

2 Teaching Kids How to Succeed in School

How education leaders can use summer programs to engage students and develop their confidence as capable learners.

Partnership for Children & Youth
November 2013





Summer Learning Helps Young People See Themselves as Capable Students

An increasingly powerful body of research points to the impact of non-cognitive factors—or social-emotional learning—on students' ability to benefit from the education they receive. As schools and districts in California develop their local plans for improving student achievement and school climate, addressing these less measurable aspects of student learning could be critical for meeting local improvement goals.

The research shows that desirable academic behaviors like going to class, doing homework, arriving ready to learn, and actively participating in class—all lead to better academic performance. These behaviors are in turn strongly affected by how young people see themselves: their confidence in their own abilities and their sense that they belong in school. New research also indicates that many related skills and capacities, such as grit, perseverance, and self-confidence can be explicitly taught.

In 2013, an extensive group of summer learning programs in California intentionally addressed these non-cognitive aspects of learning for thousands of children and youth. The evidence shows that the programs successfully implemented strategies proven to engage students in learning and to develop their sense of themselves as capable learners who belong and can succeed in a school environment.

Since 2009, the Summer Matters Campaign has assisted in the creation, operation, and evaluation of these types of high-quality summer learning programs. Their hallmark is an intentional synergy and balance between the remediation often found in traditional, district-run summer schools and the fun engagement of summer camps. (See the box for more about the Summer Matters Campaign.)

The district and non-profit leaders who oversee these programs and the staff who operate them support young people's social-emotional learning through a variety of strategies. Their work is grounded in youth development research and on-the-ground experiences. **The staff develop positive relationships with the children in their charge and help them develop and internalize their understanding of behavior and academic expectations. They create a low-pressure learning environment where risk-taking and effort can pay off. And they do these things in the context of a camp-like culture on a school site so that young people can experience a strong sense of belonging in that environment.**

This report describes some of the ways these programs are intentionally structured to support youngsters' social and emotional development. It also draws from program evaluations, survey data, and in-person observations that all provide evidence of the differences this experience can make for children and youth, including the likelihood that their beliefs and attitudes will carry over into the regular school year.

The programs successfully implemented strategies proven to engage students in learning and to develop their sense of themselves as capable learners who belong and can succeed in a school environment.



High-Quality Summer Learning Programs Supported by the Summer Matters Campaign

In 12 California communities, the Summer Matters Campaign has helped education leaders and their community partners create, operate, and refine a new breed of summer learning programs. The instructional strategies they use are strikingly similar to ones recommended for implementation of the Common Core. The programs focus on strengthening students' critical thinking skills, problem-solving ability, collaboration with their peers, and confidence in their own ability as learners.

The local education agencies offering these free summer learning programs depend heavily on their after-school providers to develop and operate the programs. That keeps operating costs down while building the skills and knowledge of after-school staff. In every community, credentialed teachers play important roles: coaching the program staff, reviewing curriculum, and/or teaching specific content. A variety of partners also contribute to the program, including local libraries, parks, and community-based organizations.

Evaluation and continuous improvement are integral to these programs, which serve elementary and middle-grade students. The programs set up specific student outcome goals such as improved reading fluency, stronger information-gathering skills, greater nutrition awareness, and practice at public speaking.

As partners in the Summer Matters Campaign, all of the programs also use a common tool to assess their quality. The Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs (CASP), created by the National Summer Learning Association, provides a set of metrics that program directors and evaluators use to continuously improve program planning and implementation. The programs work closely with a growing network of technical assistance providers around the state to get training and coaching to improve specific practices identified using the CASP.

With this intensive focus on quality, the Summer Matters partner communities have built model summer learning programs that are strongly supported by school leadership and community partners. Increasingly, statewide education organizations, superintendents, school board members, and the media point to these programs as the right way to do summer learning.



Summer Matters is an initiative of the Partnership for Children & Youth and its partners at The David & Lucile Packard Foundation, the National Summer Learning Association, ASAPconnect, FowlerHoffman, PR & Co. and Children Now.

