

BELL : Middle School Summer Program



What is the community challenge?

Middle school students face developmental and social changes that can pose a variety of challenges to their academic success. Sixth to 8th graders who find themselves falling behind in subjects like reading and math may be up to three times less likely to graduate high school than classmates who are on-track to meet course requirements. Succeeding in middle school is therefore a key indicator of future success in school, work, and life.

Program At-a-Glance

Intervention: Middle School Summer Program

Subgrantee: Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL)

Intermediary: Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF)

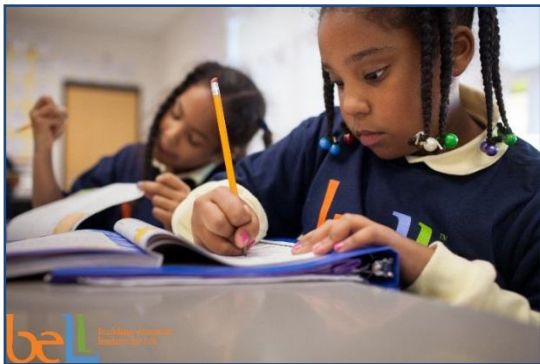
Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Population: Low-performing students grades 6-8

Communities Served: Schools throughout the U.S.

What is BELL's promising solution?

BELL's middle school program serves rising 6th through 8th grade students who are performing one to two years below grade level. The goals of the program are to increase student's literacy and math skills and to enhance their social development. BELL provides students with 6.5 hours of daily programming for approximately five weeks, five days per week.



What did the evaluation of the Middle School Summer Program find?

As a subgrantee of the Social Innovation Fund, BELL engaged an independent evaluator to conduct an evaluation of the Middle School Summer Program. The evaluation found that the program:

- showed suggestive evidence of having had a **positive impact on students' math achievement** in the fall of the next school year (although the effects were statistically inconclusive);
- showed **no effects in terms of higher reading scores** in the fall of the next school year for BELL students compared to non-BELL students; and,
- was **implemented as designed (i.e. with fidelity)** in the study districts, relative to the intended BELL middle school model and relative to national standards for summer learning programs.

One of the limitations of this study is that the margin of error around the impact findings is large, due to challenges with recruiting enough students for the evaluation. Small sample sizes in a study make it difficult to statistically detect the effects of a program, unless the effects are exceptionally large (in this instance, larger than what would be typically expected of a summer academic program). For this reason, the impact findings from the study are considered suggestive and should be used to generate hypotheses that could be more definitively tested in a future evaluation.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit nationalservice.gov/research.

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Evaluation At-a-Glance

Level of Evidence before Evaluation*: Moderate

Level of Evidence** after Evaluation: Moderate

Evaluation Designs: Implementation Evaluation; Outcomes Analysis; Impact Evaluation (Randomized Controlled Trial)

Study Population: Low-performing students who will be entering grades 6-8 in the fall, in three selected school districts

Evaluator: MDRC

* SIF-supported interventions undergo a level of evidence assessment at the point of program entry and are expected to advance that base of evidence through rigorous evaluation during the grant period.

** SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

Evaluation design, timeline and study locations

Between 2012 and 2015, Bell conducted an implementation and impact evaluation of its Middle School Summer Program. Three different school districts in which BELL operates took part in the study. Because these districts had more eligible students than the program could serve, a random assignment (i.e. lottery) model for selecting participants was used.

The report was funded in part through the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's Social Innovation Fund award.

How is BELL using the evaluation findings to improve?

BELL has used these latest findings to improve its summer learning model for middle school student participants in a number of ways. BELL also adopted a new assessment system that provides more immediate results so that teachers can quickly gain an understanding of their students and individualize their approach by the third day of program. This includes a training program that allows for greater flexibility and local customization.

BELL has adopted a new curriculum and instructional approach that is aligned with the Common Core. This new curriculum includes a focus on the social and emotional needs of participants, training staff to use a "growth mind set" instructional approach.

BELL has also created a middle school advisory committee to help think through and evaluate on-going program development. BELL continues to work with MDRC to advance an ongoing learning agenda and explore emerging questions around how summer learning programs can best serve the needs of middle school students.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the United States. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.