

Civil War, and the plight of the Lost Boys. The class went above and beyond what was planned out in the curriculum because they were personally interested in the topic and had the desire to learn more. The beauty of a summer program like this is that the students have the freedom to explore what interests them and dictate their own education, without realizing it. The arts component proved to be an additional source of inspiration for the students. Often if a student was reluctant to write about a book, they were asked to draw pictures and then write down an explanation. The level of detail applied to this process was far greater than if they were simply told to write. The freedom that came with drawing encouraged students to critically think about the questions in a format that did not feel discouraging.

While this program is not run through the public education system, its framework is something that could be adopted by the public schools. The literature about literacy-based summer programs suggests that this is a cost effective way to reduce the effects of the summer slide in low income students. If the public schools were able to implement such a program, they should expect to see immediate results as well as long-term benefits such as an increase in high school graduation rates. While the afternoon enrichment component of Anna's Arts is not something that could be recreated nationwide, monthly gatherings or demonstrations at schools could be organized state by state or in individual school districts. Another way to extend the program would be to partner with Public Libraries. Students could track their process and expand their access to literature during trips to the library. School busses that are not in use could be repurposed to make trips to libraries, eliminating the burden from working parents and guardians. Access to a library's vast resources encourages students to investigate topics that interest them and direct the trajectory of their summer reading. The program can be customized by each school district in order to best serve the population.

Another literacy-based summer program, Continued Connections, has similar goals to Anna's Arts for Kids but is implemented in a different way. This program, executed at Nicolet Elementary School in the Midwestern United States, was conceived as a way to prevent significant declines in reading levels of their students in the summer between first and second grade.³⁸ The hope was the Continued Connections would “preserve agreed upon classroom philosophies and draw upon existing structures” in order to maintain, if not advance, students reading levels over the summer.³⁹ The program was not intended to replace existing summer school or compete with library reading programs, but instead to continue the reading habits of all students. Continued Connections focused on the reading program that they used during the school year, named ZIP because students often carried reading materials in plastic bags that zipped. The summer program was designed by teachers and other faculty members who had close contact with students during the school year and knew exactly the areas they needed to focus on.

Continued Connections was originally conceived as a “school-bound program,” but that raised concerns about reaching the most disadvantaged students.⁴⁰ The issue was that students whose parents are already estranged from the typical school setting would not participate because their parents were wary of enrolling in yet another public education program. Continued Connections solved this problem by reorganizing the program and focusing on making it “available and in settings that allow easy access and simplified intake, and [were] respectful,

³⁸ Malach and Rutter, “For nine months kids go to school, but in summer this school goes to kids”, 50-51.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

culturally competent and empowering.”⁴¹ After receiving funding from a state-funded education group, Continued Connections hired three teachers to work with the program daily. Books from the school, that typically go unused in the summer, were used to stock a converted recreational vehicle (RV) to serve as a mobile classroom. The RV drove around to five geographical areas within the school district, one a day each weekday, and reduced the number of weeks these students went without constructive reading programs during the summer to two. The program received permission slips from parents before the end of the school year during a mandatory meeting, ensuring 100 percent participation among the targeted group. Each child had the opportunity to meet with a teacher who constructed a lesson specifically for his reading level. The program also fostered a sense of academic independence in the students, encouraging them to write book reports if they wanted, or to get their parents involved. Of the targeted students, 76% improved or maintained their end-of-first-grade reading level.⁴² This modest intervention program garnered results, and is both cost-effective and time-efficient and a good example of how even a little bit of intervention makes a big difference.

A nationwide literacy program would be the ultimate goal, but in order to achieve this, small pockets of initiatives need to be implemented first. These test programs would be funded from all branches of government, federal, state, and local, and then closely monitored in order to develop a system that could be widely implemented. The initial program would allow policy makers to identify what works and what does not, and funding from grants would allow some flexibility in the organization of each test program. Ideally this program would be staffed by

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Malach and Rutter, “For Nine Months Kids Go to School, but in Summer This School Goes to Kids”, 53.

teachers who would be paid in addition to their salaries at their school. It would be beneficial if these teachers could come together from schools within a district to strengthen relationships between schools. Having teachers from different schools adds a level of accountability for the teachers to produce their best work so they represent their school well. The labor market for teachers is not attracting the most qualified candidates, but the implementation of a program like this provides an opportunity to strengthen the economic viability of being a teacher. The program would be run out of the public school buildings and public libraries, but enrichment activities could take place on college campuses, college libraries, etc. While Anna's Arts has an ideal situation on the Tulane and Loyola campuses, that is not a practical option for most school districts. Keeping the programs within the school system is the most practical option for the state. Continued Connections found a way to reach their students by converting an RV, and similar creative measures could work. Smaller school districts could congregate in one location if needed, and students would have the option to attend the summer program at a different school than the one they attend during the school year.

A literacy-based summer program for all public school students is an ideal policy for the federal government to explore. The funding would come from the government and could be supplemented with individual states budgets. If such a program were to be implemented, the United States could expect to see significant improvement in elementary school reading levels, and in the long run increased graduation rates and matriculation to higher education.

Summer literacy programs would greatly benefit the American Education System, as well as the achievement levels of our students. Targeting these programs at low-SES students is necessary; however, all students enrolled in public elementary schools would have access. Much

like Continued Connections, parents and guardians need to be informed of the initiative during the school year, so the transition to summer is as smooth as possible. While the program would not be mandatory, it would be organized and presented in a way that makes it an attractive option for working parents as well as stay-at-home parents. Creating a universal summer program addresses Rawls's call to be responsible for ensuring equality of opportunity. Education is the foundation of long-term success and is critical to becoming a productive, fully functioning, member of society. Addressing this serious gap in education equality will put our nation's children on a more consistent path to success.

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