Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative Report

Contents

Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative Report

Introduction

The loss of learning during the summer months is well documented by researchers. Known as "summer slide", students in grades 3 through 5 have been shown to lose approximately 20% of their school year literacy gains during a summer.[1] Abilities such as decoding, letter knowledge, and word reading skills are particularly prone to summer melt. Studies have also shown that students from low-income backgrounds are most at risk, especially those in grades K through 3. Because summer learning loss compounds over time, the impact for low-income students is a long-term negative effect on their academic outcomes. With this knowledge in mind, Stamford Cradle to Career (SC2C) worked with local Stamford nonprofits as well as Stamford Public Schools (SPS) to roll out a summer literacy initiative aimed at reducing the impact of summer slide. This design for this project began in the fall of 2019, before schools were forced to close in March of 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The program did launch in the summer of 2020 with adjustments to the original program design to accommodate the virtual environment.

1. Project Background

Using a program model out of Worcester, MA, SC2C worked with our partners to adapt the model and create the Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative (SSLI). The model focused on creating a literacy rich environment for all campers no matter the activity. This would be accomplished through intensive professional development of camp staff and on-site support from literacy coaches. However, the onset of COVID-19 required a complete rethinking of how SC2C and our partners would implement the initiative. As SC2C and our implementing partners scrambled to ensure the safety of staff and clients and adapt to new operating procedures under state and federal guidelines, elements of the original model remained, but a new model emerged to meet the needs of a virtual experience. Many lessons were learned as we shifted to a new format. A summary comparing the proposed program to the actual program can be found in Table 1.

---

[1] Austrew, Ashley. 2019. "How to Prevent Your Kids from Losing What They Learned in School During Summer Vacation." https://www.scholastic.com/parents/books-and-reading/raise-a-reader-blog/summer-slide.html (September 15, 2020).

Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative Report

Table 1: Proposed vs. Actual Program Objectives

Proposed		Actual
In person learning with 1 coach imbedded at each partner's camp	→	Remote learning with three coaches providing virtual support to small groups of children
Focus on students in need – based on end of year Dibels scores	→	All SPS students eligible because of the four months of remote learning during spring semester
Ongoing professional development for partner program staff	→	Three sessions held, two in partnership with SPS before March, one brief overview training with Boys & Girls Club staff prior to start of program
Parent support through workshops, activities, and check-ins	→	No parents support offered due to restrictions on time and locations
Literacy rich environment for students throughout the camp	→	Unable to verify because of virtual programming
Surveying on student and parent attitudes towards reading	→	Only done in small scale at one location.

