sail
SUMMER ADVENTURES IN LEARNING

September 11, 2023

Dr. Jan Hume
Acting Secretary
Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education

Dear Dr. Hume:

Attached, please find SAIL's assessment of the K-3 summer learning programs receiving grants from the Department this summer.

It has been our pleasure to work with these programs on behalf of the Department. The grants program was considered a pilot, and we are excited to report that it was a resounding success. The data demonstrate significant and positive impact on the lives of 595 children. These outcomes also confirm the robustness of the community-based summer learning model. The report elaborates on this in depth, and makes recommendations to realize better outcomes in the future. Should you wish additional information or further analysis, just let us know.

We want to discuss this assessment with the Department, preferably in person, otherwise by zoom. We recognize that current plans call for administration of FY2024 grants to transfer to the Department of Education. It is important that there be a proper handoff in order for the lessons we have learned this summer and the recommendations we make to be properly considered going forward.

In addition, we believe that the cause of summer learning will be advanced by publicizing these results, and would like to discuss ways to do so.

Finally, there are several parties having a direct interest in this pilot with whom we plan to share this assessment. Among these are A-Plus Alabama, AELA, the SAIL board, as well as the programs themselves.

Best regards,

Jim Wooten

President, SAIL Board

Assessment of K-3 Summer Learning Programs Funded by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education Summer 2023

1. Overview

In FY2023, Alabama's ETF budget included $1.5 Million to fund a pilot program of grants to support community-based summer and afterschool learning. The Department of Early Childhood Education (ECE) was assigned responsibility for administering the grants. In mid-March, ECE opened the grants portal. In mid-May, 14 grants totaling $548,069 were awarded to eight different organizations. In addition, SAIL (Summer Adventures in Learning) was awarded a grant of $62,140 to utilize its Quality Assurance Framework to support and assess the programs.

To view an interactive map with details of the eight programs (at 14 separate locations), visit https://public.tableau.com/views/ADECESummerLearning2023/Details?:language=en-US&:display_count=n&:origin=viz_share_link.

2. Timeline

- **Mid-May**: Grant awards announced.
- **May 19**: SAIL conducted an orientation (via Zoom) to cover the Quality Assurance Framework.
- **May 31**: SAIL conducted a training session (via Zoom) to cover assessment tools (Star® and PEAR/HSA®) and topics identified by the grantees.
- **June-July**:
    - SAIL worked with the programs to set up their Star® testing environments and administer the assessments. SAIL also acted as consultant/troubleshooter to the programs during their term of operation.
    - The first program began on May 31; the others began between June 12-14. The first program ended on June 30; the others ended between July 13-28.
    - SAIL visited each program (except one) at least once to observe its operations and offer support. Notes from the visits are attached.
- **August**: Program results were collected.
- **Mid-September**: Each program will be presented a KPI Summary, showing its outcomes compared to composite results.
- **September 21**: SAIL will conduct an in-person Quality Review. All programs funded by ECE and/or SAIL (39 in all) will meet to discuss 2023 outcomes and explore strategies for improvement in 2024.

3. Grant-Cycle Timing

The following annual calendar is based on established best practices for summer learning:

Annual Calendar for Summer Learning Programs	
Period	**Activity**
September-December	Plan the next year's program at a high level. Translate lessons learned from this summer into action plans for next summer. Apply for funding.
December	Secure funding commitments prior to preparing program budget.
January-February	Finalize budget. Finalize program plans.
February-May	Hire staff and recruit students.
May-early June	Train staff. Finalize student rosters.
June-August	Conduct programs.
August-September	Conduct program review. Identify steps to improve future outcomes.

The ECE grant awards were not announced until mid-May. This caused the programs to compress their preparations into a two-three week period. Feedback from the programs identified the following challenges which negatively affected program outcomes:

- The programs were able to recruit the necessary staff, but they were not able to be as selective as they normally would. Many of the most suitable candidates had already accepted summer positions before the programs began their search.
- Similarly, most families had already made their summer plans. As a result, many programs operated below full capacity.
- Insufficient time was available for planning, training, and preparation. This was particularly challenging for programs that were new to the Quality Assurance Framework.

4. Program Assessment

This section discusses program outcomes. Data is also available in Tableau, both in graphs and a map; links are provided in the relevant sections.

