



A TALE OF TWO COMMUNITIES

HOW AFTER-SCHOOL AND SUMMER PROGRAMS BENEFIT THE NEEDIEST STUDENTS



By Emily Rogan

Just minutes away from the glitz and glamour of the Las Vegas strip, approximately 2,200 families live in one square mile of apartment housing—mostly transient people who work at the nearby casinos and hotels.

The children of these workers attend three schools—Dr. C. Owen Roundy, Vegas Verdes, and Elaine Wynn Elementary Schools—led by principal John Haynal, who was named a 2016 National Distinguished Principal by NAESP. Almost 70 percent of students are English-language learners, and most live in poverty; each of the three schools has more than 90 percent of students

receiving free and reduced-price lunch, says Haynal.

Almost 1,500 miles to the east in a rural, isolated part of Arkansas, Saint Paul Public School educates about 350 K–12 students. A stand-alone school consolidated into the Huntsville School District, more than 85 percent of Saint Paul's students receive free and reduced-price lunch, according to Daisy Dyer Duerr, who was principal there from 2011 to 2015.

While one community is concrete and highways, the other dirt roads and fishing creeks, when it comes to education, there are striking similarities in the challenges they face. Students come from households

with limited resources and access to basic tools such as internet and computers. Parents work hard to provide for their families, but as a result, children have long periods of time after school without anyone making sure they're doing schoolwork, reading, and staying out of trouble. There are limited opportunities for enrichment programs, athletics, or clubs.

Similarly, during the summer—unlike their more affluent peers in other parts of the country—these students aren't taking family trips or attending sleep-away or day camp. Out of necessity, students are left alone while their parents work, without structure or supervision. There aren't many

TIPS TO JUMP-START AN AFTER-SCHOOL OR SUMMER PROGRAM

- Don't compromise on quality; make sure excellence is not what you're working toward, but what you expect every day.
- Don't be afraid to commit to the extra work. If you want what's best for kids, you have to be all in.
- Make sure you have willing community partners; they have to be there if you ask.
- Look for grant opportunities at the federal and state levels, and go after them.
- Research other excellent schools, and connect through social media.
- Make sure grant money includes transportation; if they ride a bus to and from school, they need to do the same for after school.

(Source: Daisy Dyer Duerr)



options for them to be positively engaged or intellectually stimulated.

“I asked them what they do in the summer, and there was nothing,” says Duerr. “There’s no Boys & Girls Club, no activities. There’s a tiny trailer that’s the public library, but it’s only open four hours a week,” she adds.

According to a report published by the Afterschool Alliance, there are more than 20 million children under the age of 18 living in areas of concentrated poverty in the United States. That same report indicates that while the demand for after-school programs in such communities is 56 percent, just 24 percent of those students participate nationwide. In terms of summer programs, the study reports that there is a 66 percent demand, but just 41 percent participation in summer learning programs.

Innovative principals such as Haynal and Duerr are finding ways to bring both after-school and summer programs to their students and communities—and their efforts are paying off.

All three of Haynal’s schools are ranked in the top 10 percent of Nevada’s schools. (Haynal is part of a pilot program as a franchise principal; because of his success with his first school, Owen Roundy, he’s now bringing his methodology to the other two schools, splitting his days among the three.)

While Duerr was principal at Saint Paul (she now works independently as a speaker and consultant), every student who graduated from the high school was accepted to a post-secondary institution or trade school, or enlisted in the military. Duerr made it a requirement in order for seniors to graduate, she says.

Redesigning an Ineffective Program

When she first became principal at Saint Paul, the after-school program was basically a six-week tutoring session before students had to take the state exams, says Duerr. And despite the fact that 90 percent of the students rode the bus to school, there was no transportation for the program, so very few students participated—especially not the ones who needed it most.

Duerr applied for and received a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant through the United States Department of Education, designed to provide academic enrichment for students during nonschool hours and focused specifically on high-poverty, low-performing schools. Saint Paul received more than \$770,000 over five years to provide both an after-school and summer program for grades K–12, including transportation and food.

Once the grant was secured, Duerr and her team overhauled the after-school

program, dubbed Super Saints, to include the following:

- Students stayed from 3:05 to 6:05 p.m., and buses took them home afterward.
- Time was divided between homework support and activity-based programs.
- With just 10 percent of students with internet in their homes, high school students could work on school computers to do homework and projects; they also had access to college courses through distance learning.
- Outside groups came to provide art, dance, STEM, and other cooperative workshops.

In addition, a four-week summer program was introduced. Students were bused to school each morning and received a hot lunch before going home in the afternoon. Each of the four weeks presented a different unit that ended with a fun field trip such as the Little Rock Zoo, says Duerr.

“It was really transformational for the community,” says Duerr. “It’s something they never would have done before—they got to go places in the summertime. It was a replacement for what other people would think of as a vacation for these kids,” she adds.

During a fishing unit, a community member who makes homemade lures

“We try to close the gap by precision instruction of small groups of kids getting special attention for one key piece of their education.”

—John Haynal, principal

taught the children how to make their own. Every child received a rod and reel from the Game and Fish Commission. There was a presentation on all-terrain vehicle (ATV) safety. “We tried to engage anybody that had knowledge in the community,” says Duerr.

