A successful summer learning program approaches learning intentionally and develops the program’s infrastructure components.

3

Characteristics of effective summer learning programs in practice

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In 2005, researchers and staff at the Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University examined various summer program models and the evidence of their effectiveness. As a result of this research, the center published a handbook describing the characteristics of effective summer learning programs. The nine characteristics provide a framework for profiles contained in this chapter and demonstrate how effective practices lead to positive results for young people. Research demonstrates that programs that employ the attributes described by these characteristics demonstrate success in two areas for their attendees: accelerating academic performance and supporting positive youth development. For young people to have maximum benefit, a program must endeavor to implement all of the characteristics.

The nine characteristics of effective summer learning programs divide into two sections. The first three characteristics address a program’s approach to learning:
1. Intentional focus on accelerating learning
2. Firm commitment to youth development
3. Proactive approach to summer learning

These attributes address the program’s intent to support holistic child development. The second section covers the crucial role of program infrastructure to ensuring the organization achieves and maintains quality programming. The last six characteristics are

4. Strong, empowering leadership
5. Advanced, collaborative planning
6. Extensive opportunities for staff development
7. Strategic partnerships
8. Rigorous approach to evaluation and commitment to program improvement
9. Clear focus on sustainability and cost-effectiveness.²

An effective program speeds up learning rather than allowing students’ knowledge to slip away over the summer and employs positive youth development practices.

**Approach to learning**
Although there often appears to be a division between the education and youth development fields, logic and research indicate the two practices are integrally linked. The approach-to-learning characteristics take a holistic view of young people’s development. Programs that take this approach reflect positive outcomes: higher school-year attendance and achievement, increased motivation to learn, increased feelings of belonging, and reduced participation in risky behavior. For programs to accelerate learning effectively, instruction should not merely replicate traditional school-year content or methods. Rather, summer instructional techniques are most effective when academic learning is woven into enrichment activities like field trips or learning a new skill. These opportunities for
enhancing young people’s knowledge should complement school-year teaching in content so that children return to school in the fall.

Youth development generally refers to an approach or process by which adults, organizations, and communities provide opportunities and supports so that young people can achieve and demonstrate a set of desired outcomes. Meaningful relationships that make the difference in the life of a young person are at the core of youth development beliefs. For young people to create and maintain relationships with peers and caring adults, interactions should be planned intentionally.

Both an intent on accelerating learning and a commitment to youth development lead to the most important task of summer programs: preventing summer learning loss and narrowing the expansion of the achievement gap.

**Program infrastructure**

The second set of characteristics expresses the theory behind the infrastructural components that make up the fourth through ninth characteristics of effective summer learning programs. The roles, tasks, and decisions of the program’s leadership determine everything else that will follow. Outstanding programs tap into empowering leadership techniques so that staff members at all levels are supported in their tasks. This would include staff access to tools, resources, and information. Most important, staff would feel confident in their ability to tackle problems and take responsibility for their actions.

Program leaders play a key role in facilitating an advanced, collaborative program-planning process that offers stakeholders a voice. Not only are program staff stakeholders, but so are community members, customers, and partners. All of these audiences buy into the plan to fulfill their responsibilities to the organization and their students. Ideally, planning would begin at least six months in advance of the program’s start date. Even the most experienced program must allot planning time to produce high-quality learning and engagement
opportunities for young people. But beyond yearly planning, an excellent program will undertake a strategic planning process.

Staff development can be a challenge for summer programs because of the combination of year-round and seasonal staff. The varied backgrounds of employees can also present a challenge. For staff development to be useful, it must be relevant. In the following profiles, programs have addressed this need in multiple ways. The solutions to staff development are as unique as the programs.

Before considering the components of a healthy strategic partnership, we need to address what constitutes a strategic partnership. A strategic partnership is mutually beneficial, adds value to all partners, and meets a critical need. All partners understand what they hope to gain and what their partners hope to gain from the relationship. The mission and vision of each organization should be enhanced by the partnership. An offshoot of partnership relationships are relationships with stakeholders, people who are needed to maintain program support and interest.

Evaluation is a continual process. Programs committed to rigorous evaluation and program improvement collect feedback, measure progress, report outcomes, and work to improve the quality of their services. The first step in evaluation is defining performance indicators, which should encompass both academic and youth development goals. Measurement techniques such as surveys, academic assessment, and observation should be considered when creating performance indicators. Most important, the data collected should be used to improve program practices and should be shared with all stakeholders in a timely manner to facilitate buy-in and organizational transparency.

