The Dallas Independent School District's (Dallas ISD) Department of Summer Learning and Extended-Day Services provided summer programming for thousands of students across the district. The Thriving Minds Summer Camp, a partnership between the district and Big Thought (a non-profit organization devoted to integrating core-subject curriculum with artistic exploration), extended traditional and bilingual instruction to elementary students through core curriculum integrated with studies in the arts. The summer of 2013 marked the fourth year implementing this program. It was implemented district-wide during the summers of 2010 and 2011, scaled back to five elementary schools in 2012, and expanded to ten elementary schools in 2013 to accommodate a randomized controlled trial for third-grade students going into the fourth grade. The study is being conducted by the RAND Corporation and funded by the Wallace Foundation. The Dallas ISD provided a remedial Summer Learning Program for elementary students at nine elementary sites and eight middle school sites. Big Thought provided middle school enrichment at three campuses; Junior Players, a non-profit organization promoting creative expression particularly through drama, provided enrichment at five campuses. The High School Summer Learning Program remained similar to previous years and offered opportunities for credit recovery, test preparation, and fine arts enrichment at ten campuses. Several other enrichment programs were offered across the district, focusing on various ages and needs. These programs presented opportunities in music, dance, science, chess, and karate among other subjects.

Elementary School Summer Learning

Two elementary extended-year programs were provided by the district for summer 2013. The district partnered with Big Thought to provide the Thriving Minds Elementary Summer Camp at 10 elementary schools. These campuses were identified from an existing partnership with Big Thought for after school programming. Nine elementary schools provided the Traditional Elementary Summer Learning program and did not have an after school partnership with Big Thought. These campuses were managed by the district itself and operated Monday through Thursday from 8:00 to 12:00, while the Thriving Minds program operated Monday through Friday from 8:00 to 5:00.

Students in both programs completed coursework with certified teachers in four core subject areas: English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. At the Thriving Minds campuses, teachers teamed up with fine arts teachers and campus integration specialists to deliver an integrated curriculum in all subject areas.

Evaluation staff observed classrooms across all grade levels at seven Traditional Elementary program locations and five Thriving Minds Summer Camp locations during the first and last week of the programs, visiting 108 classrooms at both time points. Evaluators took notes in the following areas: grade level, subject, number of teachers and students, classroom setting, class lesson and instruction, and use of technology in lesson.

Some similarities between programs were found among classroom instruction, use of technology, and classroom setting. Evaluators found teachers led instruction and students worked independently in workbooks and journals among the majority of classrooms in both programs. The use of technology was not incorporated into the majority of the lessons observed. Nearly all classrooms were appropriately sized for the number of students. Somewhat surprisingly, 93.0 percent of the initial classrooms observed had sufficient supplies available to deliver the lesson. These observations were rated only on the lessons delivered, not on the lessons that could have potentially been delivered. Talking with teachers revealed that they simplified lessons so that they would not need missing supplies. Indeed, many of the lessons lacked rigor.

In nearly half of the first observations, no discipline problems were observed. This dropped to 38 percent of the classrooms during the second round of observations. Much of that decrease can be explained by the rise of moderate discipline problems as the program progressed: only 8.6 percent of the initial observations reported moderate problems while nearly one third of the observations reported moderate problems at the second time point. The nature of student activities became more passive as the summer sessions
wore on. The percentage of classrooms with students actively producing fell from 70.8 percent initially to 51.0 percent toward the end of the programs.

Approximately 4,572 students attended at least one day of the Traditional Elementary Summer Learning Program; 6,091 students attended the Thriving Minds Summer Camp. Overall, comparable proportions of students at the Thriving Minds Summer Camps and Traditional Summer Learning sites attended at least 90 percent of the instructional days (67.3% and 66.3%, respectively) even though the Thriving Minds Camp lasted five more days than the traditional summer school.

**Middle School Summer Learning**

The district’s Middle School Summer Learning program expanded to full-day services and was provided in eight conventional middle schools and LACEY, an alternative school, from June 25th to July 26th. Big Thought managed the Texas Education 21st Century Grant and provided enrichment classes in the performing arts, athletics, dance, modeling, business, and art at three sites. Junior Players provided similar services at five sites, primarily focusing on drama and the arts. Classes met Monday through Friday from 8:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

The program was offered to qualifying students in grade 6 through grade 8. Exactly 3,196 students accounted for 4,513 enrollments in 26 courses. Across all sites, 1,079 sixth, 992 seventh, and 1,125 eighth grade students enrolled and attended at least one day of the program. Z. W. Holmes and Richards Middle Schools were the two largest sites by enrollment, though the 530 students at Z. W. Holmes only accounted for 549 course enrollments.

A team of evaluators visited all eight middle schools during the first week of programming and six sites during the last week. Evaluators were unable to visit Richards and Lang Middle Schools a second time. Each evaluator used the same observation protocol as for the elementary school visits. Moderate discipline problems rose considerably as the program progressed. Only 19.3 percent of the initial observations reported classroom management problems that were moderate to significant, while exactly 59.4 percent of the observations reported moderate to severe problems during the second time point. Student activities were observed much less often during the second round: Nearly one third of the classrooms were observed not doing anything. As can be expected, the percentage of classrooms with students actively producing dropped from 64.5 to 45.9 across time points.