Overall, the programs performed well. Gains in reading and math were realized and enrollment was effectively managed. This is especially gratifying given the late announcement of grant awards. This first-year funding stream was considered a pilot, and was without question a success, confirming the robustness of the community-based summer learning model. See the remainder of this section for elaboration.

Tableau Map (with outcomes):
https://public.tableau.com/views/ADECEKPI2023/Map?:language=en-US&publish=yes&:display_count=n&:origin=viz_share_link

Tableau Graph (with outcomes):
https://public.tableau.com/views/ADECEKPI2023/CompositeView?:language=en-US&publish=yes&:display_count=n&:origin=viz_share_link

Enrollment Dimension

The enrollment dimension measures the outcomes of the programs in reaching capacity, consistent attendance, administering both pre- and post-tests, and graduating their students.

Program	Enroll-ment	% of Capacity	% Graduating	Attend-ance	Test Coverage	Enrollment Index
Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Alabama (5 sites)	104	83%	83%	79%	100%	86%
Boys & Girls Clubs of North Alabama (Huntsville)	66	88%	95%	73%	88%	86%
Boys & Girls Clubs of North Alabama (Athens)	54	72%	87%	79%	85%	81%
Boys & Girls Clubs of West Alabama (3 sites)	119	58%	41%	94%	41%	59%
WHACK Summer Enrichment Program (Birmingham)	37	93%	97%	87%	92%	92%
Sadie Moss Summer Learning Institute (Selma)	53	88%	92%	91%	76%	87%
NBCM Summer Enrichment Program (Birmingham)	45	82%	96%	98%	49%	81%
Sawyerville Summer Learning (Greensboro)	117	70%	89%	75%	65%	75%
Composite for All Programs	**595**	**74%**	**80%**	**84%**	**72%**	**78%**
Targets		**>90%**	**>85%**	**>85%**	**>90%**	**>85%**

Note: Enrollment Index is a composite of the four measures of enrollment outcomes.

Tableau Enrollment Dimension Graph:
https://public.tableau.com/views/ADECEKPI2023/EnrollmentIndex?:language=en-US&publish=yes&:display_count=n&:origin=viz_share_link

Observations:

- Total enrollment was 595.
- Programs reported outcomes that were in line with targets, except for:
  - The (previously discussed) challenge in filling program slots due to the timing of the grants.
  - Four programs struggled to administer both pre- and post-tests.

Academic Dimension

Academic growth was measured by Star® pre- and post-tests. The Star® Early Literacy Assessment is designed for younger, less proficient students; it assesses math ability to an extent, but reports only reading/literacy proficiency. Use of Star® Math is optional for students taking Star® Early Literacy Assessment. One program elected not to use Star® Math, and reported no math outcomes.

Program	Number Tested	Starting Percentile		Growth (Months)	
		Math	Reading	Math	Reading
Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Alabama (5 sites)	105	61%	52%	5.9	3.3
Boys & Girls Clubs of North Alabama (Huntsville)	55	56%	55%	1.2	0.5
Boys & Girls Clubs of North Alabama (Athens)	40	33%	56%	4.0	2.0
Boys & Girls Clubs of West Alabama (3 sites)	20	52%	53%	4.6	-1.6
WHACK Summer Enrichment Program (Birmingham)	33	61%	58%	0.3	-0.2
Sadie Moss Summer Learning Institute (Selma)	37	34%	31%	0.3	-0.1
NBCM Summer Enrichment Program (Birmingham)	21	N/A	46%	N/A	0.0
Sawyerville Summer Learning (Greensboro)	51	11%	4%	-0.3	3.6
Composite for All Programs	**362**	**55%**	**46%**	**3.3**	**1.0**

Tableau Academic Dimension Graph:
https://public.tableau.com/views/ADECEKPI2023/Gains?:language=en-US&:display_count=n&:origin=viz_share_link

