5-1-2002

Summer school safety net: a chance for all to achieve

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SUMMER SCHOOL SAFETY NET:

A CHANCE FOR ALL

TO ACHIEVE

by
Denise Horton

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
April 9, 2002

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved May 1, 02

Abstract

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Summer School Safety Net
2002
Dr. Ted Johnson
Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of summer school in raising the reading, writing, and mathematics achievement level of 41 "at risk" incoming third and fourth graders in a middle class suburban school district.

The study was conducted using modified case study methodology, participatory action research. A purposeful sample of forty-one students who were identified by their school Pupil Assistance Committees as being at-risk were selected as the study population. The intern collaborated with a team to design a summer school experience. She collected field notes and qualitative data to evaluate the program's effectiveness and to make recommendations for future programs. Pre and post-test instruments were selected and used to provide comparison quantitative data.

Major findings of this study are that clear focus on individual student goals, combined with careful attention to effective instructional principles yields success, even in a limited amount of instructional time.

Mini-Abstract

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A need existed to design a summer school program for at-risk students who had fallen behind in a middle- to upper middle class, standards-based school district. This study documented its implementation and effectiveness. Clear focus on goals in instruction attributed to the success of the program.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank:

Mr. Robert Sweeney, principal, mentor, and friend, who recognized my leadership potential and encouraged me to grow and develop as an educational leader. His mentorship provided the guidance, support, and latitude that enabled me to juggle the many tasks necessary to complete my degree requirements. His belief in me was unfailing. I thank him for his open door and his open heart.

Dr. Ted Johnson, for his calm manner and encouraging words, which allowed me to begin work on this project at a time when I was ready to put it on indefinite hold. Dr. Johnson taught me the meaning of persistence through hardship, and for that I am eternally grateful.

Mr. Joseph La Rocca, my editor, my dad, who always encouraged me get right to the point. Thanks, dad, for your patience, your kindness, for being able to fix anything.

Bernadette La Rocca, co-editor. Thanks, mom, for help, your intuitive good choices and for providing the foundation of values that guide me today.

Derrick, Gary Jr., and Amanda Horton, who are my inspiration and my joy,

Marc, who provided the challenge of self-reflection, friendship, and the ongoing support that enabled me to complete this work,

My students and colleagues, past and present, from whom I learn a great deal,

And others who touched my life in ways that provided inspiration and support: Particularly, Ricky Horton, Mary Sherman, Ann Beirs, Janese Leidy, Sue Wittwer, Grace & John Parente, and Larue Evans.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Oaktown Suburban School District has recently "raised the bar" by implementing standards to be met at each grade level in reading, writing, and mathematics. Standards in other subject areas are forthcoming. Effecting systemic change involves much effort and requires the support of all stakeholders; such is the magnitude of the shift to standards-based instruction. It is no easy task and it will not be accomplished in a few years time. A time-line has been drawn which allows for gradual growth toward rigorous standards in each subject area at each grade level, and at the same time, introduces changes in teaching methodology to reflect current research in best practice. The movement seeks to involve as many interested staff members as possible in committee work to write standards, benchmarks, and assessments. The standards initiative is clearly an established priority that the educational community is expected to embrace. In return, the district administration is offering support through a focused staff development plan, which includes:

- Consultants to work with all levels within the educational community in setting and achieving goals
- District colleague teachers who are available to provide in-district workshops on instructional methods supporting standards-based instruction: during the school day through use of released time, after school, and during the summer
- Focused building-level staff development during faculty meetings and in-service training days

- Building-level instructional support specialists who are available for classroom demonstration lessons

The standards movement has raised the level of expectation for both teachers and students. Curriculum and assessment alignment has begun and high expectations are set for student achievement with the belief that all children can learn. Special educational programs were designed to aid students with diagnosed difficulties in learning achieve their highest potential through placement in as unrestrictive an environment as possible. Modifications in expectation are made for these students through Individual Improvement Plans. However, other students who are expected to meet the district standards fail to achieve success. A Pupil Assistance Committee works to develop a network of support for these "at risk" students, but the pressing issue must be addressed: What should be done when a student fails to meet the standards despite every attempt by classroom teacher and support staff? At this point no definitive answer has been suggested, but the district is committed to providing every opportunity for those students to achieve success. Would additional instructional time in the summer be effective in moving students along toward grade level expectations? The answer to that question is the focus of this study.

The Oaktown Suburban Board of Education funded additional instructional time during the summer of 2001 to provide support to district students just completing second and third grade who were determined to be at risk. Programs at two district schools were to be designed to provide services for at-risk students, who were entering grades three and four, from all 12 schools. The principal of each school was charged with the task of providing a "safety net" for district students who had not met grade level standards. The principals of these schools had autonomy in creating a program that they felt would best

meet the needs of their incoming summer population. The intern is a classroom teacher at Woods Elementary School and had an opportunity to be directly involved in the planning and implementation of the summer school program there. Therefore the subject lent itself beautifully to active participatory research. The intern sought to determine if Oaktown School District's summer school program, held Woods Elementary School, was effective in raising the reading, writing, and mathematics scores of second and third grade at-risk students over the course of the summer program.

Case study methodology and action research were used to determine the program's effectiveness and resulted in a report of all student progress as well as a description of the overall effectiveness of the program to the principal of Woods Elementary School. The study serves to provide information that could be useful in further instruction of the involved students as well as in planning future summer school experiences at Woods Elementary School.

Definitions for the purpose of this study:

Summer School is defined as the instructional time period in Woods Elementary School between 9AM and 12PM Tuesdays through Thursdays, from July 10 to August 2, 2001.

Classified Student will be defined as a student who was legally determined, by a child study team, to be learning disabled.

At-risk students will be defined as non-classified students who were not performing to grade level expectations and who had received support from the instructional support specialist in reading, writing, or mathematics, during the 2000-2001 school year.

Instructional Support Specialist will be defined as a building-level professional who has the responsibility to provide support to non-classified students not performing to grade level expectations.

Pupil Assistance Committee will be defined as a group, including the principal, guidance counselor, and teachers, who provide support to classroom teachers for non-classified students who are having difficulty learning.

Limitations of the Study

This study provides information about the effectiveness of the summer school program designed specifically for the district students served at Woods Elementary School and suggests improvements that may enhance that program. As such, the results may not be generalized outside the setting.

Setting of the Study

The Oaktown School District is located in a middle to upper-middle class suburb on the east coast of the US, within the Factor D grouping. The racial population is approximately 78% White, 13% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% African-American, and 3% Hispanic. Of the twelve elementary schools in the district, only three receive Title One funding and no school has more than 6% non-English language proficient students. The population is relatively stable throughout the district with an average mobility rate of 7%. Parents are very involved in the life of the schools.

The Woods School is one of twelve elementary schools in the district and is located in a residential neighborhood in walking distance to many students. Student

population of Woods School during the regular school year is quite representative of the entire district. Students from sending schools were bussed to the setting. During the summer school period a summer recreation program was also in operation so summer school classrooms were chosen that provided distance from other activity. An air-conditioned wing was selected. Some classrooms had bathrooms and others used one in the hall across from their classroom. All rooms had drinking fountains. Furniture that was appropriate for the size of the children was brought to the classrooms prior to the start of the program.

Significance of the Study

Even the most optimistic in the educational community must admit that regardless of efforts expended, some children may not attain the goals we set. The question remains as to what will be done if a student fails to meet the standards. This study took a look at one proposed option- providing summer instructional time. Did participation in this program yield achievement gains as measured by pre and post-testing?

Program evaluation is a crucial part of continued planning. This study yields important insights into the future of support for students in the Oaktown School District, as the standards become a real "bottom-line."

Organization of the Study

The decision to provide summer support for at-risk students was supported by the board of education late in May of 2001 and was implemented in July of 2001, leaving little time for research and development. However, because of the high priority of the

endeavor, the intern embraced this opportunity for participatory action research. Clearly the project had great potential to address the needs of the at-risk population.

If improvements are to be made in the educational field, action must be taken using a research-based shared decision-making process, and must involve key stakeholders. The project design included case study of past practice and research and study of data indicating individual student need. Action research was employed as the intern participated in collaboratively defining problems and structuring and implementing solutions. The intern then collected and analyzed qualitative and quantitative data, reporting results to the principal of Woods School.