Finally, and often most challenging, effective summer programs plan for sustainability and cost-effectiveness. Sustainability is the ability to meet the current needs of the organization and program while actively preparing for future needs. Although program leadership usually manages this task, staff members must each be aware of and responsive to the program’s vision, mission, and strategies that support sustainability. For maximum effectiveness, strategic planning and sustainability efforts should interrelate, align with the organization’s mission, and be clearly communicated to all stake-
holders. Cost-effectiveness, the relationship between financial costs and program results, is an important component of sustainability. Understanding cost-effectiveness is beneficial because it allows programs to clearly articulate outcomes. This clear communication is useful for funder, partner, and stakeholder relationships.

Program profiles
The following profiles are of thirteen programs that were applicants to the Center for Summer Learning’s Excellence in Summer Learning Award. This award recognizes outstanding summer programs that demonstrate excellence in accelerating academic achievement and promoting positive development for young people between kindergarten and twelfth grade. Given annually, the goal of the Excellence in Summer Learning Award is to identify and highlight programs providing high-quality summer learning experiences for youth. Both the application procedure and the review process were based on the characteristics described earlier.

In 2006, the reviewers promoted thirteen programs into the second round: Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL); CentroNía; Covenant House Washington; Discovery Creek; Family Technology Resource Center; Harlem Educational Activities Fund, Inc.; Harlem RBI; Higher Achievement Program; Milwaukee Public Schools; Newport Partnership for Families; Parks & People Foundation; Summerbridge Pittsburgh; and Trail Blazers. These programs apply a range of techniques to support young people’s development and accelerate learning such as rigorous academic instruction, exploration of the natural world, and enrichment opportunities.

Each of the thirteen programs participated in an interview with reviewers who inquired about a typical program day, how the program used its evaluation data, and the program’s greatest achievement. Based on this interview and the application, the center honored a record four programs with the Excellence in Summer Learning Award in 2006: BELL, Harlem RBI, Higher Achievement Program, and Trail Blazers.
The variety of instructional and organizational practices described in the profiles illustrates the range of possibilities that compose an excellent summer learning program. There is not a single prescribed model to creating an outstanding program where young people are supported in their growth over the summer months. Rather, what is most interesting about this collection of programs is their shared commitment to quality programming and to meeting the needs of young people, families, and their communities during the critical summer months.

- **Organization**: BELL
- **Program name**: BELL Accelerated Learning Summer Program
- **Date of initial operation**: 1996
- **Number of youth served annually through summer program**: 3,750
- **Student-to-staff ratio**: 1:8
- **Highlighted characteristic**: Rigorous approach to evaluation and commitment to program improvement

The mission of BELL is to increase the educational achievements, self-esteem, and life opportunities of elementary school children living in low-income urban communities. In 1996, to counter the summer learning losses of participants, BELL began its Accelerated Learning Summer Program (BELL Summer).

BELL maintains a rigorous approach to evaluation and a commitment to program improvement. BELL Summer has four major goals for participants: improve academic performance; enhance self-concept and attitude toward learning; develop social skills, leadership abilities, and a perception of themselves as contributing members of a community; and engage their parents as educational facilitators and advocates. For over six years, BELL has been engaged in formal outcome measurement. Preprogram and postprogram assessments of academic skills are used to objectively measure improvement. BELL Summer teachers complete progress reports midway and at the conclusion of the program. Parent and staff perspective on goal achievement is collected through postprogram surveys and focus groups. BELL’s evaluation advisory board, governing
board, and management team review the program outcomes every year to determine the most effective elements of their program model and areas for improvement. Data from the previous summer are used in the planning process. These data are reported in a “Lessons Learned” report issued to senior management in November before the launch of the formal project plan in December. BELL uses the data to refine elements and replicate successful elements.

In 2004, BELL scholars gained an average of six months of grade-equivalent skills in reading and math during the six-week program. Over the course of the summer, these participants moved closer to their peers nationally, performing at the fiftieth and forty-second percentiles in reading and math, respectively, by the end of the program compared with the forty-third and thirty-first percentiles when the program began.

During the summers of 2004 and 2005, BELL participated in an independent third-party evaluation to measure the extent to which BELL Summer contributes to the learning gains of children in low-income communities compared with students who did not participate. This study used an experimental design and offers the field the first experimental evidence of a multisite summer program. The independent study yielded a statistically positive effect on students’ reading skills and parents’ home reading habits in comparison to the control group.

