



Independent evaluation of BellXcel Summer

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SUMMARY

Source: Chaplin, D. and Capizzano, J. (2006). Impacts of a Summer Learning Program: A Random Assignment Study of Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL). Urban Institute.

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INDEPENDENT EVALUATION DEMONSTRATES BELLXCEL SUMMER SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASES CHILDREN'S READING SKILLS.

Researchers from the Urban Institute completed a two-year, random assignment study of the BellXcel Summer program and its impact on children's reading achievement and parental involvement. Key findings of *Impact of a Summer Learning Program: A Random Assignment Study of BellXcel* include:

- "Scientifically rigorous evidence regarding the ability of the BellXcel Summer program to improve the reading skills of low-performing elementary school children."
- Evidence of positive impacts on the degree to which parents encouraged their children to read and the degree to which they read with their children.
- "The results are of particular importance given the long-standing public policy focus on raising achievement levels of low-income students."



"The Urban Institute's evaluation of BellXcel Summer demonstrates the power structured learning can have on a child's life during the summer months. It furthers BellXcel's conviction that high quality summer learning experiences must be made available to thousands of additional children to help them excel in school and become scholars and leaders in their communities."

- Lauren Sanchez Gilbert, Ed.D.
BellXcel, Chief Executive Officer



WHY EVALUATE BELLXCEL SUMMER?

BellXcel is not only a ‘mature’ program, but has been judged to be a high quality, stable intervention that can likely be evaluated for a number of years.

- BellXcel Summer “employs well-developed curricula in both reading and math.” The program has also demonstrated effectiveness in reducing summer learning loss among children in internal evaluations.
- BellXcel Summer receives strong, multi-year support from several philanthropic partners. It has received significant national acclaim from leading policy makers and educational agencies, such as President Clinton, then-Senator Barack Obama, the National Summer Learning Association, and the American Federation of Teachers.
- The BellXcel program has been approved by several states to be eligible for Title I funding.
- At the time of the study, BellXcel was prepared to expand its summer program to additional sites. All sites utilize the same curricula and materials, and quality control system is in place to ensure the consistent implementation of the program model.
- BellXcel exhibits a “strong interest in evaluation as demonstrated by their own internal evaluations of both their summer and school year programs and the development of an Evaluation Advisory Board.”

EVALUATION CONTEXT

The difference in learning caused by a lack of summer learning activities in grades K-8 accumulates each year. Since students from all income brackets generally learn at the same rate in school, summer learning loss ultimately accounts for 66% of the academic achievement gap between low-income and higher-income ninth grade students. Summer learning loss is also directly linked to whether students attend preparatory classes, graduate high school, and attend four-year colleges.[1]

METHODOLOGY

The Urban Institute study used random assignment, the “gold standard” of evaluation methods, to measure the effectiveness of the BellXcel Summer program model. In total, there were 1,917 applicants to the 2005 BellXcel Summer program at the three study sites (two in Boston, one in New York City), more than double the 750 available slots. Children were randomly chosen to be in the treatment group to participate in BellXcel Summer, or a comparison group that did not participate. Independent researchers collected data from student reading tests (Gates-MacGinitie), student and teacher surveys, and application forms detailing children’s race, gender, and participation status.

The Urban Institute study compliments BellXcel’s own evaluation. Using different parameters, the Urban Institute measured the difference between children attending BellXcel Summer versus children engaged in other summer activities. BellXcel’s internal evaluation measures the total amount of skills gained by children enrolled in BellXcel Summer at the beginning and end of their participation in the program.

[1] Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Olson, L. (2007). Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap. *American Sociological Review*, 72.

RESULTS

The study found statistically significant positive impacts on the reading test scores of children who attended the BellXcel Summer program.

