

Exemplary Summer Learning Programs Honored

Academic and youth development components are deftly woven into a unified whole by the 2007 Excellence in Summer Learning Award recipients to meet the needs of young people.

Breakthrough Collaborative and Summerbridge Pittsburgh, Morry's Camp, and SuperKids Camp of the Parks & People Foundation are the recipients of this year's Excellence Award. "These award winners exemplify the type of high-quality summer learning experience that should be accessible to all young people," said Ron Fairchild, executive director of the Center for Summer Learning.

The Excellence in Summer Learning Award recognizes summer programs that demonstrate excellence in accelerating academic achievement and promoting positive development for young people. Applications for the award are reviewed based on a framework that focuses on the Characteristics of Effective Summer Learning Programs.

The nine characteristics function as a set. The exclusion of one will impact a program's quality. High-quality programs, like this year's award winners, work to support the development of the whole child—intellectually, socially, physically, and emotionally—so that he or she is prepared to return to school in the fall and for a lifetime of success. The first three characteristics describe the program's mindset. The following six characteristics relate to the underlying actions and support that enable the program to operate effectively.

Breakthrough Collaborative is a national non-profit with outstanding infrastructure whose mission is to launch low-income students on the road to college and to inspire their young teachers to pursue careers in education.



Summerbridge Pittsburgh is an exemplary local affiliate of Breakthrough. Like other Breakthrough affiliates, Summerbridge Pittsburgh provides a tuition-free, intensive academic summer program.

Morry's Camp, a youth development organization, provides children from underserved communities a summer residential camp experience complemented by year-round support. Campers are supported in developing educational skills and can benefit from a continuum of services over a number of years, from fifth through eighth grade, high school, and beyond.

Every summer over the past 10 years, the Parks & People Foundation has operated SuperKids Camp, a six-week highly intensive literacy-based program for elementary school students in the Baltimore City public schools. SuperKids Camp combines reading skills improvement with recreation and cultural enrichment activities.

Characteristics of Effective Summer Learning Programs

Approach to Learning

1. Intentional focus on accelerating learning.
2. Firm commitment to youth development.
3. Proactive approach to summer learning.

Program Infrastructure

4. Strong, empowering leadership.
5. Advanced, collaborative planning.
6. Extensive opportunities for staff development.
7. Strategic partnerships.
8. Rigorous approach to evaluation and commitment to program improvement.
9. Clear focus on sustainability and cost-effectiveness.

Students Teach Students for Success



As a national organization, the Breakthrough Collaborative works to launch low-income students on a college path and to inspire their young teachers to pursue careers in education. This outstanding students-teaching-students model is the key to positive outcomes for young people. Founded in 1978, Breakthrough Collaborative now annually prepares more than 2,200 youth from lower income households for college success.

Breakthrough Collaborative

Location: 27 sites nationally
Summers in Operation: 29
Youth Served Annually: 2,200+
Staff to Participant Ratio: 3:1 overall,
7:1 in the classroom
Participant Age: 5th-9th graders

One of 27 national sites, Summerbridge Pittsburgh is an exemplary illustration of this students-teaching-students model. Maya, a participant, explains, “Summerbridge has made a big change in what I do and how I feel about myself. When I return to school, I know Summerbridge will help me make better choices in my life.”

SBP offers participants two consecutive summers of a free life-changing experience that empowers middle school students facing limited opportunities to achieve academic success. Each summer, more than 100 rising seventh- and eighth-grade students from public schools in the Greater Pittsburgh Region participate in the program.

All Breakthrough Collaborative sites recruit and train talented college and high school student to teach. They are supported by professional educators and receive training prior to entering the classroom. More than simply instructors, teachers model success, mentor participants, and infuse the program with enthusiasm. Nationally, 72 percent of teachers go on to pursue careers in education.

In addition to meeting academic standards, SBP participants must qualify for the program under criteria of limited opportunity including limited household income, potential first-generation college student, non-traditional family structure, and significant relationship stress. Ninety percent of SBP students meet three or more of these criteria.

Reducing barriers to learning is an important component to the Breakthrough Collaborative model. For this reason, transportation and meals are provided at all sites.

