USING SUMMER LAB SCHOOLS TO TACKLE EDUCATION INEQUALITY IN GEORGIA

WHITE PAPER BY
MEGAN ERNST
SENIOR FELLOW FOR EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
JANUARY 31, 2015
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Summer learning loss and food insecurity plague low-income children across the United States. These conditions exacerbate the income achievement gap present in too many U.S. communities, compounded by the disproportionate teacher turnover in low-income schools. Addressing this issue at the state and local level allows communities to tailor their responses to their unique needs. A free summer lab school run through public university teacher-training programs, designed for low-income, at-risk elementary and middle school students, offers an opportunity to address summer learning loss, feed children during the summer, and contribute to teacher education in ways research shows leads to better, longer-term teaching careers. The University of Georgia should secure state funding to develop a model program to open in summer 2016. This model, if successful, should be expanded to all teacher education programs in the state.

Megan Ernst is the Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network Senior Fellow for Education, where she serves to advance student engagement in education policy discourse at the local, state, and national level. As a student at the University of Georgia, Megan has researched student perceptions of careers in education, led a tutoring student organization, and worked within the Office of School Engagement within the College of Education. She will graduate in May 2015 from a dual degree program with undergraduate degrees in journalism and political science and a master’s of public administration. Megan’s primary policy interests are civics education, teacher training, community supports to education, curriculum design, and access to education.

For media inquiries, please contact Rachel Goldfarb at 212.444.9130 x 213 or rgoldfarb@rooseveltinstitute.org.

The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Roosevelt Institute, its donors, or its directors.

KEY ARGUMENTS
• The knowledge and achievement gap between low and higher-income students (1.25 standard deviation difference on standardized test scores) results in large part from low-income students’ disproportionate summer learning loss.
• Food insecurity resulting from poverty can cause significant cognitive stunting in young children, which means that chronically hungry students don’t learn as well as their more well-fed peers.
• Nearly 50 percent of new teachers quit within their first five years, which can be attributed in large part to a lack of pedagogical training in those teachers’ preparation programs. Universities with education programs should commit to providing quality pedagogical training, but with more flexible programs of study in order to combat new teacher attrition.
• Summer lab schools can address these three contributors to the widening income achievement gap by providing free summer enrichment to at-risk K-8 public school students that is taught by faculty at public colleges of education and their students.
Using Summer Lab Schools to Tackle Education Inequality in Georgia
By Megan Ernst, January 31, 2015

INTRODUCTION

The history of U.S. education policy initiatives is littered with disjointed solutions to narrowly defined problems. Education is a dynamic issue that is connected to a variety of other policy problems, yet we consistently propose policies that treat the classroom like a vacuum.

Family income is now the most accurate predictor of a child’s educational achievement.1 Students from low socio-economic backgrounds score 1.25 standard deviations below their higher-income counterparts.2 In order to combat this increasing inequality, we must take multiple and simultaneous approaches. Our children deserve better. This proposal seeks to address a trio of discrete policy problems that contribute to the income achievement gap and negatively affect the nation’s students: summer learning loss, lack of access to healthy food, and lack of access to flexible and quality training for teachers.

Studies have linked achievement gains and losses during the summer to family income and have found that one of the primary causes of summer learning loss is a lack of access to summer enrichment programs and resources.3 As low-income students lose ground while their higher-income counterparts are retaining or even gaining knowledge during the summer, the income achievement gap continues to widen. Food insecurity - closely correlated with lower-income levels - poses additional problems for school-aged children, including poor health, impaired social and academic development, and increased behavioral problems in the classroom.4 Finally, we have seen more and more national conversations about the future of effective teacher education. Addressing the potentially competing interests of flexibility and quality of training is critical to ensuring an effective teacher workforce, and by extension, an effective school system. Tackling these three issues together will make for a powerful policy solution.