1.1 Target Population

Students ranging from Kindergarten to third grade with low reading scores and most in need of support were initially the target population for this initiative. However, with the onset of distance learning, it was determined that all children needed additional supports after learning remotely for the final four months of the school year. We amended this focus and opened the program to include any interested student, regardless of reading level, in the program. Under this broader umbrella, any SPS student, in grades K through 3, enrolled at one of our three partners: Boys & Girls Club (BGC), INTEMPO, and Family Centers, were eligible for participation. Campers from Stamford charter schools and Norwalk Public Schools were excluded because SC2C did not have access to their Dibels (literacy assessment administered by SPS) scores which were used to understand students' baseline abilities.
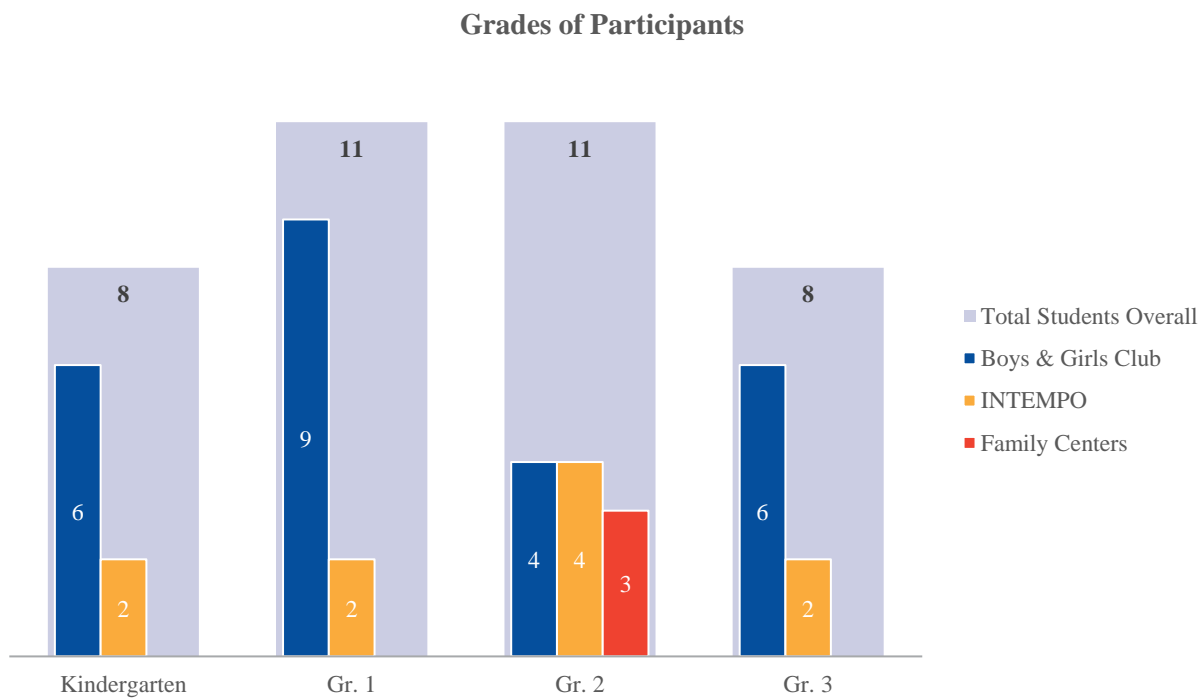
A breakdown of our participant population can be found in Table 1.1 and Chart 1.2 below. Boys and Girls Club was the largest participant due in part to their overall enrollment capacity. They were also the only partner providing in-person programming over the summer. However, despite on-site programming, BGC students in the SSLI conducted their sessions virtually like students in the other two programs since visitors were not allowed in the building.

Overall, 45 students initially enrolled in the program with 84% participating at least once during the summer. The grade level of students was fairly evenly distributed overall; however, proportions by program had more variation. Westover Elementary School had the highest number of participants representing 21% of all students followed by Toquam, Stillmeadow and Rogers each with 13%. For more information on students see charts 1.2 and 1.3.
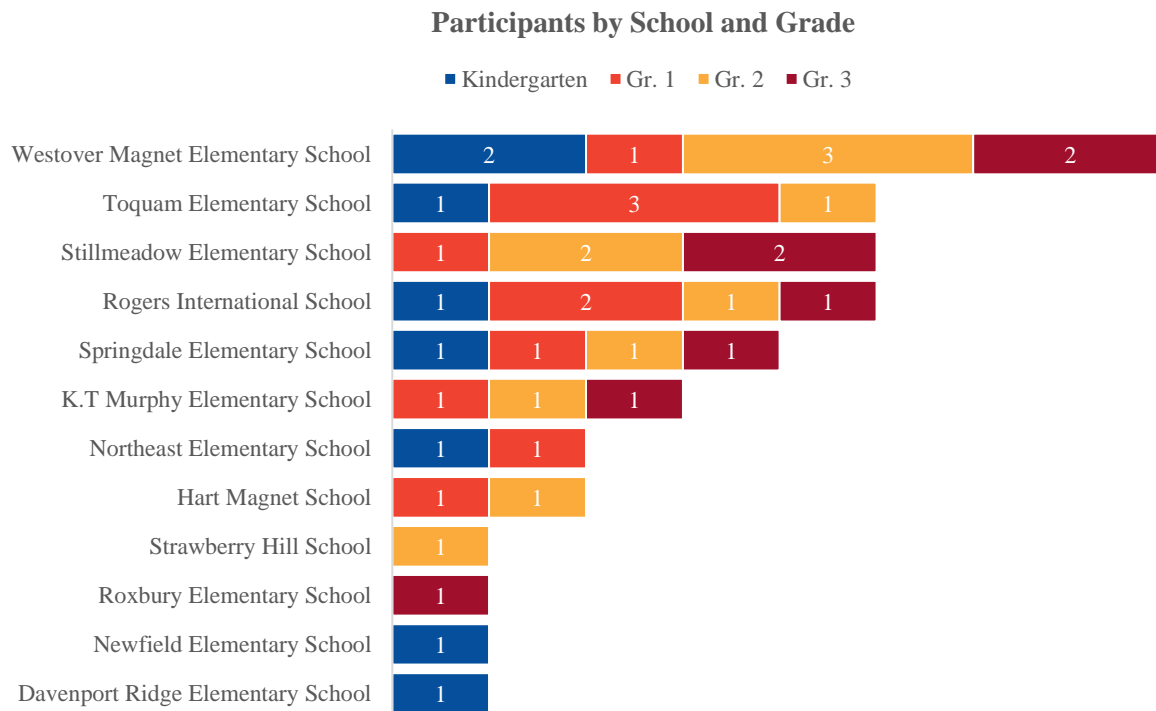
Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative Report

