



Summer Matters:

*How Summer Learning
Strengthens Students'
Success*



Made possible by a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

Prepared by Public Profit

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Source: Sacramento Summer Of Service, Student Poster, 2012

Executive Summary

Unequal access to summer learning and enrichment opportunities is a significant factor in the achievement gap between low-income students and their higher-income peers. This study describes how summer learning programs that provide high quality, engaging enrichment activities are a promising solution to this challenge and can help to narrow our unacceptable achievement gap.

This study examines the ways in which summer programs in three different parts of our state -- Fresno, Sacramento and Los Angeles -- benefitted children and their families. The study addresses a gap in the existing literature on summer programs in California by examining the extent to which youth attending high quality, academically, socially and physically enriching summer programs demonstrate improved pro-social attachments, academic self-efficacy and motivation, and English Language Arts proficiency.

- In Los Angeles, LA's BEST, a community-based organization, leads summer enrichment programs for children in elementary and middle school. Summer Matters sites use a set of thematically-based, week-long curricular units that incorporate hands-on activities that focus on building youths' literacy skills.
- The Fresno Central Enrichment Summer Adventures (CESA) program is led by the Fresno County Office of Education at the Central Unified School District. Each summer, CESA focuses on a single book, organizing academic, enrichment, and recreational activities around the book's characters and themes.
- The Summer of Service program in Sacramento is led by the District's Youth Development Supportive Services office. Summer of Service programs utilize a service-learning model, with a goal of increasing youth's school connectedness, understanding of civic responsibility, and engagement with their communities to support healthy lifestyles and environmental issues.

In the three Summer Matters communities profiled here, we find that youth made substantial improvements in their grade-level vocabulary skills, strengthened their connections to peers and adults, and sustained their academic habits and attitudes.

Improved Academic Efficacy and Sustained Academic Performance

- Participants ended the summer with vocabulary skills much closer to their grade level, increasing their Instructional grade level by over 1/3 of a grade on the San Diego Quick vocabulary assessment.
- English Learners across communities demonstrated statistically significant increases in their grade-level vocabulary skills, a gateway to English language fluency.
- Youth in Fresno and Los Angeles report increased academic work habits and reading efficacy, key contributors to academic achievement.
- Parents report that youth improved both their attitude towards reading (68%) and reading ability (62%).

Positive Relationships with Peers and Adults

- In Fresno, summer program participants were one-third less likely to be chronically absent in fall 2012 than their peers, indicating much greater engagement with school.
- Summer Matters participants demonstrated high and sustained school day attendance rates, which is critical for youth to succeed in school.
- In focus groups, parents report programs help youth prepare for the challenge of transitioning from elementary to middle school, a period when many youth begin to disengage from school.
- Nine out of ten parents report that the summer programs help their children to make new friends and get along better with other children. These social skills will help youth be more successful in school and beyond.
- Youth report that they have positive relationships with adults in the program and enjoy Summer Matters activities, reflecting the design of the programs.

Program Quality

- The quality of summer enrichment programs matters: youth who report high quality experiences in summer also report stronger work habits, reading efficacy, and social skills.
- Summer Matters programs are particularly good at providing engaging and interesting activities for youth while helping them to build strong, positive, relationships with peers and adults.
- Nearly all parents (98%) are satisfied with their children's summer program.

Based on these findings, this report concludes that summer learning programs are helping to sustain and improve academic skills, build strong connections to peers and adults, and reinforce positive work habits and attitudes.

About the Summer Matters Campaign

The hands-on activities that the staff create get the youth engaged. Staff are both professional and playful with the youth in the program.

-Summer Program Parent

The Summer Matters Campaign is part of the Packard Foundation's summer enrichment strategy, a seven-year initiative to expand and improve summer learning programs for young people in California, with a focus on children most in need.ⁱ For more information, see www.summermatters2you.net.

Since 2009, the Campaign has worked with a network of summer learning communities to build living, on-the-ground models of high quality summer programming in order to demonstrate and ultimately replicate high quality programs across the state. The 12 Summer Matters communities share a common commitment to:

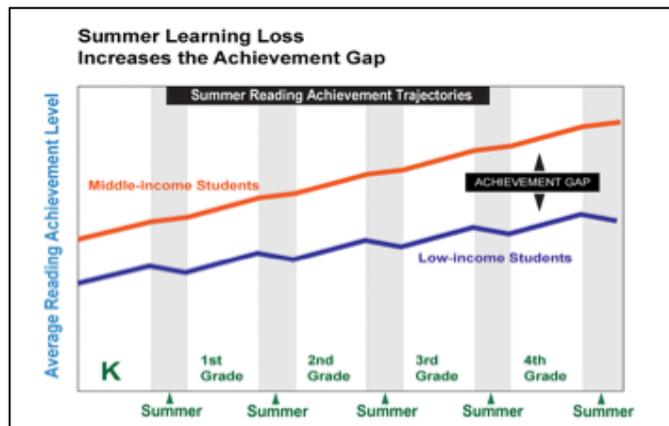
- Incorporating youth-focused reading and writing activities to combat summer learning loss;
- Retaining students in engaging, safe activities throughout the summer; and
- Promoting healthy, active lifestyles.

The programs considered in this study, all part of the Summer Matters initiative, were selected based on the quality of the programming they offer, and because they collectively represent a variety of program models. The three programs serve primarily youth from low-income communities, who traditionally have limited access to enriching summer experiences. The programs are taught by program staff, most of whom also work with the organizations' after school programs. Credentialed teachers also play roles in planning, training and coaching staff, and teaching.

Current Research

Studies show that the achievement gap between low- and middle-income youth is largely related to differences in opportunity during the summer. By the fifth grade, low-income children are 3 years behind their higher income peers in reading.ⁱⁱ This chart shows how the gap grows as children experience different opportunities in the summer.

A 15-year longitudinal study found that as much as two-thirds of the difference between low-income and middle-income youth in key academic success measures, such as participation in advanced coursework, high school drop out, and college completion rates, can be traced back to summer learning loss that occurred during elementary school.ⁱⁱⁱ



Source: Adapted from Borman (2000)

Part of this alarming trend can be explained by a meta-analysis from the RAND Corporation, which found that, “Children from lower-income families lost, on average, more learning specifically in reading comprehension and word recognition than children from higher-income families (who, in fact, made gains in word recognition)... Most disturbing is that it appears that summer learning loss is cumulative and that, over time, these periods of differential learning rates between low-income and higher-income students contribute substantially to the achievement gap. It may be that efforts to close the achievement gap during the school year alone will be unsuccessful.”^{iv}

Summer learning loss is cumulative:

- As much as 2/3 of the difference between low- and middle-income youth in academic success measures traces back to summer learning loss.
- Differential learning rates between low-income and higher-income students result in an achievement gap.

High quality summer enrichment programs can help schools address summer learning loss. The Afterschool Alliance (2010) describes well-designed summer learning programs as those that increase achievement, enhance motivation for and engagement in learning, and develop and nurture new skills and talents.

Closing the achievement gap requires both the objective to accelerate learning and a commitment to youth development.^v One example of a program effectively combining the two elements is the Better Educated Leaders for Life (BELL) Summer Program. The BELL Summer Program has demonstrated children participating over one summer not only develop a better attitude towards learning and gain 3 months or more in literacy and math skills, but also develop an improved self-concept.^{vi}

Summer programs emphasizing both academic and social enrichment lead to positive outcomes for students, including:

