

SUMMER READERS-FUTURE LEADERS

DIAMOND EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE PARTNERSHIP

SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM

Research Brief

PROGRAM SUMMARY

During the summer of 2013, the Diamond Educational Excellence Partnership (DEEP) partnered with Chollas-Mead Elementary School and the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) to design and implement *Summer Readers – Future Leaders*, a community-based summer learning program. The five-week program offered 84 rising second and third graders opportunities for: reducing summer reading loss, building reading skills, increasing motivation to read, improving social-emotional development and physical health, and engaging in hands-on science activities linked to the preservation of natural resources.

DEEP partners involved in the program included:

- California Reading and Literature Project (CRLP)
- Young Audiences of San Diego
- San Diego Science Project (SDSP)
- Groundwork San Diego
- Jackie Robinson YMCA
- Malcolm X Library
- READ/San Diego
- UPforEd
- Jacobs Family Foundation
- Parker Foundation
- Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation (JCNI)

PROGRAM VISION ROOTED IN COMMUNITY NEEDS

Summer Readers-Future Leaders was part of a larger comprehensive effort of DEEP, a collaborative effort of several dozen community leaders and organizations committed to improving educational outcomes for children attending schools in the Diamond Community. DEEP's initial vision for change calls for children attending community schools to receive the support they need to transition smoothly through the early stages of the education pipeline, including entering kindergarten prepared to learn and completing third-grade able to read proficiently. In pursuit of this vision, DEEP identified three strategy areas for action:

- Building the capacity of families to support children's early literacy and social-emotional development;
- Supporting principals and teachers in their efforts to ensure high-quality teaching and learning with a focus on early literacy development and healthy social-emotional development; and
- Expanding learning opportunities and supports for children that reinforce and improve early literacy learning and healthy social-emotional skill development.

The *Summer Readers-Future Leaders* summer learning program incorporated all three strategies. Specifically, the program directly supported early literacy development by combating summer reading loss, a phenomenon linked to the achievement reading gap between children from different socio-economic groups. It enhanced teacher capacity to provide literacy instruction through training workshops and ongoing coaching. It engaged parents through a menu of nine parent-involvement activities linked to literacy and children's learning more generally. It offered students an extended opportunity beyond the school year during which literacy skills were reinforced and improved.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The program's structure and activities were designed to conform to best-practice research on effective summer learning programs. The program's nine key components are described below.

Literacy Acceleration and Enrichment: With the support of the California Reading and Literature Project, the program trained nine certificated teachers to deliver a literacy acceleration and enrichment curriculum aligned with district and Common Core standards.

Literacy Linked to the Arts: Young Audiences of San Diego's teaching artists provided students twice-weekly classes that integrated theater and dance with reading to improve both reading motivation and skills.

Science and Service Learning: Two mornings each week, students, along with their teachers, participated in experiential hands-on science learning opportunities at Groundwork San Diego's four-acre outdoor classroom, or EarthLab, located in the Chollas Creek Watershed. The San Diego Science Project trained and supported teachers in delivering a curriculum that linked science activities to literacy. UCSD undergraduate students, working under the supervision of a faculty advisor, assisted teachers and evaluated elementary school students' scientific journals. Groundwork's Green Team of local high school students volunteered their support as well.

Connecting to Community Literacy Resources: Once weekly, students and their teachers visited the Malcolm X library, where they checked out books and participated in the library's summer reading program. Both the Malcolm X Library and READ San Diego provided students with incentives for active engagement in reading. READ San Diego provided each student with six books for their home libraries.

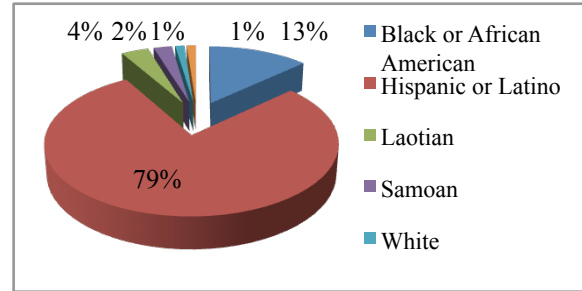
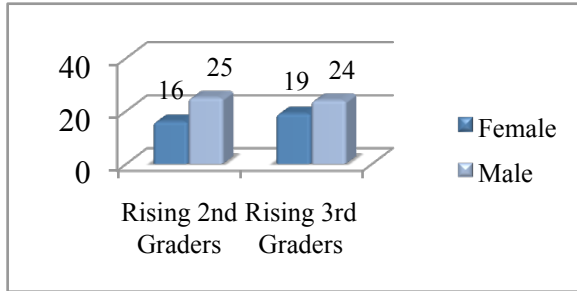
Building Strong Bodies and Character: Five afternoons per week, students participated in swim-and-gym and character development programming at the Jackie Robinson YMCA. Swim and gym included twice weekly swim lessons in addition to other games and activities. Character development included small group facilitation focused on understanding the core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility.

