

Research Brief

Year 2000 Summer School in South Carolina

Program Description and Costs

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March 2001

Introduction

This research brief provides a summary of a recently completed study of the state's year 2000 summer school program conducted by the South Carolina Educational Policy Center in collaboration with the Education Oversight Committee (EOC), the South Carolina State Department of Education (SDE), and the Instructional Leaders' Roundtable. The Education Accountability Act (EAA) of 1998 states that following a review of the performance of a student on an academic plan, "the student may be retained or he may be required to attend summer school for promotion" if his work has not been at grade level or if the terms of the plan have not been met (Section 59-18-500(C)). A 1999 legislative proviso provided that a student placed on academic probation might be required to participate in summer school or a year-long comprehensive remediation program (provided outside of normal school hours). SDE guidelines specify that summer school programs meet the same standards required during the regular school year. Although the guidelines provide flexibility to local districts in how to structure the program, students are to have "sufficient time to receive instruction in each area of academic deficiency."

A number of the strategies required by the EAA and the related SDE guidelines involve increasing student learning time through a variety of strategies including summer school. Anderson and Walberg (1993) recommended extending learning time by increasing the school year, allocating sufficient time to critical subjects and activities, helping students use out-of-school time more effectively, and changing management practices in schools and classrooms.

A recent synthesis of the research literature on summer school effects (Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, & Muhlenbruck, 2000) concluded that students completing summer remedial work scored higher than comparison students who did not attend summer school. Programs that provided small group or individual instruction produced the largest increases in student learning. An earlier review of 39 studies (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Greathouse, 1996) found that summer learning loss was equivalent to 1 month of instruction, and was greater for math facts and spelling than for other subjects. The investigators hypothesized that these skills involve the acquisition of factual and procedural knowledge that is especially susceptible to forgetting. Similar findings in the Cooper, et al., 2000 review led the authors to suggest that summer loss may be greater for math since reading is more embedded in students' everyday environments.

Some researchers have found that the loss of academic skills in the summer is greater for students at risk for low academic performance. Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson (2000) have been studying 790 Baltimore students since the students entered first grade in 1982. The authors found that students from families of high and low socioeconomic status made equivalent gains in reading and math during the school year. However, students from low-income families experienced a much greater summer loss of skills than their more advantaged peers. As a result, low-income students fell further behind each year. By the end of the fifth grade, the difference in achievement between poor and non-poor students was more than 2 years in verbal achievement and 1½ years in math achievement.

A recently completed study (Monrad & May, 2000) of the academic plan provision of the EAA indicated that there was a genuine need for information on summer school programs in South Carolina as they are currently structured. This study was designed to gather information about the different ways that summer school programs were provided to students in the summer of 2000. Surveys were used to collect information on the number of students served at each grade level, the number of days and hours per day, the reasons for summer school placement, student consequences of summer school attendance, sources of funding, and program costs. Subsequent studies are planned to evaluate summer school effects on student achievement.

Instructional leaders, typically assistant superintendents or directors of instruction, in all 86 South Carolina school districts were mailed surveys in late November, 2000. A copy was also sent to the district superintendent. Follow-up contacts included personal telephone calls to remind participants of the survey and solicit their cooperation. The initial letters and subsequent contacts resulted in responses from 79 school districts (92%). These districts included 90% of the students who scored below basic on the 1999 PACT.

Results

Of the 79 districts responding to the survey, 74 (94%) indicated that they had a summer school program during the summer of 2000. Under regulatory and statutory provisions, districts had the option of providing comprehensive remediation instead of summer school and five districts opted for this alternative. The remainder of this section provides data from the 74 districts operating summer school programs. Because some questions were omitted by respondents, the numbers reported in the tables and graphs that follow may reflect fewer than 74 school districts.

Program Description

Instructional leaders were asked to specify the criteria used to place elementary and middle school students in summer school. Table 1 shows the percentage of districts using each criterion. Since instructional leaders were asked to mark all of the criteria that they used, the percentages sum to more than 100%.

Table 1 Criteria Used by Districts for Summer School Placement

Criteria	Percentage of Districts
Academic Plan	97
Failing Grades	91
Low Test Scores	69
Teacher Judgment	68
Parent Request	38
Other	8

Table 2 details the number of elementary and middle school students enrolled in summer school by grade level and the number of districts serving students at each grade. Table 2 shows that 59,509 students were served in the 74 districts and that the focus for these districts was in grades 3-8; about 95 percent of the districts served students in these grades. The number of students in grades 3-8 represent approximately 36% of the students scoring below basic on one or more sections of the 1999 PACT.

