

DATE: May 23, 2017

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Rundle School Outside In Summer Program Review

ORIGINATOR: Nancy Petersen, Acting Executive Director

RESOURCE STAFF: Sanaa El-Hassany, Lisa Farlow, Lynn Schlacht

REFERENCE: [June 23, 2015 Board Report, Summer Programming Opportunities for Socially Vulnerable Students](#)

ISSUE

Abbott, R. J. Scott and Rundle Schools worked with community partners to provide a summer program at Rundle School in July 2016. The program was intended to explore how summer programming may serve to mitigate the risk of a summer learning gap for students from socially complex circumstances.

BACKGROUND

In June 2015, administration provided the Board with a report overviewing recent research and existing practice in the Edmonton area around summer programs that were targeted for socially vulnerable communities and intended to mitigate the risk of summer learning gap. This original report highlighted the following:

- the issue of summer learning gap and ways it can be mitigated for students of all backgrounds and social/economic circumstances
- ways school boards can contribute to the mitigation of this gap
- research identified programming components of a summer program that will mitigate the summer learning gap
- current summer programs in the Edmonton area available to families in socially vulnerable circumstances; many of the programs are hosted in District schools and facilitated by some of the District's key partners

The Board subsequently committed funding to a summer pilot to further explore the role the District can play towards reducing the summer learning gap. Rundle School was identified to host this program for students from Abbott, R. J. Scott and Rundle Schools. The District worked in partnership with the following community partners to develop and offer the program: Boys and Girls, Big Brothers Big Sisters, The Edmonton Public Library, E4C, The Family Centre, Frontier College and the Sarah McLachlan School of Music. District leaders and the group of partners worked together to plan the program. Our community partners took lead in the delivery of the program, with the District providing evaluation support. The program was branded Outside In, and the attached report is a summary of the evaluation of this program in its first year of operation. Included in the evaluation are recommended next steps to build upon the successes from July 2016.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Outside In report provides an overview of the program's implementation. The evaluation of Outside In was structured against the critical programming components identified by the summer learning gap research:

- Programming that runs daily for several hours a day.
- Programming that includes recreation, the arts, enrichment and leadership experiences.
- Programming that has a daily literacy component to it.
- Programming that reflects trained, qualified adult instructors.
- Programming that is well planned and organized.
- Programming that has a nutrition component.
- Programming that engages with families.

Learnings from 2016 will inform the summer program offered in July 2017. Plans are currently under way for this year's Outside In, again to be hosted at Rundle School and developed in partnership with several community partners.

KEY POINTS

- The District worked with community partners to offer a summer program for the students of Abbott, R.J. Scott and Rundle schools in July 2016.
- The program, branded Outside In, was evaluated; this evaluation report is Attachment I.
- Lessons learned from 2016's Outside In will inform this year's summer programming.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Summer Camp Evaluation: An evaluation of Outside In summer camp 2016

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SUMMER CAMP EVALUATION

An evaluation of Outside In summer
camp, 2016

December 2016

Introduction

Outside In was a summer learning opportunity that ran at Rundle School in July 2016, in partnership with many community groups.

The purpose of the camp was to address the summer learning gap through daily literacy activities and a camp-like atmosphere with physical activities, crafts, and music. The camp ran for three weeks in July from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m from Monday to Thursday. It was attended by students who go to Rundle School, Abbott School, and R.J. Scott School during the regular school year. Twenty-four campers attended with regularity, split into two groups: one group of students who just finished Kindergarten to Grade 2, and another who just finished Grade 3 to 6.

This report will evaluate the successes of this camp.

Background

An [Information Report to the Board of Trustees on June 23, 2015](#) summarized research about summer programming supports for vulnerable students. It highlighted research on the summer learning gap: on average, students lose the equivalent of one month of learning over the summer, while students from socially vulnerable backgrounds experience an even greater loss than their middle class peers.

The report explained that research provides direction for school boards to consider the following actions in terms of the role they can have in reducing the impact of the summer learning gap:

- provide summer learning programming opportunities;
- partner with community groups who can offer summer programming for children and youth; and
- provide community groups with access to school and playground space to host summer programming.