Family Engagement: Opportunities for engaging families in children's summer learning were woven into each program area. In lieu of a program fee, families were expected to participate in student art performances, science labs, fitness nights, and/or literacy events.

Community Engagement: DEEP convened implementing partners weekly throughout the summer to discuss program progress and challenges. Additionally, partner organizations shared their work during two monthly meetings with the full membership of DEEP. These meetings served as occasions for deepening community understanding of educational change.

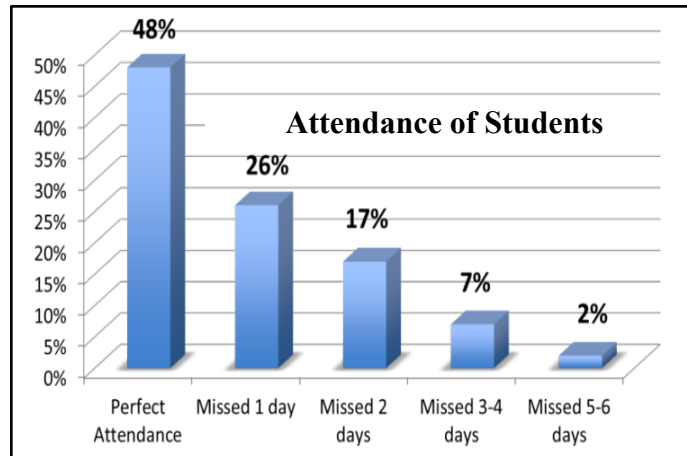
KEY OUTCOMES

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION. A total of 41 rising second graders and a total of 43 rising third graders completed the program. Twenty-five students were female, and 49 students were male. The vast majority of students were Hispanic students from non-English speaking homes.

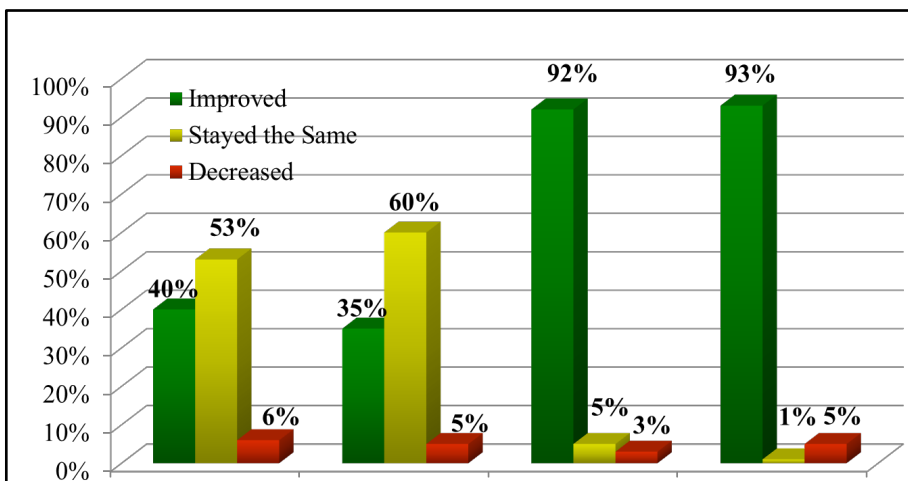


PROGRAM ATTENDANCE.

