



Contents

- Introduction 2
- 1. Project Background..... 2
 - 1.1 Target Population..... 3
- 2. Project Setup 4
 - 2.1 Literacy Instruction..... 5
 - 2.2 Data Collection 5
- 3. Outcomes 5
 - 3.1 Assessment Results..... 6
- 4. Lessons Learned and Recommendations 7
 - 4.1 Lessons Learned: Structural Adjustments..... 7
 - 4.2 Lessons Learned: Improved Data Support/Tools..... 7
 - 4.3 Lessons Learned: Family Engagement 7
 - 4.4 Lessons Learned: Assessing the Program 8

Introduction

Summer learning loss, or “summer slide”, is a well-documented phenomenon that can have particularly harmful impacts on literacy development in elementary school students. Studies have shown that students in grades 3 through 5 can lose up to 20% of literacy gains during the summer.¹ Compounding this loss has been the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted learning for over a year and a half. Though the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning loss is not yet known, the preliminary data from the 2021 Connecticut state literacy assessments showed more students failing to meet the benchmark than in 2019 when the assessment was last administered. When looking at the end of year DIBELS assessment data for elementary school students in Stamford Public Schools, 44% of students were assessed as below or well below benchmark. Disaggregating the data, 57% of Hispanic/Latino students, 50% of Black students and 79% of ELL students were not achieving literacy benchmarks. With this lens, Stamford Cradle to Career (SC2C) offers the Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative (SSLI) targeting students below benchmark in grades K-3. SSLI provides opportunities to reinforce literacy lessons from the school year through small group support and a robust, literacy-rich summer program environment that emphasizes ways children can learn literacy skills through everyday interactions.

1. Project Background

SSLI is framed around a successful model of summer literacy support used by a United Way collaborative in Worcester, MA. The Worcester model includes professional development, embedded literacy coaches, literacy materials, and shared learning and support across a coordinated network of summer program partners. By providing staff with ongoing professional development and support, using small group student instruction, and creating “literacy rich” environments where, no matter the activity or child’s reading level, students would be exposed to practices that promote the building of literacy skills throughout the summer, the Worcester initiative found it was able to reduce student’s summer learning loss by 85-90%².

In the inaugural year of the Stamford program, the COVID-19 pandemic forced SC2C to adapt the Worcester model to a virtual format; abruptly ending our planned professional development sessions and preventing our literacy coaches from working in-person with staff and students. Despite these last-minute changes, the 2020 SSLI program served 38 students across three summer camp sites. Modest improvements were seen in literacy assessment scores at the end of the summer, but with local and state assessments being canceled because of the pandemic, the larger impact was difficult to assess. Furthermore, the parent engagement piece of the program could not be implemented.

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).

² <https://unitedwaycm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Impact-Story-Summer-Literacy-Initiative.pdf>

Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative Report



In 2021, SC2C ran five SSLI professional development workshops for camp staff as well as in-person programming reaching over 100 students at three partner locations in Stamford. The three partner camps in 2021 included two organizations from 2020: Stamford Boys and Girls Club (Yerwood Center) and Family Centers, along with a new partner the Stamford YMCA.

All three partner sites held in-person activities during the summer; however, the YMCA ran a weekly program model, which led to high student turnover. New children were given a pre-assessment by the literacy coach assigned to the YMCA, however, of the 34 children who attended at least one day from the YMCA program, only nine were given a post-assessment as they had been attending with enough regularity for the literacy coach to feel comfortable assessing them again.

While family interactions were still limited due to COVID-19 restrictions, the 2021 program made a more concentrated attempt to share updates with families through a bi-weekly flyer (in English and Spanish) that detailed what students were learning, how it was connected to reading and language development, and what caregivers could do at home to support these lessons.

1.1 Target Population

Participants for the SSLI are drawn from partner summer camp sites with a focus on children in grades K-3, particularly, those who are below benchmark based on their end of year DIBELS scores and/or a pre-assessment with the literacy coaches. Though demographic and income data are not collected by SC2C, the children served by our partner summer camps are predominantly from low-income households and are demographically reflective of the populations not meeting benchmark standards within the Stamford Public Schools (SPS).

