



Summer Learning Helps Grand Rapids Youth to Succeed in School and Life

The Believe2Become (B2B) initiative grew out of a desire among philanthropist, education, civic, and community leaders to close the achievement gap in their community by 2025. While discussing solutions to support their youth, they looked closely at out-of-school time—eventually identifying summer learning as a key strategic lever in the equation. In 2010, the B2B Summer Learning Academy (SLA) was established and has produced compelling academic and social-emotional outcomes for local youth.

In early 2009, LINC/NCDI, the neighborhood engagement arm of B2B, families, and community stakeholders from neighborhoods around Grand Rapids came together for a series of town-hall meetings to address a single question: “What are the barriers children in Grand Rapids face in reaching their full potential?” From these gatherings, a picture began to form—a picture of neighborhoods with concentrated poverty, sparse opportunities, and limited access to high-quality education.

Early B2B funders knew that collaborative action on a systemic level was necessary. “We need to ensure that all of our youth are succeeding in school, work, and life,”

“The B2B Summer Learning Academy is an example of what’s possible when a community comes together in support of summer learning. With a clear vision for youth success and a commitment to summer learning, Grand Rapids is making great strides towards closing the achievement gap.”

— Gary Huggins, CEO, National Summer Learning Association

said Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation Senior Program Officer Chana’ Edmond-Verley. “Our trustee believed that it was time to shift collaborative investments to a more catalytic approach to ignite social innovation.”

Four contiguous neighborhoods with low academic achievement were identified and designated as *Hope Zones*. The *Hope Zones* are home to high concentrations of vulnerable families with historically persistent educational challenges. Yet these neighborhoods have a rich set of assets and resources—including nonprofit organizations, church congregations, and several strong schools—that could be leveraged. Several key organizational partners emerged, and in 2010 the Believe2Become (B2B) initiative was launched to support Grand Rapids youth with a cradle-to-career strategy that included such components as: neighborhood



engagement, parent leadership, school readiness, in-school teacher effectiveness, and out-of-school learning.

To explore out-of-school learning strategies, B2B brought together partners such as Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS), the Heart of West Michigan United Way, the Expanded Learning Opportunities Network, the Center for Social Research, and the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA). Working with NSLA, B2B convened more than 200 leaders from city agencies, community organizations, congregations, schools, and private foundations and businesses to build awareness about the issue of summer learning loss, as well as to garner support for a coordinated summer learning strategy.

NSLA provided research from a Johns Hopkins University study, which shows that low-income youth lose 2 months of academic skills during the summer break. Given this reality, the B2B SLA was established to see if the 2 months of loss could be reduced or even eliminated. The B2B SLA was born with direction from a multi-disciplinary team from GRPS, advice from NSLA, and generous support from the Student Achievement Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation. B2B SLA goals focused on reducing summer learning loss in math and reading by increasing the overall academic dosage youth receive during the summer months.

¹Alexander, K.L., Entwisle D.R., & Olson L. S. (2007). Summer learning and its implications: Insights from the Beginning School Study. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 114, 11-32.

Community Demographics for the Grand Rapids Hope Zones	
Unemployment Rate	23-28%
Percent of Persons below Poverty Level	19-33%
Percent of Adults with a High School Diploma	53-60%
Approximate Total Number of Children	12,000
Local Nonprofits	65
Religious Congregations	83
Public Schools	13

**Data aggregated across all four Hope Zones.*

B2B Funders and GRPS: A Partnership in Summer Learning

B2B funders further engaged with Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) to collaboratively design what summer learning would look like under the B2B initiative. “The important approach was to acknowledge GRPS’ expertise in educating urban youth and provide an array of support for their efforts,” said Edmond-Verley. “The B2B philosophy is grounded in a strong belief in the wisdom of its partners.”

B2B found a summer ally in Teresa Weatheral Neal. Currently Superintendent for GRPS, at the time that she first became involved, Neal was the Assistant Superintendent of Community and Student Affairs. Neal recognized that collaborating with B2B would help the district progress in its objectives to increase attendance and active participation in summer school; increase student preparedness for middle- and high school transitions; improve math and literacy skills; increase knowledge about college and career options; and increase parent and family involvement in summer and school year activities.