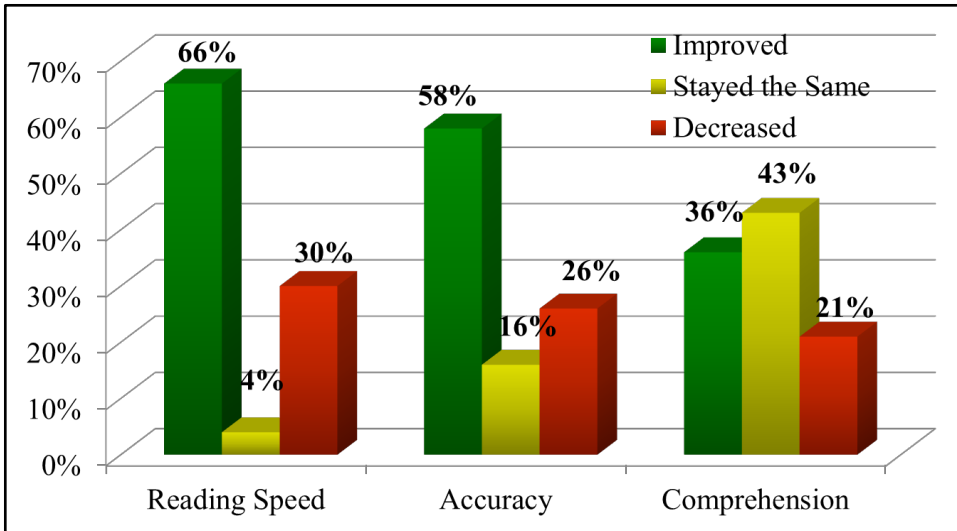
Average daily attendance in the program was 83 students, or 90% of enrolled registrants. The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) establishes 85% or above as an indicator of strong programs. Initial enrollment was 92, which dropped to 84 by the program's end, representing a retention rate of 91%. Seventy-four percent of students missed one day or less. The single highest number of absences occurred on July 5, the Friday following a holiday.



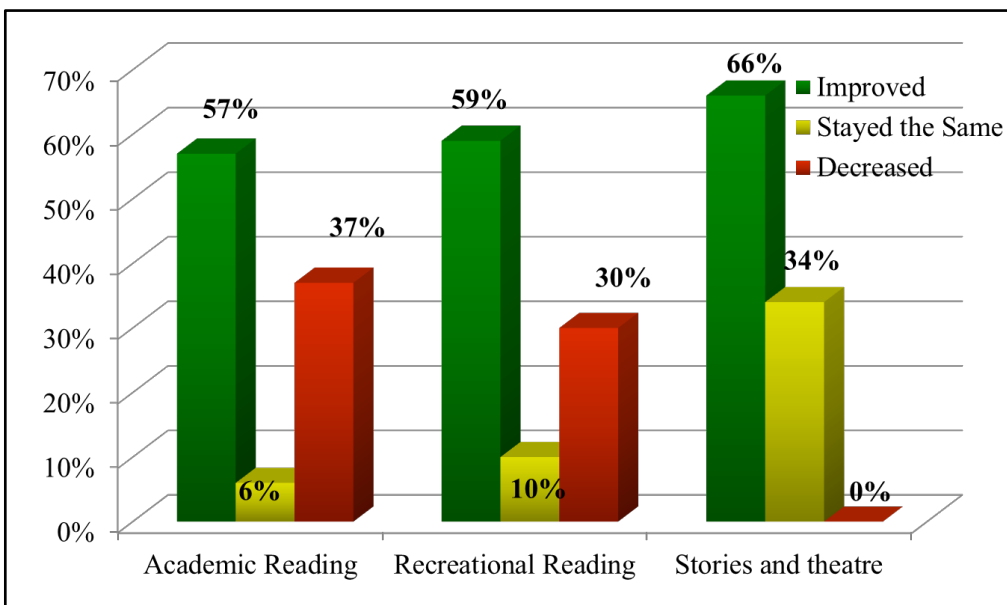
CHANGES IN READING COMPETENCY. Reading competency includes mastery of phonics, fluency, vocabulary building, and reading comprehension. Pre- and post-assessment data revealed that between 93% and 97% of students maintained or increased competency in recognizing letters, phonics patterns, and irregular words.



Between 70% and 79% of students maintained or increased their competency in reading fluency, vocabulary skills (accuracy), and comprehension.