Summer learning efforts are generously supported by funders including:

- The David & Lucile Packard Foundation
- Kaiser Permanente
- S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation
- Noyce Foundation
- PG&E
- Irene S. Scully Foundation
- The Fort Fund
- Give Something Back Office Supplies

An Intentional Focus on Social-Emotional Growth Pays Off for Young People



In the Summer Matters Campaign partner programs, there are no grades or traditional tests. Instead, culminating projects and performances provide students with a compelling reason to participate and work hard. A strong camp theme and culture support the students' sense of belonging and their development as self-confident learners who believe they can succeed. The low-risk environment is also designed to provide the type of emotional supports that help all children feel more confident at school.

Clear Expectations for Behavior—Coupled with Youth Development Strategies—Support and Motivate Students

The presence of a “camp-style” theme for the summer learning program can help staff put behavior expectations into a new frame, literally.

In programs run by LA's BEST, the elementary-age kids are introduced to the concept of “Fun Frames” - a set of behavior expectations that are in keeping with their themes. At Noble Elementary, for example, the staff worked with students to create lists of Expectations, Boundaries, Rewards, and Consequences. In keeping with the program's Super Heroes theme, a typical boundary was “Keep your super powers to yourself,” and one expectation was “Keep the bat cave clean.”

These were all combined with a set of program principles—honesty, leadership, bravery, and power—and coupled with encouragement to “Be incredible!”



*“Every second. Minute. Hour.
Bigger, better, stronger.
We've got power.”*

Student Chant Used During Opening Ceremony
at Noble Elementary.

In every room at the Central Enrichment Summer Adventures (CESA) program in Fresno, middle-grade students and summer program staff saw a color-coded poster reminding them of the Qualities of Leadership:



Student-written “lessons” related to these qualities also abounded on the classroom walls. “Greet others with respect and kindness.” “Offer opinions and participate in discussions.” “Note your surroundings and be respectful of peers and property.” “Engage in all activities and follow directions.”

When the staff saw young people demonstrating these positive behaviors, they gave them a bead of the corresponding color which the kids attached to their name badges. For the students, the Qualities of Leadership functioned as guidelines for behavior, predicated on the concept that leadership, broadly defined, applies to everyone. This message was consistent with themes of leadership from the novel *Gone*, a modern-day spin on the *Lord of the Flies*, which set the program theme. During the daily leadership segment of the program, students talked about the qualities they personally possess and used them as a shared vocabulary for discussing relationships and issues like bullying.

“Every kid can be a leader. We try to get all of them to promote good behavior and have a good attitude,” said one staff member, who works in an after-school program at the high school during the school year. He talked about the long-term change he sees in young people who have spent their summer at CESA. **“They make better decisions. I’m not saying we change all their lives forever, but they are doing better during the school year because they’ve been exposed to different things. We give all of them an opportunity to fit in. They actually want to come to school.”**

Results from the Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs

Programming builds skills, knowledge and behaviors through activities that blend academic and social-emotional development strategies throughout the day.



Combined Score
All Programs

Positive Reinforcement: All staff recognize movement toward group or individual goals, highlighting specific behaviors.



Behavior Management: An intentional, consistent behavior leadership style is led by both staff and youth, who hold each other to a jointly developed behavioral contract that defines expectations and consequences.



These scores are based on intensive quality assessments done for each program that measure the extent to which programs are intentionally implementing these strategies. Staff use the data to identify specific practices that need to be improved for the next summer. Score definitions: 1 = Basic; 2 = Emerging; 3 = Proficient; 4 = Exemplary.

Varied Opportunities for Success Nurture Students' Self-Confidence



In summer learning programs that blend academic and non-academic activities cohesively, every young participant finds lots of challenges but also at least one area where they can and do really excel. **This experience of being successful in front of their peers and in front of adults they respect builds confidence that carries over into the school year. The rewards are even richer when it's an activity that was new or daunting to begin with.**

At Will C. Wood Junior High in Sacramento, the 7th and 8th graders in the district's Summer of Service program choose a focus activity and then design a service project around it. Basketball, soccer, and break-dancing were among their choices. Some made their selection because they already had some skills, but for others it was a new experience. For these novices, the supportive culture of the program made learning a positive experience. One key component was the tone set by local high school volunteers who served as assistant coaches and mentors. Another was the kids' enthusiasm because they were doing something they chose. And yet another was their project of running clinics for the younger kids in their neighborhood.

