

Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative

Executive Summary of the 2011 Evaluation



HSLI...Where the Summer Learning Faucet Stays On!

Summer is a time ripe with opportunity for learning for children and youth. As children leave behind the structured school day and their afterschool programs where much of their time is spent on homework, they are eager for something different. Summer programs have the gift of time, with the freedom to fill the whole day with activities that captivate children's interest, leveraging what is known about motivation and engagement in learning to build skills needed for success in school and in life.

The goal of the Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative (HSLI) is to provide low-income youth with fun and engaging experiences to stem summer learning loss. Summer can be a time when low-income children are vulnerable. There is a common notion that summer is a carefree time for children, filled with time to play outdoors, go to summer camp, and on family trips. However, for many children, summer is a time when they lack access to adult supervision, healthy meals, and stimulating learning experiences. More than half of the achievement gap between lower-and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities (Alexander et al, 2007). The research shows that they may experience a three-month drop in reading skills, which can accumulate to a two-year achievement gap by middle school.

During an HSLI visit to a summer program that focused on the Nature Curriculum, a boy was asked, "What do you like to read?" His eyes lit up and he enthusiastically replied, "I like to read about butterflies. Come, look, we have butterflies here that are waiting to hatch. Well, actually they are still chrysalis."

Purpose

- Advance summer learning and literacy for low-income children

What's at stake?

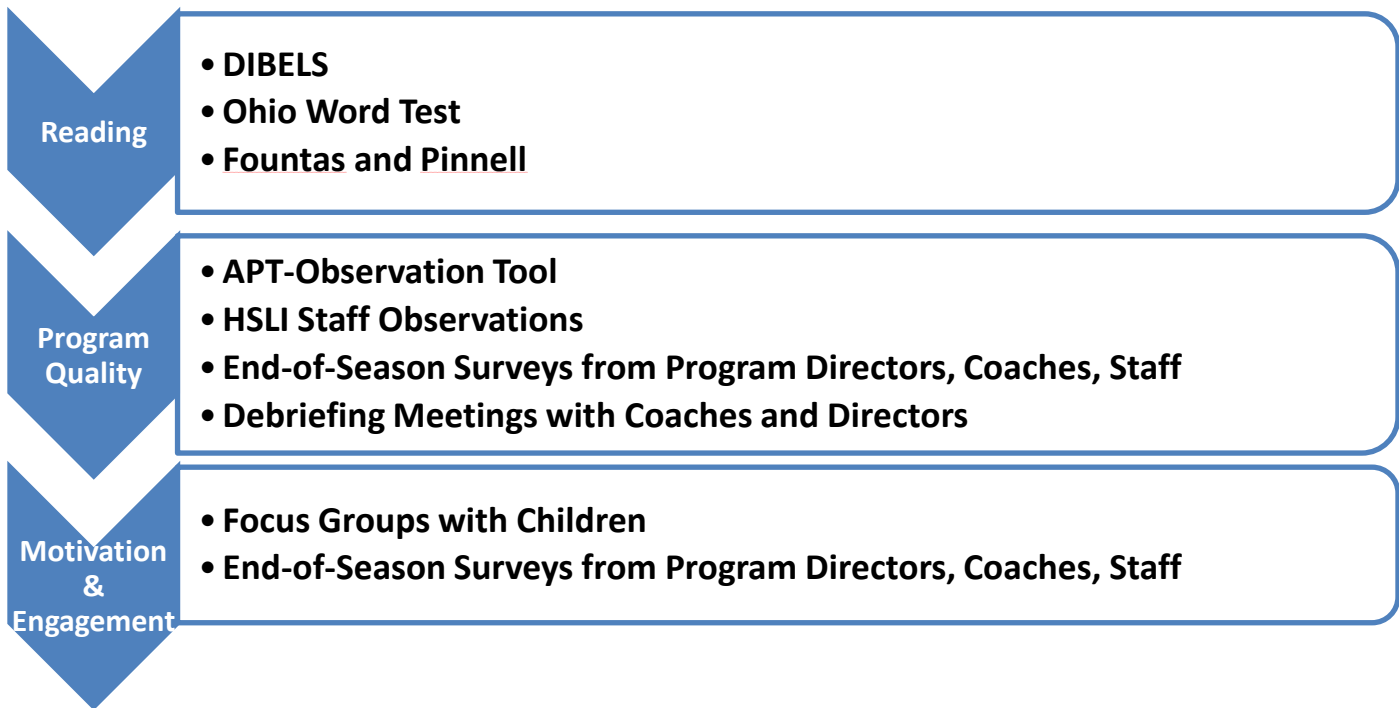
- 60% of children in Springfield and 79% of children in Holyoke are not reading proficiently by grade 3.
- Given the added risks of high percentages of children being low-income, limited English Proficient and having special educational needs, it is critical to insure that we keep the learning faucet on in the summer.