SBP teachers create an individualized education plan for each student. Ninety-two percent of students who complete SBP graduate from high school and 80 percent enroll in college. This is in comparison to 59 percent and 42 percent of students, nationally. At all sites combined, 80 percent of Breakthrough Collaborative students are accepted to college-preparatory high schools.

The intensive academic experience of SBP consists of four core classes: Math, Writing Through Literature, Public Speaking, and Wellness. All Breakthrough Collaborative sites provide instruction in core academic subjects. Public

Speaking and Wellness are courses SBP developed to meet the unique needs of their students. Students thrive in the supportive and challenging environment. “I love Summerbridge because it’s giving me somewhere good to go. I can also keep my mind growing over the summer,” said Joseph.

SBP also works to increase participants’ life skills. Students meet with a mentor daily to support the development of organizational and goal-setting skills. Throughout the summer, young people participate in enrichment activities like Career Day and Community Service Day. SBP also conducts cultural field trips to destinations such as the Pittsburgh Opera and Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

Like all Breakthrough Collaborative sites, SBP fosters a strong sense of community through daily all school meetings and spirited special events. “Summerbridge inspires me to do my best,” states R. J.

Beginning this summer, SBP will expand their support to program alumni through a new high school program to serve students and their families through high school completion.

Characteristics of Effective Summer Learning Programs in Practice

#6. Extensive opportunities for staff development

In the SBP program, there are extensive opportunities for staff development. Before students arrive, teachers complete an intensive, two-week training program that empowers them to succeed in the classroom. Professional educators lead teachers in workshops on effective instruction, issues on diversity, and other aspects of the learning process. The Princeton Review ranked the Summerbridge teaching experience alongside the White House and the Supreme Court as one of the Top 10 internships in the country.

Summerbridge Pittsburgh

Location: Sewickley, PA
Summers in Operation: 13 years
Youth Served Annually: 150
Staff to Participant Ratio: 4:1
Participant Age: Rising 7th and 8th graders

Camp supports youth all year

Playing basketball, swimming, and recording a CD are some of the many fun activities at Morry's Camp. Said Vanessa, age 11, "If you went to Morry's Camps for a couple of days, you would definitely want to stay, because it is a great place. That's why I go back each year!"

Morry's Camp serves at-risk young people from the New York metropolitan area. A youth development organization, Morry's Camp supports participants during the summer and throughout the year. School personnel or a social worker recommend participants to receive a full scholarship for four years. As rising fifth graders, children commit to the program for four years. The residential summer camp operates for four weeks. These two components give rise to the name for this section of the service continuum: the 4x4 program.

"I'm blessed to attend Morry's Camp. It helps you stay focused in life, go to high school and make it to college." –Humberto

Monthly school year meetings maintain the support network. Campers learn academic skills, to treat others with respect, how to overcome obstacles, and goal-setting. Staffers also stay in contact with campers and their parents through a newsletter, phone calls, and emails.

Fun and learning are both part of Morry's Camp. Campers experience nature and participate in traditional camp activities. Fun educational opportunities prepare campers for the next school year.

A centerpiece of the summer residential experience is the academic Olympics competition. Campers represent countries and compete in inquiry-based math, science, and cooperative challenges.

Campers work in small groups on scientific, historical, and literary projects.



Participants share these projects with peers at an expo. Participants relax, read books, write journals, and develop computer skills at the Education Clubhouse.

Symphonic sounds fill the outdoors when participants play stringed instruments. The orchestra program introduces a new musical genre. Campers learn patience, discipline, and dedication.

Campers cultivate cooking and mathematical skills through the culinary program. Nutrition knowledge empowers campers to make wise decisions about food and wellness.

4x4 program graduates improve their anger management, accountability, and follow-through skills, according to a longitudinal evaluation. Campers develop leadership skills and altruism.

After completing the 4x4 program, young people can apply to the Post Grad program. This program goes through high school graduation. Post Grads are role models for younger campers. They also visit colleges, museums, or other historic sites, and complete an internship. Post Grads continue attending monthly meetings to foster life skills.