The staff believe that the combination of choice and performance made the youth more engaged and, in turn more successful, which built their confidence. As the program director explained, "For the students in our community, having success at any activity is a really important experience, and one that builds their confidence for trying something else that is new or challenging."

It's a testament to all the Summer Matters programs that youth surveys showed nine out of ten participants in the summer of 2013 agreed with the statement: "If I work hard at something I will get better."

Across town, the Summer of Service participants at Sam Brannan Junior High gained particular confidence in public speaking. Each day of the summer program began with all 140 participants gathered in the school's multipurpose room. Divided into six groups, the students were charged with "debriefing" the prior day's accomplishments and talking about their objectives for the day ahead. This was largely focused on the service project each group was undertaking.

"For the students in our community, having success at any activity is a really important experience, and one that builds their confidence for trying something else that is new or challenging."



“As kids plan and work on their projects, they can see the timeline and realize how fast the time goes,” said one staff member. “They work toward interim and ultimate goals and use the morning debrief to tell everyone what they are doing. A lot of kids at first hesitate to talk in front of the group, afraid they’ll stumble over their words or make mistakes. We coach them from the back of the group, helping give them the confidence to do it. For example, we had a kid named Edwin. During the school year he was always one of the quiet kids. Seeing him now, he’s a lot more confident. He does his debriefing with a lot of humor. He has become a model for other kids in his approach to public speaking.”

Clear Learning Objectives Help Students Measure Their Own Progress

The integration of academics into the summer learning experiences also helps to build the youngest students’ confidence in their ability to do well in school. This is in part due to the process these programs use to clearly explain to the children what the learning objectives are for a given activity and to have them reflect on whether the objectives were met.

In the LA’s BEST program, the staff post each day’s learning objectives, and they tell the kids what those are. **“The kids pay attention,” said one staff member. “They internalize the goals and gain confidence when they achieve them.”**

At Hillcrest Elementary in San Francisco, Reading Partners manages the summer school and after school programming. Reading Partners provides literacy support for struggling readers in kindergarten through the fifth grade. As part of the unique planning for the summer program at Hillcrest Elementary, Reading Partners oversees a process of collecting books individually selected for each child based on his or her reading level at the end of the school year. The staff, the children, and their parents are all aware of the level and what a reasonable goal for improvement over the summer would be.

“The kids know where they stand as far as reading levels – they’re confident about it and proud,” said the program director. “There are celebrations when they increase their levels. Students continue to progress during the summer based on the reading level they achieved during the school year. They have access to leveled books and individualized instruction in the summer. Building their confidence and guiding them through reading is part of the program. We want to make sure kids are safe, not only in the environment but emotionally, with confidence in what they’re learning so they take responsibility for their own growth and achievement.”

The staff members in the Summer Matters partner programs are trained on how to use specific strategies to incorporate an intentional focus on learning objectives into every activity. Those strategies begin with providing clear directions for the activity. That is followed by discussions with students about how success will be achieved and measured and about the level of attention or interaction called for in a given activity. As needed, the staff restate or clarify things in order to keep students focused.

Experiences Build Children’s Sense of Belonging

Youth who attended these summer learning programs were surveyed at the end of the 2013 program and 85% agreed with the statement: “I feel like I belong here.” That is important because, for many of the children these programs serve, school can seem like a foreign land with traditions they don’t understand and a culture they feel excluded from. Further, many of these children have little opportunity to experience or feel a part of the larger community outside of their immediate neighborhood.

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Summer learning programs can build students' sense of belonging when the programs are rich with field trips, new experiences, and an intentional camp culture that makes the school site seem more inclusive and welcoming. They can also play a crucial role in smoothing students' transition from one level of schooling to another. In some of the Summer Matters middle-grades programs, supporting that transition is an explicit program goal.

At Lion's Pride Summer Academy, housed at East Oakland Pride Elementary, some of the children came from families that don't have cars. They had seldom left their own neighborhood. Field trips to the Oakland Zoo, the Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, and the San Jose Tech Museum showed them they were part of a larger community. Before each excursion, the staff made sure students knew something about their destination and understood how their field trip related to the science activities they had been doing in the program.

