



NYSCDA

**NEW YORK STATE
CAMP DIRECTORS
ASSOCIATION**

Testimony

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing - Elementary & Secondary Education

January 29, 2013

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TESTIMONY DRAFT

1/25/2013

On behalf of the New York State Camp Directors Association and the American Camp Association (ACA) of New York and New Jersey, I applaud Governor Cuomo's commitment to improve New York's graduation rates. We all strive for an improved educational system in order to ensure that New York students contribute to a society rich with innovation and a healthy, productive, and exemplary work force that can compete in the global economy.

In that spirit, we would like to partner with Governor Cuomo, the Legislature, the New York State Department of Education, and school districts to achieve this goal. We bring to the table over a century of educational experience and a proven track record of success in the year-round education of the whole child.

Summer learning-loss is a well-researched phenomenon; we know students lose a portion of academic knowledge each summer. A lesser-known fact is that on average low-income students lose between one and two months of reading and math per year, while their higher-income peers actually make slight gains. The disparity is because higher-income children have greater access to enrichment opportunities such as educational vacations and summer programs including camps.

While 75% of public schools offer academic programs over the summer, enrollment in these programs is low, ranging between 6 and 30%. Evidence suggests that low enrollment rates can be attributed to parents who do not want their children in traditional instruction during the summer months. Many parents feel strongly about giving their children time to experience 'unstructured learning' during the summer months outside of the confines of a classroom.

Experts in the field of youth development have also recognized the importance of unstructured learning in creating healthy minds and bodies in our children. Researcher Lance Ozier wrote: "For over a century educators have recognized the American summer camp as an important learning landscape (Paris 2008), and some learning educators considered summer camp to be an ideal learning environment for children (Van Wagenen, 1935)."

Schools, too, are embracing the importance and benefits of an alternative education. Pittsburgh public schools, for example, have transitioned away from traditional classroom based summer programs and now provide camp-like programs combining academics with enrichment activities like judo and rowing.

Across the country, partnerships between camps and schools have played a critical role in the changing educational environment while enhancing positive youth development. In New York, more than ten thousand young people spend a month of their summer vacation in special camp programs designed to help them retain and build upon what they learned during the school year. Members of the New York camp community have

been innovators in the field of the year-round education of children, demonstrating the complementary educational value of a positive camp experience. More specifically, there have been four extraordinary examples in New York:

Vacamas:

Vacamas was founded in 1924 by a group of teachers, social workers and businessmen who saw the need for young immigrant women from the Lower East Side to spend a few weeks of summer in a country setting. Today, Vacamas is committed to enabling children of low and moderate income families enjoy positive experiences. Each year over 5,000 children take part in their services which provide positive, challenging experiences. The camp focuses on fighting summer learning-loss by incorporating reading and writing into many of their activities. A major goal of the camp is to create a life-long love of reading and writing in each of its campers. Vacamas' dedication to meeting this goal is clearly depicted in a short video available at <http://www.vacamas.org/>.

Longitudinal Study of Youth Development Outcomes of the Morry's Camp Experience (2004)

Project Morry is a year-round, nonprofit, youth development organization serving children from at-risk areas in and around New York City. The children that participate in this program spend four weeks at Morry's Camp during the summer and then meet once a month during the school year. The school year meetings are used to set personal goals, talk about what they are experiencing and build upon the skills learned during the summer. Key findings from the four-year study measuring camper outcomes included: progressive leadership skill development, positive emotional control, and improved accountability and follow-through. In contemporary terms, campers gained grit, persistence, self-control, and mastery orientation. Moreover, in the 17 year history of the program, the high school graduation rate for children who complete the program is 100%.

Break-Aways Partnerships for Year-Round Learning Final Evaluation Report (2001)

The Break-Aways Partnerships for Year-Round Learning was an initiative between the New York City Board of Education and ACA, New York. This program offered school children an opportunity to attend summer camp in order to combat summer learning loss. The study showed that participants in Break-Aways were able to expand their knowledge of the world by partaking in literacy instruction at camp. Together, the partners provided 21 to 28 additional days of instruction, primarily during the summer months. The Break-Aways Partnerships for Year-Round school ran from 1998 to 2003. Although the program demonstrated promising results, the NYC Board of Education terminated the program in 2003 due to funding constraints.

Trade Winds Lake Camp

Trade Winds Lake Camp was founded in 1989 in a working partnership with the NYC Board of Education and the Mayor's Office of Youth and Family Services in order to provide an academically enriched traditional resident camp experience for at risk youth, with the intent of overcoming summer learning loss and changing participant educational outcomes. These four week programs emphasized literacy and earth science education and were directed by NYS certified educators.

Camps are no longer just a place to have fun over the summer; rather, they are accepting a larger role in the year-round education and youth development of children. Camps have the ability to work directly with schools to develop and implement curriculum specifically tailored to the needs and goals of each individual school. For decades, camps have served as the 'environmental component' to children's education, particularly for children raised in urban settings. Today, many camps have expanded their role to include instruction in math, reading, science and social studies as well. Although school-camp partnerships already exist, there is room for significant growth and development within this partnership.

Learning should not be confined exclusively to time in the classroom. We acknowledge that summer learning loss is a real challenge facing America's youth, and we firmly believe summer learning loss can be significantly reduced when children have access to structured, supportive, and safe out-of-school environments over the summer. Camp is a prime example of such an opportunity. We believe there is a great deal of history and a demonstrated track record of success. School-camp partnerships can provide a viable, cost-effective solution to summer learning-loss.

Again, I would like to commend the governor and the Legislature for their commitment to the children of the state of New York. We urge you to include the camp community in your efforts to combat summer learning-loss, increase graduation rates, and develop the adults of tomorrow who must be able to compete in this global economy. To that end, we ask that any financial grants made available to schools give them the flexibility to partner with community-based organizations — including camps — in order to expand learning time to reach their goals for the education of their students.