In addition, the school could now provide adult education courses at night, enabling parents to learn basic computer skills or earn their commercial driver’s license.

Lose the Summer Slide

John Haynal is not a fan of summer break. “Suburban kids get to go to the Grand Canyon and have other national parks life experiences we all wish we could have,” says Haynal. “My kids sit on street corners because their moms and dads work at the casinos. There’s gang activity around us. We face a population that is not only transient, they don’t have access to a lot of things they should have access to, like the internet,” he adds.

In addition, many of Haynal’s students are English-language learners. “Overcoming language restrictions is key,” he explains. “I need them to return in the fall where we left them in May, so we’re not reteaching a prior grade the first month.”

Beginning the second week of June and ending the first week of August, Monday through Friday, two of Haynal’s three schools are open for four hours a day. In the computer labs, two programs are offered: Fast ForWord, which develops long-term memory, and ST Math.

“I’m a big fan of differentiation through technology,” says Haynal.

Accelerated Reader is another online program in which students participate during the summer. It’s a fun program where students earn points as the level and rigor increase. The books they read count toward the school year. “They get a good start,” Haynal says.

“In a four-hour period, we may have as many as 120–130 students show,” says Haynal. “If kids don’t show up, we call them,” he adds. “Any kid can come, but we target those who are reading below grade level,” he says.

A nearby Boys & Girls Club provides additional resources for Haynal’s students after they’re done. His tutors will walk them to the nearby facility, open until 7 p.m.

Narrowing the Gap

During the summer and in the after-school program, Haynal and his team

“They replace an empty house they’d go home to; they replace an empty stomach because we provide a snack or a meal. They’re getting great interaction that’s led by a good adult role model. They’re given the ability to form relationships. What’s the alternative to not having that?”

—Daisy Dyer-Duerr, consultant and former principal

use small group instruction to address standards-based skill deficiencies. “We try to close the gap by precision instruction of small groups of kids getting special attention for one key piece of their education,” Haynal explains.

For many of Haynal’s students, the after-school program is an opportunity to receive Tier 2 instruction as part of Response to Intervention (RTI). Students get 30 minutes each of math and technology and of language learning per day, says Haynal. That way, there is less interference with their core work during the school day, he adds.

In addition, there are other after-school opportunities focused on STEM initiatives, such as rocketry, robotics, and electronics. Haynal recently wrote a grant for a program to teach students how to learn to fly and take pictures using a drone powered by an iPad or laptop, he says.

Meeting Basic Needs

Because children can’t learn if they’re not well, Haynal has partnered with local businesses to provide mobile health care units offering dentistry, eye care, and medical care for his students and families. “If you have pain, you’re not coming to school,” he says. “So, those units are always on campus all year long and during the summer to support the good health of our kids,” he says.

Duerr emphasizes that these programs provide students with experiences they never had and fill basic needs that are particular to children living in poverty. “They replace an empty house they’d go home to; they replace an empty stomach because we provide a snack or a meal. They’re getting great interaction that’s led by a good adult role model. They’re given the ability to form relationships. What’s the alternative to not having that?” she says.

Community Support Is Key

Duerr knew from the surveys her parents and community members filled out for the grant application that everybody was on board to institute the after-school and summer programs. She emphasizes that community involvement is essential.

From deciding which weeks in the summer to offer a program to advertising and recruiting volunteers, “everyone will need to do the hard work,” she says.

“It was something the community was really behind,” she says. “The parents, the local sawmill, post office, snack shack, grocery store—everybody was on board with it. If we gave out a burger meal for the Outstanding Super Saint of the week, they would provide that,” she says.

For Haynal’s program as well, business relationships are invaluable. Telus Communications and Wynn Casinos provide food for the students and volunteers to read to students during the after-school and summer programs. “They give us large amounts of money to support the climate and culture we’re building,” says Haynal.

Leveling the Playing Field

When she instituted the summer and after-school programs at Saint Paul, Duerr says, she saw the impact it had on her students almost immediately. They looked forward to coming to school and



saw it as more than just a place they had to be for eight hours, which Duerr says really excited her.

“It became a home to these kids, which was really great because a lot of them didn’t have the best places that they were going home to,” she says. Duerr observed that more students took leadership roles, asserted themselves, and opened up emotionally in ways they hadn’t before.

Homework became a nonissue, particularly for younger children from households where parents didn’t encourage or help with schoolwork. In the after-school program, there was time to take out planners, organize, and do schoolwork before moving on to the

day’s activity. “That evened the playing field by taking the whole issue away,” says Duerr.

Hopeful Outcomes

Even with the odds stacked against them, Haynal’s students show remarkable gains, and he credits the after-school and summer programs for contributing to their growth.

“For the first year with SBAC [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium] testing, we had an average between two schools of 55 percent proficiency in ELA [Elaine Wynn and Vegas Verdes Elementary]. What a start for growing all kids,” he says.

In addition, students are retaining information and are better prepared for a new year. “We now actually begin new instruction at the beginning of the second week of school,” says Haynal.

“Cyclical poverty in rural America is probably the cruelest thing I’ve ever seen in my life,” says Duerr. “It’s very important to show students you want what’s best for them, you’re there to help them, you’re going to be there and have a relationship with them—even if they don’t have one at home,” she adds. •

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