

Executive Summary

In the summer of 2017, Big Thought supported a network of summer learning providers through an initiative called Dallas City of Learning (DCoL). By providing some financial assistance, training, curriculum and supplies, networking, transportation, and other supports, Big Thought sought to increase the likelihood that high quality programming was reaching Dallas youth throughout the summer months.

The Center on Research and Evaluation (CORE) partnered with Big Thought and DCoL partners to first determine whether the aims of the initiative were plausible and evaluable, and second, to collect some initial baseline evidence about the impacts Big Thought had on summer providers and the impacts that summer programming then had for youth.

This evaluation focuses on (1) the supports that Big Thought provided to the network of DCoL sites, (2) characteristics of those sites (namely, access to programming, and the dosage as well as quality of programming), and (3) impacts for participating youth. Multiple data sources and a mixed-methods approach to analyses was utilized to ask and answer 10 orienting evaluation questions.

While all student-level data is not yet available, moderate to strong evidence is emerging about the viability and success of the overall DCoL initiative. First, related to the overall evaluability of the intervention and the

social-emotional programming seemed to help student-adult rapport as well as generally providing more engaging programming, both of which supported program dosage via motivating students to keep coming back. Finally, art and technology materials helped quality programming overall.

3. How accessible are DCoL programs to students?

97% of DCoL programs provided during summer 2017 were free of cost and 87% of students enrolled in a program in a different zip code from their own home address. The majority of programs were provided as intended in the targeted areas of South Dallas.

4. What is the rate of and level of engagement with DCoL programs (dosage) ?

69,411 participants enrolled in 1,794 scheduled DCoL programs or events. This number represents 38,387 unique individuals who enrolled in 734 programs. Of these, 23,626 had an ID number matching Dallas ISD enrollment rosters. Over 90% of enrolled students attended only one summer program, pointing to opportunities to expand students' exposure to multiple programs in subsequent summers.

Engagement included concepts such as student excitement about coming to the program each day, how hard students tried to learn, how much they perceived students participated in a variety of meaningful activities, and whether students were interested in the things they were learning. Students, caregivers and staff had slightly different perceptions of engagement but all rated programs positively, on average.

5. What is the quality of DCoL programs?

Quality was measured using the Six Dimensions of Quality observation tool. On average, quality was basic to proficient. Two strategies were used, and Spot Observations result in systematically higher and more stable estimates of program quality than Running Records. Quality was also measured with survey self-reports. The overall impression of quality was positive; caregivers rated quality more highly than students, and program front-line staff rated program quality more highly than program lead staff.

6. What perceived value do students have about (1) their Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and (2) about their attitudes toward school and career related interests (academic growth/achievement)? [Do students perceive the DCoL programs influenced (1) their Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and (2) their attitudes towards school and career related interests (academic growth/achievement)?]

Younger DCoL participants rated their own social & emotional learning higher than their older peers; there did not appear to be meaningful differences in social & emotional ratings based on the type of program a student attended (the content focus of the program).

The opposite was true for career related interests, where older students rated their programs higher on these concepts than younger students. Older students are more likely to perceive that summer programming is ablttew1p(t)-15..7 (s)7.5 (it)16.7 (e)-17.3 (8..7 (s) (a)1.2 (t)-5.;t)-5.4 (h)0.5 g1.3 (n)005 Tw [5.4 (s)72ee

These GPA increases are small in magnitude but statistically meaningful. Differences are largest for upper elementary students; students who transitioned into 6th grade at the beginning of 2017-18 are the only group to see a decrease in average GPA.

Although statistically different, school attendance rates (days attended/days enrolled) between the 2016-17 year and the fall of 2017-18 were not meaningfully different in a practical sense; rates were averaged around 95% for both time periods. Attendance rates are strongest during the upper elementary grades, as high as 97%, and the lowest during middle school, where they dip to an average as low as 91%, which is critically close to chronic absenteeism.

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