Table 1.1: Participant Population

Indicator	Overall		BGC		INTEMPO		Family Centers	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Enrolled	**45**	-	**28**	-	**11**	-	**6**	-
Total attended at least once	38	84%	25	89%	10	91%	3	50%
English Language Learner	2	5%	2	8%	0	-	0	-
Kindergarten	8	21%	6		2		0	
Gr. 1	11	29%	9		2		0	
Gr. 2	11	29%	4		4		3	
Gr. 3	8	21%	6		2		0	
Total given pre & post-assessment	34	76%	22	78%	9	82%	3	50%

Chart 1.2: Participants by Grade

Grades of Participants

Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative Report

Chart 1.3: Participants by School

Participants by School and Grade

■ Kindergarten   ■ Gr. 1   ■ Gr. 2   ■ Gr. 3

School	Kindergarten	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3
Westover Magnet Elementary School	2	1	3	2
Toquam Elementary School	1	3	1	
Stillmeadow Elementary School		1	2	2
Rogers International School	1	2	1	1
Springdale Elementary School	1	1	1	1
K.T Murphy Elementary School		1	1	1
Northeast Elementary School	1	1		
Hart Magnet School		1	1	
Strawberry Hill School			1	
Roxbury Elementary School				1
Newfield Elementary School	1			
Davenport Ridge Elementary School	1			

2. Project Setup

Using the Results Based Accountability (RBA) model, SC2C designed the SSLI around the following statement and three key questions:

Goal: *Stamford children participating in select summer camps will engage in literacy-rich activities that foster a love of reading, while offering opportunities for select students to receive personalized instruction to boost their reading abilities.*

1) How much are we doing?
2) How well are we doing it?
3) Is anyone better off?

**A full breakdown of the SSLI RBA framework can be found in Table 2.

The program ran for five weeks across the three partner locations. This time frame was adjusted from the original six-week span to allow programs to finalize their rosters and programing due to COVID-19. Literacy Coaches conducted sessions two to three days per-week for 30 minutes at a time. SC2C hired three literacy coaches and one literacy coordinator; all of whom were educators with experience in teaching elementary literacy. Coaches were not required to be SPS

employees. As a result, one coach and our coordinator were SPS employees, one was a Norwalk Public School employee, and the third coach was a Kindergarten teacher in Maryland. Coaches focused use of language, reading, phonics and phonemes to build literacy skills in participants.