Together, B2B and GRPS developed a program model in which each youth attends a GRPS school in the morning for literacy and math enrichment and then moves to a community or faith-based organization in the afternoon for integrated learning and engaging enrichment activities. GRPS brought several district resources to the table—curriculum, facilities, technology, special projects teams, transportation, school counselors, and a portion of the funding. The B2B funding collaborative funds local organizations

to run the afternoon activities and manages overall operations and coordination between community organizations and GRPS. The community and faith-based organizations are responsible for developing curriculum and activities that complement GRPS academics.



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Approximately \$1.2 million was budgeted for the B2B SLA in 2012. GRPS leverages funding to support the B2B SLA from a variety of sources, including Title I, 21st Century Community Learning Center, and a federal School Improvement Grant.

To attract targeted youth from *Hope Zones*, B2B worked closely with a local marketing agency to develop B2B branding and outreach strategies that promoted B2B and the SLA throughout the community. This outreach included using billboard advertising promoting actual residents from the *Hope Zones*, which appeared in both English and Spanish throughout the city and are featured in this report. GRPS also managed a centralized process for youth recruitment that helped further connect individual programs and families to B2B. Through grassroots outreach, local marketing and advertising, and community events, targeted youth awareness of B2B has been heightened in Grand Rapids. According to B2B SLA program directors, local youth say they feel as if they are a part of

something larger than just their day-to-day participation in various programs—they feel connected to and supported by the community because of B2B.



Believe2Become billboard advertising

The B2B Summer Learning Academy

In 2012, 22 nonprofits, ranging from national to community and faith-based organizations, oversaw 36 sites. These sites provided after-noon enrichment activities focused on literacy, math, STEM, arts, recreation, and college awareness. These nonprofits also provided career development and work experiences for high school students in the program.

B2B SLA providers were selected through a competitive grant process in which they were required to identify at least one academic area they would integrate into their program. In 2012, each provider also was required to engage a state-licensed classroom teacher to further ensure that the design and instruction of all activities effectively supported academic success. B2B funding provided a range of resources to support enrichment such as Khan Academy, Skills Pointer, and GRASP, a literacy curriculum developed by GRPS. Providers received technical assistance and training from NSLA, GRPS, and Michigan Works to support outcome-based planning and program development.

Many of these providers served Grand Rapids youth prior to the initiative, but operated independently. Through the B2B SLA, all providers are given both strategies to achieve positive program outcomes and the flexibility to customize the initiative to their individual youth needs and program strengths.