Table 2 Students Participating in Summer School by Grade Level

Grade Level	# of Students	# of Districts	% of Districts
K	2,330	29	39
1	3,988	45	61
2	3,866	46	61
3	7,502	70	95
4	8,275	71	96
5	9,241	70	95
6	7,959	70	95
7	8,670	70	95
8	7,678	70	95
Total Students	59,509		

According to the instructional leaders, about 97% of the students participated in summer school because of below grade-level academic performance. Districts varied considerably in the number of hours per day and the total number of days included in the summer school session. While the average number of hours per day was 4.5, the range was from 3 to 7 hours. There was also a wide variation in the number of days that programs operated. The average for length of program was 18.9 days, but the range was 10 to 31 days. There were a variety of consequences for students following participation in

summer school. After review of the student's summer school performance, the student was either promoted with an academic plan (92% of districts), put on probation with an academic plan (43%), promoted with no academic plan (57%), or retained (72%).

Program Costs for 2000

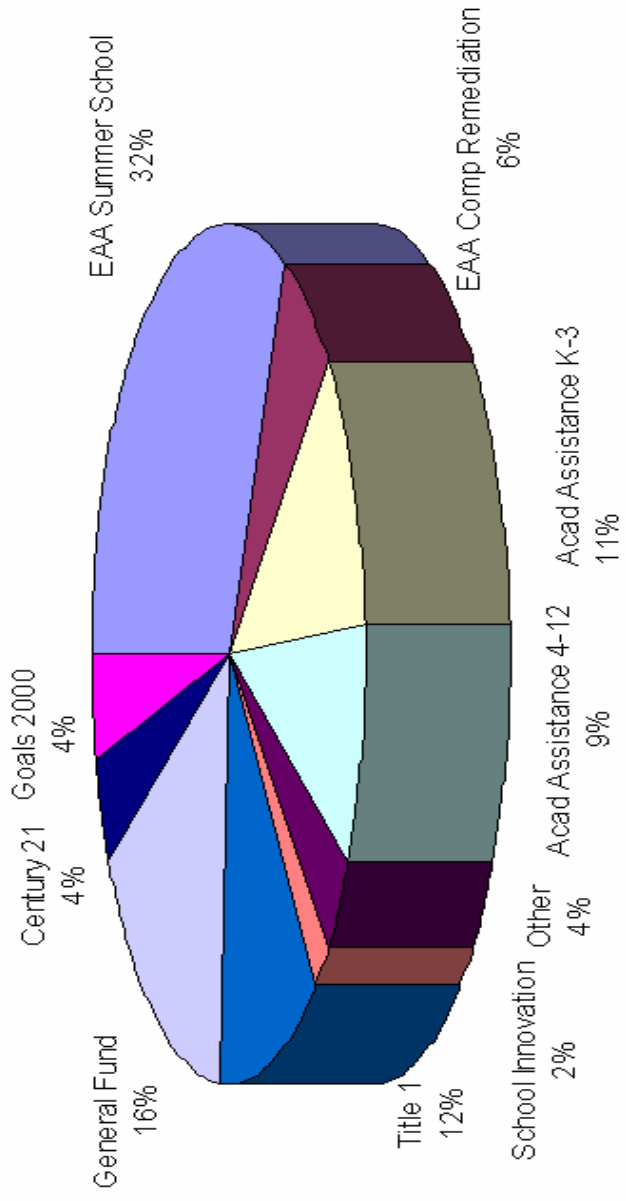
Of the 74 school districts operating summer school programs in 2000, 69 reported a total cost figure for the instructional program and 62 reported transportation costs. The FY 2000 state allocation for both summer school and comprehension was \$18 million, or \$69.25 for each student scoring below basic on the 1999 PACT. With respect to instructional costs, the 69 districts spent \$16,151,100. The average district cost per student was \$306.41. This figure varied considerably from district to district; however, given the range in the numbers of days and hours of operation, the variation in cost per student is not unexpected. Costs of transportation for summer school averaged \$39.46 per student for the 62 districts reporting transportation costs. All together, these 62 districts spent an average of \$29,285 each, or \$1,815,693 for summer school transportation. The average district cost per student for instruction and transportation in grades K-8 was \$345.87. Based on the reported average expenses of the districts, the total summer school expenditure if all 86 districts had conducted summer school programs is projected to be approximately 21.3 million dollars. The figure varies slightly depending on whether the calculation is based on the average number of students served by each district or the number of students scoring below basic on the 1999 PACT.