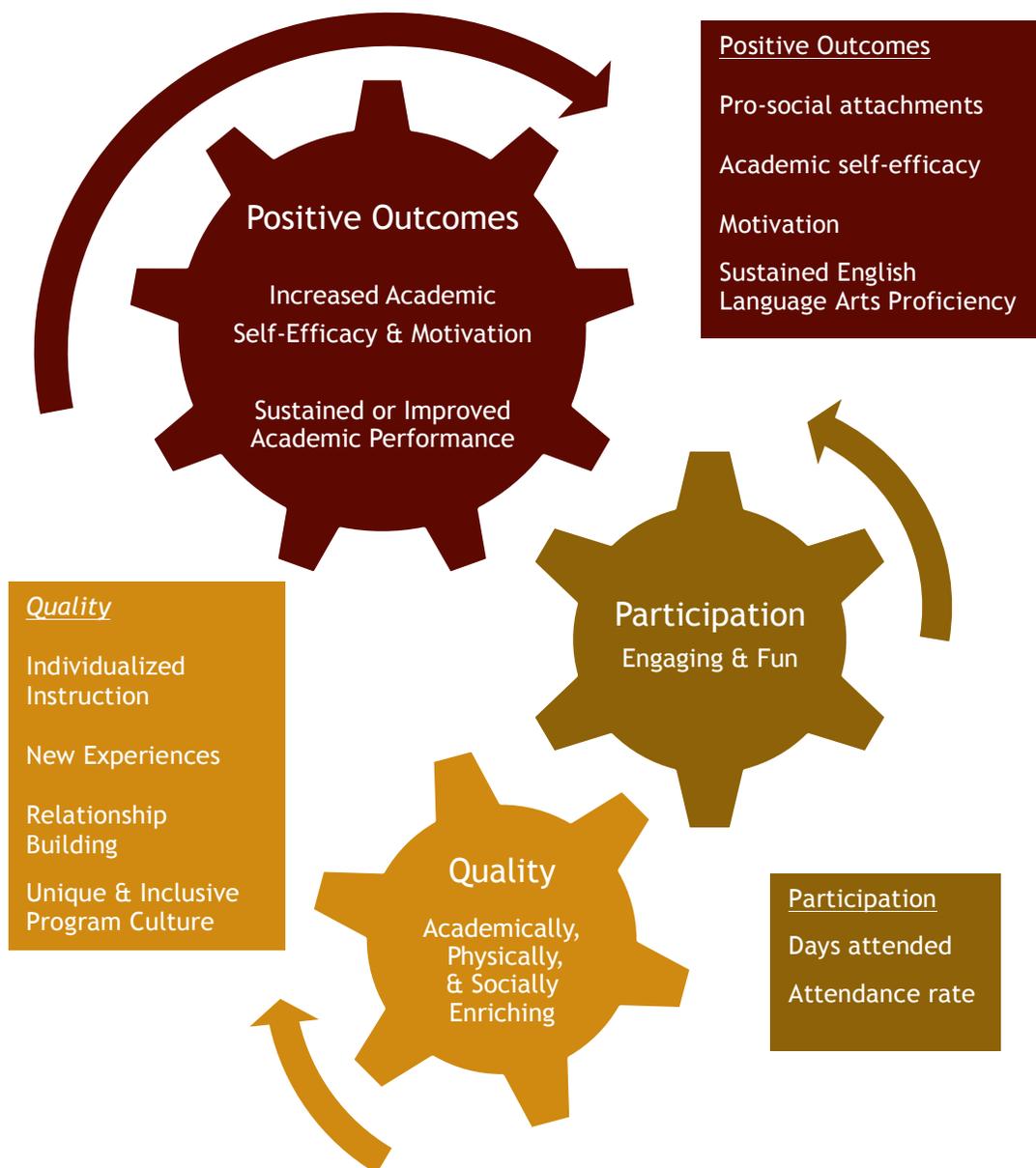
- Higher school-year attendance
- Increased motivation
- Increased feelings of belonging
- Less risky behavior

In contrast with the traditional remedial summer school model, summer programs emphasizing *both* academic and social components lead to positive outcomes for students: higher school-year attendance and achievement, increased motivation to learn, increased feelings of belonging, and reduced participation in risky behavior.^{vii} These positive outcomes are most likely to result when programs begin in the early grades, are offered over multiple summers, and focus on prevention and development rather than remediation.

Ensuring access to summer learning opportunities is particularly important for low-income youth. While parents from higher income families are likely to have the means to provide enriching and exciting activities for their children, for most low-income parents, this is not the case. Instead, children in low-income communities may spend the summer without the chance to attend enriching programs.^{viii}

Theory of Action

This study is guided by a Theory of Action which posits that summer learning programs can have a strong positive impact on children’s learning and development, leading to increased academic self-efficacy and motivation, which in turn contributes to higher academic performance. Youth are most likely to benefit when they are regularly attending a high quality program.



Evaluation Questions & Progress Towards Goals

Drawing from prior research, this study explores the extent to which youth enrolled in enriching, experiential summer programs demonstrate improved or sustained pro-social attachments, academic self-efficacy, motivation, and English Language Arts skills. The study is organized according to four evaluation questions.

| Summer Matters Evaluation Questions | Evidence of Success | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------|------------|
| | Fresno | Los Angeles | Sacramento |
| <i>Are programs high quality, academically, physically and socially enriching?</i> | ● | ● | ● |
| <i>Do participants demonstrate stronger social skills and positive relationships?</i> | ● | ● | ● |
| <i>Do participants demonstrate improved academic self-efficacy and motivation?</i> | ● | ● | ◐ |
| <i>Do participants sustain English Language Arts proficiency?</i> | ● | ● | ● |
| Key | | | |
| ● | Ample Evidence | | |
| ◐ | Mixed Evidence | | |
| ○ | Limited Evidence | | |

Data Sources

The following table illustrates how survey data, focus group and interview findings, as well as district-level data map to the evaluation questions.

| Evaluation Question | Observational Data | Youth, Parent, Educator and Staff Input | Student Academic & District Data |
|--|--|--|---|
| 1. <i>Are programs high quality, academically, physically and socially enriching?</i> | <p>Program Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purpose Planning Staff Partnerships <p>Point of Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualized Intentional Integrated Unique Program Culture | <p>Interviews with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program leadership School district leadership <p>Structured Focus Groups with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff Parents Program leadership <p>Parent/Caregiver Attitudinal Survey</p> | |
| 2. <i>Do participants demonstrate stronger social skills and positive relationships?</i> | <p>Program Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not Applicable <p>Point of Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not Applicable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer Outcomes Measures Survey (for all Participants) <p>Structured Focus Groups with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff Parents Program leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent/Caregiver Attitudinal Survey Youth poster contest | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant School-Day Attendance |
| 3. <i>Do participants demonstrate improved academic self-efficacy and motivation?</i> | <p>Program Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not Applicable <p>Point of Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not Applicable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer Outcomes Measures Survey (for all Participants) <p>Structured Focus Groups with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff Parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent/Caregiver Attitudinal Survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant Demographic Information San Diego Quick vocabulary assessments (10-15% sample) |
| 4. <i>Do participants sustain English Language Arts proficiency?</i> | <p>Program Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not Applicable <p>Point of Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not Applicable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer Outcomes Measures Survey (for all Participants) <p>Structured Focus Groups with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff Parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent/Caregiver Attitudinal Survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant Demographic Information San Diego Quick vocabulary assessments (10-15% sample) Academic Performance Data (e.g., district benchmark tests) |

Introduction to the Communities

The Summer Matters programs in Fresno, Los Angeles and Sacramento were selected for in-depth study because of their high quality programs and youth population served.

In summer 2012, Fresno served 394 middle-school-aged youth; Los Angeles served 1,380 elementary-aged youth; and Sacramento served 333 middle-school-aged youth.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Youth Served

| | Fresno (n=394) | Los Angeles ¹ (n=1,380) | Sacramento (n=333) |
|------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Latino/a | 49% | 80% | 39% |
| African American | 18% | 11% | 28% |
| White | 16% | - | 12% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 5% | 4% | 19% |
| Unspecified/other | 9% | 5% | 1% |
| Native American | 3% | - | 1% |

Source: The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Summer Communities Grant Reports, 2012

My daughter, who is a bear to get out of bed for school, wakes up every morning at 6:30am to go to camp without a fight! She likes to go and she has shared some of what she is learning with me.

-Summer Program Parent

¹ Only three race/ethnicity categories are reported for LA's BEST participants.

LOS ANGELES

The Summer Matters program in Los Angeles is administered by LA's BEST - a local afterschool partner with the Los Angeles Unified School District.

The LA's BEST summer programs use a project-based approach emphasizing active learning, engaging activities, relationship building and creating safe spaces. The summer program includes wellness, language arts, and building connections to the outdoors. LA's BEST offers summer programs at 89 sites across the city; 12 are considered in this report.

As you...move around the sites, you see that the theme is built on expanding literacy and connecting youth to the outdoors through traveling, getting kids to develop language and reading skills, etc. That was ...why we wanted a project-based approach.

- Program Leader

Features of Population Served:

- 90% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch
- 32% of students were English Learners in 2012²

Program strengths observed on site by the evaluation team include:

- LA's BEST summer programs have an emphasis on literacy, health, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). The programs use an evidence-based curriculum to promote literacy.
- Students are engaged in hands-on, kinesthetic activities that are made relevant to young people using a unique theme at each site. The program themes are also used to integrate learning objectives and help to promote a strong program culture.
- Program staff are involved in advanced program planning, orientation and lesson planning, which is important to ensure staff have a voice in programmatic design and feel comfortable with the content and curriculum.
- Student alumni come back after graduation to volunteer in the program.
- Built-in opportunities for parents to interact with staff occur at the sign-in and out times.
- Staff represent community diversity, and are culturally competent.

² This statistic includes programs in consideration of this evaluation report; across all 189 programs administered by LA's BEST, 43% of participants are English Learners.

FRESNO

Fresno administers the Central Enrichment Summer Adventures (CESA) program through the Fresno County Office of Education at the Central Unified School District. Fresno CESA is built upon a structure emphasizing reading retention, STEM, fitness, nutrition, and out of doors experience.

