



**Montgomery County Public Schools'
BellXcel Summer Program Evaluation**

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SUMMARY

**MCPS EVALUATION SHOWS BELLXCEL'S
SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM
SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASES MATH
AND READING SKILLS.**

- There was statistically significant evidence of positive impact of the BellXcel program on MAP scores.
- BellXcel's professional development made site staff better educators, and was recognized as a very valuable aspect of the summer learning program.

At the request of the Board of Education for Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), the Office of Shared Accountability evaluated BellXcel's summer learning program to assess academic gains, program implementation, and professional development.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

There was statistically significant evidence of positive impact of the BellXcel program on MAP scores in math in Grades 3 and 4, and among all students and four subgroups: Hispanic/Latino, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) recipients, Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS) recipients, and special education recipients. Additionally, there was statistically significant evidence of positive impact of the BellXcel program on MAP scores in reading for Grade 3 among all students and among three subgroups: Hispanic/Latino, ESOL recipients, and FARMS recipients.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

BellXcel received high marks for the way it administered the new program, and for providing timely and useful support throughout the summer.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BellXcel's professional development made site staff better educators, and was recognized as a very valuable aspect of the summer learning program.





BACKGROUND

As studies increasingly show, children living in under-resourced communities suffer greater losses of academic skills during the summer break compared to their higher income peers, who are more exposed to academic and enrichment activities. This academic and enrichment hiatus leads to significant loss of academic skills – two months or more each summer – accumulating year after year. “Of further concern, the gap between economically disadvantaged and advantaged students that results from summer learning loss has been shown to be cumulative; Hayes and Grether (1983) estimated that as much as 80% of the reading achievement gap that existed between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students at sixth grade could be attributed to summer learning loss.”¹

Recognizing the importance of summer learning among elementary school students, the Montgomery County Council formed a unique public-private partnership with MCPS, the Norman R. and Ruth Rales Foundation, and BellXcel.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The partners launched a 4-year plan consisting of five-week annual summer programs at eight Title 1 elementary schools, serving 1,045 rising 3rd and 4th grade scholars. The program will ultimately serve 4,200 MCPS students. BellXcel serves elementary students who score below the 60th percentile on the county’s Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments.

Summer Learning Program Goals

- Increase literacy and math skills among 3rd & 4th graders
- Strengthen self-confidence
- Improve social emotional skills
- Improve teacher effectiveness
- Increase parental engagement

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Implementation

The Office of Shared Accountability interviewed the staff and instructors at each of the eight Title 1 school sites about staffing, training, communication between MCPS and BellXcel, support from MCPS and BellXcel, and benefits and challenges with the BellXcel summer learning program.

Academic impact

This study used multiple regression analyses that included attendees and non-attendees, and was controlled for students’ characteristics, including their initial abilities.

Evaluation Scope and Questions

The main purpose of the evaluation was to assess gains in academic skills among enrolled students. A secondary purpose was to gauge program implementation, professional development, communication and project management, in order to glean insight for continuous improvement.

The evaluation addressed the following questions:

1. What was the impact of the program on student mathematics and reading skills?
2. Did the impact of the program vary by student subgroups?
3. How was the program implemented with regards to curriculum, staff training, and overall program operation?

Study Participants

- 815 students in Grades 3 or 4 who attended BellXcel for 19 days (out of 25) or more, and had MAP test results from fall 2016 upon summer program completion. (Non-participants were 1,135 students who did not attend the BellXcel summer program.)
- Seven out of ten attendees were Hispanic/Latino and a similar percentage received ESOL services.
- Close to 90% qualified for FARMS services and almost one-fifth received special education services.

1. Hays, D.P., Grether, J. (1983). The school year and vacations: When do students learn? *The Cornell Journal of Social Relations*, 17, 56-71

RESULTS

Academic Achievement

- Based on multiple regression analyses, there was statistically significant evidence of positive impact of the BellXcel program on MAP scores in math from fall 2016 for participants in both Grades 3 and 4, among all students and four subgroups: Hispanic/Latino, ESOL recipients, FARMS recipients, and special education recipients.
- There was statistically significant evidence of positive impact of the BellXcel program on MAP scores in reading for Grade 3 among all students and among three subgroups: Hispanic/Latino, ESOL recipients, and FARMS recipients.

