



# Road Map Summer Learning Exploratory Study

February, 2018



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**Youth Development Executives of King County**  
*Working together to advance the youth development field*



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# Executive Summary

## Background

Summer is a time for fun and learning for young people. Unfortunately, youth from low-income families have fewer opportunities for high-quality summer learning experiences; for them, summer can be a time when the achievement gap is compounded.

This report summarizes the findings and lessons learned of the Summer Learning Exploratory Study, which was designed to build a community of practice focused on mitigating summer learning loss and to engage in exploratory assessment of summer program quality, youth engagement, and participant academic growth.

Fourteen King County-based summer programs from seven organizations participated in this study.

## Recommendations

Foster better communication between school year and summer programs.

Rely on academic scales of SLPQA for academic assessment.

Develop better systems of matching students with best-fit programs.

Support programs to secure the staff and resources needed to deliver quality programs.

Maintain value of enrichment and exploratory learning.

## Key Findings

### Program Similarities

- Participating programs balanced delivery of activities focused on academics and enrichment, aiming to expose students to new experiences while offering engaging learning activities.
- All programs utilized partnerships and field trips to provide enriching program activities. All programs delivered meals, and most planned formal family engagement activities.
- Program staff members from all sites want increased collaboration and communication with schools about the best ways to support students academically, socially, and emotionally.

### Program Differences

The participating cohort was recruited based on similar program characteristics; nonetheless they exemplify diversity in the ways young people are served by summer programs.

- Differences in the age of students served, program length and academic support delivery model all impact quality and impact of program.
- Host organization characteristics (size and location of programs) resulted in differences in the program offerings.
- Academic support focus, delivery model and goals varied.

### Program Successes

- Summer programs showed quality improvement through the Youth Program Quality Intervention process.
- Students reported high satisfaction with the summer programs, along with substantial skill building.
- Families believe summer programs provide emotional and academic support.

### Program Challenges

- Programs struggled to hire and retain qualified staff.
- Programs want for sufficient resources to pursue quality improvement strategies including program planning, staff training and program implementation strategies.
- Programs were not successful in their attempts to implement a valid and reliable academic assessment.

# About the Road Map Summer Exploratory Study



## Learning Questions

The following questions guided the evaluation activities conducted as part of this exploratory study:

- What is the quality of summer programs overall, as measured by the Summer Learning Program Quality Assessment tool (SLPQA)?
- What measures do summer programs use to assess impact on academic outcomes?
- What strategies and tools are most useful, and can these be replicated at more sites?
- Are we able to draw any conclusions about the impact of summer programs on academic growth, and the relationships among program quality, student attendance, program features, and academic impact?
- What recommendations can we make to improve data collection?
- What recommendations can we make to improve summer programs?

Additionally, the study incorporated multiple open-ended opportunities for participant feedback and took an emergent-theme approach to analysis so that unanticipated lessons could be identified.

## Background

Summer is a critical time for sustaining the learning gains made during the school year. However, many young people from low-income families have too few opportunities for high-quality summer learning experiences. For these young people, the months between school years prove to be a time when they fall behind their wealthier peers, ultimately compounding the achievement gap year after year.

In 2016, two key work groups of the Road Map Project, Birth to Third Grade and Youth Development for Education Results, sought and received funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to strengthen summer programming in King County. Specifically, the Summer Learning Exploratory Study was designed to build a community of practice focused on mitigating summer learning loss and to engage in exploratory assessment of summer program quality, youth engagement, and participant academic growth. The purpose of this effort was to increase understanding of the relationship of youth program quality and academic outcomes in summer learning programs, empower providers of summer learning programs with information about how well they meet program quality standards and achieve academic outcomes, and identify tools to increase program quality and effectiveness.

## About this Report

This report is a summary of the findings and lessons learned from a two-year study spanning the summers of 2016 and 2017. It describes the participating cohort of summer programs, including information on program engagement, quality, and outcomes. It identifies common themes that impact those three important factors, outlines lessons learned, and provides recommendations for strengthening the summer programs offered to young people in King County.

# Study Details

## Participating Programs

Boys & Girls Clubs of King County:  
Smilow Rainier Vista Club,  
Renton/Skyway Club

East African Community Services:  
Elementary Program

Neighborhood House: Burndale,  
Firwood Circle (year 1 only), Seola  
Gardens

Southwest Youth & Family  
Services/New Futures: Arbor  
Heights, Windsor Heights,  
Woodridge Park

YMCA of Greater Seattle: Beacon  
Hill Elementary, Concord  
Elementary, Summer Language  
Journeys

Kent Youth & Family Services:  
Birch Creek Summer Splash (year 1  
only)

Center for Human Services, Camp  
Ballinger (year 2 only)

## Program Selection Criteria

**Participant characteristics:** More than 50% of served youth need academic support (are below standard or at risk of falling behind), and are in kindergarten through 12th grade.

**Dosage and intensity:** Programs meet for four or more weeks, at least four days a week, for at least three hours a day.

**Low or not cost:** In all instances, youth participation in the summer program was voluntary and the programs were provided at little or no cost to participants. The sites that charged for programs offered full scholarships.

**Outcome goals:** Programs have a goal of academic growth or maintenance (no learning loss) in math and/or reading.

## About the Cohort of Summer Programs

Fourteen summer programs from seven organizations participated in the Summer Learning Exploratory Study. Most programs participated both years; two participated in year one only, and one program joined for the second year only.

Staff members from participating programs were expected to engage in the following activities:

- Attend a full-day Summer Learning Institute in both 2016 and 2017.
- Engage in pre-summer data collection sessions with the evaluation team to ensure compliance with the necessary evaluation components.
- Make the program available annually to School's Out Washington for a full session Summer Learning Program Quality observational assessment and interview, and a follow-up coaching session on program quality.
- Track daily participation and demographic data of youth using the tracking tools provided.
- Submit academic growth data in a usable format to evaluation team.
- Participate in a full-day Planning with Data session in fall 2016 and fall 2017, and in bi-monthly summer learning cohort meetings through spring 2017.
- Participate in at least two focus group style discussions, in fall 2016 and fall 2017.