- Organization: CentroNía
- Program name: CentroNía School Age/Youth Development Summer Program
- Location: Washington, DC
- Date of initial operation: 1986
- Number of youth served annually: about 200
- Student-to-staff ratio: 1:10
- Highlighted characteristic: Strategic partnerships

CentroNía provides comprehensive education and family support services to nearly a thousand low-income predominantly African American and Latino and African immigrant individuals.
The program provides holistic support to children, youth, and their families, incorporating an outcomes-based curriculum with a multicultural foundation and arts-integrated pedagogy. Integrating the arts with other subject areas combines the hands-on creativity of the arts (visual, performing, and literary) with the focused content of subjects such as math, science, language arts, and social studies.

CentroNía developed an integral web of strategic partnerships with local arts institutions, including the Corcoran Museum, the Levine School of Music, The Freer Art Gallery, and the District of Columbia Public Access Television. All of these organizations participate by offering classes for participants, organizing trips, and providing vital staff professional development. In addition, CentroNía’s Multidisciplinary Arts Program uses its relationships to accelerate learning opportunities for students who want to continue rigorous arts instruction. CentroNía’s arts program has secured student scholarships at institutions such as the Corcoran College of Art and Design, Young Playwrights Theater, DC Dance Theater, GALA Hispanic Theater, and other organizations. Through its many affiliations, CentroNía’s students have received innumerable opportunities to attend art exhibits and other events.

The program engages youth participants in language acquisition, multidisciplinary arts activities, literacy, recreation, technology, and youth leadership. The goal is that students will acquire a basic knowledge and vocabulary to articulate their ideas and visions in addition to supplementing the foundation of their traditional academic settings.

- Organization: Covenant House Washington, Prevention Services
- Program name: Summer Enrichment Program
- Date of initial operation: 1999
- Number of youth served annually through summer program: 150
- Student-to-staff ratio: 8–10:1
- Highlighted characteristic: A firm commitment to youth development

The Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) is designed to meet the needs of youth aged eleven to seventeen at high risk for teen preg-
nancy, substance abuse, violence, and low educational attainment. The program enhances young people’s academic skills while expanding their life experiences through community service projects, recreation, and cultural outings. Developing participants’ social and familial relationships is also a goal of the summer program.

The academic portion of the program occurs in the morning during the seven- to eight-week summer program. The students attend math, language arts, social studies, and technology classes that focus on cultural or youth-centered themes. Participants experience cultural and recreational enrichment through field trips and activities. Guest speakers visit the program and engage youth in group discussions on topics such as politics and substance abuse.

Following the morning academic component, youth select from a range of activities such as community service opportunities or arts projects. The students can participate in the Youth Advisory Board, which helps members to develop leadership skills and self-awareness while providing a service to their community. Youth can also expand their abilities in the Peer Leadership Training program, which provides peer mentoring, career exploration opportunities, and job-readiness skill development. Both the Youth Advisory Board and Peer Leadership Training allow youth to develop skills to ensure their future success while providing feedback to the program.

- Organization: Discovery Creek Children’s Museum of Washington
- Program name: Summer Nature Adventure Programs
- Date of initial operation: 1996
- Number of youth served annually through summer program: 1,400 in 2006
- Student-to-staff ratio: 6:1
- Highlighted characteristic: Proactive approach to summer learning

Discovery Creek Children’s Museum of Washington provides meaningful outdoor experiences that are hands-on and minds-on to Washington, D.C.’s underserved children. The museum’s staff members are committed to helping children experience, appreciate,
and become stewards of the natural environment by educating through ecoimmersion exhibitions, live animal demonstrations, and dynamic interactive teaching.

Planning for the Summer Nature Adventure Programs is a year-round process. The summer program managers create a work plan with a highly organized breakdown of monthly tasks. This work plan is constantly updated and revised to reflect the most efficient operational practices and procedures. The summer program staff schedule time throughout the year to meet with all staff members. Meeting topics include professional development opportunities and discussions in behavior management, program content, and strategies for working with children. Discovery Creek ensures that all full-time staff members are trained in educational approaches that include experiential education, object-based learning, inquiry-based learning, place-based education, and immersion education.

Each summer session is designed around a theme and teaches environmental education through science, art, culture, history, play, team building, and outdoor adventure. Each day is planned by staff members to include a variety of activities that engage the mind of every child. The goal at Discovery Creek is to find a way to connect with every child and spark that child’s interest in science or the natural world.