Table 2: SSLI RBA Framework

Question	Measure
How much are we doing	# of students in each camp
	# of students receiving literacy support
	# of hours of camp time
	# of hours of literacy coach instruction
	# of students assessed pre/post on attitudes towards reading
	# of students assessed pre/post on literacy development (Dibels)
	# of parents involved in parenting programs
	# of PD sessions (camps)
	# of hours of PD sessions (camps)
	# of camp staff given PD
	# of parent engagement activities
	# of hours of parent engagement activities
How well are we doing it?	% of campers receiving literacy coach support
	% of students surveyed on attitudes towards reading
	% of students assessed on literacy development
	% of parents participating in parenting programs
Is anyone better off?	% of students whose attitude toward reading improves
	% of students whose literacy improves (Dibels)
	% of staff who feel more confident designing literacy-rich activities
	% of staff who feel more confident supporting students in developing literacy through play
	% of parents who feel more confident engaging in literacy building activities at home

2.1 Literacy Instruction

Students were clustered by grade into groups of two to four students. Our literacy coordinator then used two sections of the Dibels assessment (phoneme segmentation fluency and nonsense word fluency) prior to the start of instruction to help coaches understand student's ability in two areas critical to literacy development. The sections of the Dibels assessment were also chosen for their ability to be administered virtually and relatively quickly. Kindergarten and first graders were screened on phoneme segmentation fluency while all students were screened on nonsense word fluency.

Prior to starting, coaches were provided with a three-day training on literacy development in young children which included ideas and resources for activities and lesson structures that promoted literacy. This professional development training was provided by a Curriculum

Associate for K-12 Literacy from Stamford Public Schools. When it came to implementation, coaches were given leeway to structure and run their lessons as they saw fit. This flexibility led to some variations in implementation, the impacts of which will be discussed later. One challenge with the virtual setting was gaining access to observe lesson implementation. This was because SC2C staff did not have access to Stamford Public Schools (SPS) email for most of the program. This was important because an SPS email account was necessary to grant access to the Google Classroom platform used by coaches. Despite this challenge, SC2C's Data Manager was able to observe the instruction of two INTEMPO lessons and was walked through a typical lesson by one of the BGC coaches.

Though the style of implementation differed from a routine-centered approach, where students followed the same lesson format each time, to a more free-flowing approach that allowed students to pick the next activity from a set of options, there was consistency in the way read-a-louds and vocabulary games were incorporated into lessons.

2.2 Data Collection

Data was collected from a variety of sources and focused on both qualitative and quantitative data. The data, source, and frequency used by SC2C in our SSLI are outlined in the table below.

Qualitative Data:

SC2C's Data Manager conducted one-on-one interviews with all three literacy coaches in addition to the literacy coordinator. The Data Manager also conducted one-on-one interviews with the program directors at BGC and INTEMPO. In addition to the interviews, the Data Manager attended weekly check-in calls between the literacy coordinator and the coaches and kept notes on the challenges and ideas discussed. Lastly, a focus group and interviews were held with parents from INTEMPO and BGC. SC2C's Data Manager conducted a call with three parents from BGC about their experience with the program. For INTEMPO parents, the organization preferred to conduct the calls themselves and one of their staff spoke to four parents recommended by the literacy coach assigned to INTEMPO. INTEMPO then provided a summary of the conversations to SC2C. Analyzing the transcripts from all the interviews and parent interactions, the data manager created a table defining themes and codes used to assist the final analysis (Table 2.2.2).

