

Summer Semester

A Grant Proposal to Fund Summer School Programs[⊗]
for the State of Wyoming
October 1, 2003

Background

The 57th Legislature of the State of Wyoming requested the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) to design a grant program which could be made available to districts to fund costs associated with summer school intervention and remediation programs for children at risk of failure. The grant was to be designed as a stand-alone program separate and outside of the education block grant.

The legislature made this recommendation based on a study presented to them last year (2002) which examined the at-risk adjustment to the current funding model. This study emphasized the difficulty of determining whether or not current funding for at-risk programs was adequate, citing such problems as lack of consistent definition of adequate/inadequate student performance. It cited a great disparity across districts in the identification of eligible students and the provision of noticeably dissimilar levels of intervention and remedial programs, raising the question of whether or not supports were offered equitably to all Wyoming pupils.¹

Complicating this discussion of adequacy is the difficulty of isolating specific at-risk intervention dollars within the prototypes used by the funding model. Management Analysis and Planning (MAP) maintains the prototypes are designed with classrooms small enough to adequately compensate for an average number of at-risk students. The prototypes themselves do not fund services delivered beyond a regular school day, like before or after school tutoring, or summer school. Again, MAP maintains that the adjustment made to the model for at-risk funds should go a long way in funding these programs as well. Last year's report on the at-risk adjustment indeed found that the current adjustment, coupled with Reading Assessment and Intervention funds, came close but did not fully fund one particular district's compensatory programs (regardless of whether or not they were adequate).

A further development that obscures the question of adequacy is that, due to ever-increasing emphasis on student proficiency, districts are continually adding programs to their cadre of at-risk offerings. On the other hand, there are proposals this year to increase funding within the model via a mobility modification to the at-risk adjustment, and to incorporate the reading intervention funds into the model itself, accompanied

[⊗] Whenever the terms Summer Semester, summer school, summer programs, or summer offerings are used in this report, they should also be construed to be synonymous with and include inter-session programs for year-round schools.

by an increase. Finally, some additional federal funds are being made available to states, i.e., \$2 million this school year for a Reading First initiative.

Last year's report concluded that if the model could be supplemented by isolating and funding summer school, a common intervention and remediation offering made by most districts, perhaps the question of the level of adequate funding provided within the prototype would become less onerous. It is hoped programs funded "outside" the model would be taken into consideration in analyzing the appropriateness of reimbursement for costs associated with their targeted audiences.

As discussed last year and reiterated this year, the issue of adequacy may well rest more with program equity than program funding. Consistent with findings in other reports, the unequal identification of and levels of services delivered to students needing additional supports varied so greatly among and between the districts that policymakers and the public cannot be assured all students are exposed equally to quality educational services. Making financial assistance available to districts for summer school can help align supports with student needs through guidance in the form of grant provisions emphasizing targeted professional development, monitoring, minimum program requirements, performance evaluation, etc.

Summer School – A National Perspective

Summer school is becoming more and more commonplace in school districts across the nation as changes occur in our society and in our academic expectations. By 2000, more than one quarter of the nation's school districts required summer school attendance for students not meeting standards for promotion.² Cox Newspapers research identified that nationwide about five million students were enrolled in summer school in 1999.³ Moreover, it can be expected that demand for summer school will continue to grow in the foreseeable future. These demands are driven by the large and growing number of single-parent or two working parent households, pressures from international competitiveness of students from other countries, and the emergent national emphasis on higher academic standards and minimum competency requirements.⁴

Summer Learning Loss

In particular, recent information concerning the impact summer vacation has on learning loss has prompted schools to attempt to slow this "summer slide." Harris Cooper, Ph.D., now of Duke University, along with other colleagues, undertook a statistical analysis of thirteen different studies on summer vacation loss, synthesizing their results into a "meta-analysis." The analysis showed that on average, students lost one month of instruction over their summer vacation⁵ and that summer loss was more pronounced for math facts and spelling than for other tested skill areas. Both

math and spelling involve the acquisition of factual and procedural knowledge, which, without practice, is most susceptible to being forgotten.

Importantly, the meta-analysis also revealed substantial differences in changes in reading comprehension between middle-class and lower-income families. Some children in middle-class families actually showed summer reading gains, but children from lower-income families sustained losses. Thus, summer vacation exacerbates learning differences between socioeconomic groups, and contributes to widening the achievement gap as students progress from grade to grade.⁶

Is Summer School Effective?

Lately there has been considerable research conducted on the effect of summer learning programs. Basically, the findings note that when summer instruction is done “correctly,” it does have positive effects on student learning. Additional summer hours provide the benefit of a longer calendar for those students who need more time to meet learning goals. For some students it is often the last opportunity to avoid retention and/or accumulate enough credit hours to graduate from high school.