Summer Learning Academy Statistics

2010

TOTAL BUDGET
\$902,300

ENROLLMENT
727

PORTION OF YOUTH FROM HOPE ZONES
56%

2012

TOTAL BUDGET
\$1,222,900

ENROLLMENT
1,200

PORTION OF YOUTH FROM HOPE ZONES
70%

CHANGE 2010-2012

TOTAL BUDGET
\$320,600 increase in investment

ENROLLMENT
65% increase in enrollment

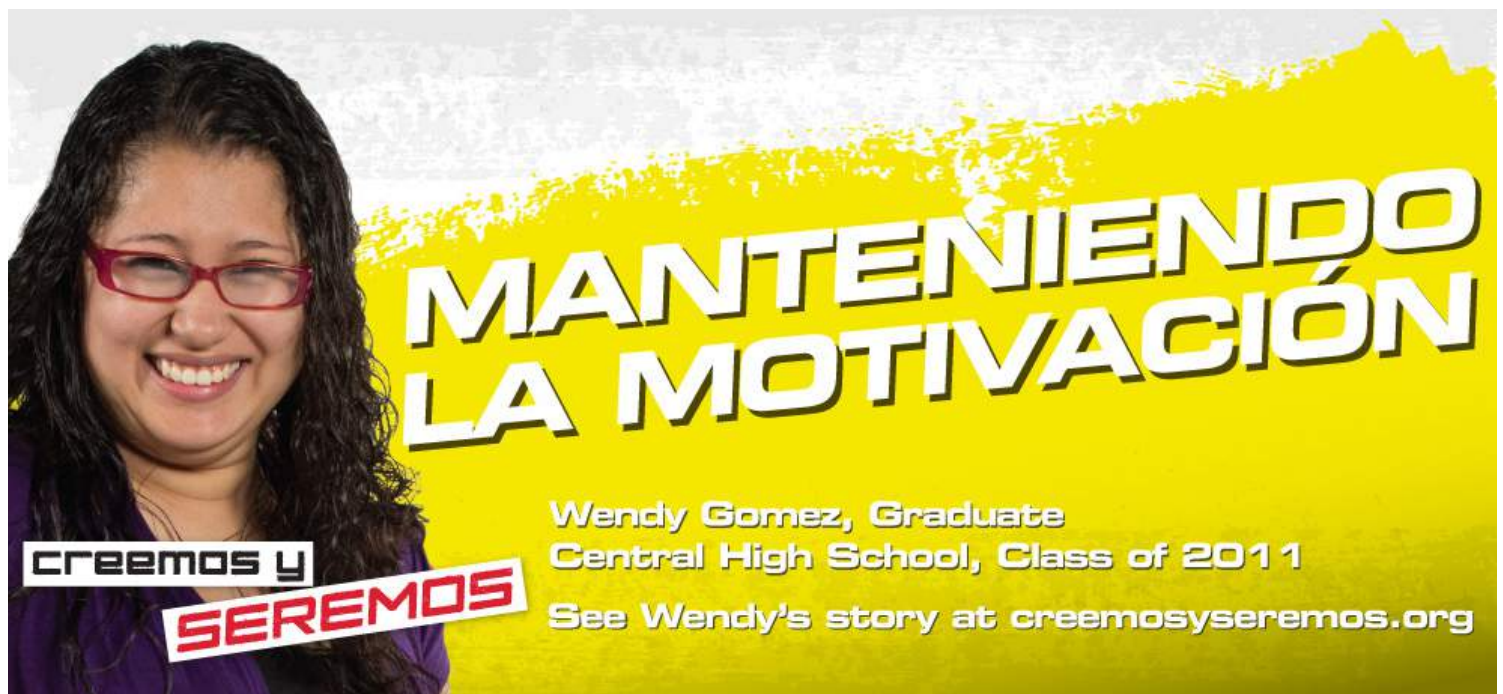
PORTION OF YOUTH FROM HOPE ZONES
14% increase in Hope Zones youth served

The Impact of Summer Learning in Grand Rapids

Data is an important aspect of the B2B SLA strategy. It provides an accurate understanding of available community assets, level of community engagement, improved site and program management, program evaluation, and alignment between school and out-of-school time resources and curriculum to support year-round learning for youth. A data-sharing work group was formed between GRPS, B2B, and the Community Research Institute at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy early on in the creation of the B2B SLA. This group enables the safe transfer of GRPS student records, including test scores, attendance, and demographic data to B2B SLA providers with parental consent.

effectively eliminating summer learning loss. Middle school B2B SLA participants benefited the most, with average gains equivalent to 14.1 weeks of school year instruction in math, while their non-participating peers lost over one-third of the math skills and knowledge gained during the previous school year.

“Youths’ beliefs about their ability to learn and succeed have been found in some research studies to predict later academic performance,” said DeVos Foundation Senior Program Officer of Research, Education, and Congregations Edwin Hernandez. Pre- and post-surveys in summer 2011 show that positive youth behaviors have developed as a result



Believe2Become billboard advertising

Providers use the data to ensure that curriculum is developed and delivered in an individualized way to meet the needs of each child. Camp Fire West Michigan Executive Director Gail Orange emphasizes the importance of data, saying that, “if you don’t know where kids are, you can’t move the needle. You can’t come up with the strategies.” The student data helps B2B leaders understand the progress of student achievement, and how to adjust the initiative to better support youth academically.