"It allows them to understand that what happens in the classroom has an impact in the world," one staff member explained. He used an example from a recent trip to the San Jose Tech Museum which came on the heels of a lesson the children had completed about electrical circuits. **"Our kids understood what they were seeing and made the connection to what they had learned. Even better, one boy ended up explaining to another child who happened to be at the museum what was happening and how circuits worked, including using the vocabulary he had learned doing the circuit lesson."**

Summer programs can also play a crucial role in smoothing students' transition from one level of schooling to another. In some of the Summer Matters middle-grades programs supporting that transition is an explicit program goal.

Camp Culture Puts Fun into the Learning Environment



For a summer learning program to strengthen a child's sense of belonging, it must first be a place they want to spend time. That means fun, and the Summer Matters Campaign partner sites make it a priority to create a "camp culture." An LA's BEST staff member quoted their summer program motto: "If you're not being silly, you're not doing it right."

The camp culture looks different in each place, depending on both the students and the staff. For elementary-age kids it was superheroes at one site and Dr. Suess characters at another. Middle-grade students had tribal chants and team rituals. The day might begin with everyone gathered for a quick trivia contest or an upbeat exercise video. The staff members were coaches at one camp, leaders at another, and heroes at another.



“I’ve really valued the summer culture idea,” said one program coordinator at an elementary school. “The kids just eat it up! They get pumped up for the competitions and really embrace the theme.”

Cognizant of the research that identifies students’ transitions out of elementary school as a high-risk time, programs that serve middle-grade students typically include youth in the incoming class. At Sacramento’s Summer of Service program, this support for transition was especially purposeful.

Sam Brannan Junior High has only 7th and 8th graders. Most of the students who attend its summer program are incoming 7th graders, and one of the program’s objectives is that each attendee build a relationship with at least two adults before starting school. One of the program’s first activities was geared toward this transition goal. In a school-wide scavenger hunt, groups of kids worked in teams to complete a list of sites and tasks. In the process, they found the attendance office and the gym, met the school principal, and ultimately learned their way around the large campus. The staff members report that having the summer participants able to share their knowledge with other students when school starts makes for a smoother beginning all the way around.

“The youth reported that their summer program helped them to enjoy learning and like school, taught them things to help with schoolwork, and helped them feel ready to go back to school.”

“Smoothing student transitions is a real benefit of this summer program,” said a member of the program management staff. “The staff gain knowledge of the kids they’ll be with, and that supports positive behaviors. We’re partners with the school.”

Student surveys underscored the staff perceptions, with about 85% of respondents from all programs reporting that they felt better prepared to enter school in the fall. The youth reported that their summer program helped them to enjoy learning and like school, taught them things to help with schoolwork, and helped them feel ready to go back to school.

Results from the Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs

The program creates a “summer culture” that is different from the school year and promotes a sense of community.



Combined Score
All Programs

Program Spirit: The program creates a spirit of community and pride among all young people through daily shared traditions, cheers, competitions, team designations, and awards.



Program Principles: The program principles create a camp culture through continuous communication of key ideals, strengths, or talents that describe participants and staff.



Culminating Event: A culminating event rewards youth for their success and gives all a chance to showcase their work or new skills for invited guests.



Staff/Youth Interaction: Program environment is characterized by mutual care and respect between all staff and all youth.



These scores are based on intensive quality assessments done for each program that measure the extent to which programs are intentionally implementing these strategies. Staff use the data to identify specific practices that need to be improved for the next summer. Score definitions: 1 = Basic; 2 = Emerging; 3 = Proficient; 4 = Exemplary.

A Safe, Low-Risk Environment—and Ample Support—Encourage Students to Try New Things

In almost every program, the staff members have stories of individual children who were reticent or completely withdrawn at the beginning of the summer. After a week or even less, these children clearly became comfortable enough to emerge as confident leaders and full participants in the program.

The students, based on their survey responses, feel positive connections to the staff. About nine in ten youth surveyed agreed that the staff members helped them to remember what they learned, like them, and listen carefully to what they say.

Many staff and program managers say that having small student-staff ratios and a full day together support these relationships. With 15 to 20 youngsters for each staff member and a five- to six-hour program, the staff get to know the students and vice versa. That builds trusting relationships, making it possible to successfully and intentionally address issues that often get swept under the carpet during the school year.