- Organization: Family Technology Resource Center
- Program name: Summer Extravaganza
- Date of initial operation: 2001
- Number of youth served annually through summer program: 460
- Student-to-staff ratio: 3:1
- Highlighted characteristic: Extensive opportunities for staff development

Summer Extravaganza is one of many programs offered through the Family Technology Resource Center (FTRC) and was created five years ago in response to teacher requests to reform science, math, and technology education for children. Educators were concerned that children were losing their intrinsic interest in science
and that young girls were beginning to believe the adage that girls are not good at science or math.

Summer Extravaganza is a project-based science, math, and technology program where each summer teams explore real-world issues. The program provides students an opportunity to learn from and with teachers, scientists, college students, and professors on a university campus. It also provides teachers with materials they can integrate into their regular classrooms.

Professional development is critical to program success. Yearly, the Center for Education Integrating Science, Math, and Computing and the Georgia Tech Research Institute conduct a fifty-hour course to prepare teachers for the upcoming Summer Extravaganza. Educators earn credit for their teaching recertification from the course. Through professional development opportunities, teachers, paraprofessionals, and other partners learn effective instructional strategies. Summer Extravaganza believes that as many teachers as possible should participate so educators can incorporate science, math, and technology into classroom instruction. The program hopes increased effective integration of technology into the curriculum will boost female and minority enrollment in higher education over the long term.

- Organization: Harlem Educational Activities Fund, Inc.
- Program name: Summer Quest
- Date of initial operation: 1999
- Number of youth served annually through summer program: 125 in 2005
- Student-to-staff ratio: 12:1
- Highlighted characteristic: Firm commitment to youth development

Harlem Educational Activities Fund, Inc. (HEAF), is an education and youth development organization that works to help motivated students develop the intellectual curiosity, academic ability, social values, and personal resilience they need to ensure success in school, career, and life. Students are identified in mid-
dle school and supported through a variety of out-of-school-time academic and youth development programs through college.

HEAF’s Summer Quest Program provides summer enrichment opportunities to students who do not typically participate in quality academic summer programs. Summer Quest’s dynamic model builds academic skill and engages minds through fun and exciting activities. Students’ interests drive the content of project-based classes, which are designed to foster collaboration, communication, and leadership skills. Summer Quest activities range from academic classes to test preparation for the New York City Specialized High School Admissions Test. Recent electives included Project Restaurant, AI: Build a Bot, CSI Harlem, Order in the Court, Comic Creations, and the Fantastic Four: Elements of Hip Hop. The asset-rich environment promotes character development and social skills. HEAF’s young scholars explore issues of ethics, values, leadership, and identity through Summer Quest activities. As students meet these challenges, they increase their self-confidence and broaden their self-concept.

• Organization: Harlem RBI
• Program name: Reading and Enrichment Academy for Learning (REAL) Kids
• Date of initial operation: 1999
• Number of youth served annually through summer program: 240 in 2006, 270 in 2007
• Student-to-staff ratio: 5:1
• Highlighted characteristic: Proactive approach to summer learning

Harlem RBI is a community-based youth development organization that uses baseball, softball, and the power of teams to provide inner-city youth with opportunities to play, learn, and grow, inspiring them to recognize their potential and realize their dreams. The goal of the REAL Kids Program is to provide structured academic, enrichment, and sports programming in a supportive and engaging environment. Specific goals include the prevention of summer learning loss, an increase in literacy skills, the fostering
of positive social skills, and the improvement of physical fitness and health for all participants.

The objectives are achieved through several proactive strategies. Whether in the classroom, on the ball field, or on a field trip, participants’ developmental needs are met as they come to value and enjoy learning, cultivate their physical abilities, and build meaningful relationships. The program has five main components: literacy workshops, team clubhouse, baseball or softball teams, field trips, and a sleep-away camp.

Coaches may lead a discussion about the team’s experiences on the field in which they discuss conflict and celebrate success. The youth receive writing challenges such as composing a cheer or poem. Problem-solving initiatives are offered daily through conflict resolution role-plays and reflective discussions. Last, youth create a summer-long project using listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, which are the four elements of literacy. Past projects have included a video documentary, a sports highlight show, and life-sized baseball cards. Harlem RBI has created a proactive learning experience while giving young people the opportunity to have fun, enjoy new experiences, and develop friendships.