To support participation, programs were offered the following:

- Coaching on data collection and assessment.
- Site-level dashboard and summary report of summer evaluation results.
- Approximately \$3500 in operations funding per program site to offset costs of staff time and participation over two years.
- Two scholarships per organization to the annual School's Out Washington Bridge Conference which was combined with the National Summer Learning Association Conference in 2016.
- Scholarships to a 2017 Summer Con mini-conference hosted by School's Out Washington and focused on summer learning.
- Invitation to a staff recruitment fair held in partnership with the University of Washington.

# Program Similarities

## Summer programs commonly rely on a few key program components



**Summer is the time where we can take them outside of the housing complex** with field trips, more programming, more long-term projects, more project-based learning, getting the kids out into their community.

One of my biggest highlights was seeing all of our students hike to Franklin Falls. **For many of our students, it was their first time hiking.** They thought they wouldn't like it but they actually loved it and it made me so happy to see their faces especially when we made it to see the Falls.



### Favorite Field Trips

Ballard Locks • Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation • Camping at Moses Lake • Children's Museum • College Exploration Trip • Discovery Park Treasure Hunt • Family Fun Center & Wild Waves • Franklin Falls Hike • Fun Home The Musical • Henry Moses Aquatic Center • Museum of History and Industry • Paddleboarding • Renton Water Park • Scavenger Hunt at Trader Joes • Seattle Storm Game • Sounders Game • University of Washington • Woodland Park Zoo

All participating programs utilized partnerships and field trips to provide enriching program activities. All programs delivered meals, and most planned formal family engagement activities.

**Partnerships:** Many sites worked with external partners to deliver programming on site to students and families.

- 14 sites successfully used external partners for enrichment activities
- Key partners included AmeriCorps, Arts Corps, Auburn and Highline School District, Boy Scouts, Burke Museum, City of Seattle, Cooking Matters, Environmental Science Center, Evergreen Pools, Healthpoint, King County Library, Museum of Flight, Pacific Science Center, Peak 7-Outdoor, Scoutreach, Seattle Aquarium, Seattle Bouldering Project, Seattle Tilth, Skate Like a Girl, United Way King County, University of Washington, YMCA Camp Orkila, Starfire

**Field trips:** Sites commonly used the summer as a time to address opportunity gaps. Most sites used regular, often weekly, field trips to expose students to museums, parks, and other cultural events.

- **14 sites** incorporated **field trips** into their programming

**Meals:** All sites provided meals. Most of the sites delivered lunch through a formal meal program, most frequently funded by the United Way.

All programs provided lunch and snacks. Some sites also provided breakfast.

**Family engagement:** Most (but not all) of the sites planned formal family engagement activities. These activities included Summer kick-off showcases, College Prep Workshops, Play and Learn groups, a Workers' Rights presentation, Library2Go services, and Cooking Matters classes. Sites invited parents to volunteer for field trips and participate in culminating events. One site offered a Business Practicum class while another site hosted a family cultural event and invited families to decorate tables with items and food from their culture to share with everyone. One site had particular success in providing nutritious breakfast and lunch on site, and inviting parents to join for some of the meals to foster increased family engagement. In contrast, two programs planned events but struggled to engage parents.

- **11 sites** planned formal **family engagement** activities

## Program Similarities

### Summer programs are largely disconnected from school staff

” ”

#### We have a strong relationship with the school because we are on site during the school year.

Because we have a relationship with families and the counselor, we can be consistent with the behavior plan for the school year. I recognize that this is unusual and an asset to our program.

Even though we deliver our program in the school building, we don't have a connection to the teachers from the school. The teachers we are able to hire don't know what's going on or what happens during the school year, so supporting the students academically is a challenge.



The summer programs in this study displayed varying degrees of collaboration with the schools attended by participants. Program staff members from all sites desired increased collaboration, including more information from schools about the best ways to support students academically, socially, and emotionally.

- **Limited cooperation:** 7 sites identified with this description of their relationship with local schools (based on staff self-report). These programs met at a school site and/or had some limited support from school staff with student recruitment. However, the cooperation was limited and the success of the summer program was entirely the responsibility of the community-based organization.
- **Independent programming:** 7 sites identified with this description of their relationship with local schools. These programs were held at sites separate from the school and did not work with a particular school or schools to recruit students. These sites may have hired certified teachers to deliver programming, but these teachers did not bring pre-existing knowledge of the individual students served.

## Program Differences

### Summer programs vary in participants and structure

“ ”

I would say a strength is the continuity of working with students during the school year into the summer into the school year again.

**Working with a particular population every year and adapting and changing according to their growth is a benefit.** While staff changes, the parents can expect [the program] to be there to be a safe space and consistent schedule, so it's a consistent opportunity for families.



*Demographic details about the students served by these programs are available in Appendix A.*

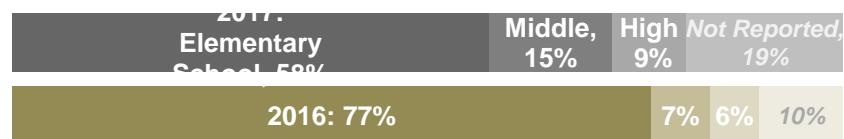
*More details about student attendance and program dosage are available in Appendix B.*

The participating cohort was recruited based on similar program characteristics; nonetheless they exemplify diversity the ways young people are served by summer programs. Differences in the age of students served, program length and academic support delivery model are described below.

**Students served:** Most programs served elementary school-aged students, while some served middle and high school-aged students.

