

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.

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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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