

# BRIGHT SPOTS

Summer Learning



## Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL), Boston, MA

In 2001, a second-grade girl named Crisimar introduced herself to Dr. Tiffany Cooper Gueye by saying, “My sister is in the program, and she’s a genius!” The program was Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL), which has provided intensive academic enrichment and support to students most at risk of failing in grades K–8 since 1992.

“She just really wanted to be smart like her sister,” says Gueye, now BELL’s CEO. According to Gueye, Crisimar, too, has advanced and “is doing very well” in BELL’s alumni program, working with BELL advisors to apply to college.

Founded in 1992, BELL evolved from a community service project organized in Boston’s Dorchester neighborhood by a group of Harvard Law School students who were shocked to realize that their teen charges read at only a second-grade level. “For the last 18 years, BELL has been transforming the academic achievements, self-esteem and life opportunities of children living in under-resourced urban communities,” says Gueye.

Over 15,000 students now benefit from BELL Summer and BELL After School programs. In BELL Summer, students typically gain three months or more in literacy and math skills in six weeks. This contrasts sharply with national norms for low-income students, who typically lose learning over the summer and thus start each academic year farther and farther behind their peers. In BELL After School, students also strengthen their academic skills, along with their interest in college and belief in themselves.

With an 8-to-1 student-teacher ratio and small-group tutoring in reading and math, BELL “deepens learning,” says Nadia Bryan Clarke, regional director for BELL Mid-Atlantic’s operations. “We are relating to our scholars, talking to them individually and daily,” says Clarke, “and that’s something that a lot of our scholars have been missing.”

### WHO THEY ARE

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**BELL served 15,307 students in Fiscal Year 2011:**

- **7,391 BELL Summer Scholars.**
- **7,916 BELL After School Scholars.**
- **50% African American, 40% Hispanic, 10% White and Asian; 35% English Language Learners.**

**Program sites: Baltimore; Boston; Detroit; Newark, NJ; New York City; and Springfield, MA.**

**\$1,000–\$1,500 cost per student at current scale.**

### CONTACT

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Clarke also notes that BELL's evidence-based curriculum aligns to state standards but allows teachers flexibility to individualize instruction. "We are not pressured to teach to a test," she says.

## Driving the program with data

A stream of data, including the results of quizzes that map to state learning standards, helps staff develop individualized learning plans. Stanford Diagnostic tests, given pre- and post-program, assess the performance of each student. In addition to academic progress, BELL tracks scholars' social gains and parent and teacher satisfaction.

Located in local schools, BELL sites are staffed by teams of program managers, teachers and other personnel who receive training through the BELL Success online platform as well as through in-person training activities.

## Navigating change

In 2011, BELL received a three-year grant of up to \$5 million, with a first-year award of \$2 million, from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF) and the Social Innovation Fund (SIF). This endorsement for its work will help offset the loss of funding that BELL has experienced as school districts find themselves unable to sign multi-year contracts or to send as many students to BELL programs.

As a result of cuts to public education, BELL reduced its growth expectations and goals for the next three years, says Gueye. "We have also increased efforts to generate independent evidence, inform educational policies and unlock new sources of funding to expand and sustain our impact."

With its grant from EMCF and SIF, BELL has set very specific goals to:

- Deliver BELL Summer to a cumulative 18,500 to 21,500 scholars over the next three years.
- Establish BELL Summer in up to three new states (priorities: North Carolina, South Carolina and California).
- Expand in five existing states (particularly Massachusetts, Michigan and New York).
- Engage the nonprofit MDRC to conduct a second evaluation of BELL Summer's effectiveness, to be completed in 2012.
- Strengthen BELL's business development capacity.

In 2011, the award will also enable BELL Summer to re-establish and expand in its program in Springfield, MA, where BELL Summer began. Mary Ellen Baron, Springfield's senior administrator for extended instructional time, expects twice as many applicants to the Springfield's summer program as in the years before the program was curtailed due to budget cuts. Says Baron, "They know BELL is back."

## WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

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**BELL Summer scholars average:**

- **Gains of 3 months or more in literacy and math skills (pre- and post-program Stanford Diagnostic tests).**
- **Curriculum confirmed as evidence-based by Mathematica Policy Research/The Urban Institute, 2006.**

**BELL After School scholars outpace:**

- **The national norm in new literacy and math skills.**

**After 2010 BELL Summer, BELL scholars showed:**

- **Increased desire to go to college; 73% (up from 18% at the start of the program).\***
- **Increased self-confidence, 89%.\***
- **Increased social and peer-relations skills, 84%.**

*\*Source: BELLSurvey*

*Source: BELL- administered SAYO*

## HIGHLIGHTS

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**BELL:**

- **Refers to students as "scholars" to establish high expectations.**
- **Maintains student-teacher ratios of 8-to-1.**
- **Provides small group tutoring in reading and math.**
- **Mentors and strengthens social skills along with academic achievement.**
- **Encourages parents to become engaged in their child's education.**