The program is centered around a single theme, which changes yearly based on a selected book read by all youth in the program. The program is situated on a single high school campus site, where, according to one program leader, “students enter the land of whatever book they are reading.”

*Because one of our end goals is to spark an interest in reading...
For those that are not avid readers [we are] teaching them how to experience reading from a different level.*

- Program Leader

Features of Population Served:

- 65% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch
- 8% of students were English Learners in 2012

Program strengths observed on site include:

- CESA has a strong focus on literacy, STEM, and health that uses a cohesive book-related theme to thread highly engaging learning opportunities into each class, while promoting a strong culture of creative learning throughout.
- CESA emphasizes transitioning from middle to high school, and the program is hosted on the high school campus.
- The County Office of Education partners with the California Teaching Fellows Foundation, preparing future educators through a variety of academic and cultural experiences that enhance leadership and professionalism, building greater awareness of the social context of schools and ensuring quality teachers for all students. This fosters a low student to adult ratio, as each student group has at least two adult co-instructors.
- CESA staff conduct reading assessments at the start of summer; youth are grouped into three groups based on their assessed literacy level.
- Staff represent community diversity, and are culturally competent.

SACRAMENTO

Sacramento City Unified School District “Summer of Service” programs use a service-learning model, with a goal of increasing youth’s school connectedness, understanding of civic responsibility, and engagement with their communities to support healthy lifestyles and environmental issues. Summer of Service is administered through the school district’s Youth Development Supportive Services office. Summer programs in this report are offered at eight middle school sites.

The approach to teaching the children is perfect for summer. My son calls it "camp" not summer school. Every day when I pick my son up he is super excited to tell me about the day's activities! Love it!!

-Summer Program Parent

Features of Population Served:

- 73% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch
- 25% of students were English Learners in 2012

Program strengths observed on site include:

- The program integrates student projects in and around their local community through a service-learning curriculum that is used with youth of all ages.
- The service-learning projects are youth driven, with students facilitating end of year showcases where parents and community members can see the results.
- The program provides targeted support for students who are transitioning from middle to high school, and promotes a strong, inclusive culture.
- Staff represent community diversity, and are culturally competent.

Improved Academic Efficacy & Sustained Academic Performance

Students succeed academically when they have strong academic skills, effective work habits, and confidence in their abilities as learners. Summer Matters programs provide support for each of these assets, with a particular focus on students' literacy.

In this section, we document the extent to which Summer Matters participants improved or sustained their work habits, confidence (“academic efficacy”), and academic skills and achievement.

KEY FINDINGS

- Participants ended the summer with vocabulary skills much closer to their grade level, increasing their Instructional grade level by over 1/3 of a grade on the San Diego Quick vocabulary assessment.
- English Learners across communities demonstrated statistically significant increases in their grade-level vocabulary skills, a gateway to English language fluency.
- Youth in Fresno and Los Angeles report increased academic work habits and reading efficacy, key contributors to academic achievement.
- Parents report that youth improve both their attitude towards reading (68%) and reading ability (62%).

SAN DIEGO QUICK ASSESSMENT (SDQA)

We only learn what we can comprehend. Vocabulary is the cornerstone of reading comprehension, which is in turn the foundation of mastery of nearly all academic content. To measure participants' vocabulary skills, Summer Matters programs administered the San Diego Quick Assessment (SDQA).

They help them spark an interest in leadership, expanding their learning by doing various activities. They are learning while having fun.

-Summer Program Parent

The SDQA has three scores:³

- **Independent:** The grade level at which a student can read words with little assistance. Measured by the grade level list in which a young person reads with up to one error.
- **Instructional:** The grade level at which a student can read words with some adult assistance, equivalent to her/his zone of proximal development. Measured by the grade level list in which a young person makes up to two mistakes in pronunciation.
- **Frustration:** The grade level at which a student struggles to decode and pronounce words, her/his "outer edge." Measured by the grade level list in which a young person misses three or more words.

Summer Matters participants demonstrate a statistically significant increase in grade level vocabulary at all three levels of the SDQA. On average, Summer Matters participants ended the summer with vocabulary skills much closer to their grade level, improving their school readiness.

Notably, program participants in Sacramento improved their Independent vocabulary level by nearly one and a half grade levels over the course of a 6-week program.

My [child] is excited to come to [the program]...every day they learn something new.
-Summer Program Parent

³ For more information about the SDQA, see Appendix B

Table 2: SDQA Measures by Community

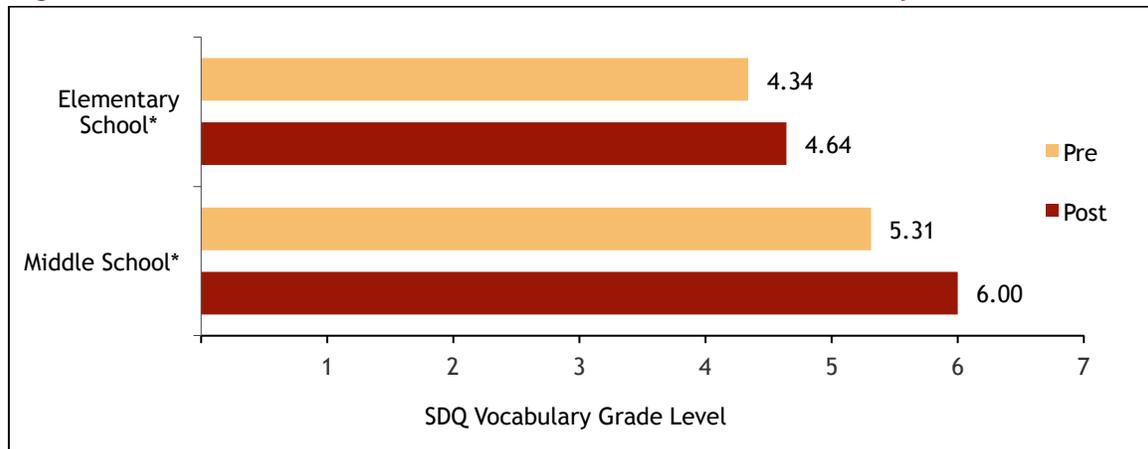
| | Independent ⁴ | | | Instructional ⁵ | | | Frustration ⁶ | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|------|--------|----------------------------|------|--------|--------------------------|------|--------|
| | Pre | Post | Change | Pre | Post | Change | Pre | Post | Change |
| Fresno | 4.44 | 5.00 | 0.56* | 5.53 | 6.11 | 0.58 | 6.20 | 6.83 | 0.63* |
| Los Angeles | 3.41 | 3.62 | 0.21 | 4.34 | 4.64 | 0.30* | 5.17 | 5.54 | 0.36* |
| Sacramento | 4.14 | 5.57 | 1.43* | 5.06 | 5.88 | 0.83 | 6.20 | 7.09 | 0.89* |
| Overall | 3.64 | 4.07 | 0.43* | 4.63 | 5.05 | 0.42* | 5.47 | 5.94 | 0.48* |

Source: San Diego Quick Assessment, July 2012 - August 2012

*Statistically significant change at $p < .05$

This pattern repeats when we consider SDQA scores by students' grade level.

