

Summer Program Offsets the Equity Gap

Hampton City Schools

Hampton, Virginia

Background

Over the past three years the Hampton City Schools (HCS) in Virginia have been retooling their summer programming. The discussion to revamp started because the data for their traditional summer school did not show gains for all students. The process for improvement was a community effort involving division leadership, the English language arts department, administrators, reading specialists, and teachers. With the goal of meeting the needs of “Every Child, Every Day, Whatever It Takes,” the HCS English language arts curriculum instruction and assessment lead Dr. Kelli Cedo worked with the community to address the equity gap that was widening over the summer months. Taking an honest look at resources allocated for conventional summer school, Cedo asked, “Is it working?” The answer was no, which compelled the team to advocate for district funding that would address the equity gap between students and optimize summer services with initiatives that would also serve students throughout the academic year.

Implementation

The school division and the community decided on the goals, measurable outcomes, and characteristics of what a summer program should be for the students in Hampton City Schools. LitCamp aligned with these targets, and the community enthusiastically embraced this resource to update summer programming and create a more engaging summer literacy camp for students.

With its uniquely engaging curriculum that builds literacy skills as well as social-emotional learning, LitCamp promised—and delivered—a dynamic learning experience. After piloting the program with K–2 students at the Forrest Elementary School in 2016, educators, students, and families were struck by its effectiveness. Expanding to four sites the next year introduced even more K–2 HCS students

DISTRICT SNAPSHOT

Approximately 20,000 PreK–12th grade students enrolled in 32 different schools comprise Virginia’s Hampton City Schools. It’s a diverse community, with approximately 62% of the student population eligible for free or reduced lunch.

70
countries
represented

50
languages
spoken

to the LitCamp program. In its third year of implementation in 2018, LitCamp was offered to K–4 students at every site—five in total—and was piloted in an HCS middle school for sixth- to eighth-graders.

The LitCamp experience is rooted in building a community for its participants by integrating student engagement and social-emotional development with literacy skill advancement. Teachers and students alike note the impact that the camp-based theme—with songs and personalized connections to texts—has on the program’s success.

Unlike the traditional static and singularly focused summer school model—which is often based upon the narrowly defined goal of “preventing the summer slide”—the LitCamp approach is one of meaningful and sustainable growth to develop lifelong learners.

Though many districts have difficulty staffing summer programs and struggle with low student attendance, reports from LitCamp families and educators reveal overwhelmingly high student attendance rates as well as

enthusiastic staff feedback.

LitCamp embraces each student's unique contribution to the learning community and encourages their innate desire to participate in activities that strengthen confidence and promote literacy skills. This inspirational development of students' social-emotional skills in a literacy-rich, fun environment has transformed the way that HCS students and educators experience summer programming.

Why LitCamp?

Using LitCamp as the core resource has dramatically improved summer programming for HCS. Exceeding the expectations of educators and administrators, it has provided participants with year-round access to books and literacy-rich experiences, thereby directly addressing the equity gap between students. The stigma surrounding summer school is shifting, as students now anticipate with excitement the opportunities for community building, social development, and academic growth that Hampton City Schools' summer programming provides.

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What I liked about [LitCamp] is that I was able to incorporate a social-emotional connection to the text that we were reading.

—Carole Birdsong,
Third-Grade Teacher, Barron Elementary School

Benefits for Teachers

- “With easy instruction and a one-day training session that breaks down the daily components of the program, LitCamp implementation is seamless and very user friendly,” says Amanda Ross, assistant principal at the Captain John Smith Elementary School.
- The program also includes supplemental training videos.

Benefits for Students

- Increased enjoyment of reading by students was noted in parent surveys.
- Improved or maintained student reading levels for the majority of participants were revealed via pre- and post-program reading assessment data.
- Elevated confidence levels in reading were reported by most students, not only during the program but into the next school year as well.
- Expanded access to books year-round for all students, which contributes to a narrower equity gap, was observed by parents, teachers, and administrators.

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