Outside In is an implementation of these recommendations.

The research also identified the following as key components of quality summer programming that will reduce the impact of the summer learning gap:

- programming that runs daily for several hours a day;
- programming that includes recreation, the arts, enrichment and leadership experiences, particularly new and engaging experiences;
- programming that has a daily literacy component to it;
- programming that reflects trained, qualified adult instructors;
- programming that is well planned and organized;
- programming that has a nutrition component; and
- programming that engages with families.

Evaluation Methods

Camp evaluation methods included observation, surveys, and reading-level tests.

Camper reading-level test: Campers' reading levels were assessed by their classroom teachers using Fountas & Pinnell in June and again in September to measure summer changes. A control group of non-campers was also tested for comparison.

Observation: Lisa Farlow, Research Consultant for this project, attended approximately two-thirds of the camp days. Observations were made of the behaviour and feelings of campers, staff, and parents. The Research Consultant also witnessed the execution of the daily camp schedule.

Camper post-camp survey: All campers were invited to respond to a survey during the last week of the camp. Surveys were administered one-on-one with a mix of yes/no and open-ended questions. The purpose of the survey was to capture positive experiences (or lack thereof) beyond improvement in literacy skills. Seventeen campers participated in the survey.

Staff post-camp survey: All staff involved in the camp were invited to provide feedback after the camp. Respondents were able to answer anonymously and six responses were received.

Parent post-camp survey: Parents were invited to participate in a survey to provide further feedback on the social and emotional impacts of camp attendance. This survey was administered at the closing barbeque carnival, and took most parents less than three minutes to complete. Parents were given the option to complete the survey privately with a written response, or they could provide their responses orally. Ten parents responded, in total representing 16 campers.

Parent autumn survey: During late September and early October, parents were invited to provide additional feedback on how they felt their children were adjusting to school, socially and academically, and whether they believed camp attendance had a lasting impact on their child's interest in reading. Five parents responded.

Evaluation of Summer Programming Components

This section evaluates how successfully Outside In attained each component as recommended by the research. Success levels will be, from highest to lowest:

- attained completely
- attained partially
- very limited attainment
- did not attain

Partnership with community groups

The program ran in partnership with Boys & Girls Club Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton (BGCBigs), The Family Centre, E4C (including ArtStart and Young Chefs), Edmonton Public Library (EPL), Frontier College, and the Sarah McLachlan School of Music.

Component evaluation: attained completely

Programming that runs daily for several hours a day

The camp ran for three weeks from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Monday to Thursday. Camp was not able to run on Fridays due to custodian scheduling.

- Some parents voiced appreciation for the later start to the day, commenting that it took the stress out of mornings and felt different from a regular day of school. Others liked the early finish time that allowed for other summertime activities like sports or spending time with friends. Others wished the day could have been a bit longer, for ease of arranging child care and pickup/drop-off.

- Two parents noted the confusion that the Monday to Thursday schedule caused, as many assumed the camp ran from Monday to Friday.
- Some research suggests six to seven weeks with longer days may be more ideal for summer programming. Some parents suggested the camp run for a longer duration and several campers, on the last day of the camp, expressed a desire to be able to return again the following week.

Component evaluation: attained partially

Programming that includes recreation, the arts, enrichment and leadership experiences, particularly new and engaging experiences

There was near-daily physical activity, much of it outside, with either unstructured playground time or structured activities such as capture-the-flag or tournament-style mini-soccer. Campers were also able to try activities that were new to most campers, such as yoga, Zumba, Chinese dancing, Taekwondo, and various crafts. E4C provided campers with a healthy morning snack and lunch. The Sarah McLachlan School of Music ran programming twice a week and allowed campers to play a variety of instruments, sing songs, and learn about musical notes.

When asked during the survey, all but two of the campers were able to remember trying something new while at camp including some crafts, some foods, and some activities like Taekwondo or Chinese dancing. When describing a paper rocket craft, one camper said, “It was fun because it worked and I didn’t think it would!”

When asked whether they tried anything challenging at camp, about half of the participants remembered an experience with ukulele/guitar being mentioned often. One camper said “It felt good because they didn’t treat you like little kids and only make you do easy things.”