What are the resources?

- Thematic curriculum
- Literacy Supports
- Training
- Technical Assistance from Coaches
- Quality Improvement
- Focus on relationships, youth engagement, behavior
- Increasing access
- Teen Apprentices

HSLI Outcomes

- 68% of children assessed advanced or maintained reading scores.
- A solid foundation in program quality
- Staff and children report high levels of enjoyment and engagement.

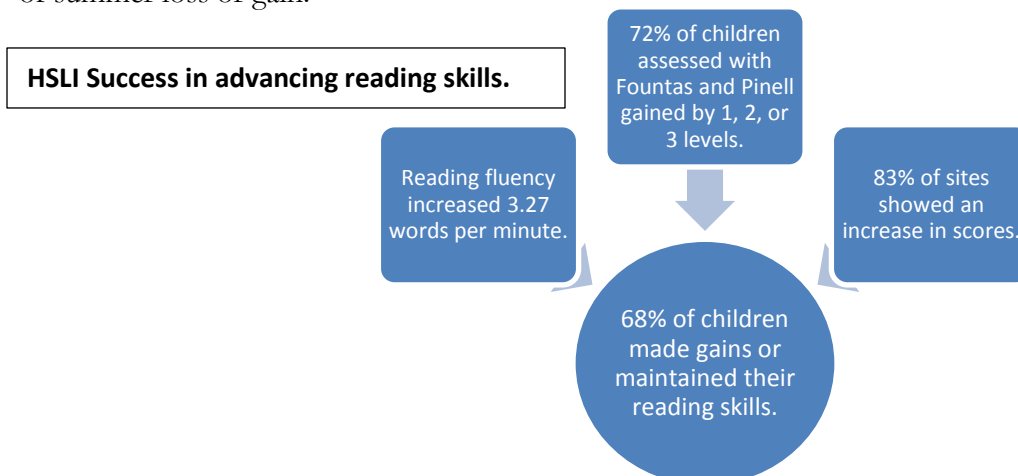


Goal ONE: HSLI helps children advance and maintain reading skill during the summer

Each summer since 2006, HSLI has refined and deepened its focus on literacy interventions, increasing research-based literacy strategies of training, planning, and coaching. The strategies have been informed by a compelling body of evidence that makes the case that summer reading is an essential ingredient to reading proficiency.

Researchers Hayes and Grether (1982) found that a seven-month difference in reading achievement between poor and middle class students in the second grade had widened to two-years and seven months by the end of sixth grade. The gap grew in spite of the fact that the two groups made similar progress during the school year, and accounts for upwards of 80% of the achievement difference between economically advantaged and disadvantaged schools.

Volume of reading and book selection are also important. As early as 1978, Heyns stated, “Reading is the single summer activity that is most strongly and consistently related to summer learning.” Jeff McQuinlan found that exposure to comprehensible, interesting reading material is the simplest and best way to improve reading achievement (McQuillan, 1998). Bracey (2003) stated that the “volume of summer reading was the best predictor of summer loss or gain.”



Goal Two: Building a strong foundation through quality improvement

Over the past ten years, the research has shown that after-school and out-of-school time programs can produce outcomes if they are of high quality (MARS, 2007). HSLI has placed a strong emphasis on program quality in a number of ways, knowing that it is the foundation that will lead to positive child outcomes:

- For the second year, external evaluators conducted quality observations with 23 programs using the APT-O tool. The tool has a 4-point scale and HSLI has asked that programs reach the benchmark score of 2.70. Program quality scores are solid, with an overall score of 3.09.
- Each program is required to complete a self-assessment and an improvement plan. Some issues that will be addressed in the year ahead are adult-child relationships, increasing reflection on learning, and more training for line staff.
- HSLI evaluator collected feedback from coaches, leaders and staff about quality and found that overall, HSLI has good quality, through efforts of a dedicated group of people. Staff feel more competent and confident. There is more work to be done on building staff teams and their ability to build relationships and learning for children.