For example, at Fresno's CESA program, the leadership component described above moved into more emotional territory as the program progressed.

One activity was called "Crossing the Line." All of the students stood in a line, and the staff leader asked them to step forward when she described something they had experienced. One question was whether they had ever been teased when reading out loud. As the staff member recounted it, "About six kids stepped forward, and one was a student who stutters a lot and was teased at the beginning of the summer. He got all teary-eyed when he saw the others and had to step outside. 'It's not just me,' he said to explain his emotional reaction. He was overwhelmed by the fact that others had the same experience. As we've gone through the summer, he also has learned to slow down so he reads more fluently. And the other kids finally understood his disability and learned not to jump on him for it."

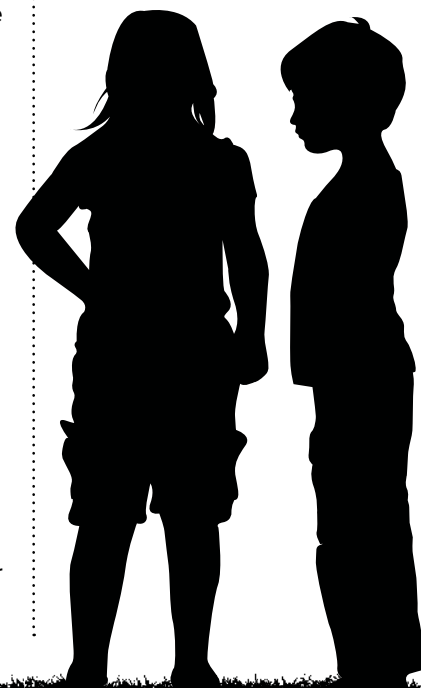
What students see as the most fun is that our program is different from the school year and from summer school. This is summer learning— kids are actively engaged in learning; they're happy."

The program manager at Hillcrest Elementary echoed comments from many programs when he said, "The children are just giving themselves to the day. They're relaxed and not on edge, they are ready to learn. The staff in turn is intentional about what goes into the lessons. We expect kids to be able to express what they're learning; the academic piece is in place. What students see as the most fun is that our program is different from the school year and from summer school. This is summer learning— **kids are actively engaged in learning; they're happy.**"

High-Quality Summer Learning Programs are Structured and Operated with an Emphasis on the Social-Emotional Skills That Support Student Learning

For after-school staff, working in the Summer Matters partner programs provided experiences that often gave them a new perspective on the young people they serve. They spent several hours every day responsible for the same small group of children or youth and for implementing a program where academic and social-emotional outcomes were equally important.

This experience changed the equation. The staff developed a stronger sense of their students' potential and the students forged stronger positive relationships with a set of young adults from their own communities.





The ages and backgrounds of the summer staff are one important element in the creation of successful high-quality summer programs. Most staff members are relatively young—in their late teens and early 20's—and from the same neighborhoods where the programs are offered. They often share the experience of having a first language other than English as well. As a result, they can connect with the program participants and act as role models in ways that are less likely with credentialed teachers.

Leveraging these relationships in a positive way does not happen by accident however. It requires that the staff learn behavior management techniques and are fully invested in the lessons they're teaching. The students feel and respond to their enthusiasm.

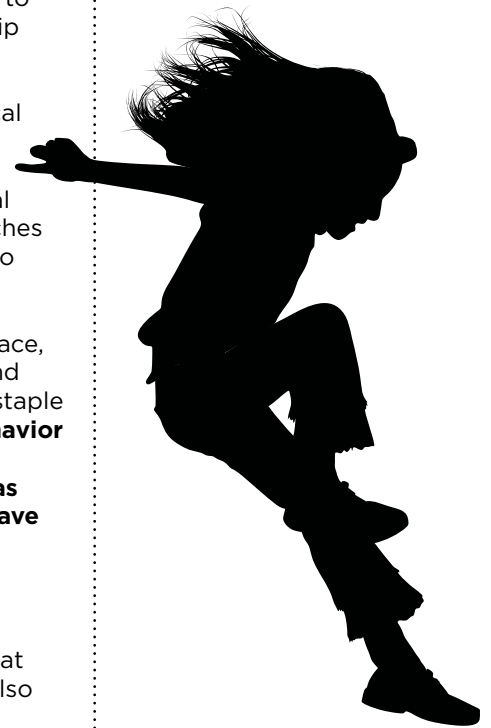
A further emphasis in the Summer Matters Campaign approach is youth choice, voice, and facilitation. Give students a choice in what they do, encourage them to voice their opinions and perspectives, and share with them the actual leadership and facilitation of the activities.

