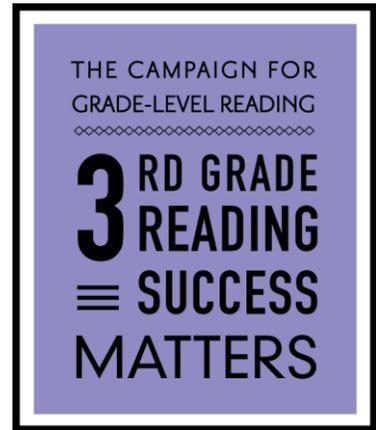


# BRIGHT SPOTS

Summer Learning



## Summer Literacy Collaborative, Boston, MA

In one Massachusetts community, a program director recalls summers when staff used reading as a punishment for kids who got too loud and rambunctious. Reading is a quiet activity, they reasoned, and it calmed things down. That changed when the program partnered with the Summer Literacy Collaborative. “This was the first summer our staff recognized that, when treated correctly, reading can be a reward,” the program director said. “There was so much enthusiasm around reading that students were asking staff to read with them. And reading seldom meant quiet time because staff were reading aloud to students; students were reading aloud to each other; and students were reading to staff. It was a dynamic shift that I attribute to the Collaborative.”

### Public-private partnerships

The Summer Literacy Collaborative is the centerpiece of an innovative program launched by United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley in 2010 in response to concern over poor reading achievement in communities with underperforming schools. On average, 62 percent of third-grade readers in these schools (compared to 38 percent statewide) fall below proficient on state reading tests. With initial funding from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, the initiative aims to stem summer reading loss and ultimately increase children’s reading skills.

The Collaborative draws on the resources of three United Way systems, three nonprofit “hubs,” seven school districts and 16 community-based summer programs for children ages 6–12. The United Way agencies carry out fundraising and coordination. The hubs, regional organizations with proven records in professional development and program support, provide training and consultation. They work directly with the summer-program sites, mainly community-based organizations like Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCAs. Summer staffers who deliver the programs receive training, materials and curricula from the hubs.

### WHO THEY ARE

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The partners are:

- **3 United Ways: UW of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, UW of Central Massachusetts, UW of Pioneer Valley**
- **3 hubs: BOSTnet, Center for Childcare Careers, Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative**
- **7 school districts/ communities: Boston, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, Springfield, Worcester**

The Collaborative serves:

- **2,193 children, ages 6–12, at 16 sites in 2011.**
- **More than 80% of children qualify for Free and Reduced-Price Meals.**
- **On average, 62% of third-graders in the children’s school districts score below proficient on state reading tests.**

### CONTACT

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**United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley**  
**51 Sleeper Street**  
**Boston, MA 02210-1208**  
**(617) 624-8124**

*Lisa Silverman Pickard, Assistant VP*  
lpickard@supportunitedway.org

## Literacy coaches

At each site, a Literacy Coach, usually an experienced teacher from a nearby public school, mentors the staff, models instructional methods, assists in aligning curricula with school district requirements and troubleshoots problems.

Involving coaches who come from the schools allows the Collaborative's program staff to build relationships with school personnel and to access resources there. It also makes teachers and principals aware of educational efforts underway in the community. One surprised Literary Coach noted, "I used to think programs during out-of-school time were just about games, but now I see how literacy can be incorporated. These girls did so much fun stuff and didn't realize how much learning was actually going on."

## Partnership payoff

In 2010, assessments using DIBELS, tests that measure K-6 literacy, found that 85 percent of children in the Collaborative's programs avoided the summer reading loss that averages more than two months among children in low-income communities. The following summer showed similar success, with 82 percent. About half of those 2011 programs had 100 percent of children averting the two-month loss of learning over summer described in research. Surveys showed that most program staff felt more confident and better able to create and deliver literacy activities, and their partnerships with schools have improved and lasted beyond the summer. The Collaborative is fundraising to bring its summer reading initiative to more communities with the goal of 25 sites for the summer of 2012.

## Part of the solution

"As we try to boost reading proficiency, the value of community-based organizations really needs to be appreciated and supported," observes Peg Sprague, United Way's Senior Vice President for Community Impact. "The schools can't do it alone. There's an underestimation of what OST programs can bring to be a part of the solution."

Following a successful summer, another program director summed it up like this: "Not only can we stop summer reading loss, but we can have a good time promoting reading and writing and literacy activities. It just takes a vision and enough people to implement the ideas."

## WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

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**In 2010, the Collaborative helped:**

- **85% of children ages 6–12 avoid summer learning loss; of those, 68% of children increased reading proficiency.**

**In 2011, the Collaborative had:**

- **82% of children ages 6–8 avoid summer learning loss; of those, 61% increased reading proficiency.**
- **91% of staff say the children's vocabulary improved.**
- **76% of children say they enjoyed reading more by the end of the summer.**

## HIGHLIGHTS

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**In 2011, in the 8–10 week program:**

- **Literacy coaches provided 1,173 hours of coaching.**
- **Hubs offered 61 hours of curricula training to staff.**

**Cost: \$200 per student, borne by the United Way agencies.**