Table 2.2.1: Data Collected

Data	Source	Frequency
# of students in each camp	Program lists	Once at the beginning
# of students receiving literacy support	Program lists	Updated as students entered/left the program
# of hours of camp time	Programs	End of program
# of hours of literacy coach instruction	Programs	End of program
# of students assessed pre/post on attitudes towards reading	Not done	Not done

# of students assessed pre/post on literacy development (Dibels)	SC2C	Week 1 and final week of program
# of parents involved in parenting programs	Not done	Not done
# of PD sessions (camps)	SC2C	Before and during camp
# of hours of PD sessions (camps)	SC2C	Recorded after each session
# of camp staff given PD	SC2C	Recorded after each session
# of parent engagement activities	Not done	Not done
# of hours of parent engagement activities	Not done	Not done
Parent feedback	SC2C	Interviews at the end of camp
Literacy coach feedback	SC2C	Interviews at the end of camp
Program director feedback	SC2C	Interviews at the end of camp

Table 2.2.2: Qualitative Data Themes and Codes

Theme	Definition	Sub-themes	Codes
Technology	Technology relates to the devices that are critical to optimum program performance.	• Challenges • Types	• Computer • Wi-Fi • Zoom • Google Classroom
Communication	How are stakeholders and essential parties communicating to each other and how does communication flow in a loop versus one way?	• Student to Student • Student & Coach • Parents & Coach • Parents & Program • Program & Coaches	• Training • Meeting • Discussion • Professional Dev.
Quality of Instruction	Ensuring that the program is implemented with fidelity across multiple locations. Understanding what worked and ensuring literacy coaches are equipped to deliver high caliber instruction.	• Challenges • Worked well • Ideas for the future	• Apps • Lesson flow • Adaptations • Limitations • Routines

3. Outcomes

Outcomes based on our RBA framework can be found in Table 3. Quantifying the "how well" and "better off" indicators were a challenge this year due to COVID-related programming adjustments that restricted the extent to which programs could create literacy rich environments for all participants. Another challenge that impacted outcomes was the limited time for coaches to train program staff and a lack of clarity around how coaches interacted with parents. However, these challenges produced meaningful lessons learned that will benefit the program in future iterations no matter the setting.

Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative Report

Table 3: Stamford Summer Literacy RBA Outcomes

Question	Measure	Outcomes
How much are we doing	# of students in each camp	85
	# of students receiving literacy support	38*
	# of hours of camp time (all camp)	BGC – 196 hours/child INTEMPO – 295 hours/child
	# of hours of literacy coach instruction	7.5 hours/child
	# of students assessed pre/post on attitudes towards reading	Not Done
	# of students assessed pre/post on literacy development (Dibels)	34
	# of parents involved in parenting programs	Not Done
	# of PD sessions (camps)	1
	# of hours of PD sessions (camps)	30min
	# of camp staff given PD	10
	# of parent engagement activities	Not Done
	# of hours of parent engagement activities	Not Done
How well are we doing it?	% of campers receiving literacy coach support	43%
	% of students surveyed on attitudes towards reading	Not Done
	% of students assessed on literacy development	79%
	% of parents participating in parenting programs	Not Done
Is anyone better off?	% of students whose attitude toward reading improves	Not Done
	% of students whose literacy improves (Dibels)	88%**
	% of staff who feel more confident designing literacy-rich activities	Not Done
	% of staff who feel more confident supporting students in developing literacy through play	Not Done
	% of parents who feel more confident engaging in literacy building activities at home	Not Done

* 38 students received at least one day of literacy instruction.

** *Improvement was defined as having no loss in scores between the pre and post-tests. 4 students did have a decrease in numeric scores, however two of the four remained in the benchmark category while two others moved from below to well below.*

3.1 Assessment Results

To begin, student's mid-year Dibels scores were compiled and reviewed. End of year scores were not conducted due to the shift to remote learned caused by COVID-19. Mid-year scores revealed that 68% of the 34 participants given a baseline and final assessment were at or above benchmark in the Nonsense Word Fluency (NFW) section. This percentage dropped to 18% when our Literacy Coordinator assessed students on the NWF section in July. The July assessment conducted by SSLI used the end of year Dibels assessment students would have received if they had been done as usual by their school. This 74% decrease in students scoring at or above benchmark for NWF highlights the impact sudden remote learning had on students this

spring. Furthermore, these results underscore the need for a program like SSLI to provide learners with additional support during the summer to prevent even more learning loss.