Figure 1: SDQA Results - Instructional Level - Middle & Elementary



Source: San Diego Quick Assessment, July 2012 - August 2012, total n=403

*Statistically significant change at $p < .05$

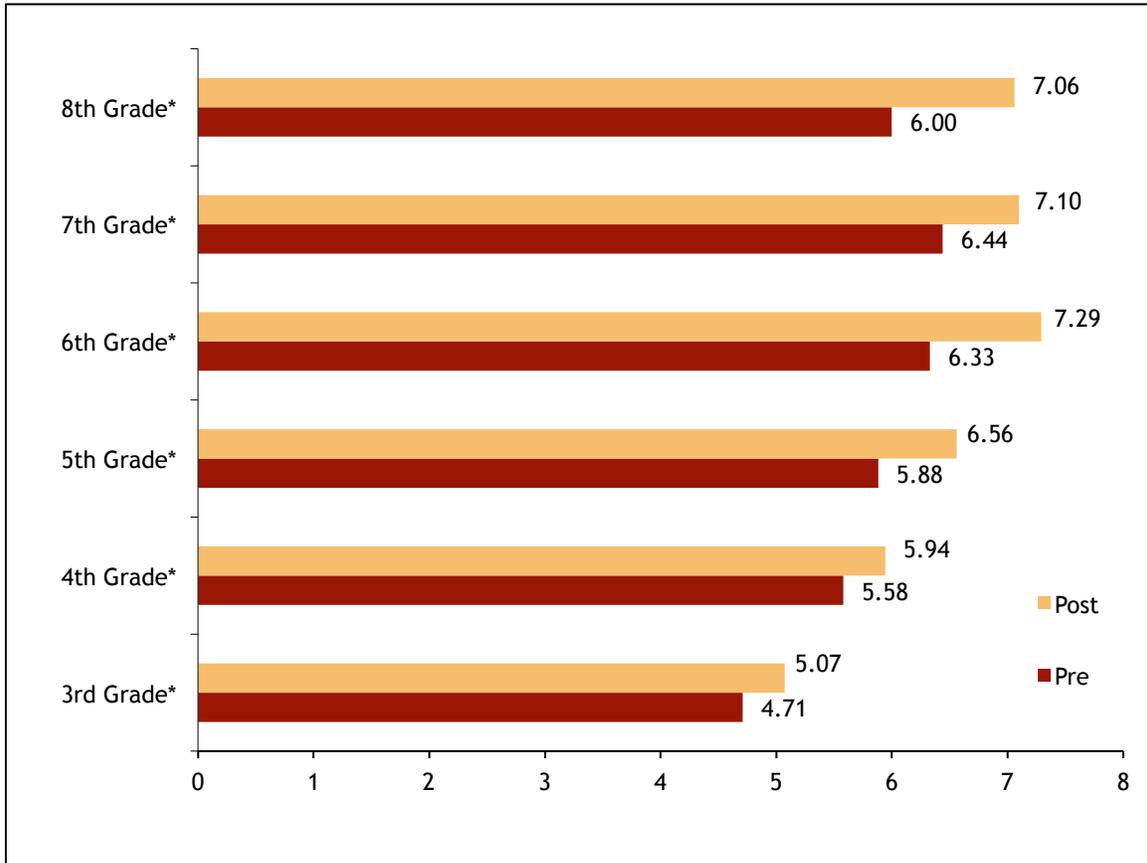
⁴ At the Independent level, Fresno n=16, Los Angeles n=102 and Sacramento n=56; Overall n=174

⁵ At the Instructional level, Fresno n=19, Los Angeles n=83 and Sacramento n=47; Overall n=149

⁶ At the Frustration level, Fresno n=54, Los Angeles n=271 and Sacramento n=169; Overall n=494

When participants' "outer edge" - their Frustration Level - is considered, we find that students demonstrated statistically significant improvements in their grade level vocabulary; these gains are particularly notable among middle-school aged youth, who were most likely to start the summer with below-grade vocabulary skills.⁷

Figure 2: SDQA Frustration by Grade Level, Overall



Source: San Diego Quick Assessment, July 2012 - August 2012, total n=403

*Statistically significant change at $p < .05$

⁷ Because of small sample sizes when matching pre-post responses on the Independent and Instructional level, analysis did not produce statistically significant results and are not included among the findings.

English Learner participants across communities also demonstrated increases in their Instructional and Frustration Levels of about half a grade level, though they tend to have lower overall grade-level vocabulary skills than their English-speaking peers.

Table 3: SDQA Measures by English Learner (EL) Status

| | Independent ⁸ | | | Instructional ⁹ | | | Frustration ¹⁰ | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|------|--------|----------------------------|------|--------|---------------------------|------|--------|
| | Pre | Post | Change | Pre | Post | Change | Pre | Post | Change |
| English Learners | 2.83 | 3.17 | 0.33 | 3.54 | 4.00 | 0.46* | 4.31 | 4.71 | 0.41* |
| Not English Learners | 3.77 | 4.16 | 0.39* | 5.03 | 5.55 | 0.53* | 5.88 | 6.33 | 0.45* |

Source: San Diego Quick Assessment, July 2012 - August 2012

*Statistically significant change at $p < .05$

When we compare the change in grade level vocabulary among English Learners and their peers, we find that the two groups demonstrated the same rate of growth in the Frustration and Instructional levels. English Learners demonstrated a smaller gain in their Independent grade level vocabulary than their peers, however.

⁸ At the Independent level, EL=18, Non-EL=90.

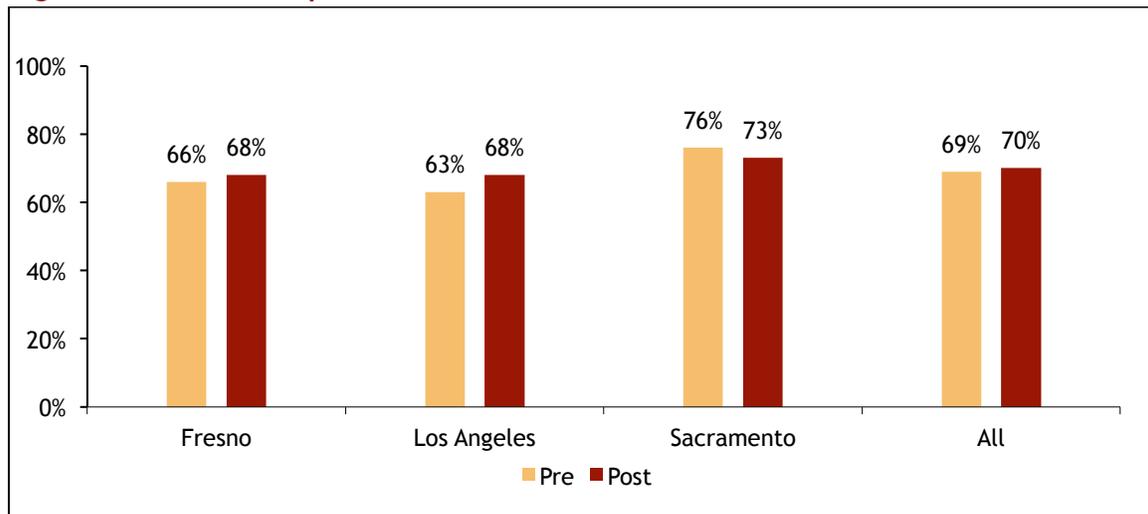
⁹ At the Instructional level, EL=24, Non-EL=74.

¹⁰ At the Frustration level, EL=84, Non-EL=220.

Youth report high and sustained academic work habits and reading efficacy, key contributors to academic achievement.¹¹ These results are drawn from the UCI Summer Outcome Measures Survey, designed to assess youth skill development and positive behavior and administered at the start and end of summer. See Appendix B for more information about the survey.

In summer 2012, youth in Fresno increased their positive response rate from pre- to post-test by two percentage points (66% to 68%); in Los Angeles, by five percentage points (63% to 68%).¹²

Figure 3: Youth Perception of Work Habits



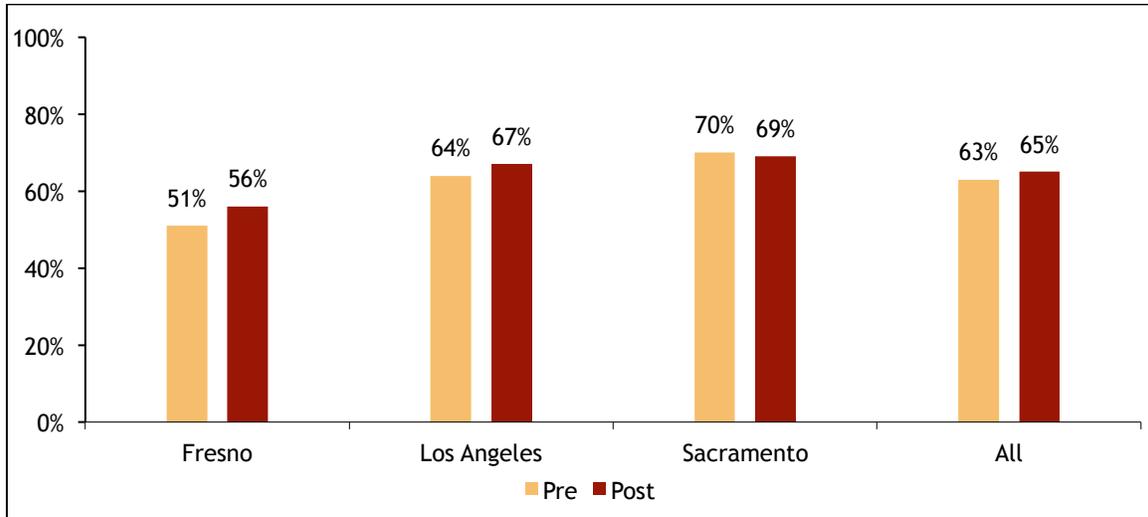
Source: Summer Outcome Measures Survey, July 2012 (pre) & August 2012 (post), n=911

¹¹ For more information about the influence of non-cognitive skills and school success, see *How Children Succeed* by Paul Tough (2012).

¹² Results reported are from the UCI Summer Outcome Measures Survey, July 2012 (pre) & August 2012 (post), the pre-post samples are not matched pairs. See Appendix A for numbers of surveys by program. Example items on the Work Habits scale include: “I work well by myself” and “I finish my work on time.”