Based on feedback from literacy coaches and camp providers in 2020, the 2021 program expanded the eligibility of SSLI participation to campers in grades K-3 attending schools outside of Stamford Public Schools. In 2021, just over 30% of the 115 students served were not SPS students. While we were glad to be able to serve these additional children, one of the challenges was SC2C could not access student level data for these children. SC2C only maintains a data sharing agreement with SPS and can only share that student data when a family has signed off on SC2C sharing their data with approved individuals. Unfortunately, the combination of children outside SPS, along with campers at SPS schools who had not signed the data release waiver, meant that SC2C was unable to share student level reading data with our literacy coaches. As a workaround, an aggregate summary of outcomes for SPS students in our partner camps was provided to coaches and coaches conducted mini pre-assessments using specific sections of the DIBELS reading assessment to evaluate students and group them accordingly. A breakdown of the children served by the SSLI can be found in table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: Participant Population

Indicator	Overall		BGC		Family Centers		YMCA	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Attended At Least Once	115	-	72	-	9	-	34	-
Kindergarten	21	18%	13	18%	0	0%	8	24%
Gr. 1	32	28%	18	25%	5	56%	9	26%
Gr. 2	30	26%	23	32%	2	22%	5	15%
Gr. 3	32	28%	18	25%	2	22%	12	35%
Total given pre & post-assessment	71	62%	53	74%	9	100%	9	26%

2. Project Setup

Using the Results Based Accountability (RBA) model for outcomes measurement, SC2C designed the SSLI around the following goal 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 SSLI program ran for six weeks across the three partner locations. Three literacy coaches provided support to the partner organizations. All three coaches were trained educators with literacy credentials. Boys and Girls Club had the largest number of students, so all three coaches provided support at this location with Family Centers and the YMCA receiving support from just one of the three coaches. The intent was for students to receive support twice a week at each location; however, scheduling conflicts including field trips and other activities made this more of a challenge than anticipated.

Table 2: SSLI RBA Framework

Question	Measure
How much are we doing?	# of students receiving literacy support
	# of hours of literacy coach instruction
	# of students assessed pre literacy development (DIBELS)
	# of students assessed post literacy development (DIBELS)
	# of students assessed both literacy development (DIBELS)
	# of PD sessions
	# of hours of PD sessions

Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative Report



How well are we doing it?	% of students assessed pre/post on literacy development
	Average number of days attended by students
	Average number of adults attending PD sessions
Is anyone better off?	% of students who maintained or improved (pre to post assessment)

2.1 Literacy Instruction

Due to the inclusion of students outside of SPS, in addition to challenges getting data release forms for SPS students in our partner camps, the three literacy coaches used specific sections of the DIBELS reading assessment to better understand student reading levels and assign students to appropriate small groups based on common needs. For kindergarten and first graders, coaches used Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) and Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) sections to assess students. For second graders, coaches used Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), and for third graders, coaches used the MAZE section for assessment.

One of the lessons learned from 2020 was that a more standardized approach to small group instruction was needed. In 2021, the program made some progress in this direction, enabled by in-person instruction and more meeting time between literacy coaches. By creating more opportunities for coaches to meet with each other on a weekly basis, coaches could collaborate on lesson ideas, resources for instruction, and draft updates to share with families. The meetings also provided opportunities for coaches to debrief with SC2C staff on challenges and successes.

2.2 Data Collection

Data was collected from a variety of sources and focused on both quantitative and qualitative data. Literacy coaches kept track of attendance for their students and recorded assessment results. SC2C's data manager conducted one-on-one interviews with all literacy coaches and program managers at the end of the summer to better understand what worked well and how the SSLI could be improved. Lastly, a survey was sent to parents at the end of the summer for feedback and to understand how helpful the bi-weekly fliers were and received 11 responses (a summary of responses can be found in the appendix).

3. Outcomes

Outcomes based on our RBA framework can be found in Table 3. **Overall, 115 students attended at least one day of programming with 98 students (85%) attending at least 5 days of programming. Of the 115 students, 62% received both a pre and post assessment.**

While the number of students reached in 2021 was three times the number reached in 2020, there are some caveats to consider when reviewing the outcomes data in 2021. The first consideration is around attendance and consistency. Despite the 2021 program meeting in person at all three sites, there were issues with maintaining consistent days/times at two of the three sites. The YMCA model runs one week-long session at a time. This led to a high turnover of students with only 9 out of 35 students from the YMCA attending with enough consistency (on average 8

Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative Report



days) that their literacy coach felt they were able to be assessed at the end of the summer. At the Boys and Girls Club, the challenge with consistency was around outings or changes to the schedule that required coaches to change days or miss a day during that week. Ideas for meeting this challenge will be discussed in the Lessons Learned and Recommendations section below.