- 7 programs served elementary school-aged students
- 2 program served elementary and middle school-aged students
- 3 programs served middle school and high school-aged students
- 1 program served only high school-aged students

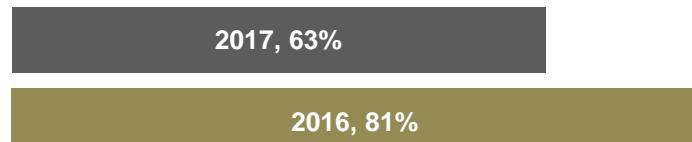
#### Percent of Participants by Grade Level



**Program length:** Programs varied in the number of days in their summer session and the length of their program day, which impacts the total “dosage” or time spent in a combination of academic and enriching program activities.

- Programs offered a range of **18-43 days of programming**.
- Program hours offered varied from **3-11 hours per day**.
- The total hours, or maximum dosage offered per student varied from **81 to over 450 hours**; the maximum figure represents the number of hours the program was open, not the number of hours students typically attended.

#### Percent of Participants Attending 16 Days or More



## Program Differences

### Host organization characteristics impact program differences

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**Because we are situated in the housing community, we don't have to spend time on recruitment;** enrollment is strong. Because we have a year-round relationship with families, can engage parents as allies/partners.



Differences in organizational size and program location resulted in differences in the program offerings.

**Organizational size:** The community-based organizations that deliver summer programs vary in size and budget.

- 5 organizations, representing 6 programs, have annual income of less than \$5M. The smallest organization has an annual income of less than \$1M.
- 3 organizations, representing 8 programs, have an annual income of more than \$15M. The largest organization has an annual income of more than \$75M.

Programs that were part of larger organizations typically had access to certain infrastructure, such as computers, databases, and already secured locations. They also were burdened by a myriad of reporting responsibilities and partnerships. In contrast, smaller organizations delivered programs with more flexibility but with a smaller staff and fewer financial resources for support.

**Program location:** Programs were delivered at public housing sites, public schools, and community-based facilities.

- 7 public housing site-based programs
- 4 community facility-based programs
- 3 public school-based programs

Programs located at housing sites often reported that recruitment and family engagement were made easier due to the program's proximity to where children live. Community-based programs cited the ability to recruit for a particular target audience (such as East African students) as an advantage. Programs based at schools were more likely to enjoy limited cooperation with the teachers and ability to hire certified teachers to deliver programming.

**Connection to School-Year Programs:** Programs serving youth at public housing sites are far more likely to serve the same youth during the school year and during the summer. Those based at public schools or community facilities often serve some students year-round, while others engage in only the summer or only school year programs.

## Program Differences

### Academic support focus, delivery model and goals varied

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Our program takes a long-term view by focusing on high school graduation and college graduation as goals. Our academic work with students focused on what they need to be successful in the future. I honestly don't know if we can or should tie that to what happens in a 6-week program, or if our program should be a component of a larger, year-round, multi-pronged effort.

**And I have no idea how to measure the academic impact of our 6-week program.**

This study revealed the wide variety approaches summer programs take to preventing summer learning loss, even among similar programs largely serving students who live in poverty in South King County.

**Content Focus:** Every summer programs offered literacy support to participants. Some also provided academic enrichment in math and/or science. Some programs aligned the content focus with grade-level standards while others let student interest drive the content focus.

**Delivery Model:** All summer programs in this study offered students activities that combined academics and enrichment, aiming to achieve a balance between the two while offering academic activities that were both effective and engaging. Yet, the ways in which programs delivered academic support varied. Some programs hired certified teachers or asked youth development staff to develop and deliver the academic curriculum in a format similar to traditional classroom instruction. Some programs offered exploratory or experiential learning activities, relying on staff and partner organizations to deliver learning on site as well as through field trips. Some programs taught in grade-level groupings while others used mixed grade-level grouping. **None of the programs believed they could be accurately characterized as falling neatly into the instructional or experiential learning category, as they aimed to include aspects of both kinds of learning in their program.**

**Realistic, Measurable Goals:** All programs agree that when setting realistic academic growth goals, programs must consider the content focus, grade levels served, the ways in which academic support was delivered, and the length of program or time spent delivering academic support. Every program in this small cohort varied on one or more of these program features, and few could define similar goals or compare impact.

## Program Successes

### Summer programs showed quality improvement through Youth Program Quality Intervention process

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**There was a distinct difference, for the better, in PQA scores for longer serving staff.** For returning coordinators the relationships are there, they've done the planning already, interaction and engagement tends to be higher, they have the quality points more absorbed into their teaching style. We can see that.

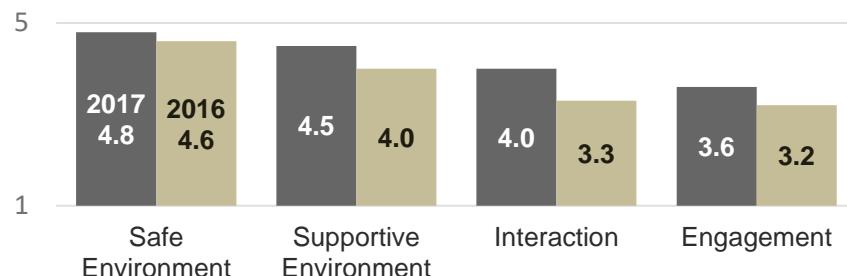
Interaction & Engagement: those are the harder PQA scales. **When you had someone leading an activity who already had a relationship with the youth,** it was reflected in higher scores in these categories.



The Summer Learning Program Quality Assessment (SLPQA) observations and subsequent planning with data meetings afforded for cohort members a structured method for identifying program strengths and opportunities for improvement. The average SLPQA Observation scores mirror a typical pyramid of program quality, with the most strength at the foundations of safe and supportive environment.

Scores suggest program improvement between 2016 and 2017

Safe and supportive environment scores are the highest.