Implementation

- Program managers at each site reported a positive experience with program implementation.
- BellXcel received high marks for the way it administered the new program, including its timely and useful support throughout the summer.
- One of the most frequently mentioned perceptions by the staff was the focus on the student – the child's experience came first and the program supported the whole child. The students were happy to come and very engaged in their learning activities. BellXcel provided different opportunities for students and allowed them to succeed at something new.

Professional Development

- BellXcel's professional development made site staff better educators, and was recognized as a very valuable aspect of the summer learning program.
- BellXcel's professional development was described as valuable, inspiring, and effective at communicating BellXcel's vision and mission, as well as day-to-day program expectations.
- Staff commended BellXcel for the clarity and breadth of the information conveyed and the energy and passion of the BellXcel trainers.

Program Attendance

- The average daily attendance was 90% or higher.
- Overall, the expectation for consistent attendance was maintained.

Program Management

- Site staff reported receiving responsive, timely and useful support from the BellXcel program liaison and team.
- Program staff reported that school principals, and staff from Title I schools, were helpful and responsive.

Curriculum

- Reports from program managers about the BellXcel curriculum were positive.
- Educators noted that BellXcel curriculum and online resources were very detailed and aligned with school curriculum and Common Core.

Differentiation

- Site staff indicated that BellXcel provided an appropriate program for students with disabilities, especially with its focus on differentiation.

ESOL Instruction

- ESOL specialists supported teachers at all sites by modeling lessons and providing resources.

Growth Mindset

- Staff reported that the quality of the program was outstanding; that BellXcel had a growth mindset approach, and that the program threaded attention to the social-emotional development of the students throughout all aspects of the program.

Student and Family Engagement

- Several staff described BellXcel as a community or as a team effort; staff also appreciated the opportunity to build relationships with students and families.

PROGRAM ENHANCEMENTS

Based on the evaluation findings, BellXcel and MCPS will implement a variety of tactics to enhance the program, such as improving overall coordination and communication. Prior to the start of the program, BellXcel will expand on-site professional development and ensure that curricula match the reading and math levels of all students. BellXcel will also provide records of Dual Language Learners (DLL) and students with disabilities. Extra instructional support for students with disabilities will be considered. A trained health technician or nurse will be on-site every day.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE EVALUATION

The results of this independent evaluation are important given the growing public policy focus on closing the achievement gap and ensuring summer learning programs are effectively reversing summer learning loss among students living in underserved communities.

Over the past decade, organizations providing OST programming have been asked to provide increasing levels of evidence to the effectiveness and rigor of their programs. Every program cycle, BellXcel collects pre- and post-program evidence of literacy and math achievement, measures program utilization, monitors program quality and fidelity, and collects stakeholder survey data.

However, BellXcel has been able to invest in studies involving non-program "control" populations less frequently. While there is high demand for these types of independent studies, they are costly and pose implementation challenges for non-profits. BellXcel is grateful for the MCPS study, as it adds to the compelling body of third-party evidence collected on BellXcel over time.

This MCPS evaluation rigorously compares similar BellXcel and non-BellXcel student populations, allowing both MCPS and BellXcel to conclusively point to the strong impact of BellXcel's summer learning program model. The findings of effective program implementation, professional development, program management, and attendance, support this study. As organizations like BellXcel continue to prioritize opportunities to demonstrate experimental evidence of program impact, increased collaboration with school district and community partners to conduct studies using readily available data sources will be essential. BellXcel is fortunate to have a strong partner in MCPS, which is committed to both evidence of impact and providing effective summer learning to children who are at the highest risk of falling behind.

CONCLUSION

The results of BellXcel's testing at the start and end of the program and the county's comparison of test results from the spring of 2016 to the fall of 2016 showed a clear pattern: summer learning programs for children living in under-resourced communities lead to favorable outcomes.

ABOUT BELLXCEL

Founded in 1992, BellXcel, is a national nonprofit leader in out-of-school-time education. BellXcel's modular solutions make it easier and more cost-effective for school districts and other youth-serving organizations to customize evidence-based summer and afterschool learning programs with measurable outcomes that transcend into the school-year. In 2018, BellXcel-powered programs reached approximately 19,000 PK-8 scholars and 2,100 educators at 154 sites in 32 U.S. states.

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