High school juniors partner with a mentor. For two years, this adult supports their post-secondary planning process. Following high school graduation, these young people can apply to become staff members at Morry's Camp.

"Other kids in the area who don't go to Morry's Camp wish they could. I'm blessed to attend Morry's Camp. It helps you stay focused in life, go to high school

and make it to college. I learned to be the best person I can be," explains Humberto, a rising high school junior.

In schools and communities where fewer than 50 percent of incoming ninth graders graduate from high school, 100 percent of campers complete high school on time.

Characteristics of Effective Summer Learning Programs

#9. Firm commitment to youth development

Campers are taught how to set goals and are supported in achieving them. This support extends throughout the year and continues for a minimum of four years. Staff members endeavor to develop campers' core values, social skills, self-esteem and sense of personal responsibility. Young people can remain involved in Morry's Camp through high school graduation and beyond.

Morry's Camp

Location: White Plains, NY (year-round); Glen Spey, NY (summer); and agency locations in Bronx, NY; Manhattan, NY; Long Island, NY; Bridgeport, CT; and Westchester, NY. Serving youth from the New York City metro area.

Summers in Operation: 12

Youth Served Annually: 300+

Staff to Participant Ratio: 1:4

Participant Age: rising 5th graders through high school

Campers benefit from literacy-infused enrichment

SuperKids Camp (SKC) is a six-week summer program for early elementary school students. Every Baltimore City Public School System elementary student is invited to participate. All children are accepted. Academic ability or the capacity to pay are not factors in acceptance. Through a network of about 10 sites each summer, SKC serves over 1,000 children annually.

More than 10,000 children have attended the camp since 1997. Operated by the Parks & People Foundation, SKC has a significant and measurable impact on students' literacy skills.

A bus picks up children at over 80 stops. On the bus, a reading counselor welcomes each child. The counselor accompanies the group to breakfast. Following breakfast, students are taught in small academically homogenous groups.

Literacy Links is an innovative program that infuses fun enrichment activities with literacy instruction.

The Open Court Reading program and thematic units comprise the curriculum. Students learn words, sounds, and comprehension ability from the Open Court Program. Fables and fairy tales are the subject of the performance-based thematic learning units. These thematic units occur during the fourth and sixth weeks of camp. This schedule creates variation for staff and participants.

SKC follows the Maryland voluntary state curriculum. This incorporation supports participants' transition from school to summer camp and then back.

Following lunch, campers enjoy enrichment activities. Campers may leave the program's site to experience their city. They participate in sailing, the performing arts, science, music, drama, or swimming. (Campers may also stay on-site for an enrichment activity.) An organization such as the Maryland Zoo,



the Downtown Sailing Center, Port Discovery Children's Museum, and the Maryland Science Center partner with SKC for Literacy Links, an innovative program that infuses fun, enriching activities with literacy instruction.

Created to insert intentional but fun learning into enrichment activities, Literacy Links is a key element in SKC's strategic partnerships. SKC provides technical assistance about literacy instruction to their partners. Campers acquire new vocabulary and improve phonic ability. Literacy Links is a value-added experience for the partners, who use their new instructional skills with other groups.

After sailing in the Inner Harbor or visiting a museum, campers return to their program site. They finish the day reading. SKC uses the 100 Book Challenge. This guided reading program builds campers literacy abilities. In 2006, campers read for 12,325 total hours.

Evaluations reveal the program's impact on students' literacy ability. At the end of camp, students are prepared to return to school ready to learn.

Characteristics of Effective Summer Learning Programs

#8. Rigorous approach to evaluation
Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skill (DIBELS), the Garfield Motivation to Read Survey, staff surveys, student attendance data, and enrichment partners' reports measure the performance of summer program. Over 80 percent of participants maintain or improve their literacy skills. A large majority of campers (90%) believe SuperKids Camp helped them become a better reader.

SuperKids Camp

Location: Baltimore, MD
Summers in Operation: 10 years
Youth Served Annually: 1,000+
Staff to Participant Ratio: 1:10
Participant Age: rising 2nd and 3rd graders