One possible solution to solve this is creating summer lab schools for low income, at-risk students. These programs should be run by public university teacher education programs and provide low-income students with direct access to teachers-in-training, along with access to a safe, enriching environment to help combat the loss of knowledge they would otherwise experience in the summer. This program will provide healthy meals during the week, addressing the gap in services for students who receive free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) during the school year. It will also allow teacher education programs to offer student-teaching practicum credit during the summer, where it was previously only available during the school year. Student teaching opportunities outside the normal school year also offers teachers-in-training the opportunity to experiment with new techniques, which provide an engaging enrichment environment for students that won't feel like a typical classroom. Because this summer program can be hosted at local schools and run by teachers-in-training, overhead costs will be low.

---

2 Ibid.
States should require and fund the development of summer lab schools for local at-risk children at public institutions with teacher education programs. As institutions of higher education, universities and colleges have a stake in closing the achievement gap and a responsibility to their surrounding community. The University of Georgia in Athens would make an ideal pilot for this initiative. Athens is one of the poorest counties of its size in the country. The student population is both majority-minority and over 80 percent free and reduced-price lunch-eligible. At 69.5 percent, the graduation rate falls below the state and national averages of 71.5 percent. Athens is home to an institution with a vibrant college of education, and could coordinate existing resources to provide a summer lab school for its most at-risk public school students.

In this paper, I will begin by examining some of the data on education inequality and how that issue intersects with poverty in this country. The following section looks at teacher education and retention. I will then look at summer education programs more generally, and provide a history of lab school programs. From there, I will look at effective models of summer education programs. Finally, I will consider how the University of Georgia’s status as an anchor institution makes it an ideal host of a summer lab school, and lay out my proposal for this summer lab school in full.

EDUCATION INEQUALITY
Inequalities in educational achievement and opportunities have been present since the beginning of American history. While time and activism have resulted in the expansion of opportunities for many Americans, today’s increasing wealth inequality has driven widening gaps in achievement and educational attainment. Growing differences in the resources spent by poor and rich families on their children, as well as declining real incomes for low- and middle-income families have had tragic effects. Differences in reading and math achievement levels of low- and high-income children are much larger than several decades ago, as are the differences in college graduation rates.

Figure 1. Trends in Race and Income Achievement Gaps, 1943-2001 Cohorts

---

6 Ibid.
Differences in early childhood home life affect children’s brain development, which in turn affects achievement in school. Rising residential segregation based on income has led to increasing concentrations of low- and high-income students in their respective schools. In addition, maternal stress, mental health, and parenting in low-income families have been negatively affected by the overall decline in income.

Education inequality is a matter of significant policy concern in the United States. Education attainment (the amount of education one completes) is a predictor of earnings, correlates with income inequality, and is also linked to health outcomes. Due to the constraints of data availability, measurement of education inequality has often taken the form of attainment and achievement measurements, such as graduation rates and test scores. However, these methods are limited in their evaluation of the complex factors involved, and measurement of educational opportunity has been proposed as a more accurate measurement of education inequality. Educational opportunity is a more complex measurement, developing the idea of the opportunity gap, or how inputs like race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, community wealth, familial situations, or other factors contribute to or perpetuate lower outputs like educational aspirations, achievement, and attainment for certain groups of students, instead of simply measuring gaps of achievement or attainment. Inequality of opportunity accounts for up to 35 percent of all disparities in achievement. Policies to address education inequality should seek to mitigate the opportunity gap. Rather than tailoring policy solutions to limited measurements of attainment and achievement linked to the high-stakes testing regimes, policies should seek to increase educational opportunity for lower-income and at-risk students by attempting to address the multiple factors that make achievement and attainment more difficult for these students.

HOW POVERTY AFFECTS EDUCATION INEQUALITY

The gap in opportunity and achievement of low-income students and their higher-income peers is well-documented. There are a variety of factors associated with poverty that contribute to low-income students’ poor educational outcomes. Poverty, income inequality, and lower socioeconomic status contribute to reduced access to educational opportunities, familial support, good nutrition, healthcare, and other factors that tend contribute to stronger educational achievement.