Observations

- Composite academic growth was solid: 1.0 months in reading and 3.3 months in math. When the effect of summer learning loss is considered (that is, 2-3 months of loss in both reading and math), these students will return to school in the fall about one-third to one-half year ahead of where they would have been absent summer learning.
- Programs are small and there is inherent variation in student test performance, thus it is best to evaluate individual program performance over a three-year period. That being said, it is worth noting that all programs reported at least flat outcomes (reading and math combined), meaning that summer learning loss was prevented in all programs.
- Math growth exceeded reading/literacy growth, as is typical in SAIL programs.
- Star® experienced significant technical issues that made it difficult to load student rosters, thus delaying pre-tests. This suppressed reported growth in two ways:
    - Teachers did not have access to pre-test diagnostics, delaying the development of individual/small group lesson plans.
    - The interval between pre- and post-tests was shortened, which caused growth to be underreported, especially for two programs—Sadie Moss and Sawyerville—whose tests measured the impact of only 10-14 days of instruction.

The Experience Factor in Academic Growth

Excellent summer learning programs combine summer camp activities with rigorous academics. Few organizations initially possess working knowledge of best practices in both; there is a steep learning curve to excellence.

This can be seen by examining this summer's academic outcomes, which in the aggregate were solid. The following chart shows that the experienced programs (that is, those that have been using the SAIL Quality Assurance Framework for several years) produced significantly better gains.

2023 Academic Growth (SAIL and ECE Programs)		
Group	Math Gains	Literacy Gains
All SAIL-funded Programs (35)	3.0	1.8
All ECE-funded programs (8)	3.3	1.0
ECE, no prior SAIL experience (4)	1.2	0.7
ECE, prior SAIL experience (4)	4.6	1.3

The ECE-funded programs with the steepest learning curve were the two Child Development Centers (CDCs). Their expertise in early childhood education required enhancement to be effective with older children (adding experienced K-12 teachers, age-appropriate curriculum, and new teaching strategies). These two programs reported flat outcomes; they prevented summer learning loss, but did not produce gains.

This reinforces the importance of the consistent use of a quality assurance framework (such as the one used by SAIL) over time to enable all ECE-funded programs to climb the learning curve and deliver the academic gains expected by experienced programs.

Cost Dimension

The funding available for summer learning meets but a tiny fraction of the need, so it is important to use it prudently. Based on recent SAIL experience, an effective academic program can be conducted for around $1,000 per graduate This does not include the camp activities.

Program	Enroll-ment	Grant Amount	Cost of Academics	Cost per Graduate
Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Alabama (5 sites)	104	$100,000	$87,500	$1,014
Boys & Girls Clubs of North Alabama (Huntsville)	66	$75,000	$87,419	$1,394
Boys & Girls Clubs of North Alabama (Athens)	54	$75,000	$74,125	$1,577
Boys & Girls Clubs of West Alabama (3 sites)	119	$89,694	$82,898	$1,692
WHACK Summer Enrichment Program (Birmingham)	37	$60,000	$54,330	$1,509
Sadie Moss Summer Learning Institute (Selma)	53	$43,000	$53,000	$1,087
NBCM Summer Enrichment Program (Birmingham)	45	$75,000	$22,309	$518
Sawyerville Summer Learning (Greensboro)	117	$30,375	$129,457	$1,245
Composite for All Programs	**595**	**$548,069**	**$591,038**	**$1,288**

Tableau Cost Dimension Graph:
https://public.tableau.com/views/ADECEKPI2023/Cost?:language=en-US&publish=yes&:display_count=n&:origin=viz_share_link

Observations

Cost per graduate was slightly high, primarily due to two factors:

- No guidance was given to grant applicants on the amount they should request, so most asked for the maximum ($100,000), even if their capacity did not justify an award of that size.
- The late announcement of grant awards made it difficult for the programs to meet their enrollment targets. They had already committed funds (for staff, curriculum, etc.) for full capacity, so the lower enrollment increased cost per graduate.

5. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Adopt a model for excellence in community-based summer learning based on the recommendations of the Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. Use the model to build consensus within ECE and to communicate to stakeholders. Incorporate the model in the grants process so that applicants will have a clear understanding of the type of program they should conduct and the vision/goals they should embrace.

In 2018, Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading issued recommendations for community-based summer learning (link). Pages 81-92 contain a roadmap to excellence, and should be the basis of the ECE model.

Recommendation 2: Align the grant cycle to the best-practices calendar. Conduct the grant cycle in November and December. Announce grant awards by December 31st. Distribute funds by March 1st.

