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"Summertime is the Time for Leisure Activities, Family Time, Vacations and Getting Some Much Needed Rest and Relaxation"

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2016 RCEU Research Proposal

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Project Summary

Summertime is the time for leisure activities, family time, vacations and getting some much needed rest and relaxation. Students look forward to going to the pool, playing with their friends, and not getting up early. However, their parents see something different. Many parents and teachers use the summer break as an extended learning season, specifically to enhance the academic skills of those that struggle to meet the academic goals set throughout the year. By 2000, many of the nations' school districts require that students that struggle to meet academic standards attend summer school (Mathews, 2000).

Research shows that students, who are not involved in academic activities during the summer months, tend to fall behind academically when school starts in the fall. This is especially true for students who struggle in areas of reading and math (Cooper, 2001). In addition, students who struggle in these areas, struggle in science as well. More often than not, "children placed at-risk for academic failure rely primarily on school for academic learning" (US Department of Education, 1993, p.2). Students across the country specifically African American students who are placed at risk for academic failure are reading below their grade level. As a result, these students tend to have behavior problems, low classroom participation, low test scores, and lack of academic success. In light of this staggering information teachers are faced with the challenge of meeting their students where they are at the start of the school year. One of the biggest challenges is to aid students in recalling the academic information that they may have loss during the summer. Cooper et al (1996) found that summer learning loss equaled at least one month of instruction. In another study, Sargent &Fidler (1987) show that students with learning disabilities and those at-risk may need extra summer learning opportunities. Cooper et al (2000) found that summer programs focusing on remedial, accelerated or enriched learning had a positive impact on the knowledge and skills of participants.

Summer enrichment programs have proven to have major benefits for students placed at-risk in reading. Studies show that students who attend high-quality summer school, participate in enrichment programs, or read 10 or more books during the summer, can maintain or improve their skills. Additionally, reading just four or five books over the summer can have a significant impact in stemming summer learning loss. Given that reading is the foundation for other academic learning; for students placed at-risk, attending a summer enrichment program has the potential for improving or maintaining academic proficiency in science and reading.

Given these studies it is paramount that at-risk students are provided with opportunities to enhance and/or maintain their current academic ability. To that end this research project will focus on evaluating the effectiveness of summer enrichment in Science, Reading and Math on

students that have been placed at risk for academic failure. The student selected will assist with the development of curriculum modules analyzing the data once the intervention has been completed. These modules will focus on using culturally specific learning strategies to teach science, math and reading. The student will be responsible for keeping logs of students' performance throughout duration of the summer program.

Student Duties

The student who serves as a research assistant for this project will be an integral part of developing and implementing this research. They will meet weekly with their mentor who will provide supervision as they work together to conduct a literary review, develop and implement a research design, support partner sites with implementation, collect and assess data on program impact, evaluate program effectiveness, and communicate research findings in writing. Learning to do these essential research tasks in a mentored environment will equip and empower the student to pursue further, independent research topics of personal interest. Furthermore, working on this project will provide opportunities for the student to deepen their understanding of factors driving academic achievement, engage meaningfully with community leaders, partner with others toward a common goal, think about affecting long-term change, and contribute toward real-world, local challenges with the potential for broader impact.

Mentor Supervision and Interaction

The student will meet weekly at UAH with Dr. Monica Dillihunt to develop goals and discuss findings. During these meetings, the mentor will informally provide any training needed to achieve these goals including guidance in areas such as writing a literary review, research design, development of curriculum, evaluation processes, communicating with partner organizations, etc. The student will be expected to show initiative in seeking out needed help and make adequate progress in accordance with the agreed upon goals. Their unique skills, experiences, and interest will also be considered and opportunities to develop these through the project will be encouraged.