*More details about SLPQA results are provided in Appendix D.*

## Program Successes

**Students reported high satisfaction, along with substantial skill building**

” ”

**I liked the variety of activities,**  
field trips, and effort the staff put  
into making camp work.

I learned how to make memories  
with new people. **I learned**  
**about money sense and**  
**vocabulary words.**

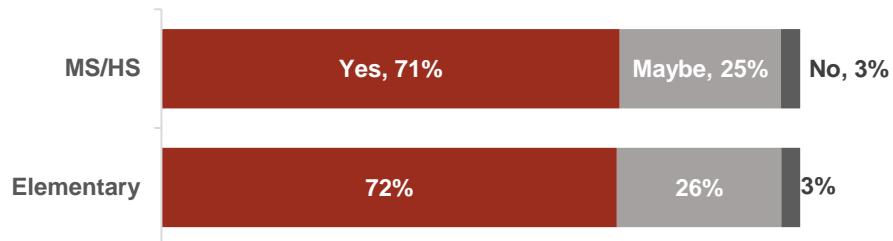
**[The most important thing I**  
**learned this summer was**  
**about] having a voice and being**  
able to make change along with  
educating me and my family about  
immigration.

**[I learned that I should] try**  
**something challenging even if**  
you are scared. Most of the time  
you'll enjoy it.

In the summer of 2017, youth were invited to complete a feedback form at the end of their program. Nine programs collected feedback forms from 93 elementary school aged youth and 106 middle or high school aged students.

The surveys revealed that across programs both younger and older students self-reported high levels of satisfaction.

Most students said they would recommend their program to a friend and/or return the next year themselves.



### Program Experience

Younger students reported positive peer experiences in the program, while most older students felt proud to be part of the summer program.

### Program Impact

85% of younger students believed that what they did in the summer program would help them in school. And about 8 out of 10 older students reported the summer program helped them build new skills, while an even higher portion indicated the program content supported their success in school and life.

*More details about student survey results are provided in Appendix E.*

## Program Successes

### Families believe summer programs provide emotional and academic support

“ ”

I like the **safety for the children** the programs provide and the field trips.

[The best part of the program is] that **my kids learn how to interact with other kids** and at the same time they learn.

[The best part of the program is] you help the children and my children are happy, **learning reading and math** over the summer.

Summer Program was great, the **outdoor activities**, and the **inside too**, spending time on reading was great.

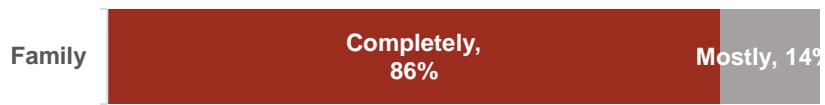
Que mis hijas estan aprendiendo un poco mas de lo ya suben. *That my daughters are learning a bit more than they already know.*

Los paseos, conosnen mas lugares, disfrutan mas. **Field trips, the kids get to know more places, they have more fun.**

[The best part of the program is] their **reading habits**, the picnics, the **field trips**, togetherness.

Families were also invited to complete a feedback form at the end of the summer. Eight programs collected 216 family surveys. Families reported high satisfaction across all programs.

100% of families reported that they were either completely or mostly satisfied with the program that their children attended.

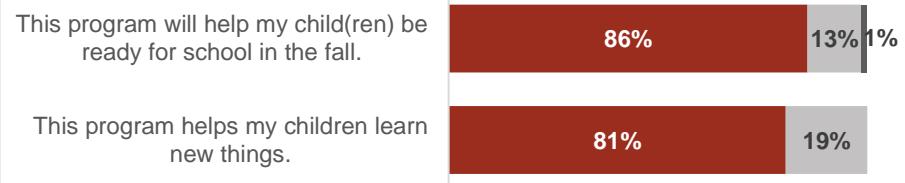


### Program Experience

Family feedback was consistently positive across all surveyed programs. Family gave strongest ratings to program safety, treating children with respect and that their children enjoyed attending the programs. Many family comments cited the field trips as one of the best parts of the program. Their feedback suggests that families would like additional opportunities to give program input.

### Program Impact

The majority of parents reported that the summer programs support their child to be ready for school in the fall.



*More details about student survey results are provided in Appendix F.*

## Program Challenges

### Hiring and retaining qualified staff

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The quality of our staff is great, but **the numbers are low because of budget.**

We don't need more individuals but we need to allow them more hours: **most of our part time staff should really be full time.**

For this summer, **we were fortunate enough to get additional funding to create better partnerships and move from part time staff to full time staff.** It was the pre-planning time that made a difference. We were able to bring in specialists and science teachers every week but we have no internal assessment for science and math, only literacy. We think we have gained but there is no way to measure at the end of the program.

Every organization cited hiring and retaining qualified staff as a chronic challenge. Site managers agree that consistent staffing during the summer is important to delivering a high-quality program.

- 6 sites reported staff turnover during the summer of 2016, and 4 sites reported turnover during 2017
- 6 sites relied on AmeriCorps Members to deliver programs in 2016, and 4 in 2017; 2 sites relied on AmeriCorps members to assist with meal delivery.
- In 2016, 4 sites use certified teachers to deliver some programs; 1 site failed to fill all open positions. In 2017, 3 sites used certified teachers to deliver programs.

Site managers believe that insufficient pay rates and insufficient work hours contribute to recruitment challenges and staff turnover.

# Program Challenges

## Securing resources to pursue quality improvement strategies

### Common Priorities for Staff Development

**Cultural competence** is imperative for staff delivering programs to diverse student populations.

**Behavior management** is a consistent challenge for summer program staff.

**Academic support** is not an area of expertise for most summer youth development workers, yet they are increasingly called on to provide academic support to students over the summer.

**Academic assessment** is likewise not a not an area of expertise for most summer program staff, and yet they sometimes are expected to administer assessments without proper training.

### Needed Program Delivery Resources

**Appropriate academic curricula** are frequently sought by programs, and many find themselves making their own for lack of a better option.

**Academic assessments**, and computers for administering assessments, are needed by most programs.

8 sites reported challenges securing **transportation for field trips**.

