

Duke Endowment Summer Programming: Literacy Camps

Faith-Placed (Not-Faith-Based) Literacy Camps
Located at Rural United Methodist Churches across North Carolina

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY



November/December 2023

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Adhere to a set of core values that are evident in choices and actions.
- Earn trust and respect through honest, principled behaviors.
- Honor commitments.
- Recognize how personal decisions and actions have impacts beyond self.
- Take ownership of decisions and persevere through challenges.
- Demonstrate self-control and composure.

The Rural Church Summer Literacy Initiative, an effort developed by The Duke Endowment, is a summer learning program that provides high-quality reading camps at United Methodist churches across rural North Carolina. The camps are "faith-placed," not faith-based, meaning that they are located in churches, but do not include religious content and welcome students and families of all, or no, faith backgrounds.

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THE DUKE ENDOWMENT

The initiative has shown tremendous growth, attributed to several factors. To ensure a personalized learning opportunity, the camp classrooms have a maximum of 12 students with a lead teacher and an assistant teacher. Thus, each day at the camp, all students are a part of the small-classroom based experiences. Lead teachers are certified, from the local school districts, and have a demonstrated record of accelerating student reading gains. Many teachers appreciate the opportunity to teach in small classes in an alternative environment to the academic year with maximum potential for individualized student instruction. NC certified teachers have typically completed at least part of LETRS training, and their curricular materials are anchored in the Science of Reading, in adherence to current state best practices.

The instruction includes great focus on phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, and more sound walls than site words. Foundational skills are at the heart of the instruction. Instruction is tailored to individual student needs. There are both summative and formative assessments (MAP Growth to measure pre-post camp reading growth, and DIBELS for formative assessment to inform individual student instruction.) Curricular materials vary by site, in alignment with the variety reflected across LEA's.



Research

The Science of Reading (SoR) is a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to teaching reading that draws upon the latest research findings in cognitive science, linguistics, and

NORTH CAROLINA PORTRAIT of a GRADUATE



- ADAPTABILITY
- COLLABORATION
- COMMUNICATION
- CRITICAL THINKING
- EMPATHY
- LEARNER'S MINDSET
- PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Portrait of a Graduate is an ideal set of competencies for North Carolina students to achieve by the end of their K-12 career.

www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/operation-polaris/portrait-graduate

OPERATION POLARIS 2.0

Navigating Students Toward a Brighter Future

- Learning Recovery and Acceleration
- District and Regional Support
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- Literacy
- Student Support Services
- Accountability and Testing
- Competency-Based Education

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Research *Continued*

educational psychology. According to Stanovich (2000), SoR emphasizes the importance of understanding the cognitive processes involved in reading, such as phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, and comprehension. Proponents of SoR argue that a systematic and explicit approach to teaching these foundational skills is essential for fostering early literacy skills in students (National Reading Panel, 2000). Research conducted by Torgesen (2002) supports the notion that a strong emphasis on phonics instruction, including explicit teaching of letter-sound relationships and decoding skills, is critical for improving reading outcomes, particularly for struggling readers.

The SoR framework challenges some traditional approaches to reading instruction, particularly the “whole language” approach, by advocating for a more structured and systematic approach to teaching phonics and decoding skills (Moats, 1999). The National Reading Panel’s meta-analysis found that

explicit phonics instruction significantly improves children’s ability to decode words, leading to enhanced reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). Additionally, research by Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) underscores the importance of integrating language and literacy development, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between oral language skills and reading proficiency. The Science of Reading, therefore, serves as a guiding framework for educators to adopt evidence-based practices that address the multifaceted components of reading acquisition and support literacy development across diverse student populations (Fletcher & Lyon, 1998).

2023 Summer Literacy Sites



Stakeholder and Community Involvement

The local rural United Methodist churches in each county for the camps partner with local public elementary schools, principals, teachers and other key stakeholders. Essentially, many community partners in each county in which the camps are held are also involved.

Key Partners for the Project

The Duke Endowment:

- Kristen Richardson-Frick, Associate Director, Rural Church program area
- Robb Webb, Director, Rural Church program area
- Bill Bacon, Director of Evaluation
- Todd Dalrymple, Associate Director, Special Initiatives and Evaluation

HC Consulting LLC:

- Dr. Helen Chen

American Institutes for Research:

- Karen Manship
- Aleksandra Holod

Point of Contact for the Summer Literacy Initiative:

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Associated Costs

The Duke Endowment is guided by Trustees who determine the structure of its philanthropic support for the programs. Through 2023, the 21 church sites were supported by 20 direct grants from the Endowment. These grant award funds were added to a church’s own contributions and the monetary and in-kind donations of their local collaborating partner organizations to fully finance the program cost. In the first year of a church’s participation, to transform a space in a church to

a usable elementary school classroom often requires some infrastructure funding. To support a camp of 2-3 classrooms (24-36 students) in a non-start-up year will cost approximately \$35,000-45,000. Most of the sites use the USDA summer feeding programming for nutrition. The actual cost varies by site because the payscale in the school district determines what the teachers are paid at the summer camp.