Family stress and support

Childhood exposure to toxic stress – strong, frequent, and prolonged adversity with the absence of protective relationships - in early environments is associated with deficits in brain development that affect children’s executive functioning and impact skills that prime their brains to be able to succeed in school. Children, even as early as elementary school, can detect and internalize stress from situations such as adults fighting, unsafe neighborhoods, financial burdens, overworked parents, single-parent home configurations, and caring for younger siblings. Damaging fear and toxic stress explain these effects in part because they affect the chemistry of brain circuits involved in the development of these capacities and impair the specific neuronal architecture that is

---

9 Duncan and Murnane, 2014.
13 Ibid.
engaged when utilizing executive function. Chronic stress can result in atrophy of the hippocampus, the learning and memory center of the brain, and in sensitization of the amygdala, the brain’s emotion system. Chronic stress can even cause less-efficient prefrontal cortex (PFC) activity, leading children with otherwise typical executive functioning to exhibit inconsistencies.

Exposure to uncontrollable stress, which is prevalent in low-income elementary-aged children in particular, can temporarily impair, if not completely deactivate, prefrontal cortical function. Chronic fear and anxiety associated with stressful environments is difficult for young children to manage, even when they are placed in situations where they may be safe. This indicates that the executive function impairments associated with high-stress environments can translate into school and other situations where children may not be directly at risk.

These issues of stress and safety increase during the summer. During summer months, many low income families are without childcare, and one in 10 children regularly spends time in self-care, either alone or with a sibling younger than 13. In fact, the number of hours children spend in self-care more than doubles during the summer, to more than 10 hours on average per week.

**Food insecurity and nutrition**

More than one in five people in Athens suffers from food insecurity and experiences difficulty obtaining safe and nutritionally adequate foods. Food insecurity poses serious mental and physical health risks. Those who are food insecure lack a steady supply of crucial nutrients, placing them at greater risk for chronic diseases, mental illness, obesity, and generally poorer health. Additionally, a lack of certain vitamins and minerals as a result of food insecurity during key stages of child cognitive development can lead to cognitive stunting and limit academic and economic potential. Children living in marginally food insecure and fully food insecure households are, respectively, 37 percent and 62 percent more likely to display anxiety, depression, inattention, hyperactivity, or aggressive behavior than those living in households that are food secure. A study of school-aged children who suffered from iron-deficiency anemia as infants – a health outcome associated with food insecurity - found impaired memory and social functioning more than 10 years after the children had completed iron treatment. Researchers examining the role of food insecurity in cognitive outcomes found that food-insecure six to 11 year-olds scored lower than their food-secure peers on a measure of child intelligence. The same study also found that these children had a harder time getting along with others, were more likely to have repeated a grade, and had lower arithmetic and general achievement test scores than food-secure children in the same age group.

Over 81 percent of the students in Athens qualify for free and reduced-price lunches during the school year. Based on the rate of food insecurity in Athens, often FRL meals at school are the only guaranteed meal in a child’s day.

---

17 Shonkoff, 2011.
19 Map the Meal Gap 2012, Clarke County. Feeding America.
21 Whitaker et. al, 2006
24 “Clarke County Free and Reduced Price Meal Eligibility Fiscal Year 2014 Data Report.” (2014). Georgia Department of Education.
**Low-income students are at the highest risk during the summer**

For some children, summer vacation includes visits to museums, libraries, and environments full of enriching stimuli. For other children, summer means months of inactivity, lack of access to enrichment, and environments that negatively impact their cognitive development. Though loss of knowledge during the summer is documented across all ages and income groups, it is most pronounced for low-income children. Where the average student may fall behind by approximately one month over the course of a summer, the average low-income student falls behind on three month’s worth of material (McCombs, et al., 2012). In addition, numerous studies have found that children in all income groups learn basic skills at approximately the same rates during the school year, indicating that summer is the distinguishing factor for differences in educational achievement between low- and higher-income students. Additionally, the effect of summers without learning is cumulative, and low-income children fall further and further behind their peers who participate in summer learning opportunities every year. Students lose math skills at similar rates across all income groups, but disparities in reading correlate strongly with income.