One survey question asked campers whether they could recall a time during camp that somebody noticed they were doing something well. About four-fifths of the participants did recall an incident in which it was noticed that they were doing something well. Examples such as the following are particularly notable: “being a good big brother”, “apologizing to a friend about [something that happened on the playground]”, “helping [another student] in the lunchroom”, “being able to read chapter books”, “not spilling my water”, and several compliments about playing instruments.

The staff survey elicited other examples of students engaging with the programming. One shared an example of campers making balloon animals, and how she observed the campers who found success easily turn to help their peers enthusiastically and without staff prompting. Another staff member talked about a shy camper eventually accepting an invitation to join in a dance circle, and who was later seen dancing with a big smile on her face.

Importantly, the camper survey responses provided evidence indicating that most campers otherwise would not have had access to these kinds of experiences. When asked in the exit survey what their summer plans entailed once camp finished, most campers said they didn’t know. A few had specific plans including other camps, playing outdoors with family members, or riding bikes with their friends, but most respondents indicated that they didn’t have any set plans beyond sleeping in or playing video games. Parents confirmed that, for most, there were no alternative plans to attending Outside In. When asked about the merits of camp, one participant answered, “It’s better than staying home and playing video games.” Another said, “[At camp] they’re just happier. They’re not staying home saying ‘I’m bored.’”

Component evaluation: attained completely

Programming that has a daily literacy component to it

Literacy skills were infused in many camp activities such as recipe reading in Young Chefs, rhymes and song writing with the School of Music, and games such as Pictionary with extra points for spelling. A daily literacy component was also planned in the camp schedule during which time campers were allowed to read silently, read with a buddy, or play games that involve reading such as *Apples to Apples* or a children's version of the game Taboo. However, the literacy component did not run every day due to 'on-the-fly' schedule changes. Scheduled literacy time was cancelled for approximately one-third to one-half of the camp days.

Component evaluation: attained partially

Programming that is well planned and organized

Though the camp had a schedule for each of its 12 days, the schedule was often abandoned due to the staff deciding that different activities would be more appropriate for campers' energy levels or moods. While the staff's flexibility and attention to campers' needs was commendable, some staff felt frustrated that they were unable to run all their planned activities.

In the staff feedback survey, four of six respondents remarked that camp was "less organized" or "less structured" than they anticipated.

One staff member said they would have liked to be more involved in planning, but didn't receive enough information beforehand to be able to plan an activity. Another commented on how multiple changes in the weekly themes resulted in re-planning of their organization's activities twice.

Component evaluation: attained partially

Programming that reflects trained, qualified adult instructors

The primary staff members who were involved in running this program were:

- One Program Facilitator from BGCBiggs who was present nearly every day.
- One Frontier College literacy coach (the only staff member with an education degree) who was present every day.
- Three success coaches: one who was present every day, two who were, on average, each present twice weekly.

Other staff involved in the camp but ran only their own programming, and weren't available to help with other camp tasks were:

- Two to three EPL staff members who were present every morning
- Three to four School of Music staff members who were present twice weekly
- Two Artstart staff members who were present several times each week
- One Young Chefs staff member who was present once each week

Other adults involved in helping run this program were:

- One Family Centre Roots & Wings worker who was present twice weekly
- Two trained therapists who were each present once weekly
- Two volunteers who were present one to two afternoons each week
- One researcher from Edmonton Public Schools who was present two to three days each week

Due to the nature of different staff members' scheduling, some days had more staff present at the camp than others. Some mornings had as many as 12 staff while several afternoons had only three or four staff members. On one afternoon there were only two staff members present.

In the staff feedback survey, some staff recommended that going forward, it would be helpful to:

- Have a more consistent staff complement throughout the week, rather than having several adults dropping in throughout the week. They felt it was difficult for the campers to build relationships with staff other than the handful of those who attended regularly.
- Have more staff, particularly because so many campers benefited from one-on-one time.
- Host pre-camp training to establish and communicate the camp norms of behaviour. Staff reported often mistakenly permitting a particular behaviour that other staff had prohibited, or vice versa.
- Clarify leadership roles. One staff member said, "It was often unclear who was the lead staff member or who could be looked to for help during the class."

