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Birmingham Action Plan Framework



Photo courtesy of HOPE Summer Camp, Better Basics



Photo courtesy of Children's Creative Learning Center at Glen Iris Elementary School, University of Alabama at Birmingham



Photo courtesy of Rising Stars Educational Enrichment Program—Summer Camp, New Rising Star Missionary Baptist Church Community Support Corporation



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Introduction

With generous support from the Belk Foundation, the National Summer Learning Association (the Association) launched a summer learning initiative in spring 2011, in Birmingham, Ala., aimed at increasing local awareness of the issue of summer learning loss and improving the coordination and alignment of local resources in order to advance

summer opportunities for youth in the community. In partnership with key stakeholders representing city agencies and schools, philanthropy, and community-based programs, the Association conducted a community assessment to investigate: community assets and needs; the range of opportunities available to low-income families and youth during the

Did you know?

According to KidsCount 2010, Birmingham City Schools had a 50 percent four-year graduation rate.

Did you know?

26 percent of Birmingham youth under 18 live in poverty and 67.4 percent of students are from low-income households.

summer; and the level and nature of public and private investments in summer learning. The Association convened a core group of stakeholders serving as members of the Birmingham Summer Learning Strategic Planning Committee, and disseminated emerging findings from the assessment to inform the committee's creation of an Action Plan for Summer Learning in Birmingham.

Why is the Birmingham Summer Learning Initiative important?

- Research has shown that students from low-income families and communities have fewer opportunities to participate in meaningful summer activities.
- While most students lose about two months worth of grade-level equivalency in mathematical computation skills during summer vacation, low-income students are at risk to lose an additional two months in reading achievement, despite the fact that higher-income students make slight gains.
- The effects of summer learning loss have been tied to a widened achievement gap in ninth grade, placement in less rigorous high school courses, higher high school dropout rates, and lower college attendance rates.
- A 2011 RAND report indicates that "...these learning losses [for low-income students] are cumulative, and students may never overcome them."
- Meaningful summer programming prevents these catastrophic effects on student achievement and can significantly benefit students in other areas. Students who regularly attend high-quality summer programs have demonstrated higher self-esteem, stronger leadership qualities, more successful transitions to the next grade, and better future employment outcomes.¹

¹ Pitcock, S., & Bialeschki, M. D. The Role of Parks in High Quality Summer Learning Programs: Implications For Action in California, 2010

Action Plan Priorities

Based on the findings from the community assessment, the strategic planning committee established three core strategies around which to organize the action plan to address these issues:

- 1) Build awareness of the need for and availability of summer learning opportunities in Birmingham.**
- 2) Increase coordination among stakeholders and their capacity to deliver high-quality opportunities at scale.**
- 3) Increase the sustainability of funding for summer learning.**

The committee created a comprehensive Action Plan Framework for Summer Learning in Birmingham, which details tactics and activities that will drive progress on these strategies, as well as measures for goals in each area. Within the comprehensive framework, the committee collaboratively identified and agreed upon a subset of priorities to be accomplished by summer 2013, which are summarized in this document. Underneath each action plan priority are highlighted examples of best practices in action in other communities.

Strategic Planning Committee

A+ Education Partnership
Alabama Power Foundation
Better Basics
Birmingham City Schools
Birmingham Department of Parks and Recreation
Birmingham Division of Youth Services
Birmingham Education Foundation
Birmingham Public Library
Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham
Girls, Inc. of Central Alabama
Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama
IPC Foundation
National Summer Learning Association
New Rising Star Missionary Baptist Church
The Belk Foundation
The University of Alabama at Birmingham
United Way of Central Alabama
Woodlawn Foundation
YWCA Central Alabama, Inc.

Strategy 1: Build awareness of the need for and availability of summer learning opportunities in Birmingham.

This communications and outreach strategy includes four tactics: 1) improve communications and outreach about the importance of summer learning; 2) research family outreach and engagement strategies and disseminate findings; 3) improve awareness of available summer learning opportunities; and 4) launch a communications campaign establishing the connection between summer learning opportunities and district reform efforts and priorities. The goals for communications and outreach during the first year of the summer learning initiative will be to:



Identify needs and barriers to participation for families.

Conducting focus groups with parents and youth will determine key barriers to participation and the types of opportunities desired (e.g., disabilities and special needs, child care, sports programs, enrichment, academic support). Common barriers include affordability, transportation, hours of operation, and safety. Programs can secure 21st Century Community Learning Center grants to ease enrollment costs, and the use of district buses can solve difficulties in transportation. Solutions to issues of safety need to address both transportation and program locations. Programs should also be created and expanded in neighborhoods with the greatest need.

