

Summer Brain Gain 2015 Evaluation and Findings

In 2015, Metis Associates conducted a rigorous evaluation of Summer Brain Gain, a program that promotes learning and engages Club youth during summer months. In previous years, Metis assessed Summer Brain Gain to help BGCA better understand how Clubs implemented it and how stakeholders perceived it. These earlier evaluations also revealed some promising results in terms of participants' learning retention over the course of the summer.

For that reason, BGCA commissioned an evaluation aimed to assess the program's effectiveness at the level of rigor required to seek certification by the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse (WWC). This designation, if achieved, would open doors to funding opportunities that require grantees to implement evidence-based programs.

Results

Results suggest **Summer Brain Gain may be working**, particularly in math and somewhat in early literacy. Overall, members participating in Summer Brain Gain at the evaluation sites experienced **no significant losses in early literacy, math or reading**. This is an encouraging finding, because research indicates that most youth lose about two months of grade-level equivalency in math skills over the summer months, and low-income youth also lose more than two months in reading achievement.¹

In early literacy, reading and math, the evaluation did not show statistically significant differences between the sites implementing and those not implementing Summer Brain Gain. However, there was **a notable increase in math for members in the Summer Brain Gain sites**. This will enable BGCA to pursue What Works Clearinghouse certification. The WWC could establish that Summer Brain Gain "Meets WWC Standards with Reservations" as an effective summer learning intervention for math.

Another important finding: The way in which Clubs implemented Summer Brain Gain seems to have an impact on the program's effectiveness. For early elementary grades, Club-wide implementation for fewer hours per day seems more likely to yield positive effects. On the contrary, increasing the amount of time older elementary members spend in Summer Brain Gain seems to be more effective. Across all ages, offering more weeks of programming (six weeks instead of five weeks) seems to indicate stronger results.

¹ Cooper, H.; Nye, B.; Charlton, K.; Lindsay, J. and Greathouse, S., "The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A Narrative and Meta- Analytic Review," *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 66, Issue 3, 227-268 (Fall 1996), <http://rer.sagepub.com/content/66/3/227.abstract>.

Metis found statistically significant differences between evaluation Clubs implementing and not implementing Summer Brain Gain across early literacy, reading and math when they included only the subset of Clubs that implemented the program as described above. This suggests that the implementation guidelines should be revised.

Metis also found that Clubs with prior experience implementing Summer Brain Gain were more successful than Clubs that implemented Summer Brain Gain for the first time. This year's evaluation found no measurable impact on 21st Century Skills or interest in reading.

Methodology

Metis used a randomized control trial design, comparing the summer learning results of youth from treatment Clubs providing Summer Brain Gain to a control group of similar Clubs that did not run Summer Brain Gain. The 28 treatment Clubs were instructed to deliver Summer Brain Gain Club-wide for at least five weeks during the summer, three hours per day.

The 27 control Clubs were asked to refrain from offering any published math or reading curricula and to limit use of locally developed summer learning activities to no more than four hours per week. Control Clubs were provided with supplemental educational supports for their members following the conclusion of the evaluation.

Both sets of Clubs administered:

- an early literacy assessment to rising first through third graders
- reading and math assessments to rising fourth and fifth graders
- pre- and post-surveys to assess 21st Century Skills and interest in reading

Treatment Clubs also provided information about attendance and implementation fidelity.

Next Steps

The evaluation will be submitted to the *What Works Clearinghouse* for certification. WWC does not provide a timeline for its review.

In 2016, BGCA will update the implementation guidelines and improve the Summer Brain Gain curricula based what we've learned from the evaluation.