



Guiding Principles | Church-Based Summer Literacy Programs

The following six principles will govern the implementation of Summer Literacy programs (SLP's) hosted in and by rural United Methodist Churches and supported by The Duke Endowment. These programs will run for six continuous weeks during the academic recess and will serve rising first- through fourth-graders who are at risk for reading failure, with the recognition that there is a movement within the Endowment, statewide, and nationally to focus on early education opportunities. While not a requirement, future funding may prioritize programs serving students before they enter third grade (age eight and younger).

These principles were designed using The Ubuntu Project, a capstone project of a former Endowment fellow. They are meant to provide guidelines for new and existing programs, while allowing for context and community-specific needs. For details on how to implement this program with fidelity, please see the Implementation Guide.

Undergirding all of these principles is a focus on evidence and evidence-building. The Endowment recognizes that there is no tested model in the scientific literature for summer literacy programs hosted in rural churches, and seeks to fill that void by developing a model that can be evaluated for effectiveness. We therefore place a high emphasis on program fidelity, standardized assessment and, if possible, the creation of a student waitlist to serve as a control/comparison group.

The Implementation Guide also provides evaluation questions and the corresponding measurements for each principle. These questions are intended to help maintain program fidelity and to encourage continuous quality improvement.

A strong program will show evidence of these six principles:

1. Thriving and Engaged Church Community
2. Strong Community Investment
3. Wrap-around Services
4. Empowered and Effective Teachers
5. Data-informed and Student-focused Instruction
6. Family Engagement



Thriving and Engaged Church Community

***Principle:** Start with and build upon a thriving rural church community.*

Why this matters:

The United Methodist denomination defines a “vital congregation” as one with strong worship attendance, growing professions of faith, and consistent participation from members in both internal and community-focused activities. In addition, a recent evaluation of the Thriving Rural Communities Initiative at Duke Divinity School identified fifteen markers of a “thriving” church. The list included engagement in regular hands-on service and mission work, valuing young people, and offering something for everyone.

Rural communities often have limited resources and therefore struggle to meet the many needs of their inhabitants. In these communities, the church provides much needed social capital to help the community address the unmet needs. In a successful literacy program, the host church provides crucial project resources, including volunteers, financial support and physical space. Vital or thriving congregations, as defined above, are best suited to provide these resources and to serve as both the backbone organization and largest champion of high-quality programs such as an SLP.

Strong Community Investment

***Principle:** Build relationships with school and community leaders to develop a sustainable program that will serve children who stand to benefit most from the program.*

Why this matters:

Community investment serves three essential roles: (1) to identify community need, (2) to ensure that the program reaches children most at risk for failure in school, and (3) to promote the long-term viability of the program. Given the current North Carolina mandate that struggling readers receive summer instruction from their district, the host church and community must justify the need for additional literacy offerings.

For programs to have the greatest possible impact, program staff will need the assistance of school and community leaders to identify and reach those children most at risk. Research has shown that students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times less likely to graduate high school than proficient readers. Research has also shown a strong link between poverty status and drop-out rates, placing low-income students who struggle with reading in what is often referred to as “double jeopardy”. Additionally, to encourage strong community relationships, a successful summer literacy program will ultimately be sustainable long-term with little to no funding from the Endowment.



Wrap-around Services

Principle: *Whenever possible, recognize and address unmet needs that hinder a child's ability to participate fully in the program.*

Why this matters:

A child's physical health, emotional health, and home environment directly impacts his or her ability to participate in and benefit from summer learning programs. Low-income students are particularly likely to experience barriers to access and learning.

A successful literacy program will address barriers to learning by providing support for students' basic physical needs, including healthy meals, and emotional needs, including a safe and nurturing environment, structured incentives for attendance and performance, and strong relationship opportunities among students, families and volunteers. Additionally, programs must find a way to address logistical barriers, such as a caregiver's work schedule, that could preclude student participation. Possible solutions include providing transportation and/or child care before and after the program.

Empowered and Effective Teachers

Principle: *Select highly effective reading teachers who provide data-informed and student-focused instruction.*

Why this matters:

A successful program will hire highly effective teachers with the skills to create custom lesson plans that respond to the specific needs of their students while adhering to all aspects of the Balanced Literacy Approach, as outlined in the Implementation Guide.

Highly effective teachers set clear expectations and create a learning climate that is centered around assessment and reflection. They are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach and ensure student engagement through relevant and rigorous instruction. In addition, highly effective reading instructors have demonstrated success in consistently fostering exceptional reading growth among the students they serve.

Data-informed and Student-focused Instruction

Principle: *Instruction is grounded in the Balanced Literacy approach, designed around individualized reading growth goals, and driven by student assessment.*

Why this matters:

Student-specific learning goals are directly linked to more rapid literacy gains. To set effective and individualized goals, summer literacy programs must be intentional about class sizes, schedule and assessments.

Data-driven instruction is particularly important, as accurate and consistent assessments will allow teachers and students to set realistic and clear expectations for growth. To ensure standardized and actionable student data, teachers will administer formative assessments. It is recommended that teachers conduct the assessments weekly, and that they use a district-approved tool. Teachers will also work with external technical assistance provider(s) to administer



the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT) at the beginning and end of the program. Finally, if relevant, the program will obtain students' end-of-grade (EOG) and beginning-of-grade (BOG) test scores from the district, in hopes of showing student growth over the summer and in subsequent years.

Classrooms should also be kept as small as possible to facilitate one-on-one attention, and the three classroom hours will be devoted directly to reading using a Balanced Literacy framework. See implementation guide for more details.

Family Engagement

Principle: Engage parents and guardians in their child's learning.

Why this matters:

Studies have concluded that there is a positive relationship between family engagement and students' educational achievement. To this end, successful programs will work to ensure basic parent and guardian involvement through a program orientation, weekly parent/guardian workshops, and an end-of-program celebration. The orientation will provide an overview of the program, the workshops will equip parents and guardians to reinforce their child's learning at home, and the celebration will reiterate the importance of literacy in children's lives. See Implementation Guide for specifics.