Barriers and Roadblocks

Family engagement, participation interest and credibility, and transportation are the most significant barriers to the camps. In terms of participation interest, that refers to the notion that church leaders need to build credibility with the school leaders before holding these camps; district leaders like to know that these camps, while located in churches, welcome students and families of all or no faith backgrounds, and that there is no faith-based curriculum involved. District and school leaders also like to know that the curriculum being taught is in alignment with NC DPI’s guidelines and best practices, and that the reading camps across the state have a record of improving

student reading outcomes and confidence over the summers. Building credibility can also be a concern with newer sites. Sometimes it takes a year for the community to see that the camp delivers high quality literacy instruction and reading growth along with enrichment opportunities.

To overcome the family engagement barrier, the Duke Endowment asks participating church sites to engage families in a meaningful and welcoming way, equipping them with rich literacy activities for caregivers to use with their children at home. The churches also host weekly dinners for the entire

Barriers and Roadblocks *Continued*

family and opportunities for caregivers to meet with camp teachers to discuss their children’s reading progress during Family Night events. Churches provide camp materials that are accessible in the family’s home language, and that equip the families with enrichment activities. Sometimes the camps include books that are culturally inclusive and explain ways for parents to talk to their children about the texts, such as question stems (i.e. Who is the main character?). The camps include games, recipes, etc. so that families have lots of rich resources.

Transportation can also be a barrier in rural areas. When a participating church has access to a church van or bus (its

own or a collaborating church’s), that asset is often used to address the barrier. When a church-owned van or bus is not available, churches must explore other options for providing transportation to students whose families are not equipped to bring them to the program in the morning and/or get them home in the afternoon. For example, one site was able to execute a partnership with the school district in the 2023 summer term to enable school buses for transportation to the programming. Other sites contract with their county’s public transportation system or a private transportation company. However, these partnerships are not always available, thus making transportation a common barrier.

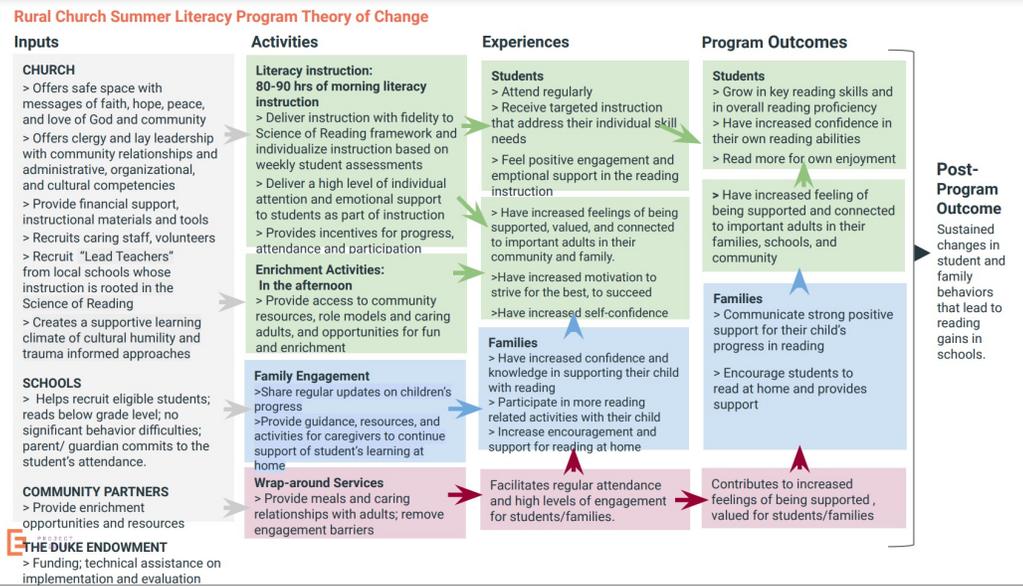
Measurements of Success

The summer programming is guided by a logic model. The inputs, activities, and experiences lead to expected program outcomes. Contributing to the success of the programs are the locations where these programs happen—within church sites, which lend themselves well to the summer reading camp experience in that they have a full kitchen, classrooms, open play spaces, etc. In addition, the church locations are outfitted to ensure a full fit for the camp, so if a camp location is lacking in any particular setting needed for the students, that is remedied prior to holding the camp and welcoming the children to the facilities. Anecdotally, camp attendees and their parents offer that a definite measurement of success is that the camps offer enrichment activities staffed by camp staff and church volunteers.

Academically, independent evaluation (which since 2020 has been conducted by the Endowment’s grantee partner the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and uses vetted pre- and post-testing) has shown that students who attend the summer literacy camps gain an average of 2-3 months of literacy skill during the camp period. Thus, the “summer slide” is arrested, and students gain additional ability in all measures of reading. This finding has been consistent in the program across time and geography, and as the initiative has expanded from 2 church sites

to 21. Independent evaluation with common pre- and post-program testing was initiated in 2016. Since then, on average across all sites, students have achieved statistically significant reading gains in every year of the program. These gains have been documented in 7 different years and using four different standardized reading skill measures: the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in 2016, the Gates-MacGinitie reading test in 2018, the Lexia RAPID from 2019-2022, and the MAP Growth in 2023. (Independent pre- and post-testing was not conducted in 2017.)

In addition, on pre- and post-program student and parent surveys each year, both students and their parents/caregivers show statistically significant positive changes in confidence and attitude related to their own, or their student’s, reading.



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