



Evaluating the Effects of Easton's Weed and Seed Summer Nights Program on Paxinosa Elementary Students' Summer Learning Loss and Family Asset Development



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ABSTRACT

During the summer, students typically forget the material they learned in the previous school year, what is generally known as *Summer Learning Loss*. Easton Weed and Seed's 2013 Summer Nights program included a curriculum component to reduce attendees' learning loss, and this component was expanded in Summer Nights 2014. Continuing work begun as part of an honors thesis by Shannon Nitroy `14, we collected student attendance measures, surveyed families, and considered the effects of moving the program indoors to the Easton Area Community Center. These efforts will contribute to improved understanding of the program's effect, both by collecting more dimensions of information, a larger sample size, and better measurement of curriculum activities' characteristics. This presentation provides an initial characterization of the information collected followed by a summarized analysis.



Penn State Agriculture Center provided great activities with earthworms

ABOUT SUMMER NIGHTS

Summer Nights started as an effort to meet several community needs. The West Ward is an economically disadvantaged neighborhood where many children lack access to structured summer activities, transportation, and meals. There are few activities for children during the evening hours.

- Held June 23, 2014 – August 21, 2014 from 4-7 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays at the Easton Area Community Center.
- Each night included a free dinner followed by a curriculum activity and an activity presented by a community partner.
- A curriculum element designed for this year's program focused on the Search Institute's Family Assets Framework and summer learning loss.
- The Community Partners also noted their contributions to the set of assets advocated by the Search Institute for improving the quality of life for families and communities.

SURVEYS

We expanded on the research from the previous year in large part by further implementing its proposed components, including brief surveys of the children's parents or guardians – both English and Spanish speakers. We measured some key components of the Family Assets Framework, and the table below shows a summary of the questions and answers. We also collected feedback on the families' reasons for attending.

Question	Response: Always	Response: Sometimes	Response: Never
How often the family eats a meal together a day.	28	11	1
Consequences/ Rules established, if any.	28	11	1
How often the family works together to solve problems.	25	15	0
How aware the family is about people and places in the community.	20	19	1
How appreciated/ Loved/accepted they feel in their community.	24	13	3

It is interesting to see that the majority of families have positive responses. The responses may be biased toward socially acceptable answers.

ATTENDEES

The following schools were represented among the attendees. Notably, the nearest school to the program is Paxinosa Elementary. One would assume that the majority of the children attend this specific school, but the program has a wide reach to many different students in the area, including beyond the elementary school years. A sign that the program is becoming popular is that there is a variety of schools represented.

School	Number of Attendees
Easton Middle School	14
Paxinosa Elementary	11
March Elementary	10
Easton High School	9
Easton Head Start	3
Other schools with only one student	13



Several young children gather together to complete math, science, reading, and writing worksheets.



Children gather together to listen to a guest's presentation (Left: Easton dental services Right: Easton area police)

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The following organizations/foundations participated. They were asked to answer a survey indicating their coverage of components of the Search Institute's Family Assets Framework. According to the Search Institute, the more attributes youth and their families obtain, the more self-esteem, knowledge, and communication they can carry in their personal lives and education. This table indicates the components covered by each of the Summer Nights partners.

Family Assets Framework	Organizations/Foundations
Choose to Help Help Others Improved Social Responsibility	Kellyn Foundation Cops 'n' Kids Reading Room
Intelligent Choices Follow Directions Increasing Family Engagement	Lehigh Valley Youth Theater Easton Garden Fence
Expect the Best Maintaining Expectations Sense of Connecting to Community	C.A.T – Bicycle Safety Amerihealth Caritas
Adapting to Challenges Connecting to Community Student Involvement in Crime	Easton Police Department Easton Fire Department
Nurturing Relationships Establishing Routines Reduced Summer Learning Loss	Penn State Agricultural Extension Saint Bernard Therapy Dogs
Arts/Humanities Environmental and Ecology Geography	Dance/Fitness Class Heritage Day Reenactment
Civics and Government Increased Respect of Self and Others Reading, Speaking, and Listening	

A new component this year was time to do worksheets on math, reading comprehension, writing, and science exercises under Yanel Garcia's supervision. This was a surprisingly successful addition, based on the large number of children actively engaged each night and reluctant to leave the table for the community partners' events.

RESULTS AND FUTURE STUDIES

Because Summer Nights was held outdoors at Centennial Park in Easton's West Ward last year, it was difficult to accurately record attendance and to provide the curriculum. Now that the program has transitioned indoors, there was improved ability to measure participation and more time for the curriculum component of the program. There were over 50 attendees whose families were willing to be part of the study, despite potential language barriers among Spanish-speaking individuals. As evidence that the E.A.C.C can be a better environment for curriculum activities, there were more children engaged than in past years. As with the previous study, we will next turn to measuring how much the students grew academically, as measured by the school district's DIBELS examination. Our intent is to combine the scholastic measures with the family and community attributes to help Weed and Seed and the City of Easton provide foundations for students' future success.