Figure 2. Summer Learning Loss Increases the Achievement Gap

---

25 Von Drehle, 2010; Terzian et al., 2009; Alexander et al., 2007; Miller, 2007; Chaplin & Capizzano, 2006
26 Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network, 2010; Terzian et al., 2009
The National Survey of American Families surveyed 6,600 families and found that children in households below 200 percent of the federal poverty line were significantly less likely than children from households at or above that threshold to participate in summer programs. Eighteen percent of low-income students surveyed attended summer learning programs, while 29 percent of higher-income students attended these programs. Data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class, confirms that a lower percentage of children from low-income households have access to summer enrichment opportunities such as overnight camps, vacations, libraries, museums, and more. For example, only 20 percent of low-income children reported visiting arts, science, or discovery museums over the summer, compared to 38 percent of middle-income children and 62 percent of high-income children. Over 81 percent of students in Athens live below 185 percent of the federal poverty line, as evidenced by FRL enrollment. If the findings above translate to Athens, it is likely that local low-income youth are severely disadvantaged in their access to summer programs.

The Athens-Clarke County school system does not operate a formal summer school due to budgetary restrictions. Athens Leisure Services provides summer camps at the community centers around the county, but their programs cost $40 per week. They offer scholarships that may result in discounted or free programs, but their budget is limited. A host of nonprofits, camps, and businesses offer summer programming as well, ranging from sports camps at UGA to art and cooking classes at local businesses. These programs all charge fees, ranging from $50 to more than $400 per week. Cost is therefore the biggest barrier to effective summer programming in Athens. This is true for families as well as the school district. The issue of cost results in the students who need enrichment the most not having access. Additionally, though a wide variety of programs exist in Athens to occupy children during the summer, the lack of a school district-supported educational enrichment program taught by trained (or in-training) professionals intended to support school-year academic work is a significant gap in services.

TEACHER EDUCATION AND RETENTION
A tangential but separate issue plaguing our education landscape is teacher retention and education. The national narrative points to a shortage of teachers. However, new research from Harvard’s Richard Ingersoll finds that in fact the teacher workforce is ballooning, much faster than the growth in student population. Over 200,000 new teachers are beginning each year, where 25 years ago, there were only 65,000 new teachers a year. The pitfall, then, is not a lack of teachers, but a lack of retention. In 1987, the most common teacher was one with 15 years of experience. Current research shows that the average teacher is a first-year beginner.

Not only is the workforce “greening” as Ingersoll calls it, but these new teachers are less likely to stay. Several studies have pinned beginning teacher attrition between 40 and 50 percent in their first five years. Ingersoll’s most recent study suggests that first-year attrition rates have increased by about one-third in the past two decades.

Studies have tied attrition to pre-service training, finding that new teachers with the least pedagogical preparation are the most likely to leave after their first year. Teachers with more training in pedagogy and methodology – especially practice teaching, observation of other classroom teaching, and feedback on their own teaching – were far less likely to leave teaching after their first year on the job.

29 $47,700 for a family of four.
30 $44,123 for a family of four.
33 Ingersoll, R. (2014).
34 Ibid.
This indicates a need for modification of the current teacher preparation methods. While pedagogical training is important, it’s also the case that more than 40 percent of new teachers are being trained through alternative entry programs rather than traditional degree programs. This is due in part to the flexibility offered through these other methods. If colleges of education were able to offer more flexible options with the same critical mass of pedagogy and practice teaching, perhaps teacher attrition would be less of a national crisis.

**SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS**

Summer learning programs are an effective strategy for addressing summer learning loss. Both cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys of student populations have found that middle- and high-income students are significantly more likely to engage in summer learning and enrichment activities than their low-income peers. These activities include attending day or overnight camp; going on vacation; visiting a park, zoo, or petting farm; and a host of other activities.

Providing summer learning opportunities for lower-income students has proved to be effective when those programs have a specific set of characteristics. These programs should be affordable and accessible to all. To maximize effectiveness, summer programs should be offered at early grade levels. Though students of all ages benefit from summer enrichment, students in the earliest grades appear to improve the most. For example, reading interventions are most effective in the summers before third grade. Additionally, summer programs are effective when they provide students with nutritious meals. Though on average 17.5 million kids utilized FRL programs during the 2008-2009 school year, that summer only 15 percent of those children utilized the federal summer lunch program. Summer programs serving low-income students are an effective way to provide healthy meals as well. Summer programs are also important because they serve as safe places for play and learning while students’ parents work, mitigating the increase in child self-care during summers.