The organization of the remainder of this paper is as follows: Chapter Two presents a literature review and summary of related research. Chapter Three addresses five areas related to the research design used for the study. First is a general description of the research design. The second area addresses the development and design of the research instruments used in the study. The third part describes sample population and sampling techniques used in the study. In the fourth part the approach to data collection is presented. To conclude Chapter Three there is an explanation of how the data analysis plan was used to determine the program's effectiveness. In Chapter Four research findings are presented. In Chapter Five, conclusions are drawn, implications are asserted, and areas in need of further study are suggested. References and Appendices will follow.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE AND RELATED RESEARCH

The standards initiative is a hot topic in the educational community. The purpose of standards-based instruction is to set a minimum level of competence by developing statements that describe precisely what student must know and be able to do across all areas of study. The teacher must focus student learning on specific and well-defined goals, then evaluate whether or not a standard has been met. This is an initiative that demands accountability in a field that, many argue, is filled with variables. To those not involved in the day-to-day task of defining, implementing, and assessing standards in education, the task seems simple enough; teach this specific content and then test it. Some see learning as simple quality control and accountability. Those who work tirelessly to develop human potential understand that there are many variables that influence student achievement. Frymier and Robertson (1990) identified a number of variables related to a student's family or personal background that appear to contribute to increasing the risk of failure in school. The most often cited factors were single parent families, low socioeconomic status, minority group, limited English proficiency, low educational attainment of parents, mobility, and psychosocial factors such as family instability, family tragedy, and personal pain.

Research indicated some disturbing findings in the way educators respond to the problem. It has been found that at-risk students are frequently treated differently from their higher achieving peers. For example, they have been found to be seated farther away from the teacher, given less direct instruction, offered fewer opportunities to learn new

material, questioned primarily at the knowledge/comprehension levels, not prompted when they do not know the answer to a question, given less praise, criticized more frequently, given less feedback, interrupted more often, and given less eye contact and other nonverbal communication of attention and responsiveness (Lehr & Harris, 1988).

The term "at risk" is used to describe students who have difficulty achieving success in school. One may choose to look with low expectation at a student who seems to have a deck of unfortunate circumstances stacked against him, or one may choose to take a different perspective. Hixson (1990) defines the term *at-risk* as those students with a "continuing pattern of inadequate performance. Students are placed 'at risk' when they experience a significant mismatch between their circumstances and needs, and the capacity or willingness of the school to accept, accommodate, and respond to them in a manner that supports and enables their maximum social, emotional, and intellectual growth and development." He acknowledges the fact that there are multiple factors that influence learning outside the realm of school's reach. However, education is a "process that takes place both inside and outside the school itself and is, therefore, affected (as opposed to determined) by (a) the social and academic organization of the school, (b) the personal and background characteristics/ circumstances of students and their families, (c) the community contexts within which students, families, and schools exist, and (d) the relationship of each of these factors to the others." (1990 Hixsman and Tinzmann).

Klug (1989) notes that school leaders can influence levels of motivation by "shaping the school's instructional climate," which in turn shapes "the attitudes of teachers, students, parents, and the community at large toward education." By effectively

managing this aspect of a school's culture, principals can "increase both student and teacher motivation and indirectly impact learning gains," Klug says.

The long-range goal of Oaktown School District is to develop standards and benchmarks, and to align curriculum, instruction, staff development, resources, and assessments toward insuring that all students meet the specified standards. This goal implies continuous research and reflection among the entire educational community as students move toward success. It must involve intervention when students fail to achieve success. Intervention requires careful consideration of specific student needs and collaboration among all involved to develop a successful plan. Intervention may come in the form of Individual Improvement Plans (IEP) for students who have been classified as having special educational needs by their local Child Study Team. The IEP contains appropriate goals for those students and appropriate support is given to achieve the goals within the individual child's capability. Intervention comes most frequently for the non-classified student from the classroom teacher, who problem-solves, re-teaches and re-assesses. Intervention in the Oaktown School District may also come in the form of support from an Instructional Support Specialist. This professional is a part of the Pupil Assistance Committee, whose function is to brainstorm methods that teachers can use in the classroom to address individual learning challenges. The specialist performs a variety of functions as a support to both students and teachers. Permanent pullout grouping has been replaced by periodic needs-based group instruction and/or in-class support. Specialists offer demonstration lessons and collaboration on approaches to facilitate successful learning. The role is designed to support teachers in providing experiences

that lead to success for each child, and the emphasis is on reaching a goal rather than looking for a reason that a goal has not been met.

Research in educational practice has shed new light on how to meet student needs. "As we approach a new century, it is increasingly evident that the educational methods we have been using for the past 70 years no longer suffice. They are based on scientific assumptions about the nature of knowledge, the learning process, and differential aptitudes for learning that have been eclipsed by new discoveries. Yet changing them has been slow because the nature of educational reform in this country is largely one of tinkering with institutional arrangements. Rarely has reform penetrated the "educational core." (Resnick 1998) In order to truly change the way we think about how to educate children, Oaktown School District has embraced, as a district goal to study and implement Lauren Resnick's Principles of Learning as best practice in educational instruction. At the heart of Resnick's work is the conviction that all children can learn.

Resnick has explained nine Principles of Learning, which are elaborated on the website of the Austin Independent School District. Briefly described, they include:

- ***Organize for Effort.*** An effort-based school replaces the assumption that aptitude determines what and how much students learn with the assumption that sustained and directed effort can yield high achievement for all students. Everything is organized to evoke and support this effort. High minimum standards are set, and all students' curriculum is geared to these standards. Some students will need extra time and expert instruction to meet these expectations. Providing that time and expertise helps send the message that effort is expected and that tough problems yield to sustained work.
- ***Clear Expectations.*** If we expect all students to learn at high levels, then we need to define what we expect students to learn.
- ***Recognition of Accomplishment*** Progress points should be articulated so that, regardless of their entering abilities, all students meet real accomplishment criteria often enough to be recognized frequently.

- ***Fair and Credible Evaluations.*** Assessments must be aligned to the standards and the curriculum being studied.
- ***Academic Rigor in a Thinking Curriculum.*** Teaching must engage students in active reasoning about concepts.
- ***Accountable Talk.*** Accountable talk seriously responds to and further develops what others in the group have said. It puts forth and demands knowledge that is accurate and relevant to the issue under discussion. Accountable talk uses evidence in ways appropriate to the discipline (for example, proofs in mathematics, textual details in literature).
- ***Socializing Intelligence.*** Intelligent habits of mind are learned through the daily expectations placed on the learner. By calling on students to use the skills of intelligent thinking and accountable talk, and by holding them responsible for doing so, educators can "teach" intelligence. This is what teachers normally do with students they expect much from; it should be standard practice with all students.
- ***Self-Management of Learning***
- ***Learning as Apprenticeship.*** For many centuries, most people learned by working alongside an expert who modeled skilled practice and guided novices as they created authentic products or performances. Much of the power of apprenticeship learning can be brought into schooling through appropriate use of extended projects and presentations, and by organizing learning environments so that complex thinking and production are modeled and analyzed. (Resnick2002)

It is with a conviction that all children can learn, in spite of variables, that a summer school program was offered in the Oaktown School District to provide "at-risk" students with more time to reach the standards. Could additional time assist them in reaching set goals? What does the research suggest?

Heyns' research of summer learning (1978) found that at-risk students tend to learn at a slower rate during the summer months than during the school year, and links this finding to the effect of more influence from peers and family in a disadvantaged population. Her further analysis of summer instruction (1987) concluded that program evaluation was in order, for many were loosely designed with no clear objective. According to Cooper, while summer programs do not always enhance cognitive growth, they may prevent declines. The results of Cooper et al.'s comprehensive meta-analysis

(1996) indicated important implications on the problem known as "summer-slide." All students tend to lose more ground in math than in reading, speculatively because home environments tend to provide more opportunities to practice reading than math skills. Cooper et al. have argued that summer losses may be mediated by continuing school experiences over the summer, particularly when programs are small and instruction is individualized. Austin et al. (1972) concluded that summer programs in elementary math and reading generally promoted modest achievement gains, but found that few summer programs established clear goals that were easily evaluated. To reach goals, Levin (1991) found that accelerating student learning, rather than slowing the pace with remedial instruction, is most effective. However, evidence of effectiveness of summer programs in achieving goals has been scanty. Often it was found that summer programs had given little attention to goal setting at all. Zia (1999), in her study of the Montgomery County, Maryland summer school program, demonstrated the importance of careful evaluation to ensure that programs are being implemented as intended or they will fail to achieve their intended purposes. Instruction must be aligned with assessed outcomes. In Maryland, the goal of the program was to foster competency in problem solving, reasoning, mathematical communication, and learning strategies. Teachers in the program, however, failed to incorporate the inquiry-based practices necessary to achieve the desired results.