When asked about their confidence and interest in reading (i.e., reading efficacy), respondents in Fresno increased their positive responses by five percentage points (51% to 56%); in Los Angeles, by three percentage points (64% to 67%).¹³

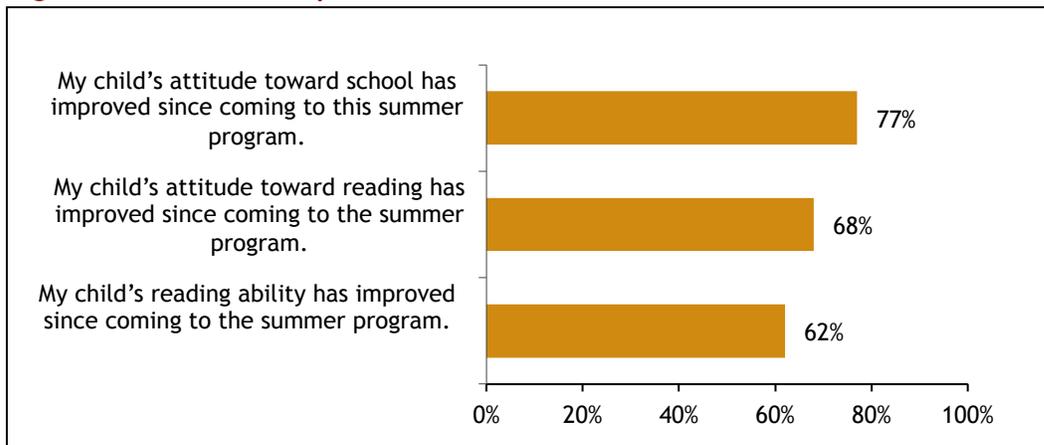
Figure 4: Youth Perception of Reading Efficacy



Source: Summer Outcome Measures Survey, July 2012 (pre) & August 2012 (post), n=911

Similarly, parents report improved outcomes in both participants' overall interest in school and in reading ability.

Figure 5: Parent Perception of Youth Academic Outcomes



Source: Parent Satisfaction Surveys, July 2012 - August 2012, total n=905

¹³ Results are reported from the UCI Summer Outcome Measures Survey, July 2012 (pre) & August 2012 (post), the pre-post samples are not matched pairs. See Appendix A for numbers of surveys by program. Reading Efficacy assesses a student's sense of reading competency such as "I expect to do well in reading" and "I am interested in reading."

When asked about the best components of the program in focus groups, parents emphasize programmatic strengths including:

- Educational content and program structure mixing “fun” activities with academic activities lead to academic skill building.
- The prevalence of reading and literacy activities in the curriculum.

For example, in the Fresno focus group, parents attribute kids’ improved attitude toward reading to the program environment: Summer Matters offers an environment with less pressure, and more fun, than in the school year. Parents add that their children are even more engaged in reading since the featured book for the summer is popular with youth.

DISTRICT BENCHMARK RESULTS

The evaluation team also considered the impact of summer learning programs on participants’ benchmark scores. Most California school districts administer these formative assessments that are aligned with school curricula to provide educators with real-time information about students’ mastery of curricular content.

We found mixed results when analyzing change in the proportion of youth at or above grade level on English Language Arts benchmark assessments between fall 2011 and fall 2012, and spring 2012 and fall 2012. Given that tests are unique to each district, and have changed between 2011 and 2012, the mixed findings are unsurprising.

She is an avid reader. Now...she is almost finished with the book...and I am into it too and we are talking about it at home. She is saying, "Mom – wait 'til you get to hear about this character!"

-Summer Program Parent

Positive Relationships with Peers and Adults

Summer Matters programs help youth develop strong social skills necessary to succeed in school and in life. When young people feel connected to peers and adults in their school community, they are more likely to attend school regularly.

Too often in low-income communities, young people have limited opportunities to explore their communities and to learn new things. Helping young people to expand their horizons and explore their talents helps build strong pro-social attachments, as well.

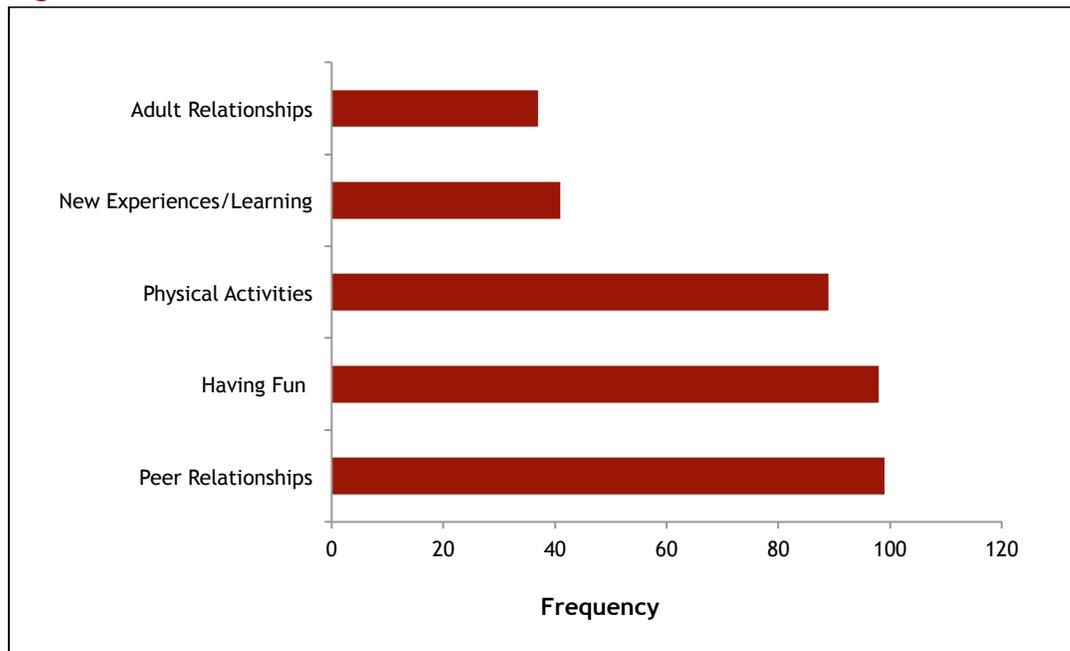
KEY FINDINGS

- In Fresno, summer program participants were one-third less likely to be chronically absent in fall 2012 than their peers, indicating much greater engagement with school.
- Summer Matters participants demonstrated high and sustained school day attendance rates, which are critical for youth to succeed in school.
- In focus groups, parents report programs help youth prepare for the challenge of transitioning from elementary to middle school, a period when many youth begin to disengage from school.
- Nine out of ten parents report that summer programs help their children to make new friends and get along better with other children. These skills will help youth be more successful in school and beyond.
- Youth report that they have positive relationships with adults in the program and enjoy Summer Matters activities, reflecting the design of the programs.

Youth participated in a poster contest in which they described - through words, pictures, or both - why “summer matters to me.” The most common themes referenced by participants align closely to the structure of summer programs’ design to promote positive social skills and to expand children’s horizons by providing fun, engaging activities.

As noted elsewhere in this report, it is unlikely that many Summer Matters participants would have had similar experiences if they hadn’t been in these programs. Most parents report that their child would be at home if they weren’t at Summer Matters.

Figure 6: “Summer Matters to Me Because...” Poster Themes¹⁴



Source: Fresno, Los Angeles student posters, 2012, n=195¹⁵

¹⁴ Figure 6 includes the frequency of occurrence of the top five most common themes of the 195 posters collected in Fresno and Los Angeles.

¹⁵ Youth in Sacramento completed their posters during the second day of summer programming; themes from this community are excluded from this figure.

The following poster from a participant at LA's BEST exemplifies key themes in youth posters across communities, including references to:

- Having fun
- New experiences and learning opportunities
- Youth engagement with the program

These programmatic characteristics are associated with further development in academic-self efficacy, pro-social development and motivation.