4 sites had a **waitlist**

3 sites struggled with **insufficient space**.

Program staff easily reached consensus on opportunities to improve program quality that are common across programs. They also easily identified strategies to address those needs, but lack the resources to implement many of them. These opportunities and strategies are detailed below.

**Program planning:** Sites lack sufficient time to plan in advance for summer programs. Most summer program leaders are also responsible for school-year programming, and have very little time after the end of the school year program to plan the entire summer program. Site managers believe that staff who are busy running school-year programs in May and into June should not be responsible for planning the summer program.

**Staff training:** Program managers consistently identify areas where staff would benefit from professional development, but do not have the budget or time in the staff schedule to provide meaningful professional development to meet these needs. Some programs depend on seasonal employees who are not hired much in advance of program start, so training time is limited. Site managers believe that staff should have time built into their schedules for sufficient training prior to delivering programs. *Specific needs are detailed in the side bar.*

**Program delivery resources:** Program managers consistently identify key shortcomings in the tools and resources they have at their disposal to deliver the kind of high-quality programs that prevent summer slide while addressing opportunity gaps. *Specific needs are detailed in the side bar.*

# Program Challenges

## Academic assessment

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**We struggle as an organization with summer learning assessments:** none of our summer sites use the same one. If we align the assessment to the program content, it doesn't mean anything to the schools. If we align our measure with the school, it doesn't work well for the students or staff; then before you know it, the school changes anyway. If we make up an assessment ourselves to balance the two goals, then we're teaching to the test, doesn't really tell you much.

### Percentage of Assessed Students

2017,  
45%

2016, 71%

*Details about measured impact on academics are provided in Appendix C.*

This study set out to explore how summer programs assess program impact on academic outcomes, and see what conclusions can be drawn regarding successes towards this end. The study, in fact, revealed significant challenges to implementing a valid and reliable pre- and post-program academic assessment in the context of summer programs.

First, few programs found a tool that they deemed a good fit. There is no one-size-fits-all assessment tool, due to the variety of academic support approaches. Programs independently sought assessment tools but struggled to find assessment tools that reflected the academic focus of their program and the developmental stage of the students served, and many had concerns about the cultural appropriateness of specific measures.

Second, regardless of their approach to summer academic support, programs do not know what kind of impact is reasonable to expect given the context, length of program, and program staff resources and skill. When measurable changes are not detected with a particular assessment, program staff have no way to know if this is the result of a program shortcoming or if the tools are simply not sensitive enough to measure the kinds of changes that can happen in a few weeks. Even if measurable changes are demonstrated over a summer, it is not clear that these gains are meaningful, or if they will sustain when students return to the classroom in the fall.

Finally, many programs, particularly those without the support of certified teachers, felt ill-prepared to administer valid and reliable academic assessments. Assessments are often time-consuming and require some skill or assessor training.

While some sites try to rely on district data in lieu of administering assessment, this is rarely useful. Programs often can access spring assessment scores from the school district as a pre-program measure, but the lack of a matched fall assessment makes school district data of little use when assessing the impact of a summer program on summer slide. If a program does find an assessment that aligns with program content, it may or may not align with what the school district cares most about in terms of minimizing summer slide.

## Recommendations

### Foster better communication between school year and summer programs

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**We'd love to partner more with school systems over the summer** – utilizing certificated teachers, curricula, assessments, college and career readiness resources, etc. I think part of the barrier to that is that school systems don't necessarily see us as partners in the same work. We are a crucial part of ensuring kids don't slip in the summer, that they stay healthy, and that they graduate and feel connected to their education, but I'm not sure that case is being made to school districts as well as it could be.

Our partnership with the school afforded us direction in selecting a pre- or post- assessment. **We would like to continue this conversation beyond summer**, and share our results with our students' teachers in the fall.

**I would like more connections with the schools.** Beyond how to get the data from the schools. Going in the fall and explaining, this is what we did in the summer and these are the kids we worked with – no agenda. At the end of the year, we are going to start our summer program, here are kids we think will be part of it, here is our plan. **We need more sustained communication.**

Summer programs led by community-based organizations crave greater information-sharing with teachers and school-based staff about the best ways to support their students academically, socially, and emotionally. Summer program staff also believe they can share useful information with classroom teachers about the students they serve in the summer prior to school start.

There are many institutional barriers to this, including confidentiality concerns and staff bandwidth in both schools and youth programs. Organizations that deliver school year and summer programs report that information-sharing during the school year is more common, because staff of both programs are working with the same students at the same time. They wish for a similar kind of teamwork regarding the students served during the summer.

Institutional leaders should work to decrease these barriers to improve how students are served year-round.

## Recommendations

### Rely on academic scales of SLPQA for academic assessment

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I feel like the PQA is comprehensive enough that it **measures all those points that we can't measure but with standardized assessment tools.**

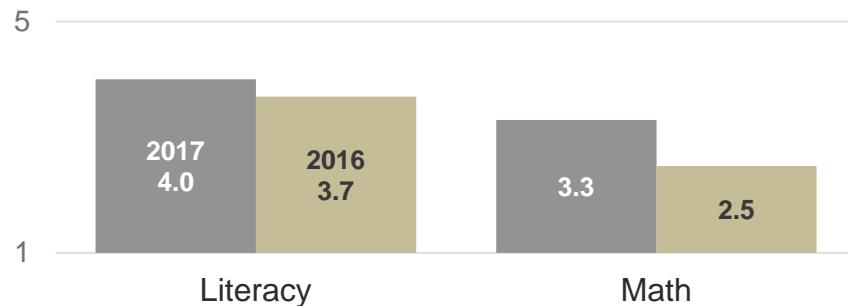
**One area where I was excited to see YPQA scores increase was math and literacy**, which I think had to do with returning teachers coming back and one of the teachers had been working with the youth during the school year which made a big difference.