As discussed in section 2.1, all students were assessed at the beginning and end of the five-week program. **Overall, 88% of the 34 students given a baseline and final assessment saw an improvement in scores for nonsense word fluency.** In addition, the percentage of students at or above benchmark went from 18% at baseline to 47% in the final assessment. On average, students who participated in the SSLI gained 14 points between the pre and post-test. Furthermore, the number of students in the well below category decreased by 46% while students scoring at or above categories increased. A visual representation for the nonsense word fluency assessment can be found in chart 3.1

While the progress for participants is positive, it should be noted that caution must be used when drawing sweeping conclusions about the extent to which SSLI impacted this growth and any variations in improvement between programs and/or grades. The small sample size of children and lack of fidelity in how the program was implemented across each site makes drawing large-scale conclusions difficult. However, we were able to learn valuable lessons regarding training, implementation and data collection that will serve us well for next year's program.

Chart 3.1

n=34

Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) Outcomes

■ Well Below   ■ Below   ■ Benchmark   ■ Above
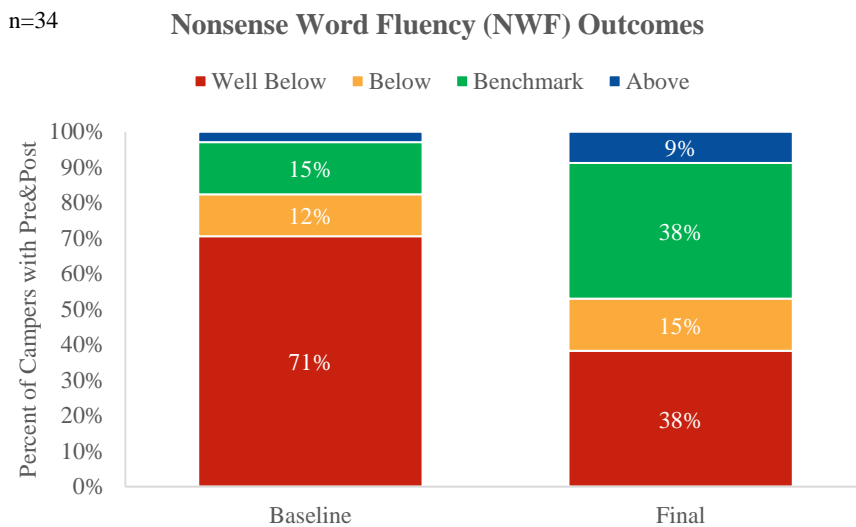
4. Lessons Learned & Recommendations

This was a learning year for all stakeholders involved in the SSLI, and we discovered some critical lessons that can be applied towards distance learning initiatives this fall in addition to future iterations of the program that occur in person.

4.1 Lessons Learned: Technology

This was the earliest lesson learned. In a virtual setting, students need a one-to-one device ratio along with a stable internet connection and, if possible, a headset to help block out background noise. There was some confusion among families about whether they could keep their school

issued device and hotspot over the summer leading some to return their devices. In these cases, students would then participate using an iPhone or tablet which made it hard to see the shared reading passages. Ensuring a clear loop of communication between the school system, partners and SC2C should help avoid some of the confusion around returning devices while allowing the district to still perform the necessary updates and maintenance to the devices on loan.

In the case of BGC, their device to child ratio was often not one to one and in the beginning the signal strength of their internet was not strong enough to support multiple connected devices streaming at the same time. This presented a challenge for literacy coaches as student's voices and video would become out of synch making it hard for coaches to support students in read aloud activities. The internet capacity at BGC was improved part way through the program but the multiple students on one computer remained a challenge.

