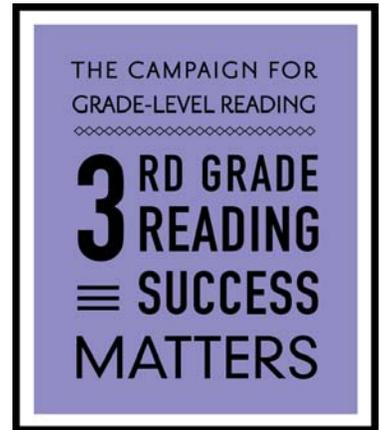


# BRIGHT SPOTS

Summer Learning



## Horizons National, Norwalk, CT

“Start young and stick with it” might be the motto for Horizons National, a program that helps more than 2,000 low-income students improve their reading and math skills by an average of three months each summer. The program starts with kindergarteners to help them become confident, skilled learners before an achievement gap separating them from more advantaged children becomes too large to bridge. Eighty-four percent of Horizon students return year after year, attending Horizons for an average of five years.

“A three-month jump in reading ability is quite an achievement among a population that typically loses two to three months over each summer,” says CEO Lorna Smith. Summer learning loss is the single greatest factor in the annual growth of the achievement gap.

### Boosting Self-Confidence

The first Horizons program opened in 1964 in New Canaan, Connecticut at New Canaan Country School. In 1995, Horizons National was formed to replicate Horizons programs across the country. These programs serve low-income students from neighboring public schools on the campuses of independent schools and colleges and draw funding and leadership from the community. Horizons National works with the programs throughout the year to ensure success, providing program support and initiative funding. While required to adhere to a common set of principles, each affiliate is unique and reflects its local community and the culture, curriculum and philosophy of the host school. Most affiliates operate under the 501(c)(3) of their host schools.

The cornerstone of the Horizons approach is a six-week, full-day summer session. The model joins three hours of academic instruction in reading, writing and math with three hours of enrichment programming that includes swimming, arts, recreation and games, and science. It’s no accident that 100 percent of the students learn to swim. Horizons finds that an emphasis on swimming boosts students’ self-confidence and encourages risk-taking in academic subjects.

### WHO THEY ARE

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#### Horizons National:

- Serves over 2,000 children annually in 23 programs across 10 states.
- Enrolls children, K-8<sup>th</sup> grade, 100% of whom qualify for Free and Reduced-Price Meals.
- Partners with over 300 public schools.
- Average cost per student: \$1,800. Cost to student: registration fee of no more than \$50

### CONTACT

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## The Slow-Bake Model

In each of the 23 communities where a Horizons affiliate has taken root, a core group of donors has come together to champion the program, serve on a local Horizons board and partner with Horizons National. They raise and manage most of the \$1,800 per student cost of operations, while Horizons National provides funding for one or two specialized support staff members, materials, training, evaluation and data.

Using a “slow-bake” approach to growth, a program begins with only one or two grades in the first year and adds grades each year until the full K-8 program is in place.

## Long-Term Commitment

“Our long-term commitment makes us different than other programs,” says Smith. “We’re narrowing the gaps in both achievement and life opportunity that severely undermine success for low-income children.”

STAR Reading assessments show that, although on average Horizons students come to the program below grade level, their rate of learning parallels average trends in their grade, while other low-income students slide. Another critical component of Horizons is that it exposes its students to a robust blend of cultural and academic enrichment. Field trips, guest speakers, camping trips, and college visits are just a few examples of the Horizons experience.

“At Horizons, projects and experience-driven learning made everything fun,” says alumnus Joseph Chan, who still relishes winning an Uno tournament embedded in the math curriculum. Inspired by his Horizons experience, Chan now serves on the National board and was instrumental in launching a Horizons affiliate program at the Brooklyn Friends School in Brooklyn, NY.

## Literacy Initiative

In 2008, Horizons launched a new Literacy Initiative to support its high-quality language arts instruction with assessment, targeted intervention, and curriculum. Network-wide data analysis now continuously identifies trends, best practices, and areas for improvement. The National office also provides each affiliate with a dedicated Reading Specialist as well as the training and tools needed for skill-based assessment of student performance.

The Reading Specialist typically spends at least four hours daily providing small-group or individualized instruction, including read-alouds, word fluency, vocabulary development, decoding, spelling, writing and other skill-based activities. For the balance of the day, the specialist works with teachers to align instruction with the curriculum, and coordinates follow-up with parents and the student’s regular school.

“Horizons proves itself effective and sustainable year after year,” says Smith. “We’ve never lost a program.”

## WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

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### Among Horizons students:

- **84% return year after year, attending the program for an average of 5 years.**
- **100% learn to swim.**
- **Gains in reading skills average:**
  - **3 months for all Horizons students.**
  - **4 months for students reading below grade level.**
- **Students retain significantly more reading gains than other low-income students.**

## HIGHLIGHTS:

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### Horizons

- **Is a 6-week program that lasts at least 6 hours daily.**
- **Emphasizes reading and math daily.**
- **Has a student faculty ratio of no more than 5 to 1.**
- **Has an academically diverse, student body that is also racially, culturally and gender-balanced.**
- **Cultivates strong individual relationships between faculty, staff, students and parents.**
- **Provides daily recreational and instructional swimming.**
- **Encourages parental involvement.**
- **Holds student fees to \$50.**
- **Works to maintain connections with students over the winter.**