Perhaps most importantly, these summer programs should differ from traditional school year programs. Summer programs offer the opportunity for more innovative approaches to learning. Academic content should complement school year material, not repeat the same thing learned in school the previous year. In that vein, programs are more effective when they integrate physical, recreational, and cultural development alongside their instruction. This is particularly effective for low-income students who may not have access to extracurricular activities like sports and music during the school year.

Additionally, summer programs have proven to be effective when trained staff is hired, class sizes are small, and community partnerships are incorporated. The most effective summer programs utilized experienced teachers, while less effective programs utilized college students trained minimally in education by the summer program. Additionally, programs with small group or individualized instruction have the largest impact on student achievement. Community partnerships with libraries, parks and colleges have been effective in creating sustainable programs, as well as introducing students and their families to community resources.

---

35 Ibid.
36 Terzian, et al., 2009; Meyer et al., 2004
37 Meyer et al., 2004
38 Terzian, et al., 2009
39 Miller, 2007; Cooper, et al., 2000
41 Food Research Action Center, 2010
42 Afterschool Alliance, 2010; Terzian et al., 2009; Bell & Carrillo, 2007; Schacter, 2001
43 Afterschool Alliance, 2010; McLaughlin & Smink, 2009; Terzian et al., 2009; Bell & Carrillo, 2007; Miller, 2007
44 Terzian, 2009
45 Cooper, et al., 2000
46 National Summer Learning Association, 2009b; Terzian et al., 2009; Miller, 2007; Wimer & Gunther, 2006

Copyright 2015, the Roosevelt Institute. All rights reserved.
THE HISTORY OF UNIVERSITY LAB SCHOOLS

University lab schools, designed with the intent of preparing teachers and teacher educators, are based upon the clinical teaching model pioneered in the medical field. Clinical teaching began in medicine in 1765, at which time the study of individuals seeking medical degrees focused on hands-on work with patients. In physician and nursing preparation programs today, students are provided as much clinical experience as possible to apply what they are learning in the lecture portion of their classes.

Clinical practice in education developed from the progressive education movement of the late 19th century. In 1894, John Dewey opened the University of Chicago Laboratory School, the first of its kind. These schools provided teacher educators and researchers the opportunity to develop theories of child development and education, and provided teachers-in-training the opportunity to gain classroom experience alongside skilled professionals and their own professors. In the 1920s, private beneficiaries like the Rockefeller Foundation partnered with universities to develop a number of child development laboratory programs on university campuses, usually housed in psychology departments. Anchored in this history, laboratory schools have fulfilled a three-part mission. Lab schools “facilitate research endeavors designed to learn more about how children grow and develop and how they should best be educated,” “provide exemplary educational facilities for young children while educating college students about child development and early childhood education,” and “serve the early childhood professional community in the form of training, educational presentations, membership on advisory boards, etc.”

Clinical practice has been emphasized as a way to reform and improve teacher preparation. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education’s study of teacher preparation summarized by stating that “creating a system built around programs centered on clinical practice also holds great promise for advancing shared responsibility for teacher preparation; supporting the development of complex teaching skills; and ensuring that all teachers will know how to work closely with colleagues, students, and community.”

These schools, as they still exist, often operate year-round as private or charter schools. The important mission and contributions of a lab school, however, can be translated into the summer setting, expanding its mission to include addressing summer learning loss and providing services to low-income students specifically. Wilcox-Herzog and McLaren synthesized research into the elements of successful lab schools, resulting in an 8-point list worth including in full:

1. Provide a clear mission that is clearly accessible and understandable to members of the community and campus. Have a plan for meeting the mission and a means for documenting accomplishments.
2. Define the curricular program by implementing a clear philosophy and curriculum, based on theory and research, which is apparent to all involved in the program.
3. Secure various streams of funding through fundraising, grants, and development opportunities. Work to secure university support.
4. Build relationships through networking with key players and potential advocates. Such networking can lead to fiscal support as well as nonmonetary resources.
5. Balance the historical tripartite mission by aligning teaching, research, and service within a particular philosophical or curricular approach by providing opportunities for students and staff to increase their

49 Ingersoll, R. (2014).
knowledge and skills (teaching), having clear policies and procedures for research and providing information to the community at-large and exemplary early childhood services as a showcase (service).

