



HOW LITCAMP POSITIVELY IMPACTED STUDENTS' LITERACY & SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

SUMMER ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

The Summer Enrichment Program in the Schenectady City School District, NY serves over 1,100 students in Grades kindergarten–6.¹ This 4-week program operates during the summer months, Monday through Friday, for 10 hours per day at several Schenectady City school sites and includes a number of academic and recreational activities.

In summer 2017, the district implemented LitCamp for two hours per day² as the literacy component of the program to meet two summer learning goals: sustain students' literacy skills over the summer—a time when students have a tendency to lose some of the skills and reading achievement gains made during the previous school year; and encourage students' social-emotional learning.

In summer 2018, LitCamp was again implemented as the main literacy component of the district's Summer Enrichment Program.

What is LitCamp?

LitCamp is a summer literacy and enrichment program for students in Grades kindergarten–8. LitCamp combines reading and writing lessons and texts with an engaging summer camp approach. Through reading, writing, listening, and speaking,

LitCamp aims to strengthen students' literacy skills and affinity for books. Additionally, LitCamp builds students' social-emotional skills around what the program refers to as "the 7 strengths"—belonging, curiosity, friendship, kindness, confidence, courage, and hope—by incorporating these concepts into LitCamp texts and lessons.

DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS

Schenectady City School District in New York enrolls nearly 10,000 students in 11 elementary schools, three middle schools, and one high school. The student population is culturally and economically diverse with more than 30 languages represented³ and the district website reports that 79% of students come from economically disadvantaged homes.⁴

DISTRICT NUMBERS AT-A-GLANCE



APPROXIMATELY 10,000
PREK–12 STUDENTS



OVER 30 LANGUAGES
SPOKEN



925 TEACHERS



UNIVERSAL FREE
MEAL PROGRAMS⁵

¹ Number of students and grades served reflect summer 2018 programming. Grade corresponds to grade completed in the spring.

² LitCamp was designed for flexible implementation—providing 50 hours (20 lessons) of literacy instruction within a 4- to 8-week time frame. The district used a 4-week implementation model.

³ Retrieved from: http://www.schenectady.k12.ny.us/about_us

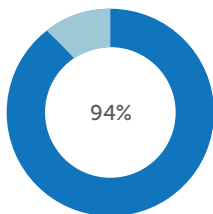
⁴ Retrieved from: <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2016&instid=800000038389>

⁵ Retrieved from: http://www.schenectady.k12.ny.us/about_us

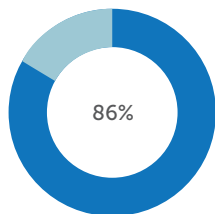
LITCAMP EVALUATION OVERVIEW

Scholastic Research & Validation partnered with RMC Research to conduct a third-party evaluation of LitCamp as it was being implemented in summer 2018 as part of the Schenectady City School District's Summer Enrichment Program. The evaluation aimed to better understand how students' reading knowledge and behaviors and attitudes toward reading changed after their participation in LitCamp, how teachers perceived LitCamp and its effects on students, and what LitCamp looked like in practice. See Exhibit 1 for statistically significant increases in students' reading behaviors and social-emotional learning. The full findings from the evaluation can be found in the research report titled, "An Evaluation of Scholastic Presents LitCamp in Schenectady City School District, NY."

EXHIBIT 1. CHANGES IN STUDENTS' READING BEHAVIORS & SEL



94% OF 5TH GRADERS
read different kinds of books after participating in LitCamp



86% OF 3RD GRADERS
had the courage to read books that might be hard to read after participating in LitCamp

Additionally, family interviews were conducted as part of the evaluation to examine the effects LitCamp had on a subsample of students and their families.

FAMILY INTERVIEW METHODS

The district and researchers were interested in how the goals of sustaining students' literacy skills and encouraging social-emotional learning over the summer extended beyond LitCamp and the Summer Enrichment Program and into the homes of students and their families.

RMC Research collaborated with site leaders at each of the four program sites to identify families interested in participating in a family interview. This case study highlights one of the interviewed family's experiences with LitCamp and how LitCamp positively benefited the literacy behaviors, attitudes, and social-emotional competencies of their children at home. The family interview included two adults and two children: one Grade 5 student and one kindergarten student. Both children were first-time Summer Enrichment Program/LitCamp participants.