**I think the [PQA] feedback on how we are facilitating those activities is helpful across all domains.** Our greatest feedback learning was can we facilitate it better to provide a better result.

It was hard to get pre- and post-assessment completed and if the student only came for a few weeks, you don't see a lot of improvement. **But PQA is about facilitation and if done well, there should be results.**

The SLPQA offers a way to measure the quality of academic enrichment in a summer program. Programs found that no matter the differences in the size of organization, students served, or the length of summer offering that the SLPQA tool for academic information was useful and supportive of capacity building.

Programs improved across the board from 2016 to 2017 and explained that they felt they could easily implement the feedback from the PQA tool.



### SLPQA Academic Support Scales

The Literacy Scale assesses:

- Participation
- Opportunities
- Staff Encouragement
- Vocabulary
- Available Materials
- Environment
- Activities

The Math scale assesses:

- Participation
- Problem Solving
- Opportunities
- Reasoning & Evaluation
- Linking Examples
- Supporting Concepts

## Recommendations

### Develop better systems of matching students with best-fit programs

“ ”

**We need to create platforms for school districts, at many levels, to understand and build relationships with youth agencies** that exist around their schools and really leverage on those agencies' services for their mutually served students.

Is there a way to do shifts like that, if we want to focus on academics, does Highline do an all-day summer school and then we pick up on 6 weeks enrichment – **what can we do to extend that time without burning them out?**

Our school year program is 4 days, but there are three other days.

**What could we be doing to extend opportunities** (time, money, transportation are all challenges)? **If we want to not just maintain but close gaps we need to meet [student] needs all the time with high quality programs.**

Some summer programs are place-based (such as those offered at public housing sites) and are mandated to offer their program to all (and only) youth who live at the site. Other programs recruit students from a larger geographic area; program staff from these programs agree that certain students are a better match for their program than others.

Currently, there is no universal method for recruiting the “best-fit” student into programs. Some programs are able to recruit through networks. But targeted recruitment for students with an academic need that is best served by a particular type of program rarely happens. As a first step towards this goal, the sector needs to conduct a census of the full array of summer programs in South King County to determine the number and types of program available and the number of spots each offers.

## Recommendations

### Support programs to secure the staff and resources needed to deliver quality programs

99

I think about funding when we are talking about **equity and making these programs great for families and students who are starting way behind the starting line. It is really expensive to make that work.** And I am always asked by funders, how much does it cost per kid? And I find that so offensive. How much would you pay for your child to have a positive summer experience? Some people spend thousands of dollars on their kids' summer programs and the funders want it be a \$1.25 per kid. **If we want to bridge the gap, there needs to be more resources invested or we are just going to keep running up against staffing issues.**

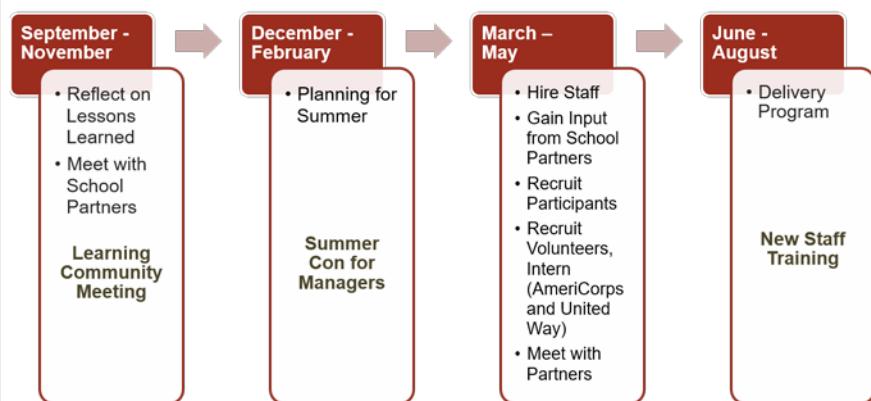
We actually got more funding this summer. But the fact that it is temporary like lots of other funding sources means we can be successful this summer but who knows about next summer. **The wish list is always: more predictable, sustainable funding, fewer strings attached to run our programming.**

Summer is a long stretch and we're a year-round program with a six-week summer program. **We are missing a whole month of opportunities for our kids**, by being closed for much of the summer, **but we can't plan for the fall and give staff a needed break if we do a ten-week summer program** even though it would be ideal.

Programs identified common barriers to the delivery of a high-quality program that they believe could be easily addressed through increased resources. The most commonly cited needs include higher pay and more hours of staffing for summer staff, increased professional development, and program delivery resources related to curriculum, field trips, and assessment. Funders of summer programs should consider how to support these key areas of need.

Programs describe the year-round effort required to deliver a high-quality summer program. Since most summer program managers are also responsible for school-year programming, few have the bandwidth or capacity to focus as fully on summer programs as they would like.

#### Annual Calendar of Summer Program Delivery



The above diagram shows how summer programming is in fact a year-round endeavor; in boldface are system-level supports that could be helpful to programs.

## Recommendations

### Maintain value of enrichment and exploratory learning

“ ”

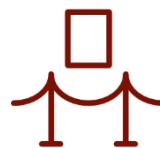
**Summer is a time when we can support youth in building leadership skills, getting involved in social justice issues, and nurturing social-emotional health.** We are limited during the school year in doing this because of our focus on academics and homework.

**We are very intentional about making our summer program not school.** We do academic support during the school year; summer is an opportunity for enrichment, getting outside, doing things [our youth] don't normally do. We focus more on social and emotional learning, nature, art projects: things that have been stripped away from the school day. Our strength is providing those opportunities in a way that other places don't.

**We get to increase the amount of service during the summer.** We can expand and spend more time on content than you get to do after school.

**I think about how a lot of our stated goals are about academic success but that academic success is in a system that does not serve our students and families in a culturally competent way.** How do we create space where our programming and people are dismantling that and empowering our kids to think about dismantling that?