- Participation in BellXcel Summer had a positive and statistically significant impact on reading achievement, particularly for treatment group students who fully participated in the BellXcel program ($p < 0.05$, effect size = 0.14)
- Participation had a positive and statistically significant impact on parents encouraging their children to read ($p < 0.05$, effect size = 0.15) and their frequency of reading to their children at home ($p < 0.05$, effect size = 0.21)
- Parents in the treatment group reported a 50% increase in the hours per week they engage in reading and other academic activities at home compared to the control group. Participants spent fewer hours watching TV and playing computer games ($p < 0.05$, effect size = 0.66)

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The results of this independent evaluation are of particular importance given the public policy focus on raising achievement levels of students living in low-income communities.

Much attention has been focused on the potential of out-of-school-time programs to increase students' achievements. In the last decade, many studies have attempted to quantify the impact educational summer and after school programs have on children's reading and math skills. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) created significant public funding for underperforming children to attend educational out-of-school-time programs. According to Senior Research Methodologist Duncan Chaplin, one of the report's authors, this evaluation of BellXcel Summer provides "the best evidence we have right now about summer enrichment and low-income students."

The implications of these findings are particularly relevant to national and local educational policy. Currently, federal funding from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is primarily used to fund after school programs. While the law stipulates that funds may be used to support summer learning programs, few districts have elected to disburse funds in this manner, thus limiting the ability of non-profit providers such as BellXcel to scale their programs and impact the lives of many more children. BellXcel "represents the type of organization that state education agencies will be considering when deciding how to use their Title I funds." The evidence contained in this evaluation supports using federal, state and/or local funds for summer learning programs as a strategy for increasing children's academic skills.



*"BellXcel is helping me read better,
and makes learning fun! I want to return
next summer."*

- BellXcel Scholar

ABOUT BELLXCEL

Founded in 1992, BellXcel is a national nonprofit leader in out-of-school-time education. BellXcel 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 states.

Delivered by school district and community-based organization partners, BellXcel-powered summer and afterschool programs impact the entire ecosystem of students, parents and educators. PK-8 scholars achieve measurable improvements in academics, social-emotional learning, and self-confidence. In 2018, scholars gained 2 months of reading skills and 2.5 months of math skills, reversing summer learning loss. According to a recent study, 100 percent of teachers reported that BellXcel positively influenced their approach to teaching in the new school year, and 85 percent of surveyed parents said BellXcel helped them become more involved in their child's education.

BellXcel has been selected twice as the best educational summer program for children in the nation by the National Summer Learning Association at Johns Hopkins University. BellXcel was chosen for the Social Impact Exchanges' Top 100 Index, the first index of U.S. nonprofits that have evidence of results and are ready to scale. The Academy for Educational Development recognized BellXcel's model of applying evaluation data to continuous program improvement as a best practice in expanded education. For three consecutive years, awarded the Social Capitalist Award from Fast Company and The Monitor Group for being an innovative, entrepreneurial nonprofit. BellXcel was named on the Top 100 Women-Led Businesses in Massachusetts.

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ABOUT THE URBAN INSTITUTE

The independent evaluation of the BellXcel Summer program was conducted by the Urban Institute's Duncan Chaplin, Senior Researcher, Mathematica Policy Research, and Jeffrey Capizzano, Director of Public Policy and Research of Teaching Strategies, Inc. Established in 1968, the Urban Institute is one of the nation's oldest and most prestigious organizations devoted to research on urban issues. Dedicated to non-partisan economic and social policy research, the organization analyzes policies, evaluates programs, and informs policy makers to improve civic and economic well-being. The Urban Institute works in all 50 states and abroad in over 28 countries to share research findings through the dissemination of reports and books to policymakers, program administrators, business leaders, academia, and the public at large.

The evaluation was funded by the Smith Richardson Foundation and the William T. Grant Foundation. To view the full evaluation report, entitled Impacts of a Summer Learning Program: A Random Assignment Study of BellXcel, please visit <http://www.urban.org/index.cfm> or bellxcel.org.

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BellXcel extends a heartfelt thank you to the generous foundations, corporations, and individuals, along with our partners, who have made BellXcel Summer and Afterschool available to children across the country since its inception in 1992. Together, we are transforming thousands of children into scholars while working to improve the quality of public education in America.