Ascher (1988) found that modest gains were obtained at disproportionately high costs. Some of the limitations of the summer programs reviewed by Ascher included: short duration, loose organization, little time for advanced planning, low academic

expectations, discontinuity between the summer curriculum and the regular school year curriculum, teacher fatigue, and poor attendance.

Roderick et al. (1999) studied Chicago's attempt at ending social promotion and raising achievement. Although students with low skills show great improvement through the treatment, gains made during the summer program were not sustained. After one year of a carefully designed and controlled longitudinal study of the program *Teach Baltimore*, Borman et al. (2001) pointed out that summer school is not, as it was put, an educational "silver bullet." Although early indications of the program point to a clear advantage for summer school attendees over non-attendees in school achievement, it also points out the need for taking a proactive and preventative stance in designing a quality summer school program.

Recent reviews of research on summer school show that high quality programs can make a difference in student learning (Harrington-Lueker, 2000), contrary to Levin's conclusions. Results of the research indicate programs that have a focus, whether remedial or accelerated, have a positive effect on student learning. There is substantial evidence that summer school can help bring many struggling students up to grade level and prevent loss of learning with other students (Denton, 2001; Harrington-Lueker, 2000). A study conducted by Cooper et al. (2000) points out that the most effective summer programs involve parents, remain small in size, undergo careful scrutiny, contain substantial academic components related to reading and math and coordinate summer school experiences with those that occur during the school year.

In conclusion, research seems to support providing an opportunity for students to attend school through the summer, if the program is carefully planned, organized, and

administered. Gains can be made when attention is paid to clear goal setting, careful teacher preparation, small group size, instruction directed toward individual goals, parent involvement, and careful evaluation. The next step was to design a program based on sound research principles.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The Oaktown School District has embraced the belief that all children can learn and the conviction that no child will be left behind. Staff development in the district has focused on this philosophy. Teachers have been trained in and employ the Principles of Learning, described by Lauren Resnick (1991), as best practice in addressing the needs of each individual student. For a small number of students learning presents significant obstacles and testing by the child study team is in order. Students classified as having special needs are provided special services to aid in their learning. Realistic expectations for special needs students are set on an individual basis through an Individual Improvement Plan (IEP). There are some students, however, who fail to perform to standard but who have not been determined to have special needs, as legally defined, and are therefore not eligible for modification in expectations. A Pupil Assistance Committee, consisting of an instructional support specialist, the guidance counselor, the principal, and teacher volunteers, monitors such students, termed "at-risk". The Pupil Assistance Committee works to provide support to the classroom teacher throughout the school year in developing strategies that may help at-risk students succeed.

The Oaktown District philosophy is that no child will be left behind. What happens if, at the end of the school year, the at-risk student fails to meet the grade level standards? Perhaps more time, in the form of summer instruction, would be one answer. Did providing instruction during the summer help at-risk students achieve success? The

purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the Oaktown School District's summer school program held at Woods Elementary School. Did 41 incoming third and fourth grade at-risk students from throughout the district indicate gains in reading, writing, and mathematics, after attending summer school?

Results of case study data analysis and action research were communicated to the principal of Woods School and were intended to provide useful evaluative information for planning future summer school experiences. The objective of the study was to improve the likelihood that a summer school experience at Woods School would help the at-risk students in attendance meet specific goals. The results may be of interest to those educational practitioners desiring to provide a "safety net" for students who fail to meet grade level standards in a suburban middle-class school district. However, the action research design of this study does not provide for external validity. The educational community has embraced the informed decision-making potential of action research, but understands that results are specific to a setting. Reflective practice takes into account both qualitative and quantitative research and applies methodology as appropriate. The following is a study in reflective practice.

General Description of the Research Design

This study lent itself particularly well to case study methodology, action research design. Development of the summer school program at Woods School was not limited by past practice because a program had not been in existence in the school district for quite a few years. The intern saw an opportunity to learn a great deal about program design and risk management and discussed, with the principal of Woods School, using

the development of the summer school as a research project. The building principal, who regularly practices shared leadership when appropriate, agreed to support the intern's project. As one of the summer school instructors, the intern was an active research participant. The school principal, the intern, and the other six classroom teachers who were involved in teaching summer school were involved in collaboratively designing the program within the given budget appropriated by the board of education.

Since the decision to fund summer school intervention for at-risk students had been late in coming, program research and design was completed quickly. The intern recorded the process of establishing and administering the summer school through field notes as a qualitative record for later review. Background information was gathered through an interview with the Woods School principal. After the decision was made to fund the summer school, the position was posted and teachers could apply through a letter of interest and paper interview (see Appendix A). An interview was then conducted by the summer school principal for final selection of staff. Letters of invitation had been sent out to all at-risk students from the six sending schools in the district (see Appendix A). Name, address, and phone number of all students who planned to attend the summer school were compiled by the secretaries of each sending school and sent to the district transportation department so that bus routes could be established. A copy of the student information, including bus route, was then sent to the Woods School principal. A needs assessment survey (see Appendix A) had been sent by the Woods School principal to the classroom teachers of all students who were expected to attend summer school. The Instructional Support Specialist from each sending school compiled

the needs assessment surveys and returned them to the Woods School principal. They were separated by summer school class so that summer school teachers could review information sent from each student's sending school to plan for individual learning needs.

The summer school staff met to discuss the organization of the summer school and to develop the program. Pre and post-action assessment choices were made. During the fist collaborative meeting, quantitative assessment choices were discussed. Teachers then researched available options and met again to agree upon a final selection. Student needs assessments that had been sent from each child's school were distributed to the appropriate teacher at this second meeting so that instructional planning could begin and so that goals could be set for each child. Responsibilities for preparing pre-test materials were distributed among summer school teachers.

Attention was given to the climate of the summer school. It was agreed that each teacher would make phone calls of introduction to each student's home to establish a connection with parents and to make each child feel welcome. Introductory activities were discussed and planned to help develop a sense of community for each classroom and to relax the children prior to pre-testing. The decision was made to provide a structured schedule, with time for a snack and short break outside, and to give nightly homework.

All pre-test materials were available in a central location on the first morning of summer school. Grade level teachers decided to meet informally during the week prior to opening to share ideas. The next formal meeting was set for the conclusion of the first week. The intern worked to prepare two reporting forms. The first was a pre and post-test data collection form that was used to report scores back to each student's sending

school and to provide qualitative data for this study (see Appendix B). The second was a report of student progress that went home to parents at the conclusion of the program (see Appendix C). The intern also prepared a survey (see Appendix D) based upon research and field note patterns to gather comments and suggestions from summer school teachers regarding the program.

The pre-action quantitative assessments were administered to each child on the first day of summer school. Instruction proceeded and then post-action quantitative assessments were administered to each child on the last day of summer school. Results were recorded on the appropriate form to be sent to the instructional support specialists in the students' sending schools. A narrative report noting student progress was sent home to parents and guardians of each child. Teachers filled out the post-action survey.

The duration of the study was four weeks, consisting of three hours of instruction, three days per week, for a total of 36 hours of instruction. Field notes were taken at the conclusion of each day and were stored in a notebook for decision-making purposes and for reflection in drawing conclusions. At the conclusion of the program, summer school teachers were surveyed to obtain evaluative data regarding the program.

Description of the Sampling and Sampling Techniques

All at-risk students from the five sending schools were sent a letter of invitation to attend summer school free of charge and were provided free bus transportation. In all 54 students attended the summer school. To provide for the greatest amount of data, all students were originally to be included in the sampling. However, attendance emerged as an issue. According to response from parents, some families had already made plans for

summer vacations and would miss part of summer school since the option to attend summer school was not known until late May. Because the purpose of the study was to determine if gains would be made during the course of treatment, the ability to measure gains of the study population was crucial. Teachers pre-tested on the first day of summer school and post-tested on the last, but if a student entered late or it was know that a student was ending the summer school session early, teachers pre-tested on a student's first day of attendance and post-tested on the student's last day of attendance. Unfortunately some students missed the last class without warning, so no post-test data could be collected for them. Students for whom pre and post-testing data was collected were included, yielding a purposeful sampling of for 41 students in the study population. Eighteen were fourth-grade students and 23 were third-grade students, arranged in seven classes, according to grade level. Class size ranged from six to nine students. All students were determined to be educationally at-risk by their local pupil assistance committee. However, they were not classified "special needs" by a child study team. Students attended summer school free of charge and were provided bus transportation.

