

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 7, 2017

CONTACT: Garrett Berberich, garrett@himmelrich.com, 410.528.5400

Studies: Summer Arts Programming Improves Academic Performance

Baltimore students in Young Audiences Summer Arts Academy Outperform Peers

BALTIMORE – Low-income Baltimore City Public Schools students who participated in a new arts-related summer academic program from Young Audiences avoided summer learning loss and, in many cases, gained ground on their national peers in standardized testing, according to evaluations released Tuesday. The new findings showed potentially groundbreaking progress in tackling summer learning loss, a chronic challenge facing public schools.

The results, confirmed in two separate studies involving nearly 800 students, are significant because summer learning loss – particularly among students at or below poverty level – is among the most difficult challenges facing the Baltimore school district and other high-poverty schools across the country. During summer, students typically fall below where they ended the previous grade, setting them back as they start a new school year. In fact, a 2013 National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) survey of 500 teachers found that 66 percent reported the need to spend three to four weeks re-teaching students course material at the beginning of the year. Another 24% reported the need to spend five to six weeks doing the same.

“City Schools has enjoyed a great partnership with Young Audiences, not only during the school year but also the past two summers,” said Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises, chief executive officer of Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools). “During the summer, Young Audiences reinforces key math and reading concepts through the arts and creative activities – and we’re pleased with the results we’ve seen. When students participate in summer learning programs that help them move ahead or reduce learning loss, they start the school year off stronger.”

The Young Audiences Summer Arts and Learning Academy (YA Academy), run by the Baltimore-based arts-education non-profit Young Audiences of Maryland in partnership with City Schools, was free for students and held at four sites across the city: Gardenville Elementary, Thomas Jefferson Elementary/Middle, William Pinderhughes Elementary, and Fort Worthington Elementary/Middle. Eighty-eight percent of the participating students were from high-poverty Title I schools.

“These results were a pleasant surprise given that we generally expect that students will lose ground over the summer,” commented Dr. Marc L. Stein, Associate Professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education, who conducted a separate program evaluation for Young Audiences which looked at participating students’ academic skill and social-emotional development. “The Young Audiences summer program combines many of the best practices of summer learning programs and appears to be a promising model. These findings deserve to be investigated more rigorously to find out how and for whom the program appears to be working.”

“This is not your typical summer school program,” said Stacie Evans, Executive Director of Young Audiences. “We taught literacy and math through the arts every day and instruction was collaboratively taught by teaching artists and teachers specifically trained in arts-integration methods. If you walked into one of our classrooms, you might have seen students using hip hop music to help solve word problems in math, or creating dances to summarize and sequence main events in a story.”

The Baltimore City Public Schools evaluation found:

- For math, statistically significant results showed that students in grades 3-5 who regularly attended (defined as attending at least 75% of the program) the YA Academy improved 1.8% percentile points in national student rankings on i-Ready standardized testing from the spring of 2016 to the fall of that year. That compares to a decrease of 2.8% percentile points for city schools students who did not attend any summer programming.
- In reading, YA Academy students in grades 3-5 with regular attendance fell only .8% percentile points while students who did not attend any summer programming fell 2.1 percentile points upon returning to school in the fall.

- Results for all grade 3-5 students regardless of attendance rate showed Young Audiences attendees falling just .3% percentile points in math and .7% in reading. These were significantly smaller losses than students with no summer programming (down 2.8% in math, down 2.1% lost in reading).
- In literacy, only 3% of the students in grades K-2 attending the YA Academy did not meet their benchmark goal (the empirically derived target score that represents adequate reading progress¹) on the standardized DIBELS assessment in the fall after returning to school compared to 8.1% of students not attending any summer programming not meeting the benchmark.

Young Audiences external program evaluation participants found:

- 79% of students who attended at least 75% of the program and who took pre- and post-tests had a positive change from the first to the last week of the program on a curriculum based measure of mathematics.
- Approximately 60% of students who attended at least 75% of the program and who took pre- and post-test writing prompts showed positive change in their structure and content of their writing.
- 71% of students who attended 75% of the program and were administered pre- and post-assessments showed growth in at least one out of three social emotional competency areas over the course of the program. The social emotional competencies studied were relationship skills, self-awareness, and goal directed behavior.

"The arts offer an extraordinary opportunity, particularly during the summer, to reignite the joy of learning and to set young people on the right course to start the school year strong. These impressive results from Young Audiences mirror findings of the landmark [Wallace Foundation](#) study showing that elementary school students with high levels of attendance in high-quality, voluntary summer learning programs can experience benefits in math and reading," commented Matthew Boulay PhD, National Summer Learning Association founder and interim CEO.

Eric Harrell, father of 9 year-old Summer Arts Academy participant, Aria Harrell, said "Before this academy, I could tell that my daughter was struggling in math. By using the arts she was able to learn math in a different way-a way that worked for her. She has so much more confidence in her math class."

¹ "Dibels Next Benchmark Goals and Composite Score," Dynamic Measurement Group, Inc. (December 1, 2010). <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/DIBELSNextFormerBenchmarkGoals.pdf>

Links to complete City Schools and Young Audiences Evaluations:

YAMD evaluation:

<http://www.yamd.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Young-Audiences-Final-2016-Program-Goal-Evaluation-Report.pdf>

City Schools evaluation:

<http://www.yamd.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/City-Schools-2016-Summer-Learning-Evaluation-1.pdf>

About Young Audiences/Arts for Learning Young Audiences is the nation's largest arts-in-education provider and started in Baltimore in 1950. As a Young Audiences affiliate, Young Audiences/Arts for Learning (YA) is a nonprofit organization devoted to enriching the lives and education of Maryland's youth through educational and culturally diverse arts programs for more than 65 years. Each year, YA reaches more than 190,000 students through over 7,000 arts learning experiences by partnering professional artists from all disciplines with schools throughout Maryland for hands-on arts learning experiences. We envision a Maryland where the arts are valued for their capacity to transform lives, and where every student is immersed in opportunities to imagine, to create, and to realize their full potential through the arts. For more information, contact YA at [410-837-7577](tel:410-837-7577) or visit yamd.org.