During the planning stage of its Out-of-School Time (OST) Initiative, the Providence (R.I.) After School Alliance (PASA) engaged a marketing firm to conduct surveys and focus groups of targeted youth and their parents. The major barriers to participating in after-school programs were the lack of age-appropriate quality programming; concerns about the safety of programs that did exist; and the lack of transportation home at the end of the day.



Create a communications campaign, including effective communications and talking points for different stakeholder groups such as principals, teachers, and program providers about the importance of summer learning opportunities.

By focusing on family outreach and engagement strategies, programs are able to market to new potential participants and parents learn about summer activities for their students. Many parents who do not enroll their children in summer learning programs simply are not aware of the range of opportunities available. The www.birmingham365.org website is one resource that could help to bridge the gap between provider and participants. Birmingham 365 could give providers an online menu of services and self-populated program profiles. Parents would be able to find resources online in one place and easily identify what programs are the best suited for their children.

The Baltimore City Super Summer Initiative is an innovative communications campaign and partnership among city agencies, nonprofit partners, and private sector to let parents and children know about the full range of programs and services available to young people during the summer.



Promote summer opportunities by creating a centralized, web-based catalog of youth summer resources. This online resource should include tips on the key characteristics that families should look for when selecting an opportunity.

To supplement the website's reach, the community should also publish summer activities booklets, and organize summer learning recruitment fairs, summer learning tours, and open houses. A corps of community liaisons should be employed to also bridge the gap between providers and parents by promoting summer learning opportunities, addressing issues of access in communities, and referring families to additional comprehensive services and resources for youth.

Baltimore City Super Summer Initiative partners created the www.youthbmore.org website and enlisted the help of a regional call center, 211 Maryland, to serve as a community hub for information on summer learning academies, food programs, library programs, and other programs such as camps, recreations programs, and sports leagues.

As a statewide afterschool network, the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance (RIASPA) created a Google map of all of the summer program offerings in Rhode Island. The map includes all relevant information about programs and allows parents to zoom in on their neighborhood to see the programs available near them.

Strategy 2: Increase coordination among stakeholders and their capacity to deliver high-quality opportunities at scale.

The second strategy, focused on citywide coordination and program quality, includes nine tactics: 1) identify barriers to program operations and coordination; 2) address barriers to family and youth participation; 3) establish quality standards for a comprehensive summer learning model and common outcomes framework; 4) improve evaluation practices; 5) improve quality of local programs; 6) increase the number of high-quality programs; 7) leverage partnerships; 8) develop intentional partnerships between programs and the school district; and 9) implement a community action and sustainability plan for summer learning. The initiative's focus for the first year will be to accomplish the following goals to improve coordination among stakeholders and the quality of programs:



Establish local quality standards and toolkits.

Local quality standards can be incorporated into program design and outcome frameworks to create common, high-quality practices across the community. Quality standards also allow foundations to better articulate and evaluate funding requirements. Representatives from the school district, community-based providers, advocacy groups, professional development providers, city agencies, and philanthropy should work together to identify and prioritize research-based program components (e.g., physical activity, creative thinking, career learning and internships) and age groups served.

Technical assistance providers should create resources, trainings, and toolkits that map to quality standards, help programs select and measure program outcomes consistently, and identify areas for continuous improvement. Funders should consider offering incentives, such as professional development opportunities and access to data systems, to programs that agree to work towards continuous improvement according to the quality framework.

By focusing on family outreach and engagement strategies, programs are able to market to new potential participants, and parents learn about summer activities for their students. RIASPA and PASA worked together with state agencies to develop statewide afterschool quality standards and create the Rhode Island Program Quality Assessment (RIPQA) tool. PASA designed an additional component to assess administrative practices, staff development practices, and family engagement, based on the needs of the programs it serves.

In Indianapolis, all grantees of the Summer Youth Program Fund are encouraged to follow the Indiana Afterschool Network's Standards, a set of voluntary guidelines based on best practices in education and youth development. Learn more at www.indianaafterschool.org.



Identify or create an entity that is responsible for coordinating summer learning activities, including advocacy, data collection, and technical assistance.

Coordinated system-building efforts lead to higher levels of efficiency in planning programs and responding to issues. A corps of trainers should be identified and developed in Birmingham to provide technical assistance and resources to programs that support students with disabilities and special needs; promote best instructional practices in informal learning settings; build capacity to improve on the continuum of local/national quality standards; and train programs to perform self- and peer- assessments of program quality.

While planning for a citywide OST initiative in Providence, R.I., the mayor created a coordinating intermediary (PASA) to efficiently mobilize public and private talent and resources and to provide quality improvements, quality standards, and accountability measures.



Develop intentional partnerships between schools and community-based organizations in order to strengthen programs and increase family access.