As summer programs respond to the growing emphasis on summer learning loss, they are increasing their focus on academic skill-building activities. Yet this focus is in tension with the desire to use summer time to address opportunity gaps in ways that are not possible during the school day or within after-school programs. Program staff are concerned that a heightened focus on academic skill-building may be narrowly defined as a focus on reading and math, and take time away from other subjects such as science or history, or on related topics such as social justice, environmental science, or social and emotional learning. They want to ensure that this does not result in summer programs comprised simply of direct instruction at the expense of exploratory or experiential learning activities. They are concerned that a focus on teaching to grade-level standards may prevent summer programs from encouraging students to pursue their own interests. Advocates for bolstering summer programs' role in closing the achievement gap should consider the unintended impact that such a shift in summer programs could have on student experiences.



## Conclusions

This study set out to explore summer program quality as measured by the Summer Learning Program Quality Assessment tool (SLPQA) within a cohort of summer programs. The observation scores suggest that the cohort is comprised of high-quality summer programs, earning an average rating of at least 4.0 out of 5.0 on three of the four program quality scales. Perhaps more importantly, program improvements were demonstrated by year over year assessments using this tool. These conclusions regarding program quality aligned with feedback gathered from youth and family surveys. Participants generally reported satisfaction with programs' quality and impact.

This study also set out to describe how summer programs currently assess academic outcomes, describe their impact and make recommendations to improve data collection. A primary lesson of this study is that programs are not successfully implementing a pre- and post-program academic measure, but rather are making due with semi-consistent use of imperfect measures. Use of these measures is time-consuming and is not providing useful information. The lack of robust academic measures makes it impossible to draw conclusions about the impact of summer programs on academic growth. The SLPQA Literacy and Math scales represents a better way of measuring the quality of academic support provided by summer programs, as well as delivering specific lessons learned that programs can use to strengthen this support.

Finally, this study set out to document best practices in the field, as well as challenges that can inform recommendations and improvements to program delivery. Students would benefit from better communication and continuity between school year and summer programs. They would profit from being matched with a program that best meets their needs, given the wide array of program types. Students would gain from summer programs that have the resources they need to retain staff and implement program improvements. Finally, students would benefit from summer programs that not only provide academic support, but also maintain an emphasis on exploration and enrichment.

## Appendix A: About Students Served

### About the Youth Participants

According to program records, student programs served a total of 414 students in year 1 and 557 students in year 2.

### Response Rates by Program

- Gender data was reported by all 12 programs
- Grade data was reported for 10 out of 12 programs
- Family poverty data (qualification for Free or Reduced Lunch) was reported by 11 out of 12 programs, but programs rarely were able to report this for all participants
- Home language data was reported for 10 out of 12 programs

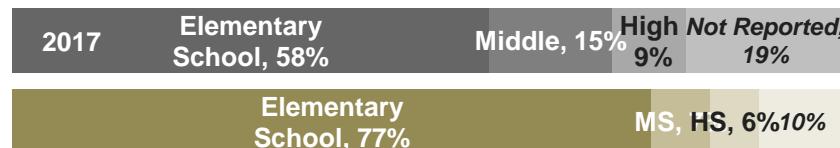
### Other Languages

- In 2016, **Other** languages included Afar, Amharic, Arabic, Cham, “Eastern European,” Mandarin, Nuer, Samoan, Tagalog, Tigrinya, Turkish, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese.
- In 2017, **Other** languages included 13 languages that were each reported by under 3% of respondents: Amharic, Arabic, Cambodian, Cantonese, Chinese, Ethiopian, Luganda, Nuer, Russian, Samoan, Tagalog, Tigringya, and Vietnamese.

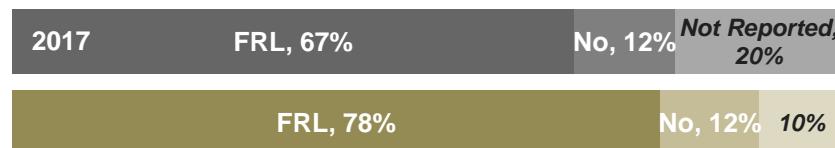
### Participant Gender



### Participant Grade in School (in fall following program)



### Family Qualification for Free or Reduced Lunch



### Participant Race/Ethnicity

	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>
African American/Black	41%	52%
Hispanic/Latino	23%	27%
Multi-Racial	7%	8%
White	8%	2%
Asian American	6%	8%
Other	3%	0%
Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%
Native American	<1%	<1%
<i>Not Reported</i>	10%	4%

### Participant Home Language

	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>
English	30%	26%
Spanish	26%	21%
Somali	9%	22%
Ukrainian	4%	<3%
Other	12%	10%
<i>Not Reported</i>	19%	19%

## Appendix B: About Engagement, Attendance and Dosage

### Program Attendance

The **attendance ratio** indicates the percentage of program days a student attended, or the ratio of days attended to days absent of the days they planned to attend. *Weeks in which a student did not attend the program are excluded from the calculation, as many families sign up on a weekly basis during the summer.*

### Attendance Group

The attendance groups indicate the percentage of students with an attendance ratio within a certain range.

- High  $\geq 85\%$
- Medium 50-84%
- Low  $< 50\%$

### Program Dosage

Minimum dosage for this study is defined as students who attend the program at least 16 days in the summer.

