



March 2015

Expanded Learning Opportunities Are Critical to Improve 3rd Grade Reading

By the time children reach third grade, they must be successful readers in order to continue to succeed in school. Students today need more time and more ways to learn so that they can master skills necessary for literacy success, and struggling students need more support to catch up and stay on track with their grade level peers. Learning programs available outside the school day and specifically offered over the summer, can help children maintain or improve their skills over school breaks, and provide opportunities often not otherwise available for the most challenged students, families and communities.

Gaps in Literacy Skills Start Early and Continue to Grow: Education is a lifelong process that begins at birth – from cradle to career. But the children who most need additional learning opportunities are often the least likely to get them. Differences in literacy skills emerge as early as 9 months of age, and educational disparities grow through early childhood and the early elementary years depending on available learning opportunities.

1. By the time a child from a low-income family reaches sixth grade, he or she has spent an estimated 6,000 fewer hours learning than a peer from a wealthy household. This includes 220 fewer hours being read to by family members; 1,395 hours not spent in preschool programs; and 4,385 fewer hours in after-school, summer and other extracurricular activities.
2. Once a student is behind by the 4th grade, particularly in reading and math, he or she is fighting an uphill battle in the higher grades. Because of inadequate resources to address poor reading outcomes in later elementary and middle school, 75 percent of students who are poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school.
3. On average, over the summer months, students actually lose several months of academic progress if they are not engaged in other learning opportunities.

What We Know About Programs That Work: Expanding opportunities for learning to reach beyond the school day and the school walls is one of the most important and effective literacy achievement gap closure strategies at our disposal. Expanding summer learning opportunities within already proven effective programs, like those supported by the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) initiative is a smart investment.

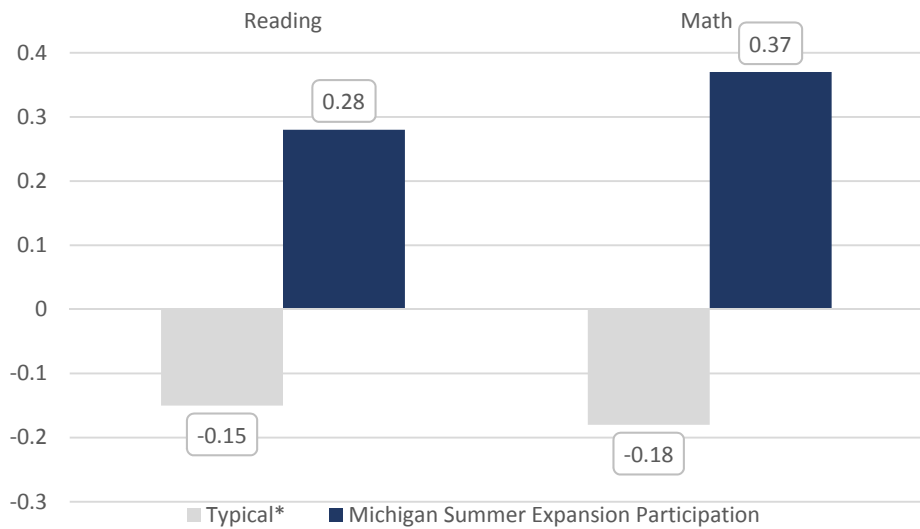
The research is clear on what the most challenged students need to succeed in school and how we can improve literacy levels. Students need:

- multiple flexible learning options that can accommodate life challenges;
- consistent supportive relationships with adults inside and outside of the classroom;
- expanded learning opportunities beyond the school day for remediation; and
- connections through their schools to services that are typically outside of the classroom to ensure that students are healthy, well-nourished, and can focus on their education.

High quality afterschool and summer learning programs that take advantage of community, post-secondary and workforce partnerships offer opportunities to build on the school day and provide the supports listed above that students need. They can help students get motivated and engaged, and can help them catch up. They successfully engage parents in their children’s learning. The research clearly illustrates that afterschool and summer learning programs positively impact attendance, achievement, behavior and eventual high school graduation. A high quality expanded learning summer program pilot in Michigan helped

students retain academic skills from the previous school year; improve students’ performance in reading and math; increase student participation and engagement; and promote students’ development in other areas needed for success in school and life. Despite these and other research findings, quality expanded learning opportunities are not available consistently across the state, and a lack of state investment has contributed to the lack of accessibility.

Change in Academic Skill Levels Over the Summer
Michigan Students, 2011



Source: 2011 Before-and After-School Summer Expansion Grant Fact Sheet
Michigan State University, January 2012.

Funding Expanded Learning in Michigan: Michigan relies almost entirely on federal CCLC funds to support expanded learning programs. Despite prioritizing almost \$17 million in state resource 10 years ago, funds specifically for quality expanded learning programs have been reduced to a few small pilot programs that serve only a few areas of the state and a minimal number of young people. A state investment of at least \$50 million would be required to fund just the most qualified unfunded CCLC applicants, and a larger investment is required to provide quality expanded learning opportunities through the summer months.

Now is the time to capitalize on the commitment to supporting children’s literacy development early and the extraordinary public and private partnerships that have been created and maintained in communities around the state to expand learning opportunities in order to improve that development. Michigan needs to increase year round expanded learning opportunities that intentionally include resources dedicated to mitigating summer learning loss. As a start, increasing funding for CCLC programs that specifically target 3rd grade reading is essential.