A strong partnership between community providers and the school district will lead to specific, age-appropriate youth outcomes that support district priorities throughout the year. Novice teachers and education students could take advantage of opportunities for professional development by joining program staff. Community providers can add value by piloting innovative instructional technology, strategies, and interventions that the district is interested in adopting in lower-stakes, informal learning environments. The district and providers should establish data-sharing agreements and align standards and assessments in order to promote learning as a year-round, lifelong practice for which the entire community is responsible.

Pittsburgh Public Schools releases an annual Request for Proposals for its Summer Dreamers Academy and partners with local organizations to facilitate a wide variety of unique activities for campers. Offerings range from playwriting to judo, with options that appeal to a wide variety of interests.

As a part of the Baltimore City Super Summers Initiative, Baltimore City Public Schools, city agencies, and community-based providers partnered to create the Read to Succeed – Plus! Program, a camp strategically designed to address both summer learning loss and 3rd grade-level reading for summer 2012 and beyond. The core components of Read to Succeed – Plus! will be professional development for staff, art enrichment activities with experienced partners, recreation and play, guided independent reading time, meals, and enrichment trips to cultural institutions, libraries, and pools.

Strategy 3: Increase the sustainability of funding for summer learning.

The final strategy, focused on policy and funding, includes three tactics: 1) improve stakeholder awareness and capacity to secure diversified funding; 2) leverage current public and private funding to advocate for increased private investments and supportive policies; and 3) create a collaborative approach to funding at the community level. The committee's policy and funding priorities for the first year will be to:



Coordinate with State Department of Education to communicate to districts/schools that summer is an allowable use of Title I funds.

Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides \$14.5 billion dollars in annual federal funding to schools that serve high numbers of youth from low-income families in order to help all students meet state achievement standards. To be eligible, at least 40 percent of a school's population must be from low-income families, and the funding formula provides heavier weight relative to percentages of low income youth served. Title I schools are able to use funds for school-wide programs, including summer programs, to help reinforce and accelerate learning in core subjects. In School Year 2009-2010, more than 56,000 public schools made use of Title I funds, reaching 21 million students nationally.¹

In fiscal year 2012, an estimated \$232 million in Title I funding will be dispersed to the Alabama State Department of Education, which in turn funds eligible districts and schools.² The Birmingham Summer Learning Initiative should work with the Alabama State Department of Education to create strategies and communications that promote summer as an allowable use of this significant funding stream.

As a statewide intermediary, RIASPA has developed a strong relationship with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), and created strategies to encourage districts to utilize Title I funding for summer programming. RIASPA uses information from RIDE to ensure districts understand that this is an allowable use of funds.

¹ More information is available from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs website in Title I, Part A funds. This information can be accessed at: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>

² More information is available at the United States Department of Education website detailing Funds for State Formula-Allocated and Selected Student Aid Programs, by program: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/statetables/13stbyprogram.pdf>

By ensuring that enrichment activities are aligned to state standards in literacy and math, Pittsburgh Public Schools was able to utilize Title I funding for activities delivered by community partners. An activity specialist oversaw the creation of these academic linkages and certified activities, while teachers facilitated the academic component of each activity with campers, alongside staff from each activity organization.



Build capacity of summer program providers to identify and secure diversified and sustainable funding.

The Birmingham Summer Learning Initiative should research and document current and potential public and private funding opportunities to support summer learning programs and systems by investigating community development grants. A technical assistance provider could develop resources to support program finance and sustainability, with information on how to leverage public and private funding opportunities and advocate for increased public and private investments in summer learning.

RIASPA has worked to advocate for and develop statewide funding streams for summer learning and is currently advocating for a bill before the legislature that would create a public/private funding partnership between key agencies and the state. Additionally, RIASPA collects appropriate funding opportunities and sends them to its membership of over 1,000.

The Summer Youth Program Fund Indianapolis is a collaborative funding model that has awarded more than \$29 million in grants to summer program providers since 1995. The existence of the fund, along with its common application and reporting process, helps increase summer program providers' capacity to identify and secure diversified and sustainable funding.

Conclusion

The Birmingham Summer Learning Committee has developed a comprehensive Action Plan for Summer Learning in response to data on community needs. The priorities established by the committee for the first year of the Summer Learning Initiative are research- and evidence-based. The implementation of the plan will help maximize existing resources in the community, support working families, and help to close the achievement gap for Birmingham youth.

For more information on the Birmingham Action Plan for Summer Learning or the initiatives highlighted within, please contact Hillary Stroud, Director, Strategic Initiatives and Evaluation at the National Summer Learning Association, at hstroud@summerlearning.org or 410-856-1370 x 202.