Description of the Data Collection Approach

Initially, the intern met with the principal of Woods School to determine what steps had already been taken at the district level to set the stage for summer school development. The intern collected data in the form of field notes. All records thus far collected pertaining to summer school were reviewed. These included: letters of invitation that had been sent home to parents and guardians, permission slips, class lists, bus routes, teacher applications, teacher assignments, and needs assessment surveys.

Field notes were kept in a journal that detailed the unfolding process of summer school development. Each summer school teacher collected pre and post-test data on a student's first and last day of attendance in the program. The intern designed a data collection instrument on which to record student scores. Teachers were instructed to use this form to record scores and then submit completed forms to the Woods School secretary so that it could be copied for purpose of this study and sent to the student's sending school for reporting purposes. The Scott-Forseman/Addison Wesley Mathematics final quarterly test, Level 2 for incoming third graders and level 3 for incoming fourth graders, was used as a group measure to obtain baseline quantitative data regarding mathematical ability. The same test was administered post-action for comparative data. A picture prompt assessment, in which students were instructed to write a narrative story based on information in a given picture, was administered as a measure of narrative writing, pre and post action, and was scored using the New Jersey State Writing Rubric. The Rigby Benchmark Assessment, Level O for incoming third graders and Level M for incoming fourth graders, was administered pre and post-action to determine each student's level of reading comprehension. Comprehension was assessed by percentage and re-tell was assessed using an agreed-upon retell rubric to yield rubric scores. The Botell Reading Inventory was administered to each student individually as pre and post-action assessments in level of decoding words (see Appendix B for sample assessments and recording form).

In conclusion data as gathered through both qualitative and quantitative measures. An interview response, field notes, and teacher survey results would comprise the qualitative data and pre and post-test instruments would yield quantitative data.

Description of the Data Analysis Plan

Data was analyzed on an ongoing basis, throughout the project, in order to make decisions about summer school operations. Data was analyzed as a whole at the end of the project in order to draw conclusions.

Was the program effective? What was learned from this summer school experience that will enable us to provide a more effective experience for students next year? The answer required a triangulation of data. The first step was to compile and reflect upon each piece, then look at the data as a whole, considering background research throughout. As patterns emerged, conclusions were drawn about the effectiveness of the summer school program. Finally, recommendations were made about future programs.

Quantitative data was compiled in chart format (see Appendix B) by subject area for ease of examination, and was reviewed to note change. Decisions were regarding the significance of the data. Field notes and teacher survey results were reviewed, coded and mapped for emerging patterns (see Appendix D). Finally, recommendations were made for future program design.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Field notes indicated a high level of enthusiasm among summer school staff initially and a bit of frustration toward the end of the program. A frequently heard comment was that there was so much to do in so little time. Only 16 three-hour days were available to diagnose, instruct, and post-test. Not only was the planned duration of the program short, some students' programs were cut even shorter due to family vacation schedules. What gains could be made in such a limited amount of time? Reliable pre and post-action assessment were crucial to evaluation of the program. Success of the program would mean success for the children. If pre-action assessment could provide specific diagnostic information, the limited time and small class size could be optimized. That is exactly what was done. The pre-tests chosen provided valuable information that enabled implementation of individual learning plans.

Figure 1 shows the mean writing gains. On the average students gained one point on the rubric score. Teachers reported careful attention to the writing process during daily instruction. The New Jersey State Writing Rubric was used to coach students as to what was expected in a final copy. Picture prompts were used as the main tool for eliciting written narrative writing. Clearly, the goal had been set

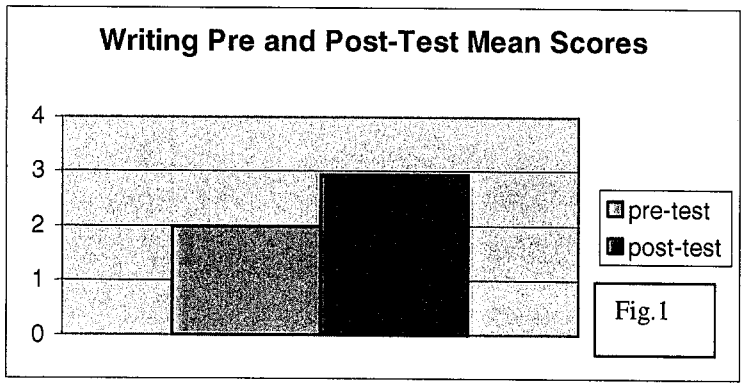

Fig.1

and expectations had been communicated to the students. Instruction focused on achieving success in responding in writing to a picture prompt. See Appendix B for a chart of all scores.

The Botell Reading Inventory was chosen as pre and post action assessments to determine the students' level of decoding. Students were shown 20 words, one at a time, to pronounce. One point was scored for each correct response. Student response and errors provided valuable diagnostic information for use in instruction. Teachers indicated that there was a limited need to focus on decoding. However, in cases where need existed, instruction was focused and successful. Numerical scoring shows that one point was gained in decoding ability, overall. More significantly, one student improved as much as four points (see Appendix B). Figure 2 indicates the mean scores obtained.

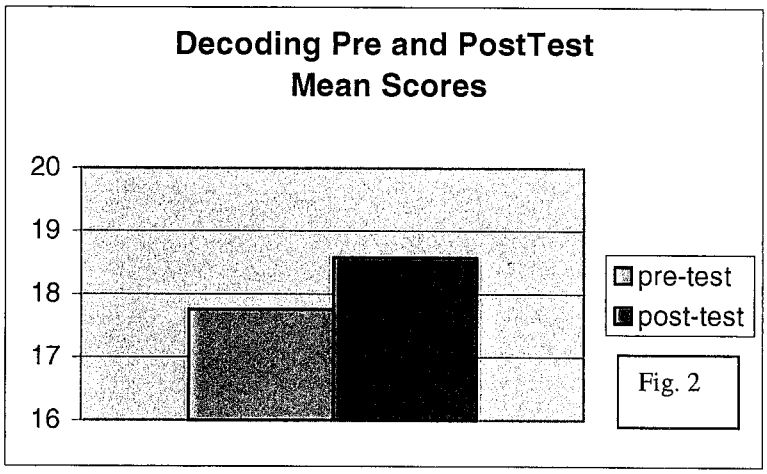

Fig. 2

The Rigby Benchmark Assessment was given pre and post action to determine the students' level of reading comprehension. Students were directed to read a passage, answer five comprehension questions, and re-tell the story in writing. Figure 3 shows gains of 20 in

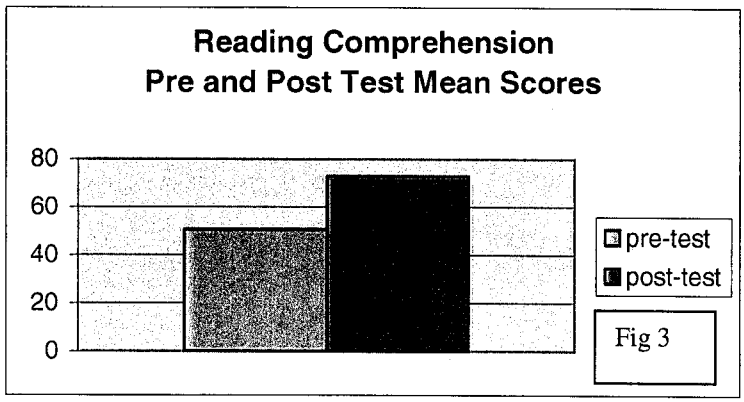

Fig 3

comprehension. Essentially this means that, on average, students answered one more question correctly on the post- test than on the pre-test, but the gain is significant because there were only 5 comprehension questions. Teachers focused instruction on strategies to improve comprehension that include looking back in a passage for evidence, self-monitoring for meaning and re-reading if necessary, and answering a question completely. The re-telling component, which is a particularly rich information source about students' ability to organize thoughts, was a valuable diagnostic tool. It provided a beginning point on which to build instruction. Although it was valuable to the teachers, it did not yield reliable scores for use in this study. Teachers reported that they were not familiar enough with the re-tell rubric to provide consistent results.

