



COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTER

COUNCIL BLUFFS

Category: Summer Learning

A lack of summer learning opportunities can create learning gaps for low-income children. Recognizing this, Council Bluffs aimed to ensure that 80 percent of K-3 students identified as reading below grade level will have summer learning opportunities to make up this difference.

Council Bluffs, a city of 62,000, sits along the Missouri River across from Omaha, Nebraska. The Council Bluffs Community School District has offered Summer Exploration, a comprehensive program for students entering grades K-8, for the past two years. This free, four-week full-day program provides students with breakfast, lunch and a day full of learning in a camp-like atmosphere. The program offers an engaging curriculum and provides daily and weekly incentives for good behavior and attendance to keep students motivated.

The goals for the Summer Exploration program are to:

- Improve student achievement
- Reverse summer learning loss
- Engage students in hands-on, high-interest activities
- Partner with the community in demonstrating that learning extends outside the classroom walls

There are two outstanding highlights of the Summer Exploration program. First, the curriculum provides students with opportunities to review and enrich their learning. Unlike the traditional notion of summer learning, where students are drilled on isolated skills, Summer Exploration complements what was learned during the regular school year and holds students to high standards with a focus on grade-level expectations. Each morning, students learn reading and math organized around a science theme. In the afternoon, students engage in activities of their choice, which provide opportunities to explore, create and interact with other students and the community at large.

The second highlight of the program is the depth and breadth of the collaborative partnerships that have been developed and sustained. Twenty-eight local agencies work with the Summer Exploration program to provide elective experiences. These partnerships allow children to work with people from each organization in classrooms as well as at their organizations over the course of the summer.

A comparison of improvement scores from before and after the program indicates that, for many grade levels, the summer school students showed greater improvement than other area students. While area students on average perform at a higher level than summer school students, summer school students are undeniably closing the gap, proving that Council Bluffs' Summer Exploration program is helping to make up the difference.

STRATEGIES

- Summer curriculum complemented what was learned during the regular school year
- Range of collaborative partnerships with local agencies enriched summer learning
- Test scores indicated low-income children are showing improvement after participation in summer programming