



Summer & Afterschool Learning: Insights From GLR Communities

DRAFT Prepared for Discussion and Development

PRACTICE BRIEF #2

THE PROBLEM

Research indicates that children of low-income families typically experience well-documented setbacks in academic performance during the summer months. These learning losses are particularly acute during each summer of the early grades (K–3rd) and are especially significant in the area of literacy and language development. Similarly, the afterschool hours are a time when children of low-income families often face risks to their safety and on-track healthy development if they are unsupervised while their parents are at work.

The good news is that dozens of studies over the past two decades have confirmed the positive benefits that are derived from high-quality, comprehensive afterschool and summer learning opportunities. This includes both academic outcomes as well as other measures of social and emotional development, physical and mental health, and overall safety and well-being.

When communities come together to expand learning opportunities during the non-school hours, they can help mitigate learning loss and help ensure that more children have the support they need to experience early school success.

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STATES**

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on what's working to move
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afterschool learning

SOLUTIONS: WHAT'S WORKING IN GLR COMMUNITIES

This brief shares our analysis of 49 stories filed by 40 communities in 21 states and one Canadian province that focus specifically on what GLR communities are doing to move the needle on summer and afterschool learning.

The communities represented in the stories include six rural counties and/or small towns located in three states (Georgia, Iowa and West Virginia). The stories also feature large urban areas such as New York City and Detroit as well as countywide or regional efforts that include a mix of urban, rural and suburban populations. Roughly half of the stories included data reporting measurable progress on outcomes for low-income children based on pre- and post-test analyses.

We identified six broad strategies as being important ingredients in efforts by local GLR Campaigns to move the needle on summer and afterschool learning:

- 1** Positive messaging and community-wide mobilization about the importance of learning and reading during the summer and afterschool hours.
- 2** Intentional alignment and integration of literacy and language development across a variety of providers resulting in stronger, more engaging, comprehensive, multiyear programming.
- 3** Portfolio approach that includes targeted, differentiated learning opportunities to meet specific needs, address key transition grades and build a continuum of services and supports.
- 4** Actionable data that drives decision-making, builds shared accountability and galvanizes efforts to close gaps, expand access and improve quality.
- 5** Strategic, cross-sector partnerships that address barriers and garner support from both the usual suspects and unlikely allies.
- 6** Two-generation approach that supports parents as essential partners in engaging children in enriching, literacy-related activities at home and in their community; encouraging healthy eating and fitness; and using technology to facilitate ongoing learning.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT DOZENS OF STUDIES OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES HAVE CONFIRMED THE POSITIVE BENEFITS THAT ARE DERIVED FROM HIGH-QUALITY, COMPREHENSIVE AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES.

Strategy 1: Positive messaging and community-wide mobilization refers to large-scale efforts to develop an increasingly clear, prevalent and consistent approach to motivate everyone to do their part to transform the afterschool hours and the summer into seasons for literacy and language development. It includes using book distribution, rallies and events, and allies and spokespeople to generate excitement and inspire action. More than three-quarters of the stories filed by communities cited this strategy. Below are a few illustrations.

- In Kansas City, Missouri, Turn the Page KC hosts an annual Summer Reading Splash event for 2,000+ K–3rd graders at the Sprint Center. The gathering helps get kids excited about reading over the summer by giving them the opportunity to select and take home new books secured through a partnership with First Book. The event also helps mobilize and focus the activities of a wide range of partners and sponsors across the city. Read more [here](#).
- In Story County, Iowa, Raising Readers partners with Harrison Barnes, a hometown celebrity and former basketball player in the NBA, to sponsor a year-round literacy tutoring program with positive results. As a spokesperson and champion for literacy, Mr. Barnes also helps inspire other partners that now provide consistent summer enrichment and nutrition programs each year to children across four school districts. Read more [here](#).
- In Durham, North Carolina, Books and Beyond: Laundromats is turning the “downtime” families spend each week in laundromats into literacy enrichment opportunities. Book Harvest team members meet families where they are in the everyday places they go — in this case, the laundromat! — with regular storytimes and literacy programming as well as bookshelves filled with free children’s books that are available any time the laundromats are open. Read more [here](#).

Strategy 2: Intentional alignment and integration refers to efforts to promote collaboration across a variety of providers with a focus on incorporating engaging literacy activities into programs. It includes embedding staff with specialized literacy training and giving providers the opportunity to opt-in for common professional development and quality improvement systems designed to produce growth in educational and developmental outcomes. Nearly half of the stories filed by communities cited this strategy. Below are a few illustrations.

