
SUMMER ADVENTURES IN LEARNING (ELO) Montgomery County Public Schools Rockville, Maryland

Summer Adventures in Learning, also known as Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) is a free Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) program designed to help children entering kindergarten through fourth grade improve their reading, writing, and mathematics skills. The program reinforces what children already know and will provide a head start on learning for the upcoming school year. Volunteers are critical to this program's successful implementation.

In its second year of operation, Summer Adventures in Learning (ELO) ran from July 7 through August 1, 2003, for four hours each weekday morning. The monthlong program was available at 18 Title I elementary schools located throughout Montgomery County. Bus transportation, breakfast, and lunch were provided.

Approximately five thousand students participated in the summer 2003 program. The majority of the participating students were Hispanic, followed by African-American, Asian American, and white students. More than three-fourths of the students participated in either the Free and Reduced-price Meals System or ESOL program. To provide the best instruction MCPS, we recruited some of the finest teachers. As qualified as these teachers were, however, they needed extra support to make it possible for students to have the educational opportunities they deserve.

Therefore, the program needed a great deal of volunteers. The Family Community Partnerships Unit trained over 200 volunteers in 2002. For summer 2003, the number of volunteers doubled to 400. The volunteers were members of the community, parents, high school students, college students, retired teachers, members of the business community, council members, aides/interns to congressmen, retired professors, and other retired people from various professions. It was a very diverse group.

Four two-hour training sessions were held at various locations in the county. The training covered how to work with students in a classroom setting, and it also included content training in order to familiarize the volunteers with the curriculum. The volunteers were assigned to school sites according to their preferences. Volunteers made a minimum four-hour commitment to the students, and most of them signed up for additional hours. Some volunteers signed up to come every day for the entire month. The volunteers chose the days and times that they wanted to work in a particular school. The volunteers worked with students on reading, writing, and math skills one-on-one or in groups. Family Community Partnerships Unit monitored the volunteers during the monthlong program.

According to a new study by the MCPS Office of Shared Accountability, stu-

dents who attended most, or all, of the four-week program in summer 2002 achieved, on average, higher levels of skill development in reading and mathematics in the first month of grades one, two, and three than their classmates who did not attend the program. In reading, there were modest, statistically significant benefits for students in grades one and two. Grade three was not included in this study. In mathematics, the results showed modest, statistically significant benefit for first, second, and third grade students who attended all four weeks of the program. With the exception of grade two results, the mathematics benefits were apparent across all levels of academic need. The benefits in all grades were similar across ethnic/racial groups.

The one area found to need improvement was daily attendance rates. Attendance is particularly important because the greatest benefit occurred for students who attended 16 or more days of the 20-day program. Earlier planning and recruitment, as well as an expansion of the program to include afternoon activities, may improve attendance, especially in families with childcare concerns.

Additional studies will be conducted during 2003-2004 to determine if the program's academic benefits are sustained throughout the school year. Student performance on the Maryland state assessments in grades two and three will also be studied to determine any potentially sustained academic effects.

Another evaluation showed that the program achieved two major goals: it established that an academic program of enriched

and accelerated instruction can attract a sizable portion of targeted students during the summer, as well as measurable benefits for students who attended most of the four-week schedule. These successes can be attributed to employing certified teachers, using a strong curriculum, having the support of parents and community volunteers, and benefiting from the coordination and leadership of principals and central office staff.

"The results of the study support the use of Title I funds for programs aimed at prevention and early intervention rather than just remediation of academic skills," Superintendent Jerry D. Weast said. Parents also expressed strong support for the Summer Adventures in Learning (ELO) program. Survey results of parents' satisfaction indicated positive approval, and the majority indicated that they would enroll their children again. One volunteer expressed the sentiments of many involved in this program, "I am so glad that I was able to make a difference in someone's life."

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