Some of Dr. Cooper’s findings include:

- ◆ “Overall, students completing remedial summer programs can be expected to score about one-fifth of a standard deviation higher than the control group on outcome measures.”⁷ If summer school is targeted specifically to disadvantaged students, it can help close the gap in educational attainment.
- ◆ Positive effects of summer school may diminish over time, and some students may need to take advantage of extra time in summer more than once.
- ◆ Summer programs have more decided effects when certain elements are in place, such as:
 - Small-group or individual instruction;
 - Parent involvement;
 - Monitoring of classrooms and careful scrutiny of the program to ensure instruction is delivered as prescribed.

Just released in February 2003 by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, an in-depth study of Chicago public schools’ well-known Summer Bridge program also found positive effects on student achievement. It was put in place in 1997 as an effort to end social promotion, and is one of the largest and most sustained summer programs in the country. Elementary school children attend the program for 90 hours during the summer, and middle school students go four hours a day for seven weeks,

a total of 140 hours of instruction. Approximately one third of Chicago's students attend Summer Bridge each year.

Summer Bridge has indeed been successful, particularly in short-term test score gains. Its highly structured format and mandatory attendance could contribute substantially to its success. Summer Bridge is an intensive remedial program with a prescribed curriculum aligned to the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Teachers are provided with specific lesson plans and classroom materials they are to use for student instruction. Some of the Consortium's major findings were:⁸

- ◆ Sixth and eighth grade students experienced substantial short-term test score gains, and the rate at which these scores increased was above the school year rate.
- ◆ Summer Bridge gains were uniform across demographic and achievement groups. Students benefiting most were third graders at the highest risk of failure.
- ◆ Summer school did not greatly change student learning rates during the following school year, but may have provided the extra boost that kept them from falling further behind; it kept students on track, but did not increase their learning trajectory.

Some of the most critical findings of the Consortium reflect those elements which need to be incorporated into a summer program to increase its chances of being done "correctly":⁹

- Summer programs may be more effective when teachers are familiar with the students they teach, adapting the curriculum to meet their specific and individual needs.
- Higher-achieving schools had more positive effect on student learning; teachers in those schools reported giving more attention to individual student need. Mandatory curriculum and uniform lesson plans did not rectify the variance in school quality.
- The quality of interaction between teachers and students was a distinguishing factor between the most effective and the average classroom. Students who evidenced the greatest learning gains were those whose teachers spent more time individualizing their curriculum and working with them outside of class.
- Part of the reason students reacted positively to their Summer Bridge experience was that it contrasted demonstrably from their regular school year experience. Although this different experience is positive, it is not a substitute for effective instruction during the school year.

To summarize, these two major studies in particular hold out promise for summer interventions for students who need more time to master standards. However, not all summer programs have met with success, and can be often plagued by problems of low attendance, uneven program quality, and short duration. Some have been discontinued. They can be costly and require planning and commitment, both administratively and fiscally. Thus, summer programs should be designed around elements proven efficacious and should receive considerable scrutiny and oversight to evaluate their impact.

Designing a Wyoming Model

A group of educators, administrators, and policymakers expert in educational issues was convened to design the summer school grant program. Members of the Summer School Design Team were Victoria Bachman, Annette Bohling, Bill Hardesty, Lonny Hoffman, Rae Lynn Job, Emily King, Jill Naylor-Yarger, Elaine Scott, Scott Stults, and Jeff Wasserburger. The first task of the team was to gather information on summer programs and solicit feedback from other interested parties throughout the state on what could work well in Wyoming.

A forum attended by approximately 100 participants entitled Rethinking Summer School was held in Riverton July 28, 2003 (Appendix A). Dr. Harris Cooper presented research findings on summer loss, how it affects different types of students, and how summer school can help close the achievement gap between different socioeconomic groups. Copies of his presentation are available in VHS and DVD format from the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE).

With the help of Keisha Edwards of the Northwest Regional Education Lab, forum participants identified the essential components of a successful summer program, and drafted models for the elementary and secondary levels, which were further refined the following day by the formal Summer School Design Team. Through a series of three additional meetings, the design team then formulated requirements for the summer school grant program proposed to be implemented within the state. These are included in this document as Attachment B, which describes the elements which must be met by districts before they would be eligible to receive grant funding under this proposal, now presented to the legislature.

In examining programs offered in other states, like Chicago's successful Summer Bridge, team members did see the necessity to change some inherent components of those programs to more closely reflect Wyoming's approach to teaching. For instance, the highly structured nature of Summer Bridge with its prescribed curriculum and lesson plans was probably not easily replicated here. First, Summer Bridge is offered in only three grades, while Wyoming's program is proposed to be offered K-12; secondly, the team did not want to delay the proposal to set aside the time to develop these kinds of rigorous materials; and finally, the team thought the ability of districts to design their own local programs was valuable and desirable.