6. **Develop links with academic programs on campus** by aligning curriculum with college coursework to maximize student learning experiences. These links need to be deliberate, intentional, and maintained for the laboratory school to have salience in the institution.

7. **Provide adequate, well-furnished space** that is conducive to meeting the tripartite mission.

8. **Consider leadership carefully** by employing adequate staff who can effectively lead and carefully consider the roles and responsibilities of each leadership position.51

These factors should be considered repeatedly in the development of a summer lab school at UGA.

**EFFECTIVE SUMMER PROGRAM MODELS**

In addition to analyzing existing lab school models, looking at particularly successful approaches to summer programs will offer insight into further best practices that can be incorporated into UGA’s summer school. Two additional programs worth noting are the Breakthrough Collaborative, a nonprofit program serving high-achieving, low-income middle school students in cities across the country, and the Auburn University Summer Enrichment Program, a program for pre-school and early elementary school children through Auburn’s College of Education.

**Breakthrough**

Founded in 1978, this organization’s model “increase[s] academic opportunity for highly motivated, underserved students and put them on the trajectory of a successful college path” by offering annual 6-week academically rigorous summer enrichment programs. Breakthrough’s “Students Teaching Students” model makes it unique. High school and college student Teaching Fellows teach subject-area enrichment courses to the middle school students. Those Fellows are mentored by Instructional Coaches, career educators from public, charter, and private schools nationwide.

Breakthrough serves mostly low-income, at-risk students: 92 percent are students of color; 71 percent receive FRL; and 62 percent will be the first in their family to attend a four-year college. The program offers underserved youth 240 hours of academic instruction in six-week intensive summer programs over the course of three years. Students receive instruction in math, science, and literacy, as well as study skills, public speaking, and leadership. They are then assisted in high school placement, followed with counseling designed to help them successfully earn admission to four-year colleges.

Breakthrough Teaching Fellows receive two weeks of training before working in classrooms through the six-week program. They are continually supported by the Instructional Coaches who help them develop their teaching skills. The goal is to inspire high school and college-aged students to become educators while providing them preliminary exposure to the field. Breakthrough Fellows that go on to teach “do better and stay longer in education than non-Breakthrough peers” according to Breakthrough promotional materials. The organization reports that 75 percent of their Fellows go on to careers in teaching.

This program has been ranked highly as an internship for Teaching Fellows, and is effective based on the pre- and post- test scores of Breakthrough students. However, drawbacks include the lack of expertise Fellows have as classroom managers and teachers and the application-based admissions process that focuses on “highly motivated” summer school students. Additionally, working with middle school students means that some of the effects of the achievement gap will have already settled in, leaving out students who may not fit into the “highly motivated” category based on negative experiences earlier in their education history. The solution proposed

here will seek to incorporate some of the best practices of Breakthrough’s program while also broadening its scope, serving younger students, and utilizing more skilled instructors.

**Auburn University Summer Enrichment Program**

Auburn University provides a summer program for 3.5 to 8 year olds aimed at providing developmentally enriching experiences to these students during the summer. The program additionally provides opportunities for undergraduate students in the College of Education to improve their skills as educators in an environment vastly different from that of a traditional public school classroom. Teachers manage multi-age classrooms and offer support for all subject areas, utilizing a project-based curriculum. The program is held on Auburn’s campus, within its College of Education, offering students and their families access to a university environment long before their children are ready for college.

The six-week program offers enriching experiences for children and student teachers, yet does not focus specifically on low-income or at-risk students. In fact, the program has a $375 tuition fee and a $50 registration fee. Additionally, the pre-school aged focus of the program, while potentially effective in transferring developmental skills, creates two concerns. First, it focuses on a narrow selection of teachers-in-training – those planning to work with preschoolers and early elementary school students. Secondly, it creates a further barrier to access for low-income families who may not have methods of learning about these programs before their children are in formal systems like public school where this information can be disseminated more broadly. The program proposed in this paper will utilize the effective connections to the university developed by Auburn’s model, but will retain a focus on low-income public school students as a means of addressing the achievement gap.