The Scott-Foresman/Addison Wesley Mathematics final quarterly tests for each grade level was used as pre and post measures of mathematical achievement. They provided an item analysis (see Appendix B) of errors with reference to specific materials to be used for re-teaching, practice, and further assessment. That feature was particularly helpful in planning for individual needs and for assigning homework targeted specifically to strengthen students' weaknesses. It also proved very helpful as assignments to send along on vacation when families requested work. One teacher shared a method of record keeping that facilitated grouping students with similar needs. Gains in Math were most impressive, nearly fifteen percentage points.

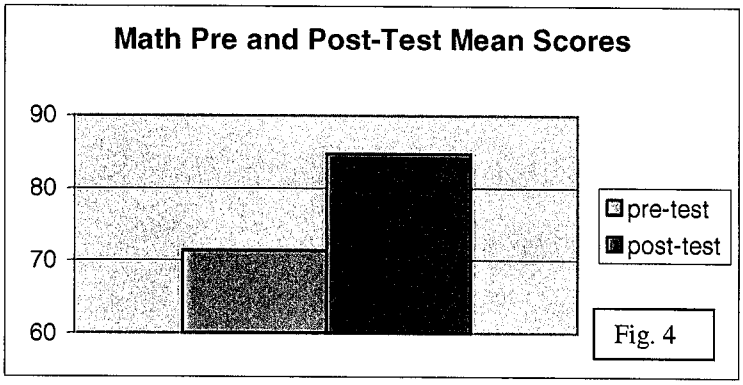

Fig. 4

Teachers were extremely pleased with the results of testing although they indicated more time for instruction as their number one recommendation for future programs. Patterns in field notes emerged in several categories that were included in designing the teacher survey instrument (see Appendix D). In the results organization was cited as excellent. Teachers indicated that they were particularly impressed with how smoothly day to day operations proceeded, considering that the program had been organized very quickly. It was noted that air conditioning added to the comfort of the facility. Clarity of goals was rated as good. Teachers felt they were able to set attainable goals for individual students, but were frustrated by lack of time to meet all needs. School climate was noted as excellent. Responses indicated that a true sense of community had emerged including collaboration among staff, parent involvement, and student level of comfort. Testing materials were rated "good" and comments indicated a desire to look further into materials for reading assessment. Teachers rated staff commitment level as excellent and noted that collaboration was very satisfying.

A review of field notes indicated high levels of motivation among staff from the onset of the project. According to the initial interview with the school principal, selection of staff was extremely important to the success of the program. The paper interview was successful in communicating a level of expectation to the applicants (see Appendix A). Careful review of the written responses and then an interview with those chosen from qualified candidates yielded selection of an extremely well qualified staff, trained in and committed to district initiatives.

Teachers very obviously worked toward success of the program, as indicated by their willingness to research and share materials and ideas. Teacher evaluation,

performed by the principal in narrative fashion, communicated the level of expected professionalism and academic rigor during the program. Results of the evaluation indicated that the teaching staff was excellent, as had been predicted by the principal. Instruction was aligned with district standards and materials were consistent with those that the students used in the regular classrooms. Parents were supportive in that they often requested that work be sent along with students who had to be away due to vacation schedules. Homework was regularly completed as assigned. The staff was pleased that time and attention had been given to creating a feeling of community business among the students. Attention to climate was evident in the creation of a summer school "family tree" – a hall display to which each student contributed. Everyone involved was successful in creating an environment of focused instruction that worked in raising levels of achievement in all areas and at the same time was warm and comfortable for all.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

Clearly the summer school program at Woods Elementary School was successful in raising the reading, writing, and mathematics scores of the students, as pre and post-test scores indicate. Significant gains were made in reading, writing and mathematics, despite the short duration of the program. Results were initially surprising but were consistent with research findings that place heavy emphasis on program organization and goals as indicators of successful summer school programs.

A combination of factors can be seen as contributing to the success of the program. Organization appears to be the most significant factor. The Oaktown School District has communicated its commitment to helping all students learn. Staff development opportunities and program development were well underway to support this goal. In funding the summer program the district took still another step toward meeting the needs of at risk students. The leadership and teachers involved in the project were committed, in response, to making this step work. From inception to conclusion, the project was a model of clear focus and collaboration. Student achievement was the goal and working together was the answer. Leadership in attention to detail yielded smooth program operation and management of records and facility were delegated appropriately. All necessary paperwork and furniture were in place prior to entrance of students. The quality work of those responsible for what may seem trivial cannot be underestimated. The program was clearly organized for effort.

Quality instruction was yet another factor. The Woods School Principal set the stage for shared decision-making. He communicated trust in his chosen staff that led to a high level of participation and commitment. The summer school teaching staff had a clear focus on the goals of the program and the needs of the students. Teachers, trained in best practice through district workshops, proved their skill in facilitating learning, not simply in teaching.

Class sizes were small. Individual needs were assessed and realistic goals were set and communicated to each student. Expectations were clear. Teachers worked initially to develop a warm classroom community that they knew would facilitate trust and student support for each other. Work progressed toward attainment of district standards. Accomplishments toward goals were celebrated.

Contact with parents (see Appendix C) was successful in eliciting support. Students and parents perceived summer school as the support it was designed to be rather than as a punishment for failure. All involved collaborated with a focus on student achievement.

The results of this study imply that a summer program of longer duration in this setting would increase the number of goals that could be set for and achieved by each child. Although students made gains, they remain behind in skills and some still do not meet grade level standards. Earlier notice to parents about the availability of the program would most likely have increased attendance and participation.

Research on summer programs indicated a clear need for organization and focus. The results of this study indicate that with attention to such details success can be attained in this setting that was one of support and focused dedication to achievement.

Summer programs in this setting are one solution to helping students achieve success. Perhaps students in the district would benefit from additional high-quality focused instructional time before or after school, as well. It is recommended that creative means to provide this time be considered.

Will gains made during summer school be maintained? The question is a topic of concern to the intern and one recommended for further study. It would be interesting to follow the progress of these students as they continue into third and fourth grade, and beyond. Are they at grade level according to Math and reading quarterly tests?

The standards movement is a one that is filled with emotion throughout the country. It is easy to cite theory in best practice, but attainment of goals requires more. Educators want to do the best for their students, but are often frustrated by lack of time, resources, organizational and parental support, and/or energy to meet the needs of large classes of students with individual needs. Teachers often feel pressured and blamed by those who point to simple solutions. One must remember that this study took place in a setting of support and focused dedication to achievement. All children can learn, indeed, however some students require more time and more support to meet standards. Needs must be assessed on an individual basis. Results of this study could not be replicated in a large-group setting or in settings where focus and support are minimal. From an inside view, the intern witnessed the time, dedication, and effort expended by highly trained individuals and saw concerted support throughout the district that led to gains in the summer school population studied.

The experience of this project provided an opportunity in leadership as a reflective practitioner. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium: Standards for School Leaders lists standards for school leaders to attain. Knowledge, disposition, and performance indicators are listed for each standard. In reflection upon these standards, the intern gained experience as a leader who has knowledge and understanding of applied learning and motivational theories. She gained experience in curriculum design, implementation, evaluation, and refinement. The project enabled reflection on principles of effective instruction, measurement, evaluation, and assessment strategies. The intern also grew as a leader who is committed to the belief that all students can learn, and that students learn in a variety of ways. Through this project she engaged in activities that ensured that barriers to student learning were identified, clarified, and addressed and that diversity was considered in developing learning experiences. She participated in a culture of high expectations for administrative, student, and staff performance, and saw student and staff accomplishments recognized and celebrated. Through this experience the intern saw that multiple opportunities to learn were available to all students, and that the program was organized and aligned for success. Most importantly, the intern continues to believe that learning is a life-long endeavor.

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Appendix A

Records Reviewed Prior to Study

To: _____

School : _____

From : Human Resources Department

Date: June 18, 2001

Re: Elementary Summer School

Thank you for your interest in the Elementary Student Support Summer School. As you are aware, this program was developed at a very late date with tight deadlines due to the close of school. Please respond to the three questions below and respond via fax by noon on 6/20/01. Thank you, once again, for your interest in helping our children.

