

BRIGHT SPOTS

Summer Learning



Summer Advantage USA, Indianapolis, IN

Despite the summer heat in 2010, Assistant Principal Kris Kingery “got chills” whenever he entered a classroom where Summer Advantage USA’s five-week learning and enrichment program was underway. No matter when he arrived, the children were excited and engaged, clustered around a project.

“It altered my perspective on education,” says Kingery, who managed Summer Advantage’s program in Pike County’s Central Elementary School near Indianapolis. “I asked to come back the next summer, because the experience was so amazing.”

Earl Martin Phalen founded Summer Advantage using an education entrepreneur fellowship from The Mind Trust, a nonprofit organization that acts as a venture capital fund for education in Indiana. The program launched in 2009, serving nearly 800 students in Indiana’s lowest-performing school districts. The program has scaled up to serve 5,000 scholars in 2011. The Indiana Department of Education is a strong supporter, providing funding and strategic guidance.

Later this year, Summer Advantage will begin offering franchises, with sales starting at \$15,000 a site. Phalen expects school districts, teachers and non-profit leaders to be the primary buyers, but he foresees Summer Advantage significantly scaling up its “company-owned” branches as well.

The franchises will be “mission-aligned and financially profitable,” Phalen says, but “no family will need to pay.” Phalen expects Title I, summer school dollars and 21st Century Community Learning Center funds to cover operating costs.

Components of success

Summer Advantage evolved from the program offered by Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL), a Boston-based learning and enrichment program that Phalen and fellow Harvard Law students co-founded in 1992.

WHO THEY ARE

In 2011, Summer Advantage serves:

- **5,000 students, 93% of whom receive Free and Reduced-Price Meals.**
- **20 school sites.**

2011 operations include:

- **850 certified teachers, teaching assistants and site leaders (school principals).**
 - **9 administrative staff working via a “virtual office.”**
 - **Online training platform.**
 - **Technology system partners include Taleo for HR and Nfocus for scholar data management.**
- \$1,000 cost per student.**

CONTACT

Summer Advantage USA

Indianapolis, IN 46201

(617) 818-1959

Earl Martin Phalen, Founder

emphalen@summeradvantage.org

Phalen continues to lead Summer Advantage, while serving as CEO of the national literacy organization, Reach Out and Read. Summer Advantage's rigorous academics are complemented by community service projects, guest speakers and field trips that engage student "scholars" on different levels and broaden their horizons. At Central Elementary, Kingery has found the program also succeeded in engaging parents through mandatory orientation, a Family Involvement Pledge and other outreach.

Kingery delights in attracting "the best of the best" teaching staff, which makes the 1-to-10 instructional ratios all the more meaningful. On select subjects, faculty members group scholars by ability. Behavior problems disappear. "I did not have one kid, in five weeks of full-day school, come to the office," says Kingery.

Broader impact

Summer Advantage tracks its performance using the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills; attendance records; surveys of scholars, parents and teachers; and Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus (ISTEP+) test results.

In 2010, Summer Advantage students gained 2.7 months grade equivalent skills on the Iowa pre- and post- tests in reading and math; this is in stark contrast to the average learning loss of 2.5 months among children in low-income communities over the summer months. That loss can place them farther and farther behind their more advantaged peers, who keep learning year-round.

Summer Advantage's positive impact can ripple beyond the actual participants. According to Superintendent Nathaniel Jones, Pike Township School District intensified its focus on literacy after Summer Advantage students came back to school with a higher interest in reading. Higher levels of parent involvement also continued. Kingery noted that parents, grandparents or guardians accompanied 61 out of 97 students participating in a mid-May event showcasing student-made books. "Those are huge numbers for us," he says.

More for less

Summer Advantage uses technology to streamline its operations and reduce costs — partnering with Taleo for hiring systems and Nfocus for scholar data management, for example. "We must be obsessively focused on our 'double bottom line,'" says Phalen. "We've got to deliver this for \$1,000 or less per scholar, and we have to make sure our scholars gain more than two months in literacy skills over the summer, and we've done that."

A small core staff uses a virtual "office," and meets frequently with school-based staff via Internet technologies. "This is a very different model," says Phalen. "If you can stay lean, stay virtual and leverage technology, you can — with very little growth capital — scale and deliver extraordinary results."

Summer Advantage's five-year goal is to educate more than 100,000 children throughout the U.S. "Our longer term vision is to educate 1 million and to be the best summer learning program in the country," says Phalen.

WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

In 2010, Summer Advantage students achieved:

- **2.7-month average gains in reading and math skills.**

Summer Advantage now shows:

- **90.6% average daily attendance.**
- **94% parent satisfaction.**
- **97% of teachers would recommend the program to students.**

HIGHLIGHTS

Summer Advantage:

- **Bases a 5-week, full-day summer program in local schools.**
- **Combines academic rigor with enrichment activities.**
- **Leverages technology and systems to reduce costs.**
- **Plans to sell site franchises, starting in late 2011.**
- **Aims to serve 1-million children nationwide by 2021.**