- Organization: Higher Achievement Program
- Program name: Higher Achievement Summer Academy
- Date of initial operation: 1975
- Number of youth served annually through summer program: 460
- Student-to-staff ratio: 12:1
- Highlighted characteristic: Intentional focus on accelerating learning

Higher Achievement is a year-round high school preparatory program for disadvantaged middle-school children. Higher Achievement’s mission is to develop academic habits and behaviors in vulnerable middle-school children to increase their educational opportunities. The organization’s goals are to improve student academic achievement, to send all program graduates to top high schools, and to make academic excellence a valued goal.
in all communities. The program combines advanced social justice-oriented curricula, with individual mentoring and high school placement. Higher Achievement fills service gaps with a four-year sustained academic intervention during the most critical years in a child’s social and academic development. This intervention builds students’ skills and attitudes that affect achievement and works to continue this progress through to college acceptance.

Over each summer of their middle-school years, participants attend classes that follow an accelerated version of local standards for learning and develop basic academic skills like note taking and managing a planner. Scholars participate in weekly field trips and a three-day university trip to experience college life. The Summer Academy bolsters scholars’ academic skills, self-confidence, and critical thinking skills.

In many urban public school systems, a lack of academic opportunity results in underachievement. Higher Achievement reverses this cycle with opportunities like relationships with mentors, accelerated and hands-on academic work, and top school placement that develop and reward academic progress. These chances for growth encourage student interest, which increases student effort, which in turn leads to academic achievement and ultimately to the opportunity to attend a top high school.

The curriculum combines skill acquisition with experiential learning activities and academic skill building. Whether simulating a United Nations debate or measuring the amount of carbon dioxide in a running tail pipe, scholars are introduced to advanced concepts through methods that inspire their curiosity and increase their confidence.

- Organization: Milwaukee Public Schools
- Program name: Summer Community Learning Centers (CLCs) Program
- Date of initial operation: 1999
- Number of youth served annually through summer program: 5,248 (summer school); 5,971 (CLCs)
- Student-to-staff ratio: 15–20:1 (summer school); 20:1 (CLCs)
- Highlighted characteristic: Strategic partnerships
Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) is a large urban decentralized school district serving over 93,500 students. One of the district’s six core beliefs is that community partnerships add value. This belief is upheld through a myriad of district initiatives, including the Summer CLC program, which has established a large number of partnerships to provide summer programming to some of Milwaukee’s neediest youth, 87 percent of whom qualified for free or reduced-fee school lunch.

Youth enrolled in the Summer CLC Program, held at over thirty middle and elementary schools, receive wrap-around services that include academic support, nutritious meals, and exposure to enriching activities and caring adults, all of which support student learning and health.

The success of Milwaukee’s Summer CLC Program is due to the collaborative efforts of the MPS Division of Community Recreation, MPS Facilities and Maintenance Services, MPS School Nutrition Services, MPS Summer School Office, and ten Milwaukee-area community-based organizations. Additional partnerships are established through the Summer School planning committee, which comprises district employees from curriculum and instruction, school nutrition, transportation, recreation, bilingual and special education, guidance, school safety, and certified or classified staffing.

The CLC program also works in partnership with its community partners to seek funding for this valuable program. Moreover, Milwaukee’s CLCs are highly represented on the Wisconsin Afterschool Network, which advocates for state-level funding appropriations.

- Organization: Newport Partnership for Families
- Program name: Reading Reaps Rewards
- Date of initial operation: 2001
- Number of youth served annually through summer program: 250 in 2004, 400 in 2005
- Student-to-staff ratio: 13:1
- Highlighted characteristic: Advanced, collaborative planning
The Newport Partnership for Families works to develop and maintain an integrated network of services that are responsive to the needs of all families, are culturally sensitive, and focus on the strengths of each family. The partnership is committed to developing high-quality programs that foster self-sufficiency, high educational standards, and true parental involvement. The partnership joined Newport, Rhode Island, Public Schools; Newport Public Education; and local community agencies to design a comprehensive summer literacy plan. This model brings all of the services and opportunities together to offer students the literacy opportunities they need within summer recreational programs.

The partnership’s educational success committee oversees all aspects of the Reading Reaps Rewards (R3) program. The committee meets monthly ten months a year. In the fall, the committee processes information from the previous year, including evaluation results. These sessions focus on what worked and what needs to be changed to overcome barriers to success. Winter meetings focus on the next year’s program, primarily defining and securing the needed resources. This process results in a strategic plan that gains broad support from program participants, members, and funders.

By design, and in all implementation aspects, the summer reading program is a collaborative process, with its agenda and decision driven by partners. The vision is held by all members of the partnership community, including parents.