- In Grinnell, Iowa, Grinnell College is recruiting, training and placing AmeriCorps members into rural, school-based summer programs that have an extremely low, 1:3 adult to student ratio in order to provide individualized attention and support to children. The program model called SLICK (Summer Learning is Cool for Kids) began in 2015 and has steadily grown over the years to provide continuity in opportunities from one summer to the next. Read more [here](#).

IN REGINA, THEY ARE SCALING UP TWO-WEEK SUMMER READING CAMPS IN 22 LOCATIONS ACROSS SIX SCHOOL DIVISIONS WITHIN THE PROVINCE.

- In New Orleans, Louisiana, and Regina, Saskatchewan, the local GLR Campaigns led by United Ways are building community-wide summer collaboratives that infuse a common approach to literacy skills development across a variety of programmatic settings and contexts. In New Orleans, they are using Reader's Theater and the arts as a vehicle for integrating easy-to-use literacy activities into programs for 2,000+ 4- to 8-year-olds. Read more [here](#). In Regina, they are scaling up two-week summer reading camps in 22 locations across six school divisions within the province. The program provides struggling readers with intensive literacy support from experienced teachers with a 1:5 adult to student ratio. Read more [here](#).
- In Indian River County, Florida, the Moonshot Community Action Network functions as a force for alignment and integration across a variety of programs and strategies during the summer and afterschool hours. Their combined efforts to work with dozens of partners to deliver [Moonshot Academy Afterschool](#) programs, [Literacy on the Lagoon](#) summer arts & environment education camps, the [iRead Book Challenge](#), the [Book Em Partnership](#) with law enforcement and [Moonshot Bookmobiles](#) help ensure that literacy is a primary focus of afterschool and summer programming for K–3rd graders throughout the county.

Strategy 3: A portfolio approach refers to building a continuum of support and services over multiple summers that addresses critical transition grades and the need for both targeted and more universal approaches. It includes providing more intensive support for struggling readers as well as delivering priority access to those children who are most vulnerable. Nearly half of the stories filed by communities cited this strategy. Below are a few illustrations.

- In the Suncoast Region in Florida, The Patterson Foundation is supporting a four-county, comprehensive summer learning strategy, which includes a large-scale Summer Reading Challenge that reached more than 8,700 K–3rd graders from 74 different summer providers in 2019. Read more about the results [here](#). Their approach also includes a more intensive, full-day, six-week Summer Learning Academy (SLA) model now operating in 12 Title I schools in Sarasota County. Read more about it [here](#).
- In both Louisville, Kentucky, and Richmond & Petersburg, Virginia, the local GLR Campaigns are focusing on the critical, and often forgotten, summer between Pre–K and kindergarten. The United Ways in both communities are using the summer months to build a bridge between the early years and the early grades and to create well-designed program models and more seamless systems of care and support for children and their families. Read more about Camp Ready 4K in Louisville [here](#) and read more about Kindergarten Countdown Camp in Richmond and Petersburg [here](#).

- In Southeast Mississippi and Miami, Florida, the local GLR Campaigns are providing intensive differentiated instruction and tutoring during the summer months to help struggling readers. In Southeast Mississippi, they are using curriculum developed by the Barksdale Reading Institute to focus on improving phonemic awareness and reading comprehension skills. Read more about the results [here](#). In Miami, they are using an RtI (Response to Intervention) approach that involves specialized teams of educators, psychologists and reading interventionists in supporting student success. Read more [here](#).

8,700 K–3RD GRADERS

in the Suncoast Region of Florida took part in the Summer Reading Challenge in 2019.

Strategy 4: Actionable data refers to communities that engage in data-driven decision-making that builds shared accountability, galvanizes efforts to close gaps, expands access and improves quality. It includes building knowledge among key community leaders about precisely how many and which K–3rd graders are gaining, losing and maintaining learning over the summer months. The strategy also includes the utilization of common assessments and shared data platforms for reporting results and tracking progress. Over half of the stories filed by communities cited this strategy. Below are a few illustrations.

- In Dayton/Montgomery County, Ohio, and Detroit, Michigan, they have formed data collaboratives using common assessment tools to drive progress on key outcome areas. There are 14 afterschool and summer program providers working together in Dayton/Montgomery County and using the same set of performance metrics focused social-emotional learning, attendance, academic enrichment, family engagement and healthy lifestyles. The program partners use the same tool (the APT provided by NIOST) to collect and discuss data on a monthly basis to drive improvements in program quality. Read more [here](#). In Detroit, 313Reads coordinated training, assessments and technical assistance across a cohort of partners that joined together to produce gains on DIBELS assessments for 83% of the 801 children served. Read more about the results [here](#).