Another challenge cited by both BGC and INTEMPO was background noise. In interviews with coaches this was a challenge brought up by each coach. Within BGC. because students were in rooms with other students engaging in other activities, and sharing a device, coaches had to contend with a lot of background noise. Despite INTEMPO's students conducting their lessons from home their coach also mentioned this issue stating that she knows there's not much we can do but that "*it's important for parents to know to find a quiet spot [for the child] and also be respectful, like if they are working. I always hear babies or people yelling and crying like I know their whole life already by now!*"

4.1.1   Recommendations: Technology
1) **Summer tech plan** - Create a clear plan, prior to the end of the school year, between SC2C, implementing partners, and SPS to inform parents they may retain their district issued devices for the summer and when they should drop their device off for maintenance prior to the next school year.
   - IDEA: Consider making each partner site a drop-off location for technology that the school could then come collect devices from since the programs are in direct contact with parents and can conduct the necessary follow-ups.
2) **Internet speed** - Identify the proper internet bandwidth needed to support the projected number of students who will be online at a given time and work with partners to upgrade their systems.
3) **Headphones** - Ensure students have headsets either on site or at home to help with distracting background noise.

4.2 Lessons Learned: Quality of Instruction
The quick pivot from in person to distance instruction limited the type of training and support we could provide to ensure the program was being implemented comparatively across the three sites. In observing some lessons, and in interviews with the coaches, there were two types of instruction formats used: one built around routine and one centered more around student choice.

The two coaches at BGC used a similar template (Attachment A) that used slides to present to students what each lesson was going to cover. This gave students the opportunity to see the format written out and the coach would read the slides aloud to students to help them follow

along. Each lesson was conducted in the same format where the coach would greet students, ask a question of the day which encouraged conversation between students and then play a word ladder game followed by reading and comprehension. Where time allowed, a game or video was used to wrap up the class.

At INTEMPO, the two lessons observed followed a less structured format where students were greeted and then the coach would suggest an activity or two for students to choose from. If no students volunteered an answer the coach would select. In the two lessons observed there were word games conducted that focused on reading and rhyming as well as read alouds with comprehension prompts.

During the pre-program training provided by SPS to literacy coaches, the trainer did provide a basic template with ideas of how-to breakdown lessons and timing. This was helpful and likely adapted by coaches based on their program needs but it did not seem to be standardized in any way which would help with data analysis. Furthermore, interviews revealed that the lesson plan ideas shared by the trainer from the Florida Center for Reading Research were challenging to adapt to virtual settings and required a lot of work on the coaches end to make them usable. Given the limited hours coaches were assigned each week towards the SSLI, future programs may want to consider either adding time or providing opportunities to create or adapt materials prior to the start of the program.

Another finding from the interviews was that the time for lessons should be extended to accommodate the settling in of students and a small buffer before the next group. Thirty minutes went by quickly especially when accounting for kids forgetting to get a pen and paper or immediately getting up to use the bathroom. Also noted was creating little bundles of supplies for children with at the most basic a notebook and writing utensil that students can use each week.

This pilot also illustrated the impact the program can have on all students, not just those most in need of support. While initially intended for only the most struggling students, there was wide ranging interest from families of children at all reading abilities and the program was able to accommodate this need. Additionally, in meetings and interviews with program directors it was expressed that if possible, expanding the eligibility to non-SPS students who attended camp programs would also be beneficial. The number of non SPS students was small in each camp.

4.2.1   Recommendations: Quality of Instruction
1) **Create a clear template for lesson formats** - As we find the best way to enact this program across multiple locations, there should be an agreed upon way for lessons to be rolled-out.
2) **Create a resource library** – A centralized source of apps, lessons, worksheets, and other learning materials that all coaches can access during the program. This would also likely be useful to programs during the school year as well. The Ferguson Library could assist with this.

3) **Pre-program prep** – Build in more time prior to the start of the program to allow literacy coaches to prepare materials they feel would be useful and get accustomed to the format.

4) **Extend intervention time** – Blocking 40 minutes for each group would allow for a five minute period to get kids settled at the start and a five-minute buffer block between one group finishing and the next arriving to allow the coach to reorganize.