Source: LA's BEST Summer Program, Student Poster, 2012

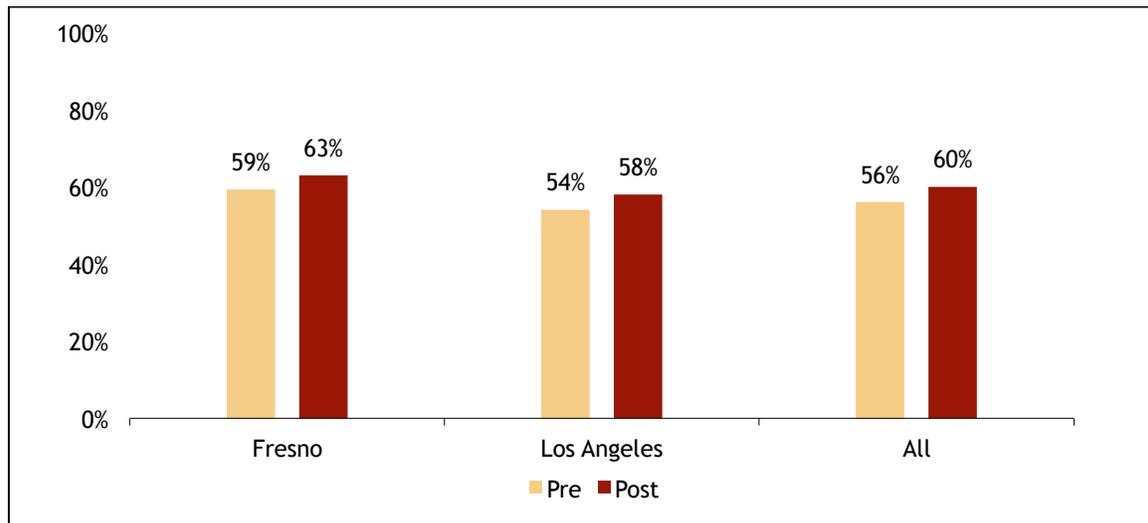
A poster from a participant in Fresno CESA includes several references to both learning and literacy, reflecting the focus of the Summer Matters programs.



Source: Fresno CESA, Student Poster, 2012

About six in ten youth report high and sustained social assets in Summer Matters programs. Fifty-six percent (56%) of Summer Matters participants reported strong social competencies at the start of the summer, rising slightly to 60%. These youth reported that they had a variety of social skills, such as getting along with kids their age and telling others what they think.

Figure 7: Youth Perception of Social Competencies¹⁶



Source: Summer Outcome Measures Survey, July 2012 (pre) & August 2012 (post), n=577; Includes students from Fresno and Los Angeles only

Similarly, youth report fairly limited misconduct both at the start and end of the summer enrichment program. About 20% of participants reported that they engaged in behaviors such as taking things from others or fighting, falling to 15% in end-of-summer surveys.

These results suggest that some youth improved their behavior while in Summer Matters programs, and that the majority sustained their positive behavior while engaging in positive pursuits during the summer months.¹⁷

¹⁶ Social Competencies are assessed by items such as “I work well with other kids” and “I can tell other kids what I think, even if they disagree with me.”

¹⁷ Reported from the UCI Summer Outcome Measures Survey, July 2012 (pre) & August 2012 (post), n=907. Misconduct Scale sample items include “I have gotten into a fight at school” or “I have taken something that belongs to someone else.”

Parents and caregivers also believe that their children improve their relationships with adults and peers at Summer Matters.

Table 4: Parent Perception of Supports for Pro-Social Attachments

| | Overall (n=905) | Fresno (n=122) | Los Angeles (n=477) | Sacramento (n=306) |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| In this program, my child has opportunities to make new friends. | 97% | 97% | 98% | 96% |
| This program helps my child get along better with other children. | 89%* | 86% | 99% | 74% |
| In this program, my child has opportunities to develop leadership skills. | 86%* | 77% | 92% | 81% |
| This program helps my child get along better with adults. | 82%* | 68% | 91% | 74% |

Source: Parent Satisfaction Surveys, July 2012 - August 2012

*Statistically significant differences between communities at $p < .05$

In focus groups, parents note that the program provides an environment in which youth can “open up.” This is largely credited to staff, who parents say are upbeat, understanding and effective role models.

Further, parents emphasize that they appreciate their children are in a school-based program. Parents report this is valuable because:

- Youth are able to see their current friends;
- Youth can make new friends during summer months, and
- Youth transitioning from middle to high school build stronger social networks, which eases the transition between grades.

Parents suggest that the high level of social engagement means that their children are self-motivated and excited to attend. Speaking to the high level of engagement, on more than one occasion, parents offered the same example: children woke up before their parents on program days.

Kids are more likely to consistently come to these programs because they have fun, build positive relationships with peers and staff, and are excited to attend. This provides more opportunities to build skills, and improve self-efficacy, motivation and English Language Arts proficiency.

My son was timid in Kindergarten, now he is in 1st grade and volunteers in class.

-Summer Program Parent

Parents reported that program staff interacted well with them, as well, indicating a commitment to family engagement and to culturally competent practice.

Table 5: Parent Perception of Program Staff

| | Overall (n=905) | Fresno (n=122) | Los Angeles (n=477) | Sacramento (n=306) |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| The summer program staff listen to me when I have a question or comment. | 89%* | 73% | 95% | 86% |
| The staff members in this program are qualified to work with youth. | 85%* | 66% | 91% | 84% |
| At least one summer program staff recognizes me when I visit. | 82%* | 43% | 94% | 80% |
| Summer program staff members understand our community. | 81%* | 58% | 90% | 76% |

Source: Parent Satisfaction Surveys, July 2012 - August 2012

*Statistically significant differences between communities at $p < .05$

[My child] is facing a lot of changes with transitioning into middle school next year. This program has given him the opportunity to meet new friends with whom he will be attending his new school.

-Summer Program Parent

Youth who feel like they belong at school, and who experience academic success, are much more likely to attend often. And students who attend school regularly are far more likely to do well on standardized tests and to complete high school. We use school day attendance as a key measure of students' social attachments and sense of academic self-efficacy.

This is a wonderful program. They teach the children respect for others and themselves; also how to get along with all types of other children. This program keeps kids off the street and learning all summer long. Excellent program.

-Summer Program Parent

Summer Matters participants in Sacramento demonstrated a one-percentage point, statistically significant increase in school day attendance rate between 2011-12 and fall 2012. Youth in Fresno and Los Angeles demonstrated high and sustained school day attendance rates.

Table 6: School Day Attendance, School Year 2011-12 and Fall, 2012-13

| | Attendance 2011-12 | Attendance Fall 2012 | % Change |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------|
| Fresno (n=367) | 98% | 98% | 0% |
| Los Angeles (n=618) | 98% | 98% | 0% |
| Sacramento (n=324) | 97% | 98% | +1%* |

Source: School day attendance rates, Fresno Central USD, Sacramento City USD, Los Angeles USD, 2012

*Statistically significant change at p<.05

Chronic absence, defined as missing 10% or more of the school year, is another indicator of youths' connectedness with the school day. Students who are chronically absent from school are more likely to perform poorly in class and to drop out of high school. We report on chronic absence here as a "warning sign" for future challenges among elementary and middle school-aged youth.

In Fresno, we find that summer program participation *decreases* the likelihood of chronic absence, as CESA summer program participants are one-third less likely to be chronically absent in the 2012-13 school year than similar peers who did not attend.¹⁸

This pattern did not hold in Sacramento, in which summer program participants were equally likely to be chronically absent than their peers.¹⁹ Comparison data are not available for Los Angeles.

¹⁸ This analysis controls for common factors that would influence youths' chronic absence rates, including race/ethnicity, gender, days suspended, English Language Arts District Benchmark scores, language proficiency and grade level.

¹⁹ The results presented here reflect school-day attendance data for participants and non-participants in the same schools from Central USD in Fresno and Sacramento City USD, 2012.

Program Quality

Young people are most likely to benefit when they participate in well-planned, engaging, and youth-centered programs that are physically and emotionally safe. Program quality is supported through organizational practices like staff training, curricular development and budget management.

KEY FINDINGS

- The quality of summer enrichment programs matters: youth who report high quality experiences in summer also report stronger work habits, reading efficacy, and social skills.
- Summer Matters programs are particularly good at providing engaging and interesting activities for youth while helping them to build strong, positive, relationships with peers and adults.
- Nearly all parents (98%) are satisfied with their children's summer program.

Program quality is assessed using the Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs (CASP) Rubric. The CASP measures program quality and infrastructural indicators across nine domains, four of which measure quality on the site-level and five of which are included in Figure 8, on the following page.²⁰ Trained observers in each community rate programs based on pre-defined benchmarks of quality and provided results to the Public Profit team.

