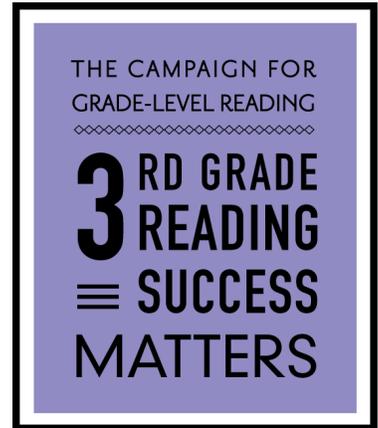


BRIGHT SPOTS

Summer Learning



Charlotte Y Readers, Charlotte, NC

Two key ingredients in its “secret sauce” make the Charlotte Y Readers program effective, according to Michael DeVaul, Senior Vice President of Organizational Advancement at the YMCA of Greater Charlotte. Designed for pre-K through second-grade children who are performing below grade level, Y Readers helps children from low-income households retain and even build learning skills in a summer camp setting.

Reading and swimming go together

“First, it’s fun. We put as much emphasis on swimming and field trips as we do on reading,” says DeVaul, noting that swimming lessons, art, music, science, health and character-development activities enrich literacy learning and boost self-confidence.

The second ingredient is a strong partnership with schools. School leaders in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District and Mooresville Graded School District assist in selecting certified teachers from their faculties, identify students to participate in the program, and provide facilities. Together, the Y and the schools track student progress and measure the program's impact. The YMCA of Greater Charlotte will be launching Y Readers in a new school system, the Lincoln County School District, this summer.

“We know our kids, so we can hit the ground running,” says Amanda Whitman, a first-grade teacher at Nations Ford Elementary during the school year and the Y Readers site coordinator there during the summer. “They just need a little push.”

A substantial track record now supports the program's success. Over six consecutive years, 89 percent of children in the program have gained an average of three months in reading skills — a striking contrast to the average loss of three months among low-income children nationally.

WHO THEY ARE

Literacy program embedded in summer camp.

In 2011, Charlotte Y Readers served:

- **400 pre-K–2nd-grade students.**
- **50% ELL.**
- **95% qualified for Free and Reduced-Price Meals.**

Students projected for 2012: 488.

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Four-Blocks model offers flexibility

Students learn in a variety of ways according to Blair Campbell, Manager of Communications, Grants and Development, yet in-school curricula often lack the flexibility needed to accommodate different learning styles. The Four-Blocks Literacy Model employed by Y Readers offers numerous and varied opportunities for all children, whatever their style, to learn to read and write.

“Four-Blocks gives us the freedom to do what works for each child,” says Whitman, who often borrows dozens of books at a time from the library to keep the selection fresh. “We follow their interests, focusing on words and stories that keep them engaged.”

Y Readers gives children two-and-a-half hours of literacy instruction each morning, when their minds are fresh. During Guided Reading, teachers support children as they learn to sound out words and use context clues to figure out their meaning. Time set aside for Self-Selected Reading fosters the children’s love of reading. The third block, Working with Words, is essentially phonics, helping children learn the patterns necessary for decoding and spelling high-frequency words. The Writing block creates opportunities for children to write their own stories, many of which are based on field trip experiences and other exciting summer camp adventures.

Going national

The Chicago-based national YMCA plans to replicate Charlotte’s Y Readers summer program in six other cities this year — Tampa, FL; Milwaukee, WI; Baltimore, MD; Silicon Valley, CA; Evanston, IL; and Lincolnton, NC — with more cities to follow in 2013. National YMCA officials singled out Y Readers after conducting a national survey of hundreds of literacy programs which found it offered the clearest evidence of helping challenged readers improve.

National replication supports the YMCA in its rededication to addressing the achievement gap separating low-income youth from their better-off peers.

Over six consecutive years, 89% of students gained three months in reading proficiency (STAR Reader Test).

Strong partnerships with schools. \$1,300 cost per student, offered free to families, paid for by YMCA Community Support Campaign and other funders.

HIGHLIGHTS

Charlotte Y Readers:

- **Was founded in 1999.**
- **Provides 2.5 hours of literacy instruction each day.**
- **Targets students performing below grade-level strategic readers.**
- **Provides camp experiences including field trips, swimming and character development.**
- **Utilizes Four-Blocks Literacy Model: Guided Reading, Self-Selected Reading, Writing, Working with Words.**
- **Is led by certified teachers, with a 1:8 teacher-student ratio.**