**COLLEGES OF EDUCATION AS ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS**

Athens, Georgia is a college town at heart. It is a place that wouldn’t exist in its current form without the University of Georgia campus in the center of it. The University provides numerous local jobs, and its students, faculty, and staff provide a steady base of consumers, taxpayers, and citizens. This makes UGA an anchor institution - a critical part of the Athens community that utilizes significant local resources and also has the opportunity to provide its community with significant benefits. The poverty that surrounds the University appears in stark contrast to the demographics of the student and faculty populations. In general, the University has a responsibility to Athens as a land grant anchor institution to focus its resources on service to the community. Specifically, as a public institution of higher education, it has a direct stake in the educational attainment of Georgians, including those growing up in the town surrounding its campus.

The University has a mission-specific calling to serve the children of Athens through providing opportunities for educational enrichment. In addition, a focus on increasing educational outcomes for low-income students is practical for the University. It would theoretically increase the number of in-state students eligible to attend the university, increasing the diversity and quality of its applicant pool.

Additionally, the University has made a public commitment to increasing service learning opportunities for its students in its 2020 Strategic Plan. The opportunity exists for the University to fulfill its mission, complete strategic plan goals, and improve its commitment as an anchor institution through a summer lab school.

**THE SOLUTION: UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA SUMMER LAB SCHOOL**

Given all of the data about the achievement gap and its causes, the University’s College of Education should implement an enrichment program supervised by the college’s faculty with the following components:

- Serve local low-income, at-risk elementary and middle school students through a free, 6-week program.
- Provide programming that is substantially different from traditional school curriculum, that still supports and relates to grade-level knowledge.
• Host the program at a local elementary school with College of Education faculty members and their students, who will receive service learning academic credit.
• Serve two free meals per day to participants and transport children to and from the program.

If implemented successfully, at-risk students in Clarke County will benefit from a program designed to keep them healthy and academically engaged during the summer, with the goal of reducing summer learning loss as a tool to combat the achievement gap. Research has shown that summer enrichment is effective. Additionally, using the components of successful lab schools as a guide, and pieces of existing models like Breakthrough and the Auburn Summer Enrichment program to modify the program for summer use, will allow for the aggregation of best practices. UGA’s lab school would draw on the university connection and educated instructors that Auburn’s program boasts, while using parts of the classroom structure and instructional coach facets of the Breakthrough program. Additionally, UGA’s program, like Breakthrough’s, would focus specifically on low-income students. However, UGA’s program should not use an application process.

The program’s size will be dependent on the number of faculty members willing to offer courses during the summer and the number of teachers-in-training who sign up to take these classes. To some extent, the amount of space available to hold classes in the chosen elementary school will limit program size as well. At first, the program may need to be targeted at students from specific elementary and middle schools. As interest grows among college of education students, the goal would be for the school to be selective on the instructor end, not the student participant end.

Ideally, the teachers-in-training helping to staff the summer lab school would be Master’s of Arts in Teaching students. These students could receive credit for a service learning course that would also count as additional practicum student teaching credit. This additional clinical experience would enhance the preparation of these student teachers, but would also potentially allow them to condense the two-year Master’s program. Currently, this condensed track is an option for students in the UGA MAT programs, but forces students to take classes out of cohort. With the addition of the summer lab school, perhaps students who intend to work in the summer semester could form their own cohort that would take an accelerated path toward degree conferral. Student teachers would get course credit for their participation, as well as for planning in the weeks leading up to the program, and data evaluation afterward.

The program’s costs would be relatively low. Costs would be concentrated primarily in facilities, UGA student and faculty funding, transportation, and food. The overhead cost for the facilities will be minimal, as school buildings are usually mostly empty but not completely shut down during the summer. Someone will have to foot the bill for the increase in utilities costs due to keeping lights on and air conditioning running in classrooms during the summer.