1. Please list your skills, experiences, background, knowledge, etc. in working with at-risk children. Are there any special skills or knowledge that you possess which will enhance your candidacy? E.g. Math Their Way training, guided reading training, Reading Recovery, etc.

2. Why would you like to work with at-risk children this summer in the Elementary Student Support Summer School Program?

3. Why will we know at the end of this summer school program that we made the correct selection in having you participate as a teacher in the Elementary Student Support Summer School Program?

Public Schools

School,

June 1, 2001

Dear Parents/Guardians:

In an attempt to insure your child's success in meeting the Public School's standards, it is anticipated that the school district will offer a summer program for children identified as needing extra support in language arts (reading, writing, etc.) and/or math. We are writing to survey your interest in having your child participate in this program.

The proposed start date of this program is Tuesday, July 10, 2001, with an ending date of Thursday, August 2, 2001. The program will be held three days each week on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM. Transportation to and from school must be provided by the parent/guardian. If we have sufficient enrollment, the program will be held here at . Otherwise, the programs between nearby schools may have to be combined.

There will be no cost for this program, but a commitment to attend all four weeks of the program is expected. Please return the attached tear off below by Friday, June 8th. Also, please note that this program will be held pending Board of Education approval. You will be notified as soon as possible concerning your child's participation in this program. I will provide you with more details as they become available. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Student: _____ Grade: _____

Name Parent/Guardian: _____ Date: _____

_____ I am interested in having my child participate in this program.

_____ I am not interested in having my child participate.

Signature Parent/Guardian: _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO SCHOOL BY FRIDAY, JUNE 8th. THANK YOU.

TO: _____

FROM: _____

DATE: *June 15, 2001*

Re: *ELEMENTARY STUDENT SUPPORT SUMMER SCHOOL*

The student listed below will participate in the Elementary Student Support Summer School program. We need your input to properly plan for this child's summer program. Please complete the information requested below and return to me by Wednesday, June 20th. Thank you for your assistance.

NAME OF STUDENT _____ *GRADE* _____
(Please Print)

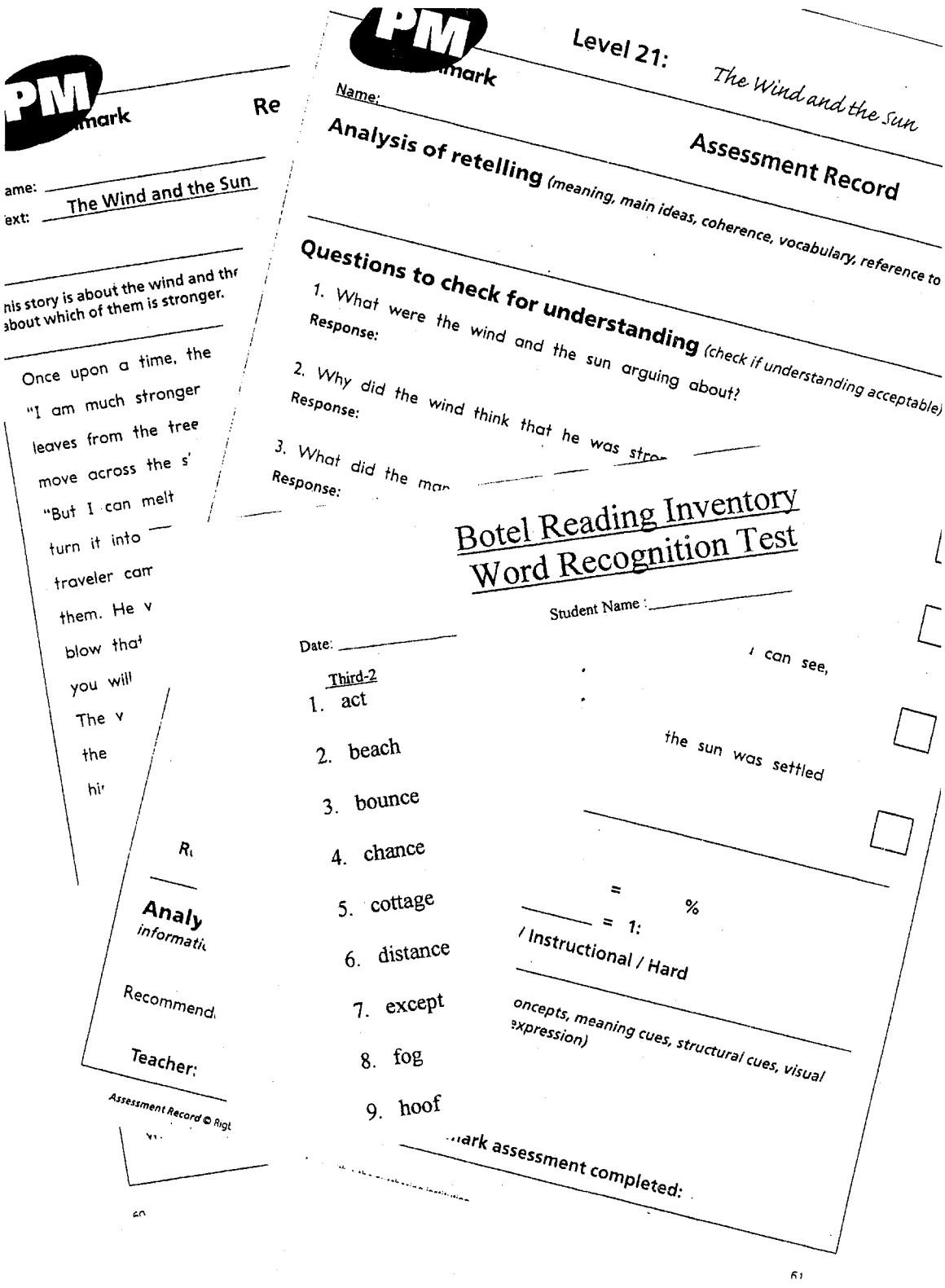
STUDENT NEEDS		
READING	WRITING	MATH

Appendix B

Testing and Recording Instruments

STUDENT WRITING RUBRIC GRADES 3-5

SCORE	1	2	3	4	5	6
Content and Organization	• I did not write an opening or closing	• I wrote an opening or a closing	• I wrote an opening or a closing	• I wrote an opening and a closing	• I wrote an interesting opening and closing	• I wrote a creative opening and closing
	• I wrote a little on the topic • I did not stay focused on my topic	• Some of my sentences told about the topic • Some of my sentences were off the topic	• Most of my sentences told about the topic	• All	• All of my sentences clearly related to opic loped my main ith examples, easons and	• All my sentences have a clear focus on the topic • I strongly supported my topic • I developed my ideas fully by using appropriate examples, reasons, details and explanations
	• I did not plan • My ideas are not organized • Some of my ideas do fit	• I or				• My ideas flow logically from one to the other • I was successful in trying something new in my writing
	• I used no ex reasons, details explanations					fective and ails
Usage	• I made many grammar mistakes				few stakes	• I made very few or no grammar mistakes
Sentence Construction	• Some sentences are incomplete or run-ons • Some sentences do not make sense	• Sc inco • Many start the		make	sed different kinds of sentences that made my writing interesting • Most of my sentences are complete and correct	• I used a variety of sentences, chose strong words and created vivid images. • My sentences are complete and correct.
Mechanics	• I made many spelling, capitalization and punctuation errors that made my writing difficult to understand	• I made m capitalization punctuation er		• I made a few mistakes in spelling, capitalization or punctuation, but they do not affect my meaning.	• I made very few mistakes in spelling, capitalization or punctuation.	• I made very few, or no mistakes in spelling, capitalization or punctuation.



PM mark

Re

ame:

ext: The Wind and the Sun

his story is about the wind and thr
bout which of them is stronger.

