Tabletop Session Summary

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Summer Programming and Resources for Families to Prepare Young Children for Success in Early Education

Presenters: Stephanie Saba and Heriberto Madrigal, San Mateo County Libraries; Dr. Amy Colton, Region 8 Comprehensive Center; Dr. Sarah Sayko, Region 8 Comprehensive Center and the National Center on Improving Literacy; Lisa Shrader, St. Clair Regional Education Services Agency (MI)

This tabletop discussion examined initiatives to ensure that early learners and their families have the tools, resources, and support they need for kindergarten and beyond.

Session Highlights

» Launched in 2012, The Big Lift is a collective impact initiative in San Mateo County, California that aims to boost children’s reading proficiency by third grade. It is based on four pillars including high quality preschool, summer learning, school attendance, and family engagement. The Big Lift provided funding to four districts in 2015 to implement the four pillars. The following year they added three additional districts. During this period, San Mateo County Libraries joined on as a partner to support the Inspiring Summers program.

» The Inspiring Summers program is offered in ten schools in seven school districts over five weeks. Academic instruction (using the BellXcel model) is provided in the mornings by credentialed teachers, and library interns provide STEAM enrichment (using the CREATE curriculum) in the afternoons. The interns also lead students in mindfulness activities that help students learn to self-regulate. Breakfast, lunch, and two snacks are provided each day.

» Active communication with families is vital to the success of the Inspiring Summers program. One-on-one conversations are had with families during drop-off and pickup periods each day. A parent orientation provides families the opportunity to meet the staff and walk through a typical day in the program. Families also receive a weekly newsletter that fills them in on what students are learning. Families can also view a dedicated website for the program. Finally, parent care calls are made to see if parents have any questions or need additional support.

» There are more than 200 staff members working across all Inspiring Summers program sites. Academic instructional staff are recruited by the schools (e.g., using the substitute pool). San Mateo County Libraries handles the recruitment of the library interns, more than half are returners. They recruit from local colleges and have a partnership with the Stanford Graduate School of Education. Menlo Park College also provides administrative support and is a source of interns. Many of the interns end up going into education after their experience with the program.

» Inspiring Summers facilitators go through training on the curriculum, social emotional learning, working with students with disabilities, and abuse prevention. Recently, they have added COVID-specific trainings.
The Region 8 Comprehensive Center has also been focused on improving the literacy achievement of early learners. It works with Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio.

Michigan has been working for several decades to try to put strategies in place to improve early literacy achievement. To support this effort, the Region 8 Comprehensive Center has been providing technical assistance focused on family-school literacy partnerships, especially for marginalized families.

Family engagement is linked in research to positive literacy outcomes for all children. Five guiding principles for this work are relationships, partnerships, learner driven, tailored to all, and having a positive learning environment. Targeted literacy strategies include reading aloud, writing, and having an abundance of reading materials and opportunities. To establish equity, families and schools must engage in trusting relationships, with educators maximizing family strengths.

Shared Resources

- Leadership Strategy 1: Create a School Environment to Support Family-School Literacy Partnerships
- Leadership Strategy 2: Develop a Communication Network Between School Staff and Families to Enhance all Children’s Literacy Achievement
- Leadership Strategy 3: Allocate Resources for School Staff and Families to Increase Children’s Literacy Achievement
- Read Alouds for Pre-Kindergarten
- The Big Lift
- Why Read Alouds?

Questions and Answers on Summer Programming and Resources for Families to Prepare Young Children for Success in Early Education

Based on observations of students in programming this summer, could you recommend some strategies that can be utilized to prepare for return to in-person instruction?

There have been challenges at all locations and at all grade levels. Students of different ages have cried or exhibited other behavioral issues when returning to an in-person setting. Parents and staff have also dealt with transitional challenges due to the change in setting and being away from their children.

There is a lot to take into consideration with the transition. Students have had different levels of engagement and support during this unprecedented period. Staff will need an outlet to talk about and navigate these challenges.

Aside from American Rescue Plan funds, what other funding structures are available to support out-of-school programs?

Funding comes from various sources (e.g., organizations like the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative). Supplemental funding can come from state and other grant sources, for example. As an illustration, a literacy grant provided books, and a library grant provided extra materials to help keep kids active.