Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth

Kids with high attendance performed better in math and reading after two summers compared with students in the control group, who were not invited to participate in the programs.

These findings are correlational but very likely due to the summer learning programs. The differences in the performance between the “high attenders” and the control group are the equivalent of about 20%–25% of a year’s learning in language arts and math at this age. These benefits persisted throughout the 5th-grade school year.

The study was conducted in five school districts:

- Boston, MA
- Rochester, NY
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Dallas, TX
- Duval County, FL

The study focused on low-income students:

- 86% qualified for free or reduced price lunch
- 47% had scored at the lowest level on math or reading tests
- 29% were English-language learners

ATTENDANCE, BY THE NUMBERS

- 63% of all kids who attended in 2013 for at least one day were high attenders
- 50% high attenders (20 or more days)
- 29% low attenders (1–19 days)
- 21% no-shows (0 days)

First-ever study of the effectiveness of large-scale, voluntary, district-run, summer learning programs serving low-income elementary students began with 5,637 children.

With a limited number of slots, 3,192 were invited to participate in consecutive summer learning programs—one before 4th grade (2013) and one before 5th grade.

The remaining 2,445 children served as a control group.

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