Districts were requested to indicate the sources of their summer school funding for instructional costs and these data are presented in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows the sources of funding and the percentage of expenditure from each fund. The FY 2000 allocation for EAA summer school and comprehensive remediation funded only about one-third of the districts' summer school costs. The district general fund (16.4%), Title 1 (11.6%), Academic Assistance K-3 (10.8%), Academic Assistance 4-12 (8.7%) and EAA Comprehensive Remediation (6.4%) were major sources. The "other" category included 12 additional funding sources; Reading Recovery, School-to-Work, Three Faces of Need, Communities in Schools, modified school year grant, local industry grant, Before- and After-School Daycare, Vision for Youth, McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, Medicaid, "EAA proviso", and gifted and talented. Most districts tapped multiple funding sources.

Projected Summer School Costs for 2001

Based on the year 2000 summer school cost data, we estimate that the 2001 projected summer school cost for a 4-week (5 days per week) program of 5 hours per day similar to the average program provided in 2000 would be \$21.5 million for students in grades 3-8. This estimate assumes that 36% of the 140,550 students in grades 3-8 who failed one or more portions of the PACT in 2000

Summer School 2000 Expenditures by Fund



would be served by summer school in 2001 (same percentage that was served in 2000 summer school). The estimate also assumes a program operating in all 86 districts and does not include the provision of any summer school services to students in grades K-2. Recent large-scale summer school programs in both Chicago and New York conduct classes for 6 to 7 weeks. Extending the state's program to 6 weeks of instruction would cost an estimated 31.2 million dollars. The current FY2001 budget recommendation from the House Ways and Means Committee of 21 million dollars would appropriate \$149.41 for each student in grades 3-8 who failed one or more sections of the PACT in 2000 for the provision of both EAA summer school and comprehensive remediation programs.

Discussion

The study found that instructional leaders want to provide quality summer school programs to their students and have been creative in seeking sources of funding to support summer school. However, many instructional leaders acknowledge that their programs could be improved in a number of ways. One question on the survey asked instructional leaders to identify strategies that would improve the effectiveness of their summer school programs and specify the support that would be required to implement the recommended strategies.

Almost 80% of the instructional leaders identified needed strategies that would require additional funding. As one instructional leader commented: "Other funding sources combined are not enough to fund a quality summer school." Instructional leaders most frequently stated that they needed to expand the program to increase program effectiveness. They mentioned expansion in terms of total number of days, length of the instructional day, and in provision of services to K-2 students. One respondent wrote that "Our greatest difficulty is money to serve our students for a longer summer school session and to continue with comprehensive remediation during the school year. Currently we have less than \$10,000 with which to plan a 2001 summer school program." An instructional leader from one of the districts that conducted a 10 day summer program said in a recent conversation that no one in the district thought that a 10 day program was sufficient; it was simply all that they could afford to provide with available funds.

The two other strategies identified most frequently by instructional leaders were the reduction of class size and the need to attract qualified teachers for summer school. Respondents stated that summer school classes, particularly for students more than one year below grade level, should have low teacher/student ratios. Suggestions included reducing the teacher/student ratio to 1/15, 1/12, or 1/8 (for the students most in need). Recruiting qualified teachers for summer school was also a major concern. One instructional leader stated that "we had a difficult time finding teachers to teach. We paid \$3,000 but certified staff was difficult to obtain." District leaders mentioned that they needed to have sufficient funds to pay teachers at their daily rates or be able to provide incentives to attract the most effective teachers.

Instructional leaders also identified the need for pre and post testing of students to assess progress, for curriculum with demonstrated effectiveness in accelerating student learning, for manipulatives and instructional supplies, for transportation funding, and for professional development for teachers. One instructional leader said that “we need intensive training for teachers on acceleration methods/strategies for students.” All of these recommended strategies would require additional funding.

We have known for many years that students vary in the amount of learning time they need to master academic skills. Summer school programs can provide additional targeted learning time during a period of the year when some students have little exposure to academic work and experience a “summer loss” of academic skills. For these reasons, and as an alternative to student retention, school systems across the country are increasing funding for summer school programs. The present study identifies types of support that might be provided to the state’s school districts to assist them in their efforts to deliver comprehensive and effective summer school programs.

References

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