Once upon a time, the
"I am much stronger
leaves from the tree
move across the s'
"But I can melt
turn it into
traveler can
them. He v
blow that
you will
The v
the
hi'

R

Analy
informati

Recommend

Teacher:

Assessment Record © Rigt

60

PM mark

Level 21: The Wind and the Sun

Name:

Assessment Record

Analysis of retelling *(meaning, main ideas, coherence, vocabulary, reference to*

Questions to check for understanding *(check if understanding acceptable)*

1. What were the wind and the sun arguing about?
Response:

2. Why did the wind think that he was stro
Response:

3. What did the mar
Response:

Botel Reading Inventory
Word Recognition Test

Student Name:

Date:

Third-2

1. act
2. beach
3. bounce
4. chance
5. cottage
6. distance
7. except
8. fog
9. hoof

I can see,

the sun was settled

= %

= 1:

/ Instructional / Hard

oncepts, meaning cues, structural cues, visual
expression)

mark assessment completed:

61

Item Analysis for Individual Assessment

Grade 3 Quarterly Test, Chapters 1–12

Student Name _____

See page 327 for scoring.

Place a ✔ in the column if the student has answered some or all of the questions correctly.

Objectives	Lesson	Quarterly Test Chapters 1–12: Test Item	Quarterly Test Chapters 1–12: ✔ if correct	Review Options in Supplements: Practice (pages)	Review Options in Supplements: Reteaching (pages)
Read a bar graph.	1-2	1		2	2
Solve problems by using a guide.	1-4	1		4	4
Read and write numbers in the hundreds.	2-1	2		15	12
Compare numbers	2-6	3		21	17
Find ending time and the time between events.	2-13	4		29	24
Use rounding to estimate sums.	3-4	5		37	30
Add 2-digit numbers.	3-6	6		40	32
Add 3-digit numbers.	3-7			41	33
Find the sum of more than 2 addends.				43	35
Add money amounts				50	41
Subtract 2-digit numbers.				62	50
Subtract 3-digit numbers.				64	52
Subtract with two				65	53
Subtract				66	54
				68	55
					58
					61
					64
					68
					71
					72
					73
Ide and					
Find					
Multiply					
Multiply n					
Divide to fin					

Continued on nex

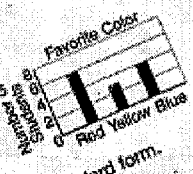
Quarterly Test Chapters 1–12

Name _____ Score _____

Date _____

Give the letter of the correct answer.

1. Use the bar graph to find how many more students prefer red than blue.



A 6 students B 4 students
C 3 students D 2 students

2. Give four hundred seventy-five in standard form.

A 4,075 B 475 C 457 D 400,075

3. Compare: 546 ● 564. Use <, >, or =.

A < B > C =

4. Eleanor began studying at 4:15 P.M. and finished 40 minutes later. What time did she finish?

A 5:00 P.M. B 5:05 P.M. C 4:55 P.M. D Not here

5. Estimate the sum of 35 and 23 by rounding.

A 20 B 70 C 50 D 60

In 6–9, add.

6. 47 + 38

A 75 B 85 C 83 D Not here

7. 235 + 351

A 514 B 516 C 616 D Not here

8. 25 + 16 + 31

A 62 B 72 C 82 D Not here

9. $\begin{array}{r} \$6.75 \\ +\ 2.31 \\ \hline \end{array}$

A $8.06 B $8.16 C $9.16 D Not here

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

Continued

[redacted] SCHOOL
SUMMER SCHOOL RECORD

Student Name: _____ **Grade completed:** _____

School: _____ **Summer School Teacher:**_____

Number of sessions attended: _____ **/12**

Math:
Pre-test SF/AW final quarterly test : _____% date given:_____
(See attached item analysis of student errors from math assessment)

Post-test SF/AW final quarterly test: _____% date given:_____
(See attached item analysis of student errors from math assessment)

Writing:
Pre-test Rubric Score _____
(See attached initial writing sample from picture prompt and rubric sheet, scored in yellow)

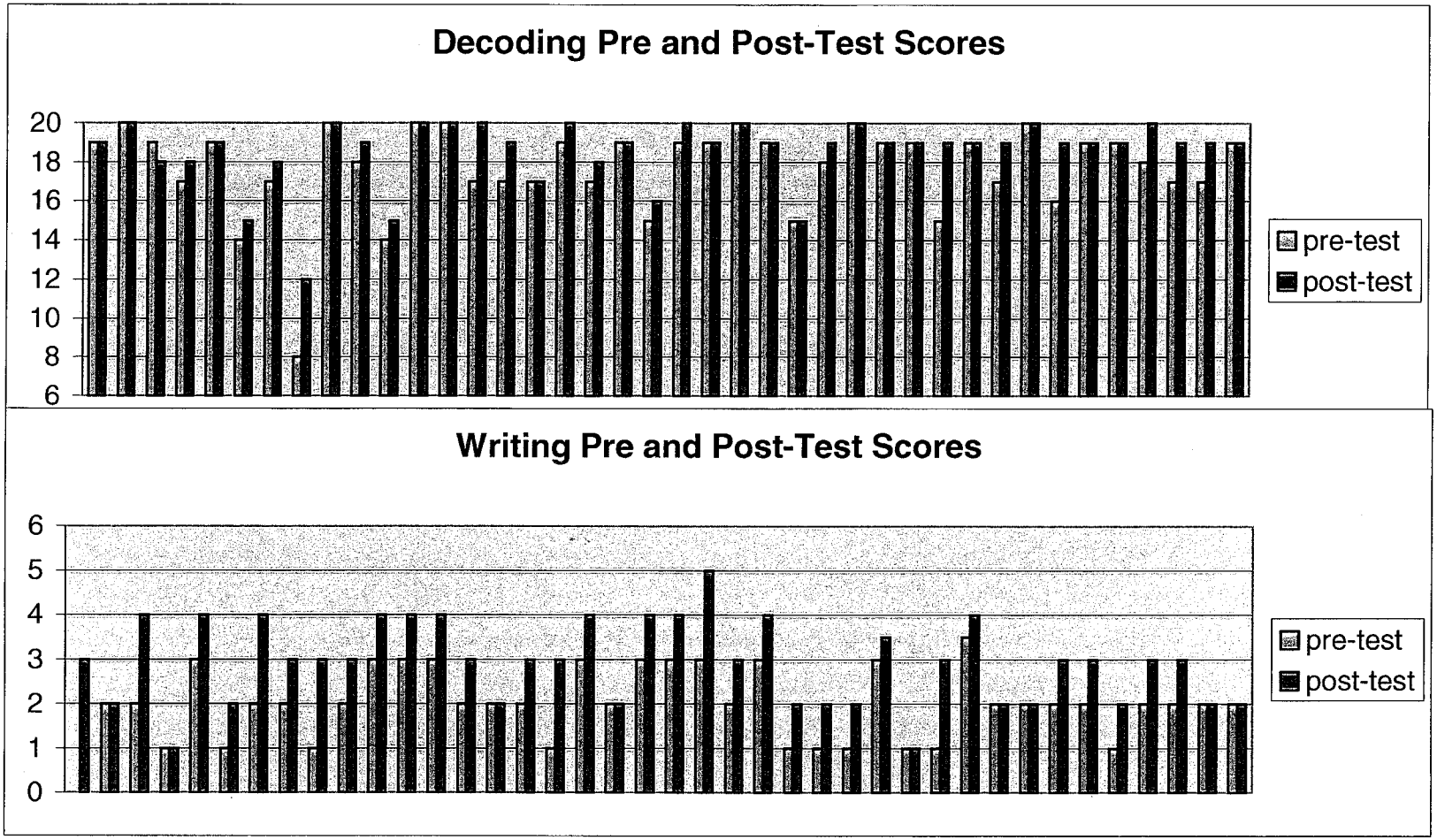
Post-test Rubric Score _____
(See attached ending writing sample from picture prompt and rubric sheet, scored in pink)