The Northwest Evaluation Association’s (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test scores for reading and math, for grades 2-12, and Primary Grade Assessments, for grades K-1, are used to measure academic progress and to estimate the B2B SLA’s impact. The tests are administered by GRPS in the fall, winter, and spring and the results are shared with B2B in order to determine the impact summer has on a student’s academic gains.

The B2B SLA has shown exciting results in academic achievement. A 2011 evaluation found that summer participants experienced significantly better math outcomes over the summer when compared with peers from similar demographics who did not participate, with average gains equivalent to 6.7 weeks of school-year math instruction,

of the B2B SLA. More students reported reading a book “every day” or at least “three to six times a week.” The proportion of participants reporting that they learned “new skills and ideas every day” increased from 53 percent to 63 percent. These findings show that in addition to supporting academic gains, the B2B SLA helps motivate participants to grow in areas that may foster future academic success.

Not only has the B2B SLA seen positive gains initiative-wide, but four providers saw exceptionally positive growth in youth academic achievement at the site level: Camp Fire West Michigan, Grand Rapids Dreams, Hispanic Center of Western Michigan, and Jubilee Jobs. These academic gains may reflect the unique program approaches to learning and instruction at the different B2B SLA sites in summer 2011. B2B SLA providers also report positive changes in youth behaviors correlated with academic progress, enrollment, and retention. These positive behavioral changes may reflect the use of specific practices at the program sites and attention to parental support. One site, New Hope Missionary Baptist Church, used family engagement to support particularly high rates of youth retention. Each of these sites is profiled with some additional information on their particular approach towards implementing the B2B SLA program on page 5.

CAMP FIRE WEST MICHIGAN

To introduce young people to career opportunities and allow them to experience being on a college campus, Camp Fire West Michigan takes middle-school students on a tour of the Grand Rapids Community College Culinary Arts Program. Camp Fire West Michigan's middle-school youth showed an average of 22.4 weeks, equivalent to over one-half of a school year of instructional gains—in math in the program's 2011 evaluation—a statistically significant improvement compared to non-participating peers.



GRAND RAPIDS DREAMS

Grand Rapids Dreams helps youth develop and enhance math skills by participating in Khan Academy modules, which provide math tutorials and practice activities that match and grow with student skill levels. Youth who attended Grand Rapids Dreams showed an average of 18.3 weeks of instructional gains in math in summer 2011.



HISPANIC CENTER OF WESTERN MICHIGAN

Hispanic Center of Western Michigan partners with Grand Valley State University College of Education to offer an interactive eight-week literacy training program that includes both group and individual reading activities. The program also introduces youth to teaching as a career to increase the number of bilingual Hispanic teachers in the K-12 pipeline. Youth who attended the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan showed an average of 17.5 weeks of instructional gains in reading in summer 2011.



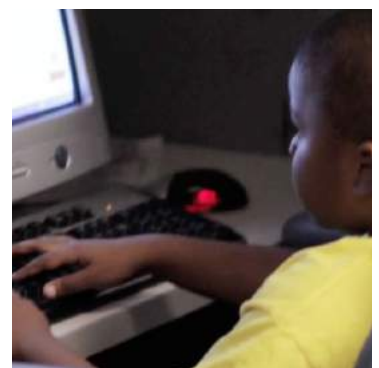
JUBILEE JOBS

Focused on preparing youth for life beyond high school, the Jubilee Jobs YES! 4U summer learning program provides high school youth with job experiences while also fostering a passion for learning through college awareness, cultural studies, financial planning, and intensive literacy and math activities. Jubilee Jobs participants showed an average of 9.9 weeks of instructional gains in math in summer 2011.



NEW HOPE MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

New Hope Missionary Baptist Church attributes its high youth return rate to its parent engagement. Staff members hold luncheon or dinner meetings every Saturday with parents, facilitate setting up homework centers in neighborhoods, and make home visits during the summer and throughout the school year. New Hope saw 63 percent of their 2011 participants return for their 2012 summer program.





Before the B2B SLA, many providers, foundations, community-based organizations, and nonprofits in Grand Rapids were operating with the best of intentions, but in a fragmented way and without a collective focus. The initiative's success is a direct result of organizations coming together in a coordinated way while allowing each to innovate and specialize based on their unique strengths.