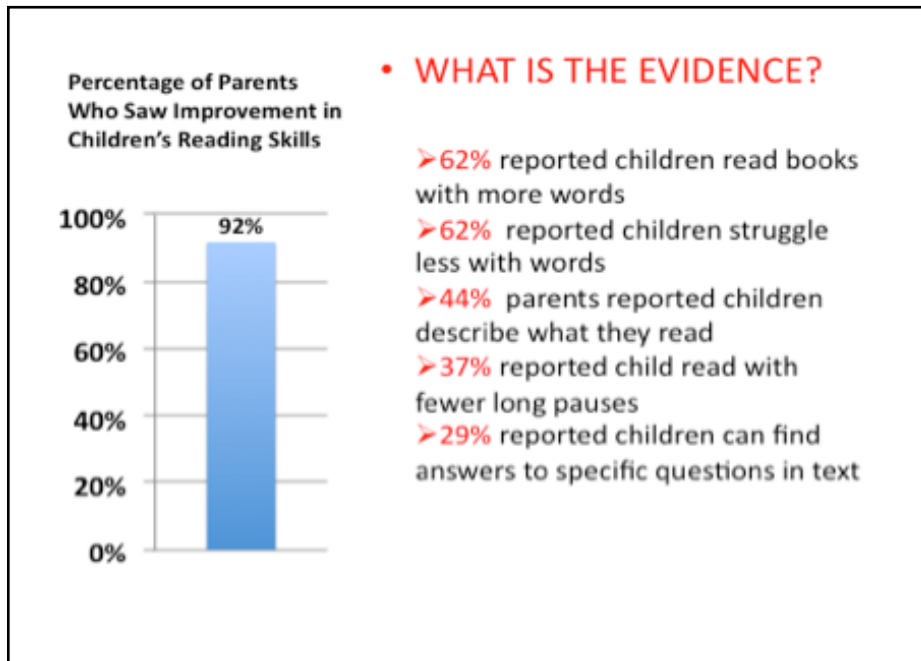


CHANGES IN MOTIVATION TO READ. Pre- and post-assessment data also revealed changes in student motivation to read. Between 63% and 69% of students either maintained or improved their motivation when it came to academic and recreational reading, respectively. Nearly a third of students experienced diminished motivation to read. One hypothesis for this outcome is that, with smaller class sizes, students who might otherwise be able to engage in reading avoidance without being noticed were held more accountable for their reading progress. Data from the Young Audiences theater programs, as represented by the stories and theater bar, revealed strong evidence of improved motivation to read.

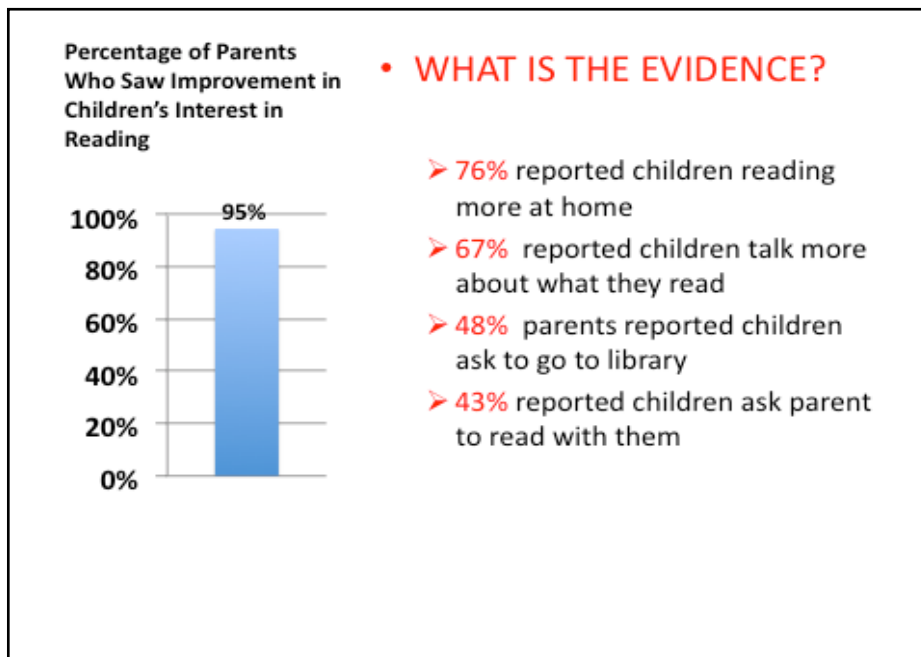


PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDREN'S READING SKILLS AND MOTIVATION