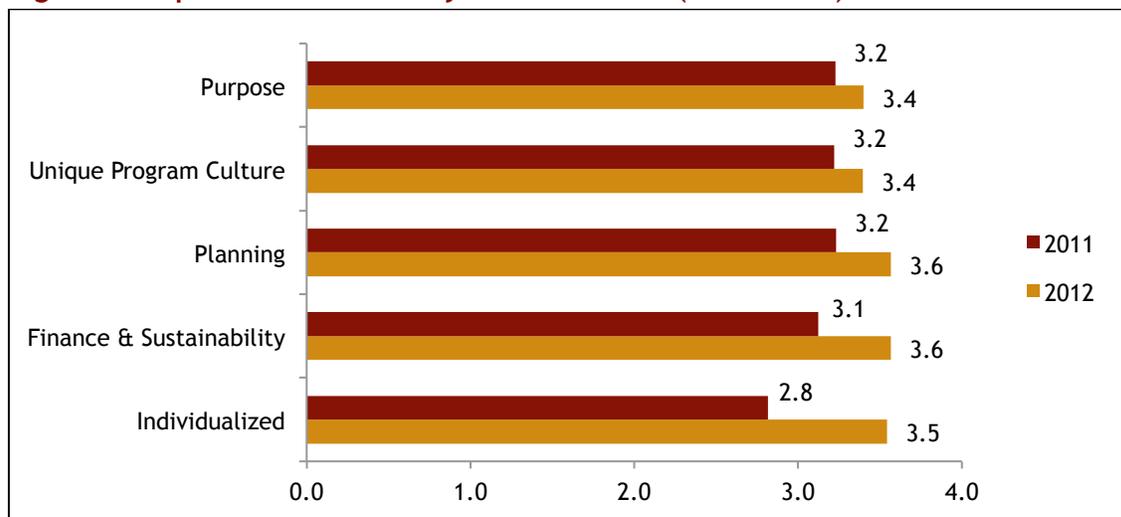
²⁰ The National Summer Learning Association is author of the Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs rubric; detailed information is at: http://www.summerlearning.org/?page=quality_standards

Results across the three case study communities over time indicate that quality is improving. Between 2011 and 2012, scores increased or remained high and sustained across communities in 7 out of 9 domains.

The largest growth is within the Individualized quality domain, which assesses the degree to which programs address, “young people’s needs early in the program and develop individualized strategies for meeting program goals.”²¹

Across the three communities, CASP observers note the use of “small student groupings for supporting learning experiences,” instruction that is “planned in advance,” and student ambassadors who “support...relationship building, mentoring and inclusion of youth voice.” These components of program design facilitate engagement of students with learning materials and staff.

Figure 8: Top 5 CASP Domains by Score Increase (2011-2012)



Source: CASP Point of Service Quality Assessments in Los Angeles, Fresno, and Sacramento, Summer 2011 and 2012

Programs are rated in a 1-4 scale, with 4 as the highest possible rating.

Youth surveys echo these observational findings. Participants report positive experiences with peers (67%), engaging activities (68%) and caring adults (74%) in their summer program.

These program strengths illustrate that the intentional program design, staff engagement with students and curricula, and youth-centered program culture facilitate youth engagement with learning and help participants develop strong pro-social connections with staff and peers and improve academic motivation and confidence.

²¹ The National Summer Learning Association is author of the Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs rubric; the domain descriptions are sourced from their website: http://www.summerlearning.org/?page=quality_standards

Quality Matters

Participants who had better experiences - as rated by their relationships with staff, peers, and program activities - rated their work habits, reading efficacy, and social competencies higher.²²

These findings show that youth who participate in high quality programs are most likely to benefit, since youth who report better program quality report higher assets.²³ Participants' experiences with adult staff and peers is the strongest among the three factors: youth who report "excellent" experiences with staff and peers rate their work habits, reading efficacy and social competencies 30% higher than those who had a "low" or "fair" experience.

Table 7: Experience with Staff, Relationship with Other Outcomes

| | Overall - Experiences with Staff | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|------|-----------|
| | Low or Fair | Good | Excellent |
| Work Habits* | 2.62 | 3.23 | 3.42 |
| Reading Efficacy* | 2.47 | 3.19 | 3.42 |
| Social Competencies* | 2.43 | 3.20 | 3.38 |

Source: Summer Outcome Measures Survey, August 2012, n=569; Includes students from Fresno and Los Angeles only.

*Statistically significant differences between Experience with Staff outcome scores, at Low, Medium, High, at p<.01

Table 8: Experience with Peers, Relationship with Other Outcomes

| | Overall - Experiences with Peers | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|------|-----------|
| | Low or Fair | Good | Excellent |
| Work Habits* | 2.74 | 3.19 | 3.44 |
| Reading Efficacy* | 2.63 | 3.05 | 3.48 |
| Social Competencies* | 2.47 | 3.05 | 3.57 |

Source: Summer Outcome Measures Survey, August 2012, n=569; Includes students from Fresno and Los Angeles only.

*Statistically significant differences between Experience with Peers outcome scores, at Low, Medium, High, at p<.01

²² Youth completed the Summer Outcome Measures Survey, available through the Afterschool Outcome Measures Online Toolbox, 2012. <http://afterschooloutcomes.org/>. Youth survey items use a 1-4 rating scale, with 4 as the highest rating.

²³ Work Habits sample items include: "I work well by myself" and "I finish my work on time." Reading Efficacy assesses a student's sense of reading competency such as "I expect to do well in reading" and subjective task value such as "I am interested in reading." Social Competencies are assessed by items such as "I work well with other kids" and "I can tell other kids what I think, even if they disagree with me." This analysis, including the data included in Tables 7-9, considers quality in three categories - low (1.0-2.9), medium (3.0-3.59) and high (3.6-4.0).

Table 9: Experience with Program Activities, Relationship with Other Outcomes

| | Overall - Program Activities | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|------|-----------|
| | Low or Fair | Good | Excellent |
| Work Habits* | 2.74 | 3.19 | 3.44 |
| Reading Efficacy* | 2.63 | 3.05 | 3.48 |
| Social Competencies* | 2.47 | 3.05 | 3.57 |

Source: Summer Outcome Measures Survey, August 2012, n=569; Includes students from Fresno and Los Angeles only.

*Statistically significant differences between Experience with Program Activities outcome scores, at Low, Medium, High, at p<.01

Parents are satisfied with the quality of their children’s summer enrichment programs. For instance, nearly all (98%) parents across communities express satisfaction with the summer program and agree that their children enjoy attending.

Table 10: Parent Perception of Program Quality

| | Overall (n=905) | Fresno (n=122) | Los Angeles (n=477) | Sacramento (n=306) |
|--|-----------------|----------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| My child enjoys attending this summer program. | 98%* | 98% | 99% | 96% |
| I am satisfied with this summer program. | 98%* | 98% | 99% | 95% |
| This summer program is a safe place for my child. | 97% | 97% | 98% | 96% |
| In this program, my child has opportunities to try new things. | 96%* | 98% | 98% | 93% |

Source: Parent Satisfaction Surveys, July 2012 - August 2012

*Statistically significant differences between communities at p<.05

Kids see us as role models, especially when staff are diverse and their identities reflect the youth.

-Summer Program Staff Member

In focus groups, parents report that programs facilitate positive social and emotional outcomes for their children by:

- Keeping youth engaged with academic and enrichment activities;
- Providing support to youth transitioning from elementary to middle, and middle to high school;
- Supporting emotional maturation of youth;
- Keeping youth out of trouble.

Parents and staff also emphasize the role programs play in providing youth with new experiences and new opportunities that they do not have during the school year, including field trips and community service projects.

In surveys, nearly all parents report that their children feel comfortable with summer program staff, and three-quarters agree that their children have “someone to talk to” in the program.

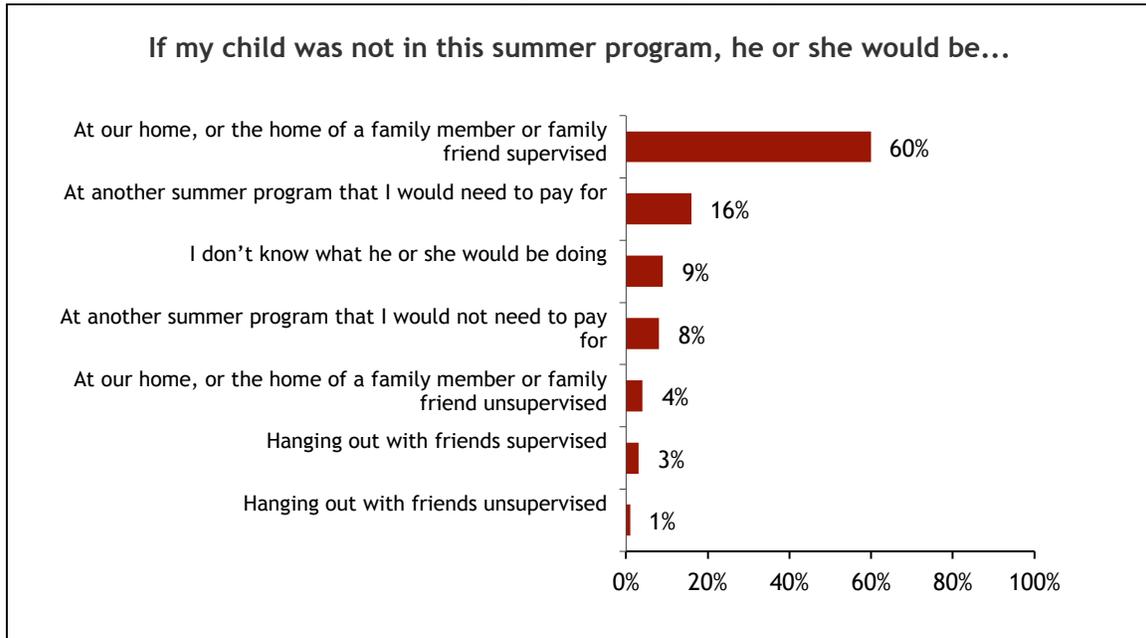
Table 11: Parent Perception of Youth Interaction with Program Staff

| | Overall (n=905) | Fresno (n=122) | Los Angeles (n=477) | Sacramento (n=306) |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| My child feels comfortable with the summer staff. | 96% | 94% | 97% | 95% |
| There is an adult in this program my child can talk to. | 75% | 76% | 74% | 76% |

Source: Parent Satisfaction Surveys, July 2012 - August 2012

When asked about alternatives to the program(s), parents report that their children would most likely spend the summer supervised at home (60%) or at another paid summer program (16%). Nine percent (9%) of parents report that they don't know what their children would do and five percent (5%) report that their children would be unsupervised without their local summer learning program.

