



COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTER

CAMDEN, N.J.

Category: Summer Learning

Camden, New Jersey is working against incredible odds. One of the poorest cities in the nation, it is addressing the consequences of summer learning loss, which can often leave low-income children far behind their middle-income peers.

In 2011, Camden City Public Schools instituted citywide summer school to prevent summer learning loss. The city's summer learning efforts are spearheaded by an initiative known as Born to Read. The initiative's partner, the American Reading Company, uses the Explorer Express program to provide a content-rich, fun and stimulating experience for students while arresting the summer slide.

Another Born to Read partner, the Cooper Learning Institute, operates an intensive summer reading program. As part of the city's Promise Neighborhood Initiative, children in grades K-2 meet four days a week from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. On average, students in the program have experienced a one-and-a-half-month-increase in their word identification skills. This summer, the Center for Family Services, Camden's lead Born to Read Partner, is housing the program five days a week at its Head Start locations, ensuring that children age 3 to 5 can access the program in their neighborhood. The Center for Family Services will also expand the program to include students in Head Start Pre-K programs, so they can also benefit from summer learning and prepare for school.

Another Born to Read summer initiative called Rise Up to Kindergarten will offer all incoming kindergarten students four weeks of literacy immersion over the summer to ease the fall transition and get them ready for school. Kindergarten teachers have reported that Rise Up students are more prepared to begin learning than those who didn't attend the program.

Born to Read's plan also focuses on increasing the number of books children have in their homes, increasing the experiences that families with young children have with books and literacy experiences during the summer. At the same time, the program is ensuring that families have access to social services during the summer when children are home from school.

STRATEGIES

- Instituted citywide summer school at each of the city's 19 elementary schools
- Started a summer literacy program for incoming kindergarteners
- Held an intensive summer reading program at Head Start locations, ensuring families can access the program in their neighborhoods