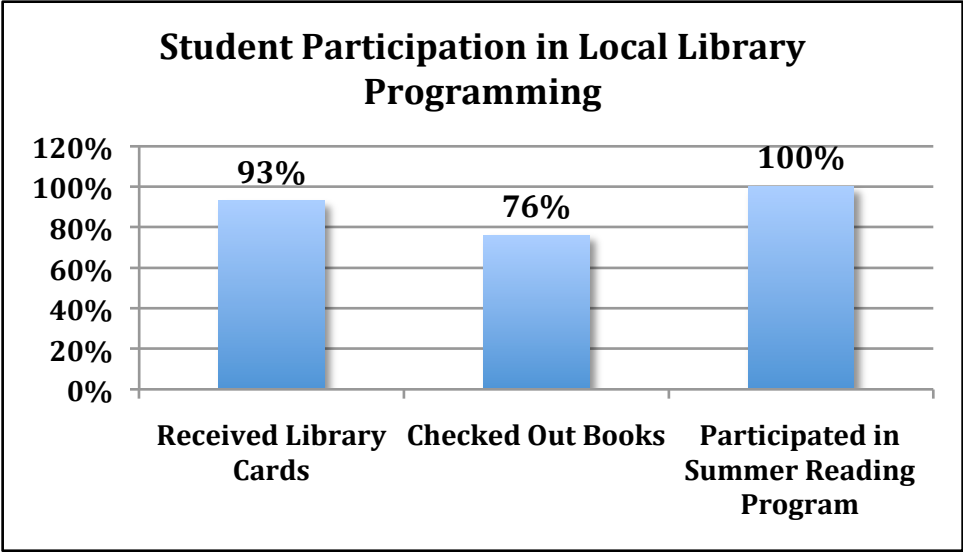
Data from surveys of parents revealed that 92% of parents witnessed improved reading competency in their children.



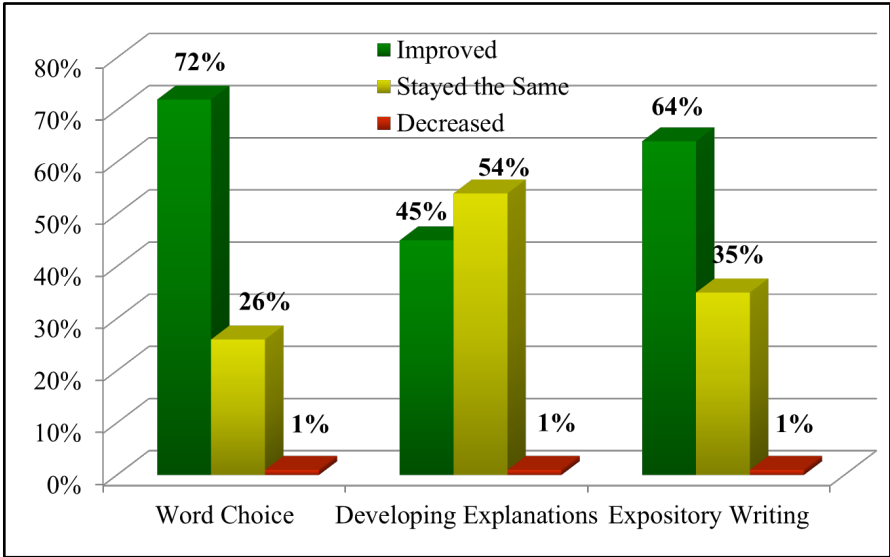
Ninety-five percent of parents reported evidence of increased motivation to read.



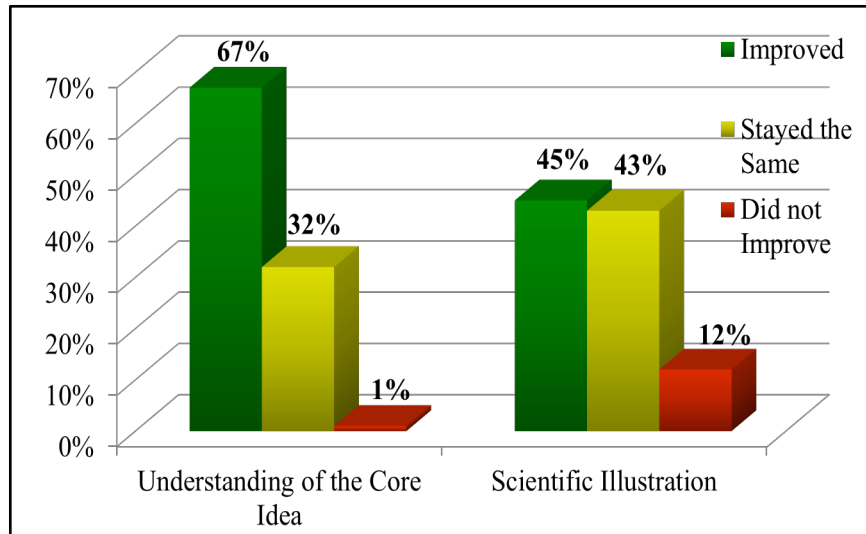
LINKS WITH LOCAL LITERACY RESOURCES. In an effort to improve reading competency and motivation, children engaged in weekly activities at the local library branch, where they received library cards, checked out books, and participated in the library’s summer reading program. Although the goal for students’ participation in each of these activities was 100%, outcome measures fell slightly short of this target in some categories (78 of the 84 students who completed the program received library cards) because a few students did not submit adequate paperwork required for library borrowing privileges. To avoid this outcome in the future, parents will be required to complete library card applications as part of program registration packets.