Because the lab school will be staffed by students receiving class credit, they will not be eligible to receive payment for their time. Though this may be a burden on students who would otherwise plan to work for pay during the summer, this cost may be somewhat offset if it meant students could condense their time to degree and find employment sooner. If undergraduate students are participating in the summer lab school, they will be eligible to use HOPE and Zell B. Miller scholarship funding to pay for their summer tuition. Graduate students will not have this luxury. Thus, the college of education should work to increase stipend and scholarship opportunities for students participating in the summer lab school program. Professors with opportunities to pay assistants and researchers may be able to fund some students, while funding for other stipends may be requested from the state legislature for future fiscal years. The college of education may also draw on existing scholarship funds to help defray costs of summer coursework, and work with UGA’s development office to procure funding from donors for scholarships specifically for this purpose.
The college may also have to secure funding for increased pay for professors and Ph.D. students acting as instructional coaches who otherwise are not paid for teaching or research in the summer. Research funding and grants may also be procured at the faculty level to fund some of this work.

The larger costs come from food and transportation. The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers a grant program for distributing summer lunch to school-aged children, regardless of income. The school district has received grants in previous years through this program to open a limited number of schools for lunch service during the summer. This grant program could fund the food served at the lab school. Transportation, however, poses the greatest cost barrier. The base price to rent a bus from the Athens school district is $225 a day, including driver wages and insurance, according to the Deputy Superintendent for Clarke County Schools Norice Price. Grants or public funding should be sought to cover the cost of buses to minimize barriers to access to the program for students that are beyond walking distance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While a summer lab school run by the University of Georgia combats education inequality by addressing some of its key causes and fits into the university’s mission as a public anchor institution, as it has been described thus far it puts the onus on the university to plan, pay and sustain the initiative. This program, while effective, needs public support of a broader sort. Additionally, the summer lab school initiative has implications beyond Athens in all of the educational communities surrounding public universities that offer teacher preparation programs.

For these reasons, the state government should provide funding for developing a summer lab school through public teacher education programs. Though these programs may vary in size and focus statewide, the general model, and funding for that base model, could be made available based on state-level legislation or through diverting funding from existing grant programs within the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement or the Georgia Department of Education. Particularly, access to grants for transportation, facilities, and stipends for participating university students would give colleges of education throughout the state access to the funding necessary to start summer lab schools. In order to begin this process, the state Department of Education, the Board of Regents, legislators, governor’s office policy officials, and relevant advocacy and issue-based organizations should be convened in conversation on the topic.

It is likely that the University of Georgia’s program could be piloted without legislation through other grant sources. This pilot initiative would allow the state to visualize the program in action. For this reason, UGA could continue with implementation concurrent with action toward legislation, as the two are not mutually exclusive. The UGA College of Education has convened a Planning Team, engaging faculty in the college, district officials and teachers, and other stakeholders to begin creating goals and coordinating responsibilities for the development of a lab school in Athens. Continued communication within this group of actors and stakeholders could result in a program in Athens prior to statewide action on the topic.

Education inequality is a crippling issue in our country. By creating a program and institutionalizing it through policy that targets three of the developing causes of this problem - summer learning loss, lack of access to healthy food, and early attrition in the teacher workforce - we can work to level the playing field for elementary and middle school children, putting them on track for a more successful academic and personal future. This policy must be championed by public higher education due to its responsibilities to local communities and to producing educated young adults at the end of our state’s education pipeline. Athens, GA is the ideal pilot location for this program. It has a thriving college community and teacher preparation program, as well as some of the starkest poverty in the state. However, it is not the only place where this initiative is needed. In fact, Georgia is not the only state where this initiative is needed. If effective at the pilot level and the state level, this policy could be implemented in states across the country as a means of national change through local initiatives.
Works Cited


Bakle, B. R. (2010, January 1). Summer Learning Loss: The Influence of Summer School Programs on Student Achievement in Language Usage, Math, and Reading. ProQuest LLC.


“Clarke County Free and Reduced Price Meal Eligibility Fiscal Year 2014 Data Report.” (2014). Georgia Department of Education.


Ferguson-Patrick, K., Macqueen, S., Reynolds, R., & Australian Association for Research in Education, (. (2012). Global Education in Teacher Education Programs: Views from Pre-Service Teachers. Australian Association For Research In Education.


Map the Meal Gap 2012, Clarke County. Feeding America.