**IN SAN MATEO COUNTY,
OVER HALF OF THE STORIES
REPORTED DATA ON
MEASURABLE PROGRESS
FOR CHILDREN OF
LOW-INCOME FAMILIES**

- In San Mateo County, California, the Big Lift is partnering with BellXcel, the San Mateo County Libraries and seven participating school districts to provide Inspiring Summers to 1,500 students at nine sites. Participants attend four weeks of full-day camp. Morning classes are taught by credentialed teachers, followed by science, technology, engineering and mathematics learning activities. On average, Big Lift kids gain 1.5 months of reading progress each summer, instead of the usual two-month “summer slide”, for a net gain of 3.5 months each year. Read more [here](#).
- In Springfield, Massachusetts, the local GLR Campaign created a Community Data Warehouse that enables all of the city’s nonprofits, public schools, early childhood providers, and summer and afterschool program providers to share data measuring before- and after-program growth. The data are also used by librarians to determine the appropriate levels for books to recommend for particular thematic units developed by programs. Read more [here](#).

Strategy 5: Strategic, cross-sector partnerships refers to building relationships that address barriers to engagement in summer learning such as transportation, nutrition and scheduling. It also includes the pivotal role that public agencies (especially libraries, schools and parks & recreation departments) and private funders can play in promoting stronger, more coherent partnerships across communities. This strategy also involves using summer and afterschool programs to test new ideas and drive systems-level innovation. Nearly two-thirds of the stories filed by communities cited this strategy. Below are a few illustrations.

- The SAIL (Summer Adventures in Learning) model in Birmingham, Alabama, is a collaborative network supported by 39 funders that collectively award more than \$800,000 annually in support of 43 summer programs, which serve more than 2,500 students at 60+ locations across the city. SAIL conducts a common annual grant cycle with one grant application, common assessment tools and single set of reporting requirements for all providers. Read more [here](#).
- In Roanoke, Virginia, the public library system is taking the lead on expanding access to both nutrition and literacy activities during the afterschool hours, on weekends and during the summer. In partnership with Feeding Southwest Virginia, every library branch in the system now offers meals along with literacy activities through their Read, Feed, and Grow initiative, which served more than 10,000 meals during its first three months of operation. Read more [here](#).

- In Council Bluffs, Iowa, the school district is investing in expanding summer learning opportunities in partnership with community-based organizations through their Camp Summer Explore initiative. One of the most significant benefits they report is that teachers and principals are using the summer months as a laboratory for improving instruction during the regular school day and year. Read more [here](#).

Strategy 6: Two-generation approach refers to efforts to support parents as essential partners in engaging children in enriching, literacy-related activities at home and in their community; encouraging healthy eating and fitness; and using technology to facilitate ongoing learning. Nearly one-third of the stories filed by communities cited this strategy. Below are a few illustrations.

- In New York City, the United Way's Once Upon a Summer model is part of a comprehensive strategy that has resulted in growth in 3rd grade reading proficiency rates at their five partnership schools from 9% in 2013 to 48% in 2019. Parent empowerment and culturally responsive practices are two fundamental components of their model, which uses literacy enrichment activities to engage parents in learning with their children. Read more [here](#).
- In [Wake County](#) and [Pitt County](#), North Carolina, both GLR Campaigns are engaged in large-scale efforts to support parent success during the summer months. In Wake County, they are engaging parents and providing an opportunity for children from 130 schools to participate in self-selecting books to read over the summer months and tracking the impact of the program on DIBELS scores. In Pitt County, they are working with several partners to support an effort to mail books to children and families over the summer months and follow-up with them using the Kids Read Now model.

IN NEW YORK CITY,

five United Way partnership schools reported an increase in 3rd grade reading proficiency rate from 9% in 2013 to 48% in 2019

TAKEAWAYS

Below are key insights garnered from our review of these stories:

1

Summer reading and book distribution efforts need to be well-coordinated into community-wide “challenges” or consistently administered campaigns in order to derive maximum benefits and document results. Libraries, school districts, parks and recreation departments, nonprofits and families need to all be on the same page, promote the same messages and use the same materials.