CHANGES IN SCIENCE LITERACY. During their twice weekly visits to the Chollas Creek Earth Lab, students were expected to show growth in written use of academic vocabulary related to science, the development of scientific explanations, expository writing, understanding of core ideas, and drawing of diagrams. Students’ notebooks were assessed with a pre- and a post-program rubric. Once again, an 80% target was set, with between 98% and 99% of students maintaining or increasing capacity in word choice, development of scientific explanations, and expository writing.



Field guides and notebooks were used to assess satisfactory understanding of two key concepts: “Understanding of the Core Idea” and “Scientific Illustrations.” Between 88% and 92% of students maintained or improved their knowledge of core ideas and their capacity to produce scientific illustrations.



CHANGES IN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP.

Students demonstrated their understanding of their role as stewards of the environment through their understanding of core ideas about the EarthLab habitats in science notebooks (see next section). They also responded to several questions related to the issue of caring for the environment in a final program survey. Ninety-nine percent of students responded positively to questions concerning their roles as stewards of the environment, exceeding the 80% target. Similarly, 100% of parents who participated in parent engagement activities at the EarthLab indicated a willingness to change their behavior in accordance with their role as stewards of the environment.

“One of the things I learned at the Earth Lab is to stop littering.”

- Student

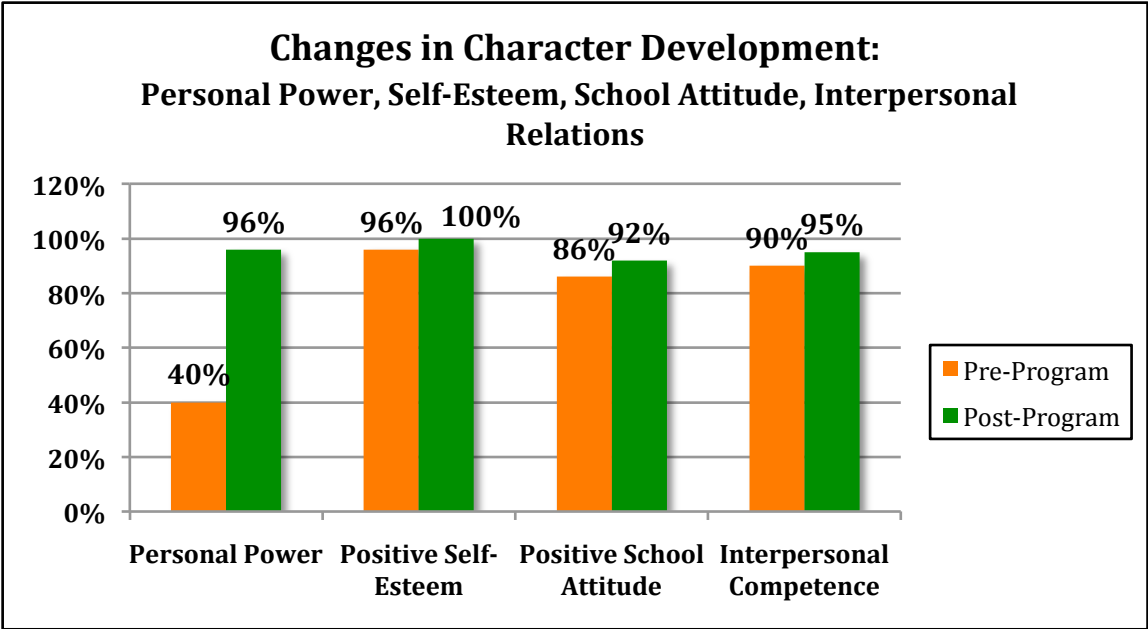
“[I will] use less water and watch what I throw out as trash and recycling.”