Of the 3,196 attending students, 2,770 were promoted to the next grade level. Of the promoted students, 973 (35%) did not meet the district requirement of attending 90 percent or more of the instructional days. The course passing rates are very similar for Big Thought and Junior Players’ sites. However the eighth grade courses at Big Thought sites reveal a dramatically larger percentage of students passed Language Arts (42.7%), Science (45.4%), and U.S. Studies (45.5%) without attending 90 percent of the instructional days than were passed at Junior Players’ sites. In the same courses at Junior Players’ sites, only 19.4, 23.1, and 21.4 percent of the students did not attend 21 days yet still passed the course.

**High School Summer Learning**

The Dallas ISD’s High School Summer Learning Program primarily provided credit recovery at 10 high school campuses and 1 alternative campus from June 25th to July 29th. Classes were held Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. The program was intended to allow ninth through twelfth grade students an opportunity to receive credit for courses not successfully completed during the 2012-13 academic year, STAAR End of Course test preparation, TAKS test preparation, and acceleration for limited English-proficient students. In order to obtain credit for a course, the student must have attended at least 90 percent of the instructional days and received a course grade of at least 70 percent.

A team of evaluators visited five high school campuses during the first and last weeks of the program. Observation protocols were the same as for elementary and middle school sites. Initially, the review classes for students retaking the **STAAR End of Course** exams were far too small to accommodate the number of students enrolled. No other classrooms were overcrowded. Most classes at both observation periods did not have discipline problems. While 22.2 percent of the classrooms observed during the first week were not involved in a lesson, that percentage shrunk to 9.5 during second observations. The percentage of classrooms with students passively receiving information grew from 18.5 to 47.6 percent.
Exactly 49 courses were offered to 3,346 high school students. The overall passing rate for the courses was 72.2 percent. The percentage of enrollments receiving a failing grade was just over 27 percent, and only 29 enrollments did not have a grade recorded.

The district offered study packets and live tutoring for students failing to meet the minimum standard on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness End of Course exams prior to retesting during July 9-13. The study packet was the minimum, mandatory option for students and was provided on Curriculum Central for campuses to freely download and print. Students who failed the relevant EOC by four or more questions or had struggled with the material in the past were strongly recommended by their home campus to enroll in a live course.

A series of paired samples t tests were conducted to evaluate whether students STAAR EOC exam scores improved from the May to July administrations. The Algebra I retesting students increased their scale score by an average of 97.87 points (see Table 1). The effect size, d, was 0.20, indicative of a small effect. Of the 317 students taking the Biology exam for a second time, the average scale score gain was 275.75 points. The results indicate a moderate effect of 0.43. Despite the large t values resulting from both Writing exam increases, the most significant increase occurred with the Reading I exam, as the results distinctly point to a medium effect.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAAR Exam</th>
<th>May M (SD)</th>
<th>July M (SD)</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algebra I</td>
<td>512 3192.87 (439.50)</td>
<td>3290.74 (204.12)</td>
<td>-4.59*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>317 3147.08 (585.90)</td>
<td>3422.83 (217.30)</td>
<td>-7.58*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading I</td>
<td>917 1656.17 (228.52)</td>
<td>1714.30 (168.08)</td>
<td>-6.70*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading II</td>
<td>341 1680.88 (253.93)</td>
<td>1825.84 (158.96)</td>
<td>-9.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing I</td>
<td>1,339 1629.93 (259.61)</td>
<td>1756.40 (158.69)</td>
<td>-17.28*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing II</td>
<td>828 1704.41 (157.19)</td>
<td>1808.60 (154.44)</td>
<td>-17.39*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.001
Note. Only three students took the U.S. History exam and are not included in the analysis.

The responsibility for accurately enrolling students for a summer learning program should fall to the students’ home schools. It is recommended that the Department of Summer Learning institute a clear and enforceable date by which home schools are required to have all recommended students enrolled. The district’s summer database did not accurately categorize students enrolled in the various programs, especially those attending one of the elementary programs. Furthermore, the reasons that students could attend a summer session need to be clearly communicated to campuses.

Observations during the last two weeks of the summer program revealed that nearly 30 percent of the observed middle school classes had no students engaged in a lesson, even though a lesson might have been delivered. During the same period, no lessons were being delivered in almost 10 percent of the classes. This is unacceptable. The number of days available to deliver instruction to students during the summer is extremely limited and therefore valuable. Furthermore, nearly all of the middle and high school students are attending the summer session because they failed a course during the regular school year: The instruction delivered during the regular school year was not sufficient for these students. In order for these struggling students to learn and achieve at higher rates, the instruction during the summer must be of higher quality than during the regular school year. As it stands, the students are expected to succeed when subjected to poorer instruction. The duty of each summer principal should be to ensure that the highest quality instruction is found in every classroom, every day.

Given the numerous reasons a student could attend summer school and the continuous emphasis on the program by the Department of Summer Learning, the total number of students attending at least one day increased markedly from the previous year at all levels. Elementary school attendance increased from 7,279 to 10,663 across both types of programs. Middle school attendance increased by 895 students from 2,301 in 2012 to 3,196 in 2013. High school attendance did not increase quite as dramatically, but still gained 227 students from 3,119 to 3,346. The evaluator supports continuing any efforts to increase participation in the summer programs.
Additional information may be obtained by consulting EA13-160-2, which can be found at http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/26344.