2

Offering program providers incentives and opportunities to “opt-in” to access the same professional development, curricula, assessment tools, data systems, grant applications and/or reporting frameworks can help bring much needed coherence to what is often a fragmented summer landscape. Local funders can play a pivotal role in creating a more aligned summer system and a more collaborative programmatic ecosystem.

3

There is no substitute for well-trained adults who can provide intensive literacy support for small groups of struggling readers during the summer months as a targeted approach for students who need the most help to make up ground quickly. This is an underlying success factor across a variety of program models and approaches.

4

Investing in public agency partnerships between and among schools, libraries, parks and recreation departments, and public housing authorities can help unlock the potential of existing programs where children already are during the summer months. Communities that have focused on strategies to improve the quality of literacy and language development within existing programs are producing as positive results as those that focus on creating new programs from scratch.

IN ROANOKE, VIRGINIA, THE PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM IS TAKING THE LEAD ON EXPANDING ACCESS TO BOTH NUTRITION AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES DURING THE AFTERSCHOOL HOURS, ON WEEKENDS AND DURING THE SUMMER.

WE INTEND FOR THESE STORIES TO SERVE AS A STARTING POINT AND SPRINGBOARD FOR A MORE CONCERTED, NETWORK-DRIVEN EFFORT TO BRING ADDITIONAL ENERGY, TALENT, INNOVATION, AND IMAGINATION TO ADDRESS THE LEARNING LOSS CHALLENGE.

Some key questions we will be addressing in our upcoming Roundtable Conversation and follow-on Community of Practice on this topic include:

- How did communities actually do what's described above?
- What did it take to get so many funders and organizations to align and coordinate their efforts?
- What will it take to sustain their commitment when emergency needs and other priorities tug at their heart strings and purse strings?
- And what are the implications of what is likely to be the longest summer slide ever (the COVID-19 question)?

It is especially urgent to consider how we might collectively apply what's working to move the needle on afterschool and summer learning to the broader learning loss challenge created by COVID-19 pandemic. There clearly is an opportunity for us to think together about how to transform some of the practices outlined in this brief into effective approaches that can still be carried out virtually and/or as part of a physically distanced experience. We intend for these stories to serve as a platform and starting point for a more concerted, network-driven effort to bring additional energy, talent, innovation and imagination to:

- Mitigate the major challenge presented by an unprecedented increase in the number of children who will enter the 2020–21 school year without a full year of Head Start or pre-K;
- Reverse the potentially catastrophic learning loss being experienced by a large proportion of students who will not derive the full benefits of remote learning; and
- Seize this moment of heightened awareness of parents as teachers of last resort to elevate a commitment to embracing parents as essential partners in attaining good outcomes for their children.

- The GLR *What's Working Practice Briefs* are designed to be an actionable resource for GLR coalitions and leaders in communities and states across the network that are looking for relevant examples and ideas about what to implement, adapt, improve, and expand as they seek to move the needle on key measures of early school success.
- The Briefs in this collection contain curated content from 112 communities that filed more than 320 stories in early 2020 about what's working well and why. Each of the six Briefs is organized around one of the key impact areas that have been part of the GLR Campaign's Community Solutions Action Plan (CSAP) framework used by 300+ communities since 2012.
- The authors of each brief have both subject matter expertise and extensive experience working with and supporting GLR communities. In compiling these Briefs, we view our roles as that of active listeners, aggregators, and guides to the rich reservoir of content thoughtfully submitted by GLR coalitions. Our aspiration is to add value by making the lesson learned from communities involved in this work more accessible to and usable by others across the country.
- The Briefs are part of an overall strategy of the GLR Support Center to play an active role in lowering the geographic barriers to learning and reduce the high costs of duplicative trial-and-error that currently exist within the network.
- The Briefs contain a range of on-the-ground, illustrative examples of strategies, practices, and programs that have been implemented in all types and sizes of communities across the network. The GLR Campaign values both what can be learned from empirical research evidence as well as the wisdom derived from lived experience. The Briefs tilt more toward the latter.
- Rather than serving as an exhaustive, how-to guide on implementation, the Briefs should be used to prompt further exploration and inquiry. We anticipate that the content will be used to instigate a series of Roundtable conversations and Communities of Practice in the months ahead as we delve deeply into the What's Working question and encourage more ongoing rigorous analyses of what we've done, what we've accomplished, and what we've learned as a network.
- We intentionally include a "draft" stamp on all of the Briefs to signal our commitment to continue to refine and strengthen these publications over time.