To offset some of the impact not adopting a strict curricular structure could possibly have on program integrity, the team built into grant requirements some of those “correct” components which have been identified as encouraging success. These include small class sizes, minimum instructional hours, targeted professional development, the generation of individual student learning plans, and on-site classroom monitoring to assure the effectiveness of teaching and program quality.

The design team discussed the importance of systematic, ongoing program evaluation so that policymakers can make informed decisions concerning the continued support of Summer Semester. They identified the need for measuring *program quality* perceived by the users, such as information on student perception of instruction, parent observations of the program and its effect on their child, and teacher evaluation of the learning environment, student progress, and need for professional development. *Program effectiveness* should measure learning gains and sustainability. Student growth over the instructional period should be analyzed, as well as other effects such as learning gains over time for those who attended summer school versus those who did not (either parents elected not to send, or students who were very close in referring evaluative scores.) Over a three to four-year period, the graduation rates of students who did and did not attend summer school (but were eligible or close in evaluative scores) could be studied to determine if there is a long term benefit of attending Summer Semester.

Although the team realized the importance of rigorous and comprehensive program evaluation, it struggled with the transition the state was undergoing in its data management and assessment systems. Ideally, the team would like to institute an on-line growth assessment system which would give immediate feedback to teachers and program evaluators. In the meantime, until new assessment and data management systems are in place, the team suggested initiating pilot studies in selected districts to analyze the effects of Summer Semester on student learning.

Another issue considered by the design team was how to limit the size of the program so policymakers would have a clear idea of what to expect in numbers of students and program costs. If the team allowed districts to offer summer school to all students scoring basic or below basic on district, classroom, and statewide assessments, the potential eligible pool could reach well over 30 percent of enrollment. Last year’s report on existent summer programs within the state indicated districts were currently offering summer school to about 10 percent of their students.

The team thought it would be desirable to limit the size of the proposed grant program in favor of enhancing program quality, and thus capped the proposed reimbursement to 10 percent of a district’s enrollment. This *does not mean* a district cannot offer summer programs to more than 10 percent of its students. All but six districts within the state now offer summer school to their students, and currently pay for these programs with existent funds. The design team felt funds currently being

spent by districts could be redirected to expand remediation or enrichment programs at the discretion of the district.

The last detail of the proposed summer school grant program the Summer School Design Team dealt with concerned the appropriate level of funding. Appendix C of this report details these estimates, as well as provides information to policymakers on the costs of minimum offerings and/or tutoring for very small districts. Basically, it is proposed that districts meeting grant requirements be eligible to receive roughly \$500 for each student attending summer school, not to exceed 10 percent of the district's elementary or secondary enrollment. If all districts participated in the grant, the total cost of the Summer Semester grant program for the summer of 2004 would be \$4.4 million, including administrative and program evaluation costs incurred by the WDE. This \$4.4 million also provides for the Summer School Design Team to meet an additional two to three times over the next year to oversee the summer school program and to make recommendations of changes that may be needed.

Lastly it should be emphasized that members of the design team were very concerned about what they perceived to be the state's implied guarantee of proficiency to Wyoming students. The first class of high school graduates who will be held to new content standards developed in recent years is the current sophomore class who will graduate in the spring of 2006. These students began Kindergarten in 1993, and were in the fifth grade when new math and language arts standards were adopted. Many team members felt it has taken an additional two to three years to align classroom instruction with these standards, now putting these students into the seventh or eighth grade without the full benefit of this change. Particularly over the next few years, as students face graduation requirements without the benefit of standards-based instruction for their full thirteen years of public school, the team felt the additional time provided by summer programs could play a vital role in helping these students succeed. Unfortunately, no single intervention will be the "magic bullet" to student achievement, but a collection of multiple extended learning opportunities will hopefully move Wyoming students closer to attaining academic success.

Endnotes

¹ Ruth Sommers, Review of the At-risk Adjustment to the Wyoming Cost-based Block Grant Education Funding Model, Cheyenne, WY, November 2002.

² J. Matthews, "Hot Debate on Value of Summer School: Some Educators Say It Helps Skills, Others Call It Unproductive," *The Washington Post*, Washington, D.C., June 2000.

³ Harris Cooper, "Summer School: Research-based Recommendations for Policymakers," *SERVE Policy Brief*, Greensboro, NC, 2001.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ H. Cooper, B. Nye, K. Charlton, J. Lindsay, and S. Greathouse, "The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A Narrative and Meta-Analytic Review," *Review of Educational Research*, 1996.

⁶ D. R. Entwisle & K.L. Alexander, "Summer Setback: Race, Poverty, School Composition and Mathematics Achievement in the First Two Years of School," *American Sociological Review*, 1992.

⁷ Harris Cooper, "Summer School: Research-based Recommendations for Policymakers," *SERVE Policy Brief*, Greensboro, N.C., 2001.

⁸ Consortium on Chicago School Research, Ending Social Promotion: Results from Summer Bridge, Chicago, IL, February 2003.

⁹ Ibid.