5) **Open up the parameters** – Allow all students to participate in the small group instruction, including those from out of district but programs must make clear which students are non-SPS and which are involved in summer school to allow for disaggregation in the post-program data analysis phase.

6) **More hours for literacy coaches** – In this year's program, coaches worked 12-14 hours per week for an eight-week period. Consideration should be given to extending the number of hours we are requiring coaches to work as part of the program. This will allow for meetings, parent workshops and staff PD in addition to lesson prep.

7) **Tiered support** – Consideration should be given to looking at how an increased number of students may lend itself to a tiered level of reading support with tier 1 students requiring more one-on-one support and tier two the small group model.

8) **Additional literacy coach** – The current target for students reached through the SSLI is 100. With only 38 being reached this summer among four coaches, there will be a need to bring on an additional coach and extend their hours.

4.3 Lessons Learned: Communication

Communication is a critical piece to the success of the SSLI. Program directors and staff, parents and students, coaches, and SC2C all need to have mapped out communication loops prior to the start of the program to ensure that issues that need to be elevated are done so in the right way and that partners, families, and SC2C are communicating a unified message on the importance of literacy.

One lesson learned around communication was the importance of communicating the program to the parents. With INTEMPO's program operating from the child's home, many parents would be present for the lessons and therefore knew more about what the program was and what their child was doing in the program. At BGC, because it was held on-site, parents only knew their child was receiving literacy support but not exactly what that support looked like. In interviews with BGC parents after the program, they mentioned that having a wrap-up meeting with the coach at the end where they could learn about their child's progress and areas to work on would be helpful. Communication with parents was also handled differently between INTEMPO and BGC due in part to the camp set up. At INTEMPO their coach was in direct contact with parents to schedule instruction times where as at BGC all parent communication was handled by BGC staff. In interviews coaches were split on the best way forward for communicating with parents (directly vs. program initiated). However, all were united that parents needed to be engaged more. Programs know their families best so ensuring opportunities for parents to meet coaches at the beginning and end of the program at minimum would be one way to increase awareness among parents of who was working with their child and how.

Communication between coaches and programs is another area that needs to be clearly defined in future programs. Coaches communicated with each other weekly which is a helpful format for raising concerns and identifying things that are working. However, there needs to be a clear line of communication for coaches and programs to discuss issues that arise onsite or even virtually during the day. Identifying a manager or someone else at the camps who can be in regular communication with Coaches and help troubleshoot issues or elevate them to the directors would help take pressure off relying solely on directors.

Communication between coaches and program staff would also be aided by including coaches in weekly staff meetings. Here there could be time built in to give mini workshops to staff on how to build in literacy activities to their programs outside of the small group instruction. Additionally, these meetings allow coaches to know more about what's going on within the program and create tie-ins during their sessions. An example given during a one-on-one interview with one of the coaches at BGC was that if the program was going on an outing to the beach, then there could be reading activities and questions of the day that tie into this outing to create continuity in the program. One challenge expressed by coaches in the virtual environment was not knowing what other kinds of activities children were engaging in throughout the day so they could find ways to tie them into their lessons.

4.3.1 Recommendations: Communication

1) **Hold weekly staff workshops** – Incorporating brief 15-30 min trainings by literacy coaches for all staff during weekly meetings will allow for ongoing professional development around building literacy rich environments and practicing literacy. Will also allow coaches to gain insight into what activities are being planned for the week so they can adapt and align accordingly.
2) **Hold regular parent workshops** – Incorporating parents into various literacy focused workshops and allowing them to meet the coaches at the beginning of the program. Provide opportunities to have parents engage in workshops held by coaches on incorporating good literacy practices at home.
3) **Hold parent/coach wrap up meeting** – Allow parents to come meet with coaches one on one at the end of the program to hear more about their child's progress and what ways they can continue supporting their child in areas where they may need additional help.