

PRESS RELEASE

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Summer School Provides Gains for Low-Achieving Chicago Public School Students

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The Chicago Public School's Summer Bridge program has aided substantial numbers of low-achieving students to gain promotion to the next grade, according to a report from the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.

"We find that the Summer Bridge program has been effective in producing achievement test-score gains over the summer, especially among sixth and eighth graders," said Melissa Roderick, Associate Professor in the School of School Service Administration at the University and lead author of the report, *Ending Social Promotion: Results from Summer Bridge*. The report was co-authored by Consortium researchers Mimi Engel and Jenny Nagaoka.

The Chicago Public Schools initiated Summer Bridge in 1997 as an integral part of a program to end social promotion. More than 21,000 students in third, sixth, and eighth grades enroll in Summer Bridge every year, making it one of the largest summer school programs in the country.

Third- and sixth-grade students who do not meet test-score cutoffs are required to attend the programs three hours per day for six weeks while eighth-grade students attend four hours a day for seven weeks. Teachers use a district-prescribed curriculum that contains materials geared to questions asked on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. Chicago Public School teachers teach the classes, which have approximately 16 students in each of them.

The study found that, although the Summer Bridge program may be a useful intervention for students who are behind, it is not a substitute for effective instruction during the school year. It appears that Summer Bridge provided a one-time boost that allowed these students to narrow the gap between themselves and other low-performing students, but it did not substantially change their subsequent performance in school, wrote the report authors.

“The good news is that students tend to react positively to the support and small learning environment provided in Summer Bridge,” said Roderick. “But it’s not surprising that a six- or seven-week program wasn’t enough to transform kids.”

For the study, the Consortium researchers looked at the results of instruction during the first four years of the program, from 1997 to 2000. After surveying teachers and students and comparing test scores they found:

- Between 1997 and 2000, approximately half of the sixth and eighth graders required to attend Summer Bridge were promoted, as were 40 percent of the third graders.
- Summer Bridge produced learning gains for students at all achievement levels and demographic groups. Third graders at the highest risk of failure gained the most.
- In reading, across all three grades, students’ test scores increased almost twice as fast per week during summer as they did during the school year. Mathematics achievement growth was similar.
- Performance was better among classes in high-achieving schools and in those in which teachers knew their students.
- Students whose teachers individualized instruction and worked with students outside of class had larger learning gains.
- Students were positive about the Summer Bridge program. They reported that they worked hard.

Students were significantly more positive during the summer than during the school year about the academic environments of their classrooms and the attention they received from their teachers.

The report includes commentaries by four experts on summer school and accountability policies. One of the commentators, Geoffrey Borman, University of Wisconsin-Madison, stated that the Summer Bridge program seems to avoid the pitfalls of failed and less effective summer programs, such as a short program duration, low academic expectations, and loose organization.

Melissa Roderick, a Co-Director of the Consortium since 1996 and an Associate Professor in the School of Social Service Administration, is currently serving as the Director of the Department of Planning and Development at the Chicago Public Schools, assisting the administration in building a new planning and analytic capacity.

The University of Chicago
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Results from Summer Bridge is one in a series of reports on efforts to end social promotion in Chicago. The series will include two additional research reports.

The Consortium on Chicago School Research is an independent federation of Chicago area organizations, comprising university scholars, foundation representatives, school system officials, and reform group leaders. Founded in 1990 following the passage of the landmark 1988 Chicago School Reform Act, it conducts research on Chicago's public schools, the problems they face, and the mechanisms for improvement.

The Consortium does not argue particular policy positions.