

Horizons EXPANDS regional footprint to Queen Anne's

It's the first day of Horizons at The Gunston School and the questions from the 36 low-income kids are coming at a rapid clip: "Can we swim in the deep end?" "Where's the bathroom?" and, most importantly, "Can we have recess *before* lunch?" One child pipes in: "I love math!"

Ellen Uzealac



Second-graders Makenna Schultz, left, and Naomi Stubbs hug during their first morning at Gunston.

It's a big day for the kids – and also for the recently renamed Horizons