- Organization: Parks & People Foundation
- Program name: SuperKids Camp
- Date of initial operation: 1997
- Number of youth served annually through summer program: 1,000
- Student-to-staff ratio: 1:10
- Highlighted characteristic: Rigorous approach to evaluation and commitment to program improvement

The Parks & People Foundation’s SuperKids Camp (SKC) program is dedicated to the prevention of summer learning loss and to early childhood literacy development. The goals of the camp are
building reading skills, creating and implementing a replicable model for effective community partnerships, and assisting in the recruitment of new teachers to the Baltimore City Public School System.

To meet their goals, SKC conducts various forms of evaluation of the students’ reading levels and their program. They conduct a before-and-after standardized vocabulary and comprehension test. Each site administrator provides weekly reports on the number of lessons mastered and the number of books read by each child. An in-depth evaluation is also completed by a qualified outside evaluator.

The research design includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, sixth edition (DIBELS), test indicates whether students have the requisite literacy skills necessary for grade promotion. The second data source is a modified version of the Garfield Reading Survey, which measures student reading motivation and camp-related experiences. Finally, a staff survey captures staff perceptions of the curriculum, student performance, and parental involvement. Daily attendance is also an important data source. Program reports from SKC enrichment providers are also reviewed to determine the degree to which they met objectives.

Data sources revealed a clear and positive impact of SKC on students’ ability to read. On all measures of the DIBELS, students demonstrated statistically significant growth. The Garfield Student Survey revealed that students’ motivation to read was strong at the conclusion of camp and that students thoroughly enjoyed many elements of the curriculum. Staff surveys indicated an overwhelming improvement in reading ability, reading interest, and attitude toward reading by students. Further, by the end of the six-week camp, students were prepared for the next grade.

- Organization: Summerbridge Pittsburgh
- Program name: Summerbridge Pittsburgh Summer Program
- Date of initial operation: 1994
- Number of youth served annually through summer program: 150
- Student-to-staff ratio: 4:1
- Highlighted characteristic: Clear focus on sustainability and cost-effectiveness
Summerbridge Pittsburgh (SBP) provides a tuition-free, two-year, life-changing experience that empowers at-risk middle-school students to achieve academic success and inspires young adults to pursue careers in education. By using a high-energy approach to learning and leadership, middle-school students gain the academic and leadership skills critical to future educational success, and high school and college-age teachers learn that the best educators are driven by dedication and passion. SBP is a six-week intensive summer session that students attend for two consecutive summers. They use the “student-teaching-students” model of educational empowerment.

SBP has an expansive network of diverse partners, including corporations, foundations, cultural institutions, public and independent schools, colleges and universities, and SBP families. The support of Sewickley Academy, SBP’s educational partner, is critical to sustaining the work of SBP. The Sewickley Academy’s business office coordinates with the SBP director to oversee and maintain all financial issues. The academy’s development director supports SBP in soliciting and securing funding from diverse entities and seeking an appropriate balance among foundation, corporation, and individual support. Because of the strength of SBP’s relationship with the academy, the strong program infrastructure in place, and a significant endowment fund, SBP could sustain its work should the support of a major funder be lost.

- Organization: Trail Blazers
- Program name: Trail Blazers Summer Program
- Date of initial operation: 1887
- Number of youth served annually through summer program: 350
- Student-to-staff ratio: 1:3
- Highlighted characteristic: Strong, empowering leadership

Trail Blazers facilitates the development of values and life skills essential for productive citizenship in inner-city youth. The summer program helps children develop a love of learning; build interpersonal skills; and increase self-confidence, self-esteem, and
self-reliance. The Trail Blazers program provides educational opportunity for at-risk youth.

Trail Blazers forges lasting and effective relationships between group leaders and the children and works with each camper for a minimum of three years. Children are introduced to Trail Blazers through the Summer Program and then participate in year-round programming including the education weekends, mentoring, and leadership training. The Summer Program has two goals: to develop a love of learning and an increase in the time spent reading and writing and to enhance interpersonal skills and the ability to interact appropriately with peers and adults.

The structure of the camp was also established to provide leadership for the children. The executive director lives on site during the summer months to manage all operations. Each camp director supervises a team of three “enablers,” who are at least nineteen years old and must be enrolled or have graduated from a college or university. Many group leaders are former campers. They also employ an education coordinator, a certified teacher who oversees education efforts and works with two literacy coordinators to implement academic programming.

Notes


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