The second consideration is that the sections used by coaches to assess students are just one part of a larger, cumulative assessment. These sections were selected for their ease of use and their ability to provide quick information to coaches that would help them make appropriate groupings for instruction; they are but a snapshot of a larger picture and a student’s improvement or lack thereof may be the result of factors outside our control. Additionally, the literacy coaches chose to use the beginning of year standards to assess children at the beginning of the program. This decision was made because of the large number of children who were below or well below benchmark, in aggregate, based on end of year data. The coaches felt that if children were so low at the end and tested low based on standards from the beginning of the year, then knowing this would help coaches better target the small group interventions.

Table 3: Stamford Summer Literacy RBA Outcomes

Question	Measure	Outcome
How much are we doing?	# of students receiving literacy support	115 students
	# of hours of literacy coach instruction (2x/week for 6 weeks)	6 hours
	# of students assessed pre literacy development (DIBELS)	93 students
	# of students assessed post literacy development (DIBELS)	75 students
	# of students assessed both literacy development (DIBELS)	72 students
	# of PD sessions	5 sessions
	# of hours of PD sessions	7.5 hours
How well are we doing it?	% of students assessed pre/post on literacy development	63%
	Average number of days attended by students	8 days
	Average number of adults attending PD sessions	20 people
Is anyone better off?	% of students who maintained or improved (pre to post assessment)	86%

3.1 Assessment Results

Students were assessed by coaches at the start of the program. Kindergarten and first graders were assessed using two parts of the DIBELS section: Nonsense Word Fluency and Phoneme Segmentation Fluency. These sections assess a child’s ability to identify correct letter sounds and blend these sounds into words, as well as their ability to segment out a word into its distinct sounds. Second graders were assessed using the Oral Reading Fluency section which measures a child’s ability to read a passage accurately and fluently within the span of one minute. Lastly, third graders were assessed using the MAZE section of the DIBLES test. This section tests a student’s ability to read and comprehend a brief passage.

Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative Report



With the aggregate totals showing many campers being below or well below the benchmark according to the end of year DIBELS assessment, the literacy coaches decided to pre-assess children in the SSLI using the beginning of year (BOY) DIBELS assessment to see how children scored on content they already should have mastered. Coaches then used the corresponding middle of year (MOY) section to assess children at the end of the six weeks.

Overall, 73% of participants improved pre to post assessment, with 13% of children remaining the same and 14% decreasing in score. Context is important to consider when looking at the results as a child could have had an off day or been distracted while attempting their pre or post evaluation. Also, the purpose of the screening was to really understand where children needed additional support and be able to tailor lessons to these areas. Attendance did not seem to factor into results as children whose scores declined attended, on average, the same number of days as those whose scores improved. Literacy coaches also explained that for some children who saw a decline in results, they were at a higher level than some of their peers and therefore coaches concentrated efforts on those children who needed the most support. In future years, understanding how a child's relationship with reading changes during this experience is something the program would like to better understand and quantify.

4. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

This year the SSLI program was able to incorporate some of the lessons learned from 2020, such as creating a more standardized instructional method, and finding ways for coaches to provide more support to camp staff on practices that support literacy development in children. However, the program continues to yield important lessons from the feedback collected by stakeholders.

4.1 Lessons Learned: Structural Adjustments

Feedback collected through interviews with literacy coaches and program directors highlights the need for some changes to how the SSLI is set up. Currently the program runs for six weeks, meeting, ideally, twice a week. Coaches and partner program staff felt that three days a week would be better and adding a fourth coach to the team would allow each program to have a dedicated coach to devote their full attention to supporting that program.

Additional structural suggestions included providing more time at the beginning of the SSLI for coaches and programs to meet and coordinate days and times that work for their needs. A longer lead-up would also allow coaches and programs to build in time for professional development and observational opportunities in more structured ways.

4.2 Lessons Learned: Improved Data Support/Tools

Data tracking in 2021 was not as smooth as it could have been and the need for a more centralized hub of attendance and assessment data is a key takeaway. Reviewing this information during the weekly check-ins between coaches and SC2C staff would also help reduce some of the data challenges from 2021 and allow for a better cycle of continuous improvement.

4.3 Lessons Learned: Family Engagement

Family engagement continues to be a key area of needed expansion. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has limited the program's ability to interact directly with families, but hopefully with more time

Stamford Summer Literacy Initiative Report



spent collaborating between coaches and programs, ideas for ways to bring families into this program can be built out and explored.

4.4 Lessons Learned: Assessing the Program

While the current RBA looks at basic measures of the SSLI, the need to better understand its impact from a staff and family perspective is important.

Additionally, since one of the goals of the program is to foster a love of reading in children, finding opportunities to measure how student's attitudes towards reading have changed is key. An understanding of what students like to read and how we can work with the library to make sure students have access to books they like is also an important consideration for next year's program.