### Average Attendance Ratio

2017, 76%

2016, 88%

### Attendance Groups

High, 44%

Medium,  
43%

Low, 13%

High, 74%

Medium, Low,  
23% 4%

### Percent of Youth Attending 16 Days or More

2017, 63%

2016, 81%

### Percent of Youth Attending 24 Days or More

2017, 32%

2016, 28%

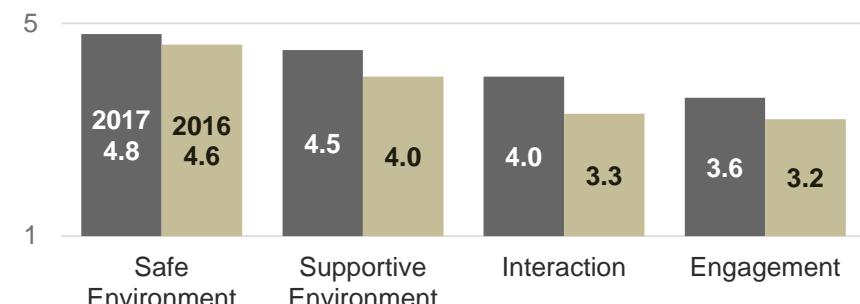
## Appendix C: Summer Program Quality

### About the Summer Learning Program Quality Assessment

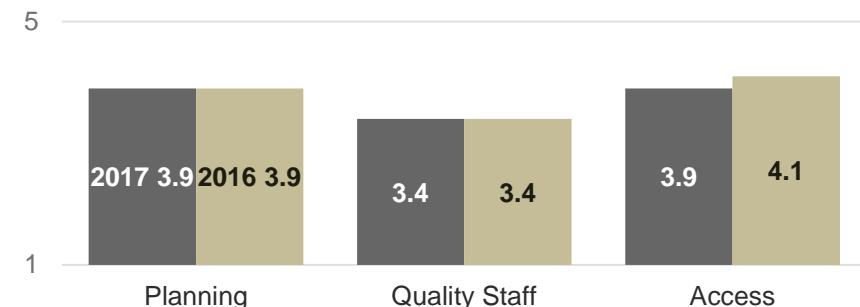
The Summer Learning PQA is specifically designed to measure the quality of staff instructional practices in both enrichment and academic settings as well as quality management practices that set the stage for successful staff engagement in summer programs. In addition to scale scores for the pyramid of quality (safety, supportive environment, interaction and engagement), sites were provided observation scores for an academic scale and subscales, as well as quality scores based on an interview. For more information about the Summer Learning PQA visit:

<http://www.cypq.org/SummerLearningPQI>

### Program Quality Scales - Observation



### Program Quality Scales - Interview



## Appendix D: Student Academic Support and Growth

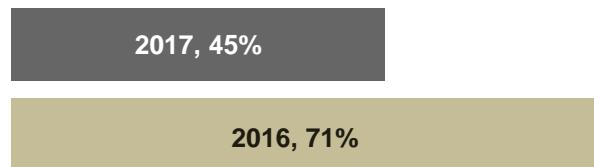
### Academic Assessments

Programs collected pre- and post-program measures of academic skills that fit the age range and content focus of their programs.

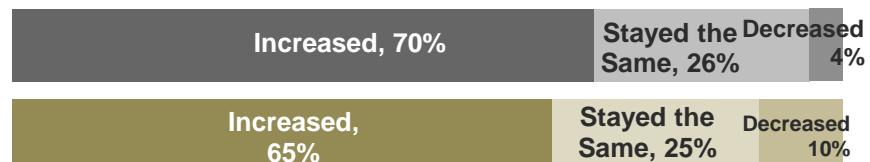
### SLPQA Academic Support Scales



### Percent of Students with Pre- and Post- Assessment



### Academic Growth, Pre- to Post-Program



## Appendix E: Academic Assessments

Programs collected pre- and post-program measures of academic skills that fit the age range and content focus of their programs.

<b>Program</b>	<b>2015-16 Academic Measure</b>	<b>2016-17 Academic Measure</b>
Smilow Rainier Vista Boys & Girls Club of King County	The program intended to gather spring and fall academic assessment data from Seattle Public Schools; data was not available in time for this report.	Measured Social and Emotional Learning, no academic assessment.
Renton/Skyway Club, Boys & Girls Club of King County	The program did not successfully gather academic data.	
Birch Creek Summer Splash, Kent Youth & Family Services	Student reading growth during the summer program was measured using the Independent Reading Level Assessment (IRLA), developed by the American Reading Company. Academic scores were reported for all participants.	<i>Did not participate in 2017</i>
East African Community Services Elementary Program	Student academic growth was measured at the beginning and end of the program with a short test designed by program staff to align with program curriculum.	Student academic growth was measured at the beginning of the program but staff decided not to do post testing because it didn't correlate well with the curriculum.
Center for Human Resources, Camp Ballinger	<i>Did not participate in 2016</i>	San Diego Quick Assessment of Reading - Independent Level
Burndale, Neighborhood House	Neighborhood House purchased and piloted an online assessment tool from MobyMax, a company which provides curriculum, diagnostic tests and assessments in reading, math, writing and other key subjects. Academic scores were reported for all participants.	Neighborhood House used the literacy component of an online assessment tool from MobyMax, a company which provides curriculum, diagnostic tests and assessments in many key subjects.
Seola Gardens, Neighborhood House		
Firwood Circle, Neighborhood House		<i>Did not participate in 2017</i>
Arbor Heights, Southwest Youth & Family Services/New Futures	Staff administered the San Diego Quick Assessment of Reading Ability at the beginning and end of the program. This test measures the recognition of words out of context. Students are scored as a particular grade level based on the number of errors they make when reading graded word lists. Academic scores were reported for all participants.	
Windsor Heights, Southwest Youth & Family Services/New Futures		
Woodridge Park, Southwest Youth & Family Services/New Futures		
Beacon Hill Elementary, YMCA of Greater Seattle	Student academic progress was assessed using the Modified Scholastic by Bell.	Student academic progress was assessed using the Modified Scholastic by Bell.
Concord Elementary, YMCA of Greater Seattle	Staff used customized reading, math and spelling assessments of students.	Staff used a pre- and post-test through STAR testing
Summer Language Journeys, YMCA of Greater Seattle	Certified teachers who delivered the academic portion of the program designed a pre-post assessment. Academic data was collected for all but one student.	Staff measured academic progress by giving a pre/post-test. Teachers also gave quizzes each week to determine if students were grasping concepts and understanding what was being taught.