleans. The afternoons are spent rotating between music, dance, theater, martial arts, and drumming lessons, as well as recreational time. The combination of an academically focused morning and enrichment based afternoon fully engages and encourages the students to make connections on their own.

By the end of the summer, Anna's Arts participants have a greater sense of their place in the New Orleans community, their abilities as a student, and their personal power to direct their education. The rising third graders took a particular interest to the book about the Lost Boys of Sudan and decided to spend extra time learning about the geography of the area, the Sudanese

Civil War, and the plight of the Lost Boys. The class went above and beyond what was planned out in the curriculum because they were personally interested in the topic and had the desire to learn more. The beauty of a summer program like this is that the students have the freedom to explore what interests them and dictate their own education, without realizing it. The arts component proved to be an additional source of inspiration for the students. Often if a student was reluctant to write about a book, they were asked to draw pictures and then write down an explanation. The level of detail applied to this process was far greater than if they were simply told to write. The freedom that came with drawing encouraged students to critically think about the questions in a format that did not feel discouraging.

While this program is not run through the public education system, its framework is something that could be adopted by the public schools. The literature about literacy-based summer programs suggests that this is a cost effective way to reduce the effects of the summer slide in low income students. If the public schools were able to implement such a program, they should expect to see immediate results as well as long-term benefits such as an increase in high school graduation rates. While the afternoon enrichment component of Anna's Arts is not something that could be recreated nationwide, monthly gatherings or demonstrations at schools could be organized state by state or in individual school districts. Another way to extend the program would be to partner with Public Libraries. Students could track their process and expand their access to literature during trips to the library. School busses that are not in use could be repurposed to make trips to libraries, eliminating the burden from working parents and guardians. Access to a library's vast resources encourages students to investigate topics that interest them and direct the trajectory of their summer reading. The program can be customized by each school district in order to best serve the population.

Another literacy-based summer program, Continued Connections, has similar goals to Anna's Arts for Kids but is implemented in a different way. This program, executed at Nicolet Elementary School in the Midwestern United States, was conceived as a way to prevent significant declines in reading levels of their students in the summer between first and second grade.³⁸ The hope was the Continued Connections would “preserve agreed upon classroom philosophies and draw upon existing structures” in order to maintain, if not advance, students reading levels over the summer.³⁹ The program was not intended to replace existing summer school or compete with library reading programs, but instead to continue the reading habits of all students. Continued Connections focused on the reading program that they used during the school year, named ZIP because students often carried reading materials in plastic bags that zipped. The summer program was designed by teachers and other faculty members who had close contact with students during the school year and knew exactly the areas they needed to focus on.

Continued Connections was originally conceived as a “school-bound program,” but that raised concerns about reaching the most disadvantaged students.⁴⁰ The issue was that students whose parents are already estranged from the typical school setting would not participate because their parents were wary of enrolling in yet another public education program. Continued Connections solved this problem by reorganizing the program and focusing on making it “available and in settings that allow easy access and simplified intake, and [were] respectful,

³⁸ Malach and Rutter, “For nine months kids go to school, but in summer this school goes to kids”, 50-51.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

culturally competent and empowering.”⁴¹ After receiving funding from a state-funded education group, Continued Connections hired three teachers to work with the program daily. Books from the school, that typically go unused in the summer, were used to stock a converted recreational vehicle (RV) to serve as a mobile classroom. The RV drove around to five geographical areas within the school district, one a day each weekday, and reduced the number of weeks these students went without constructive reading programs during the summer to two. The program received permission slips from parents before the end of the school year during a mandatory meeting, ensuring 100 percent participation among the targeted group. Each child had the opportunity to meet with a teacher who constructed a lesson specifically for his reading level. The program also fostered a sense of academic independence in the students, encouraging them to write book reports if they wanted, or to get their parents involved. Of the targeted students, 76% improved or maintained their end-of-first-grade reading level.⁴² This modest intervention program garnered results, and is both cost-effective and time-efficient and a good example of how even a little bit of intervention makes a big difference.

A nationwide literacy program would be the ultimate goal, but in order to achieve this, small pockets of initiatives need to be implemented first. These test programs would be funded from all branches of government, federal, state, and local, and then closely monitored in order to develop a system that could be widely implemented. The initial program would allow policy makers to identify what works and what does not, and funding from grants would allow some flexibility in the organization of each test program. Ideally this program would be staffed by

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Malach and Rutter, “For Nine Months Kids Go to School, but in Summer This School Goes to Kids”, 53.

teachers who would be paid in addition to their salaries at their school. It would be beneficial if these teachers could come together from schools within a district to strengthen relationships between schools. Having teachers from different schools adds a level of accountability for the teachers to produce their best work so they represent their school well. The labor market for teachers is not attracting the most qualified candidates, but the implementation of a program like this provides an opportunity to strengthen the economic viability of being a teacher. The program would be run out of the public school buildings and public libraries, but enrichment activities could take place on college campuses, college libraries, etc. While Anna's Arts has an ideal situation on the Tulane and Loyola campuses, that is not a practical option for most school districts. Keeping the programs within the school system is the most practical option for the state. Continued Connections found a way to reach their students by converting an RV, and similar creative measures could work. Smaller school districts could congregate in one location if needed, and students would have the option to attend the summer program at a different school than the one they attend during the school year.

A literacy-based summer program for all public school students is an ideal policy for the federal government to explore. The funding would come from the government and could be supplemented with individual states budgets. If such a program were to be implemented, the United States could expect to see significant improvement in elementary school reading levels, and in the long run increased graduation rates and matriculation to higher education.

Summer literacy programs would greatly benefit the American Education System, as well as the achievement levels of our students. Targeting these programs at low-SES students is necessary; however, all students enrolled in public elementary schools would have access. Much

like Continued Connections, parents and guardians need to be informed of the initiative during the school year, so the transition to summer is as smooth as possible. While the program would not be mandatory, it would be organized and presented in a way that makes it an attractive option for working parents as well as stay-at-home parents. Creating a universal summer program addresses Rawls's call to be responsible for ensuring equality of opportunity. Education is the foundation of long-term success and is critical to becoming a productive, fully functioning, member of society. Addressing this serious gap in education equality will put our nation's children on a more consistent path to success.

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