Because of these coordinated efforts, a professional learning community centered around summer learning was formed—one that opened up communication, as well as sharing of best practices and resources. B2B SLA's program directors underscore that the coordinated approach

years, providers have come together for an interactive end-of-summer debriefing facilitated by NSLA to celebrate summer successes and collectively identify solutions for strengthening not only program practices but also initiative strategies.

B2B and GRPS are committed to receiving and responding to feedback from providers to ensure that summer strategies continue to improve while reflecting the community's assets and needs. "Believe2Become has helped us be more focused and intentional—to look at academic achievement and how to impact it," said Camp Fire West Michigan Executive Director Gayle Orange. "It also includes a component of

A Community Comes Together For Its Youth

"We're all in this together. We're all partners in this process. We can impact a huge problem as a group in a way that one agency alone cannot."

has enabled them to give youth a more diverse and engaging summer learning experience. It has allowed Grand Rapids youth to get outside of their communities, and is helping to close not only the achievement gap but also what they refer to as the experience gap—allowing providers to integrate educational skills into real-life experiences.

"It's brought together people who were operating in their own sphere, and created an opportunity for networking," said Grand Rapids Dreams Executive Director Reverend Andre Daley. "We're all in this together. We're all partners in this process. We can impact a huge problem as a group in a way that one agency alone cannot." For the past three

continuous reflection with the freedom to take a critical eye and the flexibility to improve."

For the past three years, B2B partners in the Grand Rapids community have committed to continuous improvement by taking time to reflect, tweak, and plan each year. Their efforts have helped improve coordination between partners, quality of programs, and youth outcomes over the past three years, and will continue as the community works towards the goal of ending the achievement gap in Grand Rapids by 2025.

Special thanks to the Believe2Become Summer Learning Academy partners and providers:

ACSET/Michigan Works!

Boys and Girls Club of Grand Rapids

Brown-Hutcherson Ministries

Calvin Christian Reformed Church

Camp Fire USA West Michigan Council

Girl Scouts of Michigan Shore to Shore

Grand Rapids Dreams

Grand Rapids Initiative for Leaders

Grand Rapids Public Schools

Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation

Grandville Avenue Arts and Humanities

Hispanic Center of Western Michigan

Jubilee Jobs, Inc.

Mr. B's Math and Reading Basketball Camp

National Summer Learning Association

New Hope Baptist Church

Oakdale Neighbors

Renaissance Church of God in Christ

Restorers, Inc.

Sabaoth Ministries

Salvation Army Kroc Center

Steepletown Neighborhood Services

United Church Outreach Ministry, Inc.

United Methodist Community House

Vocal Music Workshop

W. K. Kellogg Foundation

Word of Faith Grand Rapids

YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids





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BELIEVE2BECOME

Believe2Become is a collaborative partnership of hundreds of organizations and individuals who believe in the unlimited potential of Grand Rapids children, and expect them to succeed. Believe2Become is creating real opportunities for children and youth to become the people they aspire to be.

NATIONAL SUMMER LEARNING ASSOCIATION

In an effort to connect and coordinate the work of providers, funders, and stakeholders within a community, NSLA leads summer learning community initiatives in cities across the country. Through the Grand Rapids community initiative, NSLA worked with Believe2Become to build community awareness about the importance of summer learning and to implement a coordinated summer learning strategy. Working closely with the DeVos Foundation, NSLA provided ongoing training and technical assistance to the foundation and community-based organizations to support the design and delivery of a high-quality summer learning model.

NSLA's community initiatives aim to develop professional capacity at the program level and promote system-building at the community level to align existing resources and increase community capacity to deliver high-quality summer learning at scale. Designing strategies that are unique to the local context, NSLA's community initiatives support community assessment; partner coordination and strategic planning; and capacity building with local intermediaries and stakeholders.

For more information on NSLA community initiatives please contact Leslie Gabay-Swanston, Director of Program and Systems Building at leslie@summerlearning.org or 410-856-1370, ext. 204.



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