Figure 9: Alternatives to Summer Program Participation, Across Communities



Source: Parent Satisfaction Surveys, July 2012 - August 2012, total n=905

Considering future program attendance, 85% of parents in Fresno, 95% of parents in Sacramento, and 96% of parents in Los Angeles indicate that their children will attend their summer program next year.

My daughter learned humility and gained a sense of accomplishment. She felt thankful for what she had after visiting a homeless shelter; she even thanked and hugged her dad for being there for her. In addition to gaining perspective, she wants to keep helping the homeless and visited again to volunteer.

-Summer Program Parent

Appendix A: Data Collection Summary

The following table includes a comprehensive list of all data collected by Public Profit.

| Summer Matters Data Sources ²⁴ | Data Received, by Community N (% response) | | |
|---|--|----------------|----------------|
| | Fresno | Los Angeles | Sacramento |
| CASP: Point of Service Quality Scores and “48 Hour” Summary Reports of Observations | 2011 & 2012 | 2011 & 2012 | 2011 & 2012 |
| Youth Participation & Demographic Data | 452 (100%) | 731 (53%) | 891 (100%) |
| Parent Surveys | 122 (31%) | 477 (35%) | 306 (34%) |
| “Summer Matters to Me” Posters | 89 (23%) | 106 (8%) | 73 (8%) |
| San Diego Quick Assessment | 57 (14%) | 276 (20%) | 70 (8%) |
| School Day Attendance | 367 (93%) | 618 (45%) | 324 (36%) |
| UCI Summer Outcome Measures Youth Survey | 276 (70%) | 304 (22%) | 334 (37%) |
| Academic Data from Host Districts: District Benchmarks, Periodic Assessments | 328 (83%) | 626 (45%) | 89 (10%) |

The Public Profit team visited each community in person to observe program elements, conduct focus groups with site coordinators, program staff and parents, and interview key leadership about summer programming strategies.

²⁴ Data totals for District Benchmarks are based on the Spring 2011-12 to Fall 2012-13 matched pairs. Summer Outcome Measures Youth Survey totals are based on the pre-test totals.

Appendix B: Data Collection Tool Descriptions

Parent Surveys & Focus Groups

The paper-based parent/caregiver survey asks parents to report their perceptions of program quality and programmatic impact on their children, as well as on the availability of other summer enrichment programs (or lack thereof) in their communities. Parent focus groups included guiding questions aligned with the same themes.

Sites administered parent surveys towards the end of summer programming; Public Profit provided survey design and technical assistance to sites for survey administration.

“Summer Matters to Me” Poster Contest

To solicit participants’ opinions about the ways in which summer enrichment programs benefit them, Public Profit conducted a poster contest, in which students were asked to complete a creative representation of the ways in which their Summer Matters program helps them. Submissions were coded by theme(s) to elucidate the ways in which youth experience summer enrichment as a benefit.

San Diego Quick Assessment

The SDQA is a list of words categorized by grade level originally devised by Margaret La Pray and Ramon Ross and published in the Journal of Reading in 1969. La Pray and Ross explain, “The graded word list has two uses: 1) to determine a reading level; 2) to detect errors in word analysis. One can use the test information to group students for corrective practice or to select appropriate reading materials for those students. The list is remarkably accurate when used for these purposes.” Subsequent research has confirmed that the SDQA provides a fairly accurate estimate of a child’s ability to read grade-level material.²⁵

The Public Profit team worked with staff-at each site via webinar to facilitate sample selection and administration of assessments. Each assessment takes approximately 10 minutes to complete and is administered as pre-and post-tests: the pre-test during the first week of the summer program, and the post-test in the last week. A randomly selected sample of students from each community participated.

²⁵ Summary from <http://blog.lexercise.com/2011/02/what-is-the-san-diego-quick-assessment/>

Summer Outcome Measures Survey

To explore the extent to which youth felt they benefitted from their Summer Matters program, youth participants completed the California Summer Outcome Measures survey. The survey is based on the After-School Outcome Measures, a project of the School of Education at the University of California, Irvine. The survey is designed for use in publicly funded after-school programs, as mandated by California Education Code.

The tool is based on existing public domain measures of student outcomes centered on behavior change and skill development; the tool was piloted in after school and summer programs in the 2010-11 school year, and the validation study published in 2011 (DuBois, Ji, 2011). The survey questions ask about what opportunities children have in summer programs, and how they feel about these opportunities.

On the Summer Outcome Measures survey, fielded to participating Summer Matters communities, students reported their own performance and skill development. Analyses were conducted to test associations between student reports of the quality of their program experiences and the self-reported student outcome scores that were collected at the end of their programs (post-participation).

Students reported their own positive behaviors in two areas: social competencies and misconduct (with low levels of misconduct viewed as a positive indicator). In this report, for two of the measures (Work Habits and Reading Efficacy), scores are reported for all three programs combined. For the other measures, scores are reported only for the LA's BEST and Fresno CESA programs, as youth in Sacramento did not complete these survey items.

The Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs (CASP)

The Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs (CASP) tool was developed by the National Summer Learning Association and is used in each of the case study communities; the tool allows staff to rate the quality of summer programs across nine domains. These program quality scores serve as the primary data source to assess the extent to which participating programs provide high-quality service.

Appendix C: San Diego Quick Results - Frustration Level By Grade

The following table shows pre- and post- Frustration grade level vocabulary data for each grade in each Summer Matters community.

San Diego Quick Frustration Level by Grade

| Grade | Overall | | | Fresno | | | Los Angeles | | | Sacramento | | |
|-----------|---------|------|--------|--------|------|--------|-------------|------|--------|------------|------|--------|
| | Pre | Post | Change | Pre | Post | Change | Pre | Post | Change | Pre | Post | Change |
| | n=382 | | | n=57 | | | n=276 | | | n=49 | | |
| 3rd Grade | 4.71 | 5.07 | .37* | -- | -- | -- | 4.71 | 5.07 | .37* | -- | -- | -- |
| 4th Grade | 5.58 | 5.94 | .36* | -- | -- | -- | 5.58 | 5.94 | .36* | -- | -- | -- |
| 5th Grade | 5.88 | 6.56 | 0.68* | 5.88 | 6.56 | .68* | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 6th Grade | 6.33 | 7.29 | .96* | 6.33 | 7.29 | .96* | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 7th Grade | 6.44 | 7.1 | .66* | 6.36 | 6.36 | 0 | -- | -- | -- | 6.48 | 7.48 | 1.00* |
| 8th Grade | 6 | 7.06 | 1.06* | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 5.95 | 7.27 | 1.32* |

Source: San Diego Quick Assessment, July 2012 - August 2012, total n=382

*Significant change at $p < .05$

Appendix D: End Note Bibliography for Literature Review

ⁱ <http://partnerforchildren.org/what-we-do/out-of-school-time-initiatives/summer-programs/summer-practice-consortium>

ⁱⁱ Donohue, N.C. & Miller, B.M. (2008). Stemming summer learning loss. *The New England Journal of Higher Education*. Summer Issue.

ⁱⁱⁱ Donohue, N.C. & Miller, B.M. (2008). Stemming summer learning loss. *The New England Journal of Higher Education*. Summer Issue.

^{iv} Sloan McCombs, J., Schwartz, H. L., Bodilly, S.J., McCinnis, B., Lichter, D. S., Cross, A. B. (2011). *Making Summer Count: How Summer Programs Can Boost Children's Learning*. RAND Corporation, iii - 22.

^v Bell, R.B. & Carrillo, N. (2007). Characteristics of effective summer learning programs in practice. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 114. Summer Issue.

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^{vii} Borman, G.D. (2000). The effects of summer school: Questions answered, questions raised [Commentary]. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 65(1), 119-127

^{viii} Afterschool Alliance (2010). Summer: A season when learning is essential. *Issue Brief* 43, June.