LITCAMP IMPACTS LITERACY

The family reflected on several ways in which they believed LitCamp was supporting and expanding their children's reading behaviors, attitudes, and competencies. The older child articulated several ways she was learning and growing as a reader and as an individual because of LitCamp.

Parent-Observed Literacy Behaviors and Attitudes

The mother shared that her older child has always been a strong and enthusiastic reader, but since attending the Summer Enrichment Program, she noticed her speaking more about the books she read. The mother's observations were further supported by the child's own enthusiastic descriptions of the Community Lit: Camp Chats portion of LitCamp noting that "...after we read the book we would get together in groups, or they'd pair us, and then we would talk about it...and then they'd go around and ask every group what they talked about." During this activity, students had the opportunity to share with their LitCamp classmates, connect to texts, and develop their speaking, critical-thinking, and social-emotional skills. This LitCamp practice extended beyond the camp day for the older child as she felt comfortable and confident in sharing her opinions with her family about the books read during camp, building on her existing strong literacy behaviors.

The parents reported that prior to LitCamp, their younger child did not show much interest in reading, but throughout the summer, both parents noted a shift in their younger child’s phonemic awareness, reading ability, and reading engagement. The younger child did not typically read at home, but throughout the summer, the parents noticed she was gradually reading independently more at home before bedtime. LitCamp incorporates Bunk Time into all of its lessons, where students are encouraged to read independently daily for 20 minutes, a practice that may have contributed to this shift in home reading behavior.

“...after we read the book, we would get together in groups, or they’d pair us, and then we would talk about it... and then they’d go around and ask every group what they talked about.”
– Grade 5 student

Student Reflections on Choice and Access to Diverse Books

During the interview, the older child reflected on her own behaviors and attitudes toward reading. Since participating in LitCamp, she said that she started reading different kinds of books. Previously, she only read chapter books, but she discovered that she enjoys graphic novels like *Sister* and *Smile* by Raina Telgemeier. Additionally, she liked being able to choose her own books during LitCamp Bunk Time saying, “It’s fun because you get to pick what you want to read and the certain genres and the type of things that you want to read, like certain books and characters.”

Throughout LitCamp, students had access to the “site library” for the program’s Bunk Time component, which included authentic, high-interest texts for students at all reading levels and across topics.

The library also included supplemental bunk-specific⁶ book collections built around the 7 strengths to further engage students in social-emotional learning. LitCamp not only incorporates high-quality, diverse texts into its lessons, it also encourages students to engage with different types of texts during Bunk Time.

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– Grade 5 student

LITCAMP IMPACTS SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

In addition to its focus on reading skills and behaviors, LitCamp promotes students’ social-emotional skills by incorporating the 7 strengths—the social-emotional concepts of belonging, curiosity, friendship, kindness, confidence, courage, and hope—into its texts and lessons. The family reflected on the valuable impact of incorporating the 7 strengths into LitCamp during the interview.

When asked about LitCamp and the 7 strengths, the mother expressed appreciation for LitCamp’s focus on building students’ personal strengths. Both parents saw the benefits of combining social-emotional lessons with literacy instruction, describing how the stories can serve as entry points for difficult conversations. They valued these opportunities to contextualize childhood experiences in meaningful ways. “[I]f there’s characters inside of a book that come to a dilemma...it would be easier for my 10-year-old to...read it and understand it and then approach me with her questions, instead of us having to just come up with the scenario that probably would most likely not fit into her everyday life.”

⁶ Bunk is the term used for each grade-level grouping in LitCamp.

The older child provided an example of her growing understanding of the 7 strengths—specifically mentioning hope—a strength that was explored in a book she recently read. The goal of LitCamp is to help students use the 7 strengths and

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– Mother*

texts to make precisely these types of social-emotional connections and then incorporate them into their own lives.

CONCLUSION

The inclusion of LitCamp into Schenectady City School District's Summer Enrichment Program has been associated with positive student achievement and attitudinal and behavioral gains.⁷ Additionally, there is evidence that the lessons and concepts taught throughout LitCamp are transferring to students' literacy beliefs and behaviors and social-emotional competencies outside of the camp setting. Specifically, this case study highlights the impact of LitCamp on the children in one family—not only observed by the parents—but also self-identified by their older child.

⁷ Please see, "An Evaluation of Scholastic Presents LitCamp in Schenectady City School District, NY" for the full research report.

CONTACT

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