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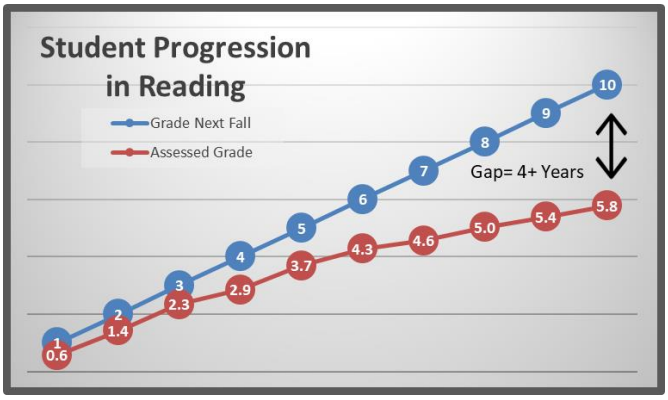
Recommendation 3: Extend the range of ages supported by the grants to include students who have just completed the sixth grade.



The importance of early childhood education is well established by research, but SAIL is not aware of research suggesting that summer learning is more effective or more important for the youngest students. The chart at right depicts pre-test scores of SAIL students over the past few years. It reveals that summer learning loss is cumulative, growing each year. The larger gaps in later years suggest that older students need summer learning as much as, or more than, younger students.

Recommendation 4: Increase the number of high-quality grant applications by:

- Utilizing networks of community-based summer learning programs, such as SAIL and AELA, to publicize the grants process.
- Clearly distinguishing this grants pool from the Pre-K grants pool also administered by ECE

- Clarifying the policy on DHR licensing
- Conducting an orientation session for applicants (before the portal is open) to ensure they understand the objectives of the grants and their responsibilities should they be selected.

The opening of the grant portal was announced in the same email announcing the pre-K grants pool. Community-based and faith-based organizations who would be excellent candidates were not on this list, and were made aware of the grants much later. Then most of them declined to apply because they are not DHR-licensed. By the time the DHR policy was clarified, the portal was closed. As a result, many excellent candidates did not submit applications.

Recommendation 5: Set guidelines for funding levels based on target enrollment. Consider a matching funds policy.

Programs were able to apply for $100,000 with no guidance given as to how to justify the amount requested. This led to applicants requesting grants ranging from $490 per student to $2,222 per student. Considering that the historical cost of SAIL programs is approximately $1,000 per student, guidance for applicants based on historical cost would allow for more fairness in grant awards. Also, almost all programs have access to funds from sources other than this grant pool. A policy on matching funds, perhaps similar to the First-Class Pre-K grants program, should be considered.

Recommendation 6: Continue the use of a quality assurance framework as discussed earlier in the section entitled **The Experience Factor in Academic Growth**.

Excellent summer learning programs combine summer camp with rigorous academics. Few organizations initially possess working knowledge of best practices in both; there is a steep learning curve to excellence. In addition, many of the organizations that can reach the target population for summer learning are small, under-resourced churches and youth organizations. SAIL has demonstrated that these organizations can successfully conduct high-quality summer learning programs, but not without the support mechanisms in SAIL's Quality Assurance Framework.

This support role is analogous to the support role that ECE plays for the First Class Pre-K Program and the role that the Department of Education plays for public schools.

Recommendation 7: Set expectations that programs should enroll students who need extra help to achieve proficiency and are least able to afford it themselves.

Funding for summer learning is sufficient to serve only a tiny fraction of the students who need it, so it is important to enroll the students who most need help. Community-based summer learning is conducted by organizations who often serve children from a spectrum of academic proficiency, for example, a youth organization serving an entire region. A "first come, first served" enrollment policy will not always select the target student population. The programs must "recruit" from their membership those students who need extra help to achieve proficiency and are least able to afford it themselves. The factors which identify those students most needing help are:

- eligibility for free/reduced lunch, and
- low academic achievement. as measured by percentile rank and/or month below grade level.