- Parent

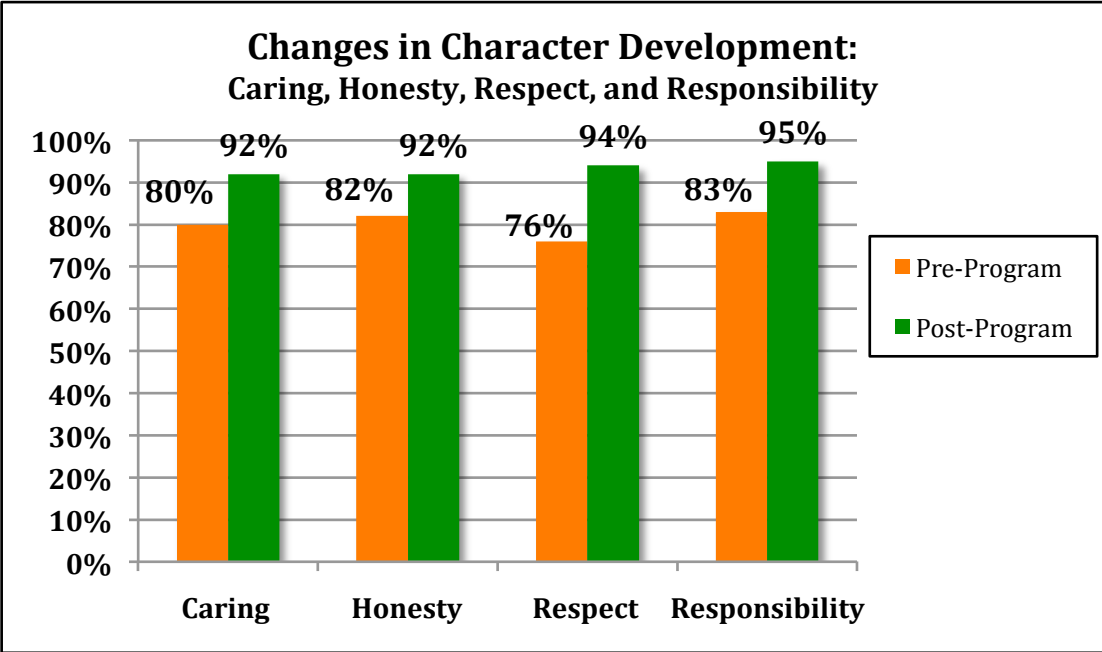
“[I will] wash the car where the soap won’t go down the sewer and have more consciousness about using chemicals at home.”

-- Parent

BUILDING STRONG BODIES AND CHARACTER AT THE YMCA. In addition to receiving a healthy lunch and engaging in regular physical activity, including two 30-minute swim lessons each week, *Summer Readers-Future Leaders* students participated in character development programs. By the end of the program, students showed growth on all indicators of strong character, with between 92% and 100% of students demonstrating attributes of personal power, positive self-esteem, positive attitudes toward school, and strong interpersonal competence.

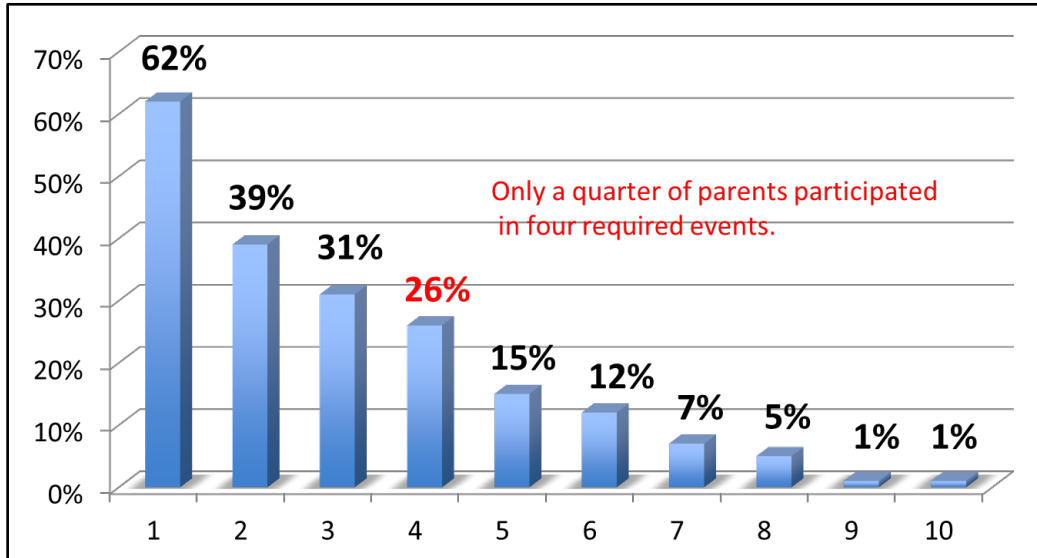


By the end of the program, between 92% and 95% of students demonstrated the attributes of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. Once again, students showed growth across all categories.