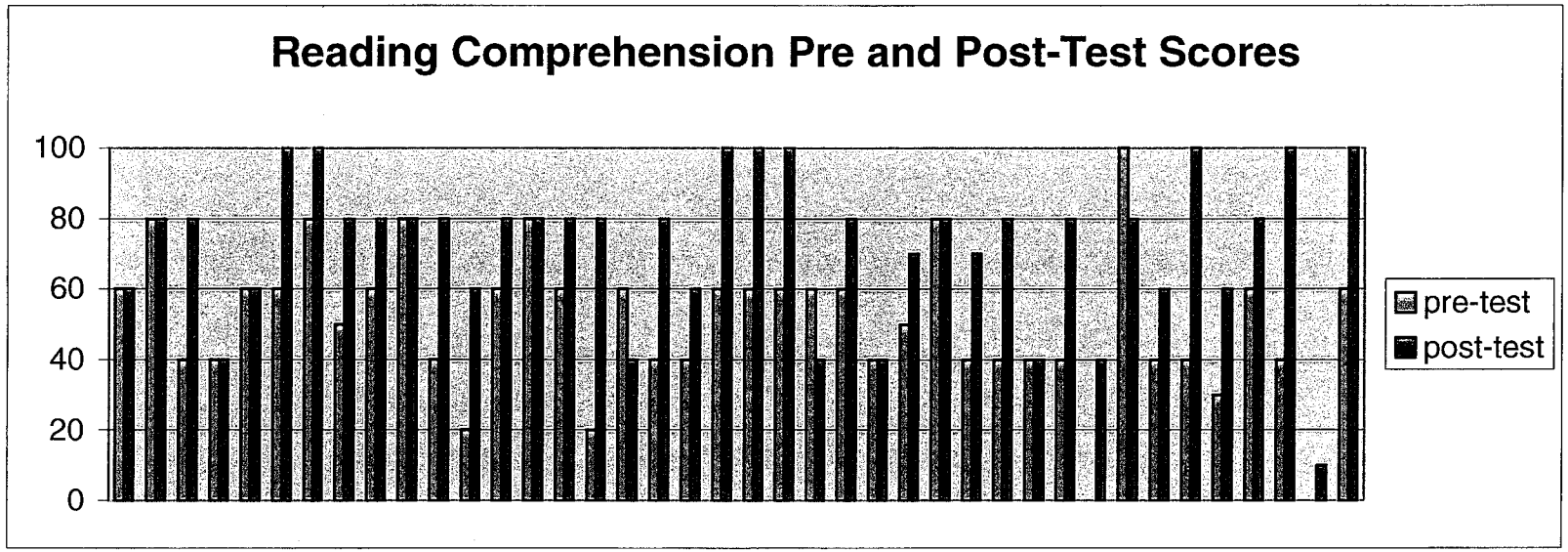
Reading:

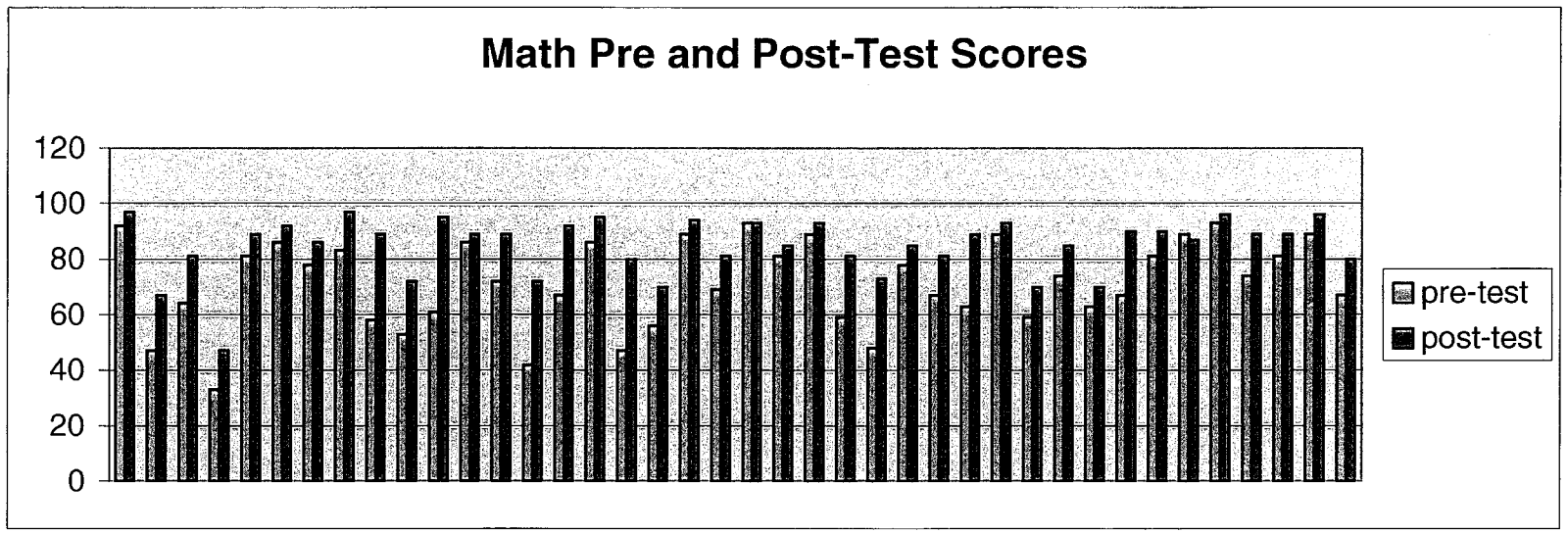
Pre-test: date given: _____
Decoding (Botell Reading Inventory)
Level of test _____ (#correct) _____
Comprehension (Rigby Benchmark Assessment)
Level of test _____ score _____%
Re-telling
Level of test _____ rubric _____

Post-test: date given: _____
Decoding (Botell Reading Inventory)
Level of test _____ (#correct) ____
Comprehension (Rigby Benchmark Assessment)
Level of test _____ score _____%
Re-telling
Level of test _____ rubric _____

Comments:


Decoding Pre and Post-Test Scores
20
18
16
14
12
10
8
6
pre-test
post-test
Writing Pre and Post-Test Scores
6
5
4
3
2
1
0
pre-test
post-test


Reading Comprehension Pre and Post-Test Scores
100
80
60
40
20
0
pre-test
post-test


Math Pre and Post-Test Scores
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
pre-test
post-test

Appendix C

Communication to Parents

July 10, 2001

Dear Parents/Guardians of Summer School Students:

I would like to welcome you and your children to this year's summer school session. As part of the Standards Initiative, the Public Schools are offering summer school courses to provide an extra boost for certain students in the areas of language arts and math. This year's program is for students entering 3rd and 4th grades.

As principal of School, I am delighted to be hosting this program at our school, and I am confident that we will offer a very strong program to your children this summer. Summer school will run Tuesdays through Thursdays, beginning July 10th through August 2nd. We expect to see your children here promptly at 9:00 AM each day summer school is in session.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact your child's summer school teacher or myself at We look forward to working with you and for a very productive summer together.

Respectfully,

July 10, 2001

Hello families!

It is a pleasure to be working with you and your child this summer!

Today we did some testing to determine exactly what your child will work on this summer. Each child will work on specific areas of need so that we make the best use of our time together. We also worked today on reinforcement work in math, reading and writing.

Your child has brought home a book today which he/she needs to read carefuly and summarize for you. We will work on re-tellings throughout the summer school, so don't worry if the summary is not perfect today. It's important that your child concentrates, stays on topic, and tries to remember important details in sequence. I know that you will praise his/her efforts as we work to develop this skill and confidence in reading more difficult text. Your child also has brought home a math game, which he/she should play with you. Practice is an important part of learning, and homework of this kind will be a regular part of our program.

Please feel free to call me at [redacted] with any questions you may have. I look forward to working together to help your child grow and learn.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

SUMMER SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT
[redacted] SCHOOL

Student Name: _____

Grade completed: _____ **School:** _____

Summer School Teacher: _____

Number of sessions attended: _____ /12

Subject	PROGRESS		
Math	Fair	Good	Excellent
Reading	Fair	Good	Excellent
Writing	Fair	Good	Excellent

Comments:

Appendix D

Teacher Survey Instrument

SUMMER SCHOOL TEACHER SURVEY

Dear teachers,

Please take a moment to fill out the survey below and return it to the office along with your report cards as you sign out today. Your input regarding the summer school will be most helpful in program evaluation and recommendations for next year. Thanks!

Please indicate your perception of each category below as it relates to the summer school experience this year.

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Organization of Program	1	2	3	4
Clarity of Goals	1	2	3	4
Summer School Climate	1	2	3	4
Testing Materials	1	2	3	4
Teacher Commitment	1	2	3	4
Parent Support	1	2	3	4
Student Motivation	1	2	3	4
Facility	1	2	3	4
Overall Quality of Program	1	2	3	4

Please use the space below and on the back for comments:

Biographical Data

Name	Denise Horton
High School	Triton Regional High School Runnemede, NJ
Undergraduate	Bachelor of Arts Elementary Education Glassboro State College Glassboro, NJ
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Present Occupation	Elementary School Teacher