Research on summer programming indicates that having more trained teachers on staff helps improve the academic achievements at camp as well.

Component evaluation: very limited attainment

Programming that has a nutrition component

Campers were provided with a healthy morning snack and lunch each day. Morning snacks included items such as yogurt, cereal, fruit, and cheese strings. Lunches included cold cut sandwiches, mini pizzas, and pepperoni sticks with veggies. There were occasional after-camp snacks such as dried fruit or popsicles. The older group of campers had two Young Chefs sessions with E4C in which they cooked from a recipe and served lunch to the younger campers. At one session they cooked tacos and at another they cooked mini pizzas. On the last day of camp each week, families were permitted to take home the extra food.

Component evaluation: attained completely

Programming that engages with families

Parents, grandparents, and siblings were invited to attend a concert and lunchtime barbeque on the final day of camp, which was well attended. During morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up, younger siblings and parents stayed and connected with camp staff and in some cases, siblings read books from the Frontier College book collection, played instruments from the Sarah McLachlan School of Music, or ate a snack. Through these connections, camp staff became aware of campers' personal situations and were able to connect with the family around the child's well-being.

Though much of the family engagement came about naturally, in the future there is room to be more deliberate in hosting activities and encouraging more parent and sibling participation, for example, by inviting parents into the lounge and offering coffee and snacks.

Component evaluation: attained partially

Evaluation of Outcomes

Campers' overall experience

The campers truly seemed to enjoy coming to camp each day and participating in the activities. Campers agreed with survey statements about whether they liked to go to camp (100 per cent of campers who responded to the survey agreed), felt safe at camp (100 per cent), felt like other campers were friendly (100 per cent), understood the rules at camp (94 per cent), felt like camp staff cared about them (94 per cent), felt that they had somebody to talk to when upset at camp (94 per cent), and would like to come back to camp next year (94 per cent).

Parents also reported that their children were enthusiastic about attending camp each morning. One parent of a particularly shy camper noted that their child hurried her parents in the mornings to arrive at camp as early as possible. Many parents noted that their child enthusiastically shared details of their camp day in the evening by recounting stories they had read, singing songs they had learned, and explaining the activities they participated in. One parent summarized the experience by saying that their child was “thrilled to attend the camp and felt good and mentally boosted at the end of each camp day.”

Reading-level changes

The average summer reading-level growth of campers and the control group was not statistically different, as measured by Fountas & Pinnell. This is likely due to the facts that camp was only 12 four-hour days long, with the specific literacy activities being cancelled on many of these days.

Reading interests and other lasting impact

A final survey was distributed in late September to parents of campers to gauge the lasting impact of camp attendance on their child.

All of the parents who responded to the survey reported that their child(ren) still, as of early October, talk about their time at camp. One parent even mentioned that their child has been asking to play an instrument because they enjoyed learning the ukulele so much. When asked whether they have noticed any changes in their child's attitude towards academic aspects of school, four said they had noticed a positive change and one saw no changes. Changes include higher confidence, more willingness to read, and a larger vocabulary. When asked whether they have noticed any changes in their child's attitude towards social aspects of school, all five respondents remarked on positive changes, such as a child who now plays with children from other grades, a child who has made their first friend, a child who continues to play with their camp friends, and a child who has improved social skills in general. Four of the five parents who responded reported bringing books home at the end of camp, and of these, all remembered either observing their child reading these books or requesting to have these books read to them.

While it is important to remember that only about one-quarter of parents responded, the responses gathered by this survey show the lasting positive impact camp had on the participants.

Summary Statement

As this evaluation discusses, there is ample evidence to show that the campers enjoyed their time at camp, gained social skills, and tried new or challenging activities. Though there is no statistically significant evidence to show that camp attendance directly impacted post-summer reading scores, the stories shared by parents show that campers gained experience fundamental to the development of literacy skills such as a positive attitude towards school, a willingness to read, and increased vocabulary.

In future years, this evaluation points to the following primary recommendations:

- camp staff should collaborate to set norms and clarify leadership roles;
- camp staff should include more trained educators; and
- camp should run for a longer period of time.