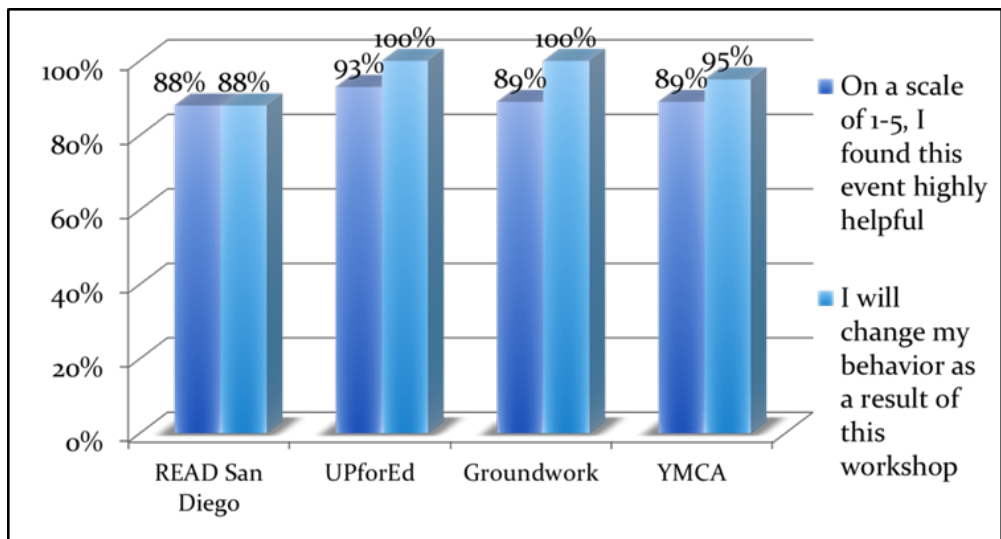


PARENT ENGAGEMENT . DEEP expected that 60% of children’s parents would attend each event. Although more than 60% of students’ parents attended a single event, only 26% of parents satisfied the requirement to attend four events.

Figure 25: Percentage of Parents Participating in One or More Events



PARENT CAPACITY-BUILDING. Of the parents who *attended* the events, the vast majority reported a high level of satisfaction with the events. Specifically, between 88%-93% of parents reported finding the event “highly helpful.” When combined with parents who found the event “helpful,” the percentage rises to 100% of parent participants reporting events to be “helpful” or “highly helpful.” Additionally, 88%-100% of parents who attended events planned to change their behavior as a result of having attended the event.



LESSONS LEARNED

Overall, all stakeholders – students, parents, teachers, administrators, and partners – reported high levels of satisfaction with the program experience. In reflecting upon the work, partners suggested a number of changes they would, ideally, implement in future programs:

- Revising the format of the orientation rally and providing parents with library card applications in their registration packets;
- Adjusting the timing, duration, and content of some of the teacher training;
- Adding field trips or other student activities to the program;
- Changing the location, time, and notification methods for parents in order to increase parent participation at events;
- Preparing partners, pre-testing surveys, and refining data collection tools to further facilitate data collection; and
- Modifying the format of the partner meetings to allow a more diverse group of program stakeholders the opportunity to attend.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The *Summer Readers-Future Leaders* summer learning program represented an unprecedented collaborative undertaking of local organizations to address the issue of summer reading loss in the Diamond Community. The program achieved or exceeded many of its ambitious targets. In those instances in which targets were not met, implementing partner organizations have explored alternative strategies for reaching them in future summers. The success of *Summer Readers-Future Leaders* is attributable to a combination of factors, including research-based design, strong principal leadership, highly professional partners, deeply committed teachers, enthusiastic parents and students, and the ongoing engagement of the larger community in understanding and supporting educational change. In addition to producing outcomes for children, the program yielded positive changes for teachers, parents, undergraduate and high school students, and partners. Teachers stretched their capacity to instruct in an outdoor classroom; families were linked more closely with such community resources as the YMCA, Malcolm X Library, and EarthLab; undergraduate students gained valuable teaching experience; and partner organizations honed their capacity to evaluate their programs more thoroughly and work collaboratively with one another. Most importantly, the program demonstrated the capacity of community partners and local schools to work side-by-side toward the common long-term goal of ensuring all children read proficiently by the end of third grade. Finally, it served as a model for the San Diego Unified School District in making the neighborhood school a provider of enriching summer experiences for children who might otherwise experience summer reading loss.

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A more extensive evaluation report of the Summer Readers-Future Leaders Program is available electronically. If you are interested in obtaining a copy, please e-mail Sandra Candler-Wafer at the following address: scandler@jacobscenter.org