6. Notes from Program Visits

NBCM Summer Enrichment Program
Date: June 2, September

Notes:
• Since New Beginning is new to summer learning, Jim Wooten and David Liddell visited before their program started. We met with Tonya Wilson and four of her staff. After a tour, the group spent about thirty minutes in general discussion. They are a child development center using the Creative Curriculum during the year, and they plan to use it this summer. They have no K-12 teachers on staff. We emphasized the importance of experienced teachers and having 70+ hours of instruction. Enrollment is going well; they have only a few openings. Tonya asked about end-of-summer reporting requirements. We discussed the SAIL reporting, and David agreed to research the reporting that ADECE might require.
• After the program completed, David Liddell conducted a debrief by telephone. NBCM reported:
  ○ Staff and students had a positive experience and witnessed growth over the course of the summer. The students responded well to reading and STEM time.
  ○ The limited time between ECE's grant announcement and the start of programming hampered Tonya and her team's ability to plan, hire staff, and recruit students.
  ○ Going forward, more robust training at the beginning of the summer (especially for new programs) would be helpful.

Sawyerville Summer Learning
Date: June 27
Notes: David Liddell visited Sawyerville Summer Learning, meeting with Kana Goldsmith and Carrie Dennis for approximately 1.25 hours of tour and general discussion. Sawyerville is a veteran SAIL program serving a large number of students from across Hale County and adjacent counties in the Black Belt. Sawyerville uses a mixed staffing model that allows them to focus on core academics while maintaining a high-energy, fun "camp" atmosphere – employing many former program participants as counselors and interns. Kana and Carrie expressed that the opportunity to extend their model to younger students was a natural transition, and one that they hope to see continue into the future. To increase enrollment in future years, earlier notification of grant awards by ECE will be important.
McRae Gaines Sadie Moss Summer Learning Institute
Date: June 27
Notes: David Liddell visited McRae Gaines Learning Center and met with John Deamer and Sadie Moss for approximately 1.25 hours of tour and discussion. McRae Gaines is a returning SAIL program that for the last two years has been rebuilding enrollment after the challenges posed by the pandemic. The short window between grant award notification and program start date posed some challenges with enrollment. As a program that serves children starting at infancy and with a facility with room to grow, McRae Gaines is well poised to continue to increase its early learning summer offerings going forward.
Bestow Schools WHACK
Date: July 6, July 18
Notes: • David Liddell visited Bestow Schools on July 6 and met with Kimya Loder for approximately 30 minutes of discussion following a brief tour of their facility. Students were attending a field trip to City Walk at the time of the site visit. Bestow's WHACK is new to the SAIL community but appears to have transitioned easily into summer learning. Bestow is a first-time user of the Bell Xcel

curriculum but reports high staff satisfaction with its content and user-friendliness. According to Kimya, the timing of the grant award from ADECE did present recruitment and enrollment challenges, but they look forward to continuing with early childhood summer learning in future years.

- Jim Wooten visited Bestow School on July 18. He met with Kimya Loder for 30 minutes to discuss program status and gain a better understand of the learning curve that a CDC faces in transitioning to summer learning. He also answered questions on post-testing, reports, and the quality review.

Boys and Girls Clubs of North Alabama (Athens and Huntsville)

Date: July 12

Notes: David Liddell visited the Athens and James A. Lane (Huntsville flagship) sites for approximately 1.25 hours each, touring the program and engaging in discussion with Angie Brockman, Suzanne Thompson, and staff. North Alabama is excitedly returning to the SAIL community after a several-years hiatus using their Summer Brain Gain curriculum supplemented by materials curated by their certified teaching staff (including certified teachers from Huntsville City Schools and a curriculum specialist from Athens City Schools). Enrollment was impacted by the late announcement of grant award by ECE, but engagement has been high and North Alabama looks forward to continuing early childhood summer learning going forward.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Alabama

Date: July 27

Notes: David Liddell visited the John Williamson site, meeting with Todd Love for a brief facility tour and approximately thirty minutes of discussion. As a veteran SAIL program, BGCCA has long experience in delivering high quality summer learning and will be a valuable peer learning partner with new grantees, especially in the area of test administration. The late announcement of grant awards by ECE put significant strains on BGCCA when it came to hiring teachers. As a result, in some sites, Todd is concerned that teacher quality negatively impacted retention of students and core academic growth. Unprecedented challenges with STAR® rostering caused delays at the Pell City site. BGCCA looks forward to continuing to serve early grades students in future years and to learning alongside other grantees.