HSLI sites are consistent in carrying out the quality standards with the aggregate score for program observation is 3.09:



Goal Three: Provide supports and opportunities for learning, motivation and engagement.

Flow is the state of deep absorption in an activity that is intrinsically enjoyable. Flow involves concentration, interest, and enjoyment. Participants in high-quality out of school time programs are more likely to be engaged in activities where they experience flow, which is inherently related to learning (Shernoff and Vandell, 2008).

In 2011, HSLI evaluators collected preliminary data on participants' learning and engagement and motivation and found that:

- Staff and coaches play a major role in promoting engagement and motivation for children.
- The consistent and extensive use of experiential education techniques and activities drives children's learning, engagement, and motivation.
- The experiences that children enjoyed the most were field trips, doing experiments, and engaging in experiential education that nurtured their desires for exploration and opportunities to be curious.

“Much like we would expect an athlete or a musician's performance to suffer if they didn't practice regularly, the same thing is true for young people when it comes to reading performance,” *Ron Fairchild, founding CEO of the National Summer Learning Association.*

Recommendations

On literacy, continue and expand the current program supports, given the reading advances made by 68% of children.

- Continue universal literacy strategies, while expanding children's time on text and the range of choices for children about what they read.
- Expand the involvement of families in promoting reading and literacy, by involving families in literacy events, sending home literacy materials and providing hands-on training for families.
- Continue and enhance technical assistance, as the utilization of coaches with teaching background is a major strength of HSLI. In addition, explore funding to make reading interventionists available to each site to work with small groups of struggling readers.

On quality, continue to maintain the focus on high quality program practices.

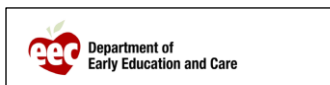
- Increase focus on adult-child relationships through more engaging and thought provoking conversations.
- Provide more voice and choice in activities and more opportunities for youth leadership and problem-solving, including more structured reflection time.
- Strengthen structural supports that make high quality possible. Identify strategies to help leaders design well-planned summer programs, and to respond to issues around staff motivation, training, and engagement with children.

On the initiative

- Create a more robust evaluation to fully understand the impact of the initiative.
 - Use a more comprehensive literacy assessment tool and a control group
 - Collect information on program variables like staff qualifications and adult-child ratios, differences in demographic variables
 - Further evaluate outcomes on engagement and motivation in learning.
- Increase focus on choice, hands-on learning, field trips, and reflection as a way to deepen engagement and motivation in learning. Find ways to increase youth leadership opportunities.
- Increase access to summer learning opportunities through community collaboration, increasing the Summer Fund, public support, and making changes in public policies.



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The Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative would like to thank the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County and our funders and partners for their ongoing commitment, inspiration and leadership. Because of you....2300 children in 39 programs were engaged in learning during the summer of 2011!

How Does HSLI Make A Difference For Individual Children?

Johanna is an English language learner. She was born in Honduras on January 29, 2002. She entered the Springfield Public school system in November 2008. She began attending the Edward P. Boland School in her second-grade-year in August 2010, after completing kindergarten and first grade in other Springfield Schools.

The Boland summer program focused on the Nature Curriculum. Johanna worked three days per week with a Reading Intervention Teacher, in a group of four children. During half of the sessions, they reread familiar texts, worked on decoding specific words, read and discussed books. During the other sessions, they re-read familiar texts, wrote about a book they had read at the previous session, and discussed a new book. They worked on books at Fountas and Pinnell levels I and K during these sessions. Johanna also participated daily in whole-group read-alouds and in small-group reading instruction. During the small-group lessons, leveled books from the A-to-Z website were used. Various comprehension strategies were taught and practiced with nature-themed books.

Johanna reports that she speaks Spanish at home almost all of the time. As a result, she does not have an easy familiarity with English syntax. Her active participation in HSLI has helped her become more comfortable expressing herself in English. Mrs. Rabbitt fostered her development in oral communication and comprehension by phrasing questions in ways to make them understood and by providing ample wait time for her to form her responses.

All of Johanna's F&P scores are in the "Needs Improvement" level, yet she continues to make strong gains. She began at Level F in October and moved to Level K by August. A score of level F at the beginning of second grade is the lowest score in the "Needs Improvement" category. A score of Level K score at the end of second grade is at the high end of "Needs Improvement," just one level below "Proficient."