The skills needed to accomplish all of this are often not easy to master. Technical Assistance (TA) providers are an integral part of each program. They focus on developing the skills of the line staff so that they fully understand how youth develop and can plan activities that are appropriate to students' developmental levels as well as being relevant and meaningful. The TA providers serve as coaches for the staff, helping them to assess their own performance and identify ways to improve their approach.

Thus armed, the staff can take advantage of the deeper relationships, slower pace, and greater flexibility of the summer program to intentionally address social and emotional issues as they arise. Writing in journals and sharing out feelings are staple activities for the students. **In addition, conflicts between students and misbehavior prompt teachable moments. Using the program's shared vocabulary and expectations for behavior, the staff are expected to stop and address issues as they arise. When summer programs work well, the kids want to stay and so have an intrinsic motivation to get along.** Having a caring adult offer strategies and support for doing that can make all the difference.

The high-quality program models that have been tested and proven through the Summer Matters Campaign provide a new approach to summer learning that can improve students' engagement and sense of efficacy at school. They can also be a wise investment. For schools and districts making decisions about how to allocate scarce resources and improve student outcomes simultaneously, such programs could be a game-changing strategy for addressing students' social-emotional learning.

The staff can take advantage of the deeper relationships, slower pace, and greater flexibility of the summer program to intentionally address social and emotional issues as they arise.



School agencies differed in the configuration and operation of their summer programs

The Summer Matters programs vary significantly in terms of their structure and operation. The differences reflect existing structures related to after-school staffing and also the needs of their respective communities, including the preferences of local school agencies. In San Francisco Unified School District, each school designs its own program, and Hillcrest Elementary chose to be a partner in the Summer Matters Campaign. In Whittier City School District, the district manages its own after-school and summer programs, providing a consistent approach across all its elementary and middle schools.



“Project San Francisco” Summer Learning Camp

District: San Francisco Unified School District

Program management: Hillcrest Elementary with lead agency, Reading Partners

In keeping with SFUSD’s site-based approach to school management, the “Project SF” Summer Learning Camp was unique to Hillcrest Elementary. Hillcrest is a community school with a wealth of local partners. It runs its after-school and summer programs under the school principal’s leadership, with a site lead selected by the school.

Reading Partners, a nonprofit organization that specializes in one-on-one reading support for low-income students, functions as the lead agency for the school’s after-school and summer programming. In collaboration with Hillcrest leadership, Reading Partners provides curriculum support, program development and evaluation, as well as professional development for summer learning programs. SFUSD gives schools a choice of lead agencies and Reading Partners was chosen for three of the district’s after-school programs in 2013.

In 2013, the six-week summer program at Hillcrest served 175 students who had completed grades K-5.

The vast majority of the staff already knew each other and their students. This continuity is a main focus of the program. Staff members largely carryover from the after-school program and some also work as para-educators during the regular school day. Several are credentialed teachers. Educators spend several weeks before summer planning for the program—including developing new lessons and activities. All brought a diverse background and wealth of education experience; many had participated in other kinds of professional development such as behavior management training.

The summer staff had a full week before the program started to plan their program, including lessons and activities. Most had previously participated in other kinds of professional development such as behavior management training.

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Jump Start

District and program management: Whittier City School District – Program is run by the school district.

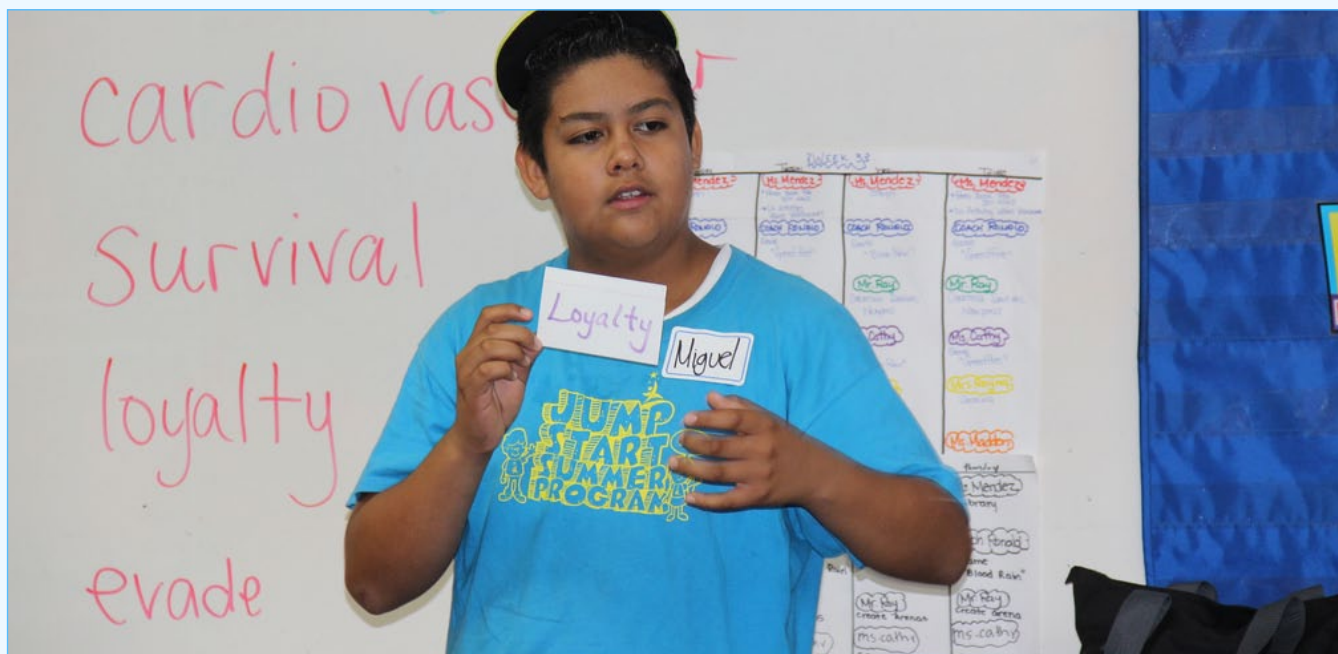
From the start in 1999, Whittier City School District committed to running its own expanded learning programs for its K-8 students. The effort has grown steadily, and the district introduced its summer program five years ago. While various community partners are involved, the district has maintained its management role.

In 2013, each of the district's six summer sites included after-school staff and one credentialed teacher. The program also hired coaches for physical fitness classes from a private Southern California group, ICES Education. Hiring for the summer began in November, and the district conducted periodic summer staff trainings throughout the spring. A major focus was lesson planning, which was organized by subject area. For example, the staff who taught art at all four elementary sites worked together to plan their classes, including the challenge of differentiating the lesson so it worked with kindergarteners on the one hand and 5th graders on the other. A credentialed instructional specialist assigned to the expanded learning program worked with each of the groups to help them develop and refine their curricula.

The summer programs use books to set the theme each year, with one for the elementary schools and another for the middle schools. They start with the theme chosen by the local public library, and in 2013, it was "Reading is Delicious." They then build all the camp activities around the books selected.

Every staff member and every student is conscious of the overarching program learning goals. In 2013, one of them was for all students to increase their reading fluency. At the middle schools that meant reading the chosen book together and infusing vocabulary development into every activity. Another goal was to provide more outdoor experiences. To further that goal, middle school students took a two-night trip to a nearby youth camp while elementary-age children took an all-day field trip.

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The Putting Summer To Work report series includes:

- Getting a Head Start on the Common Core
 - Teaching Kids How to Succeed in School
 - A High Impact Training Ground for Teachers and Staff
-

All are available for download at www.Summermatters2you.net/XXXXX.

At <http://summermatters2you.net> you will find a wealth of resources for school district leaders and program providers wanting more information about the Summer Matters Campaign and assistance in planning a high-quality summer learning program. Those resources include information about:

- Program design
- Funding and sustainability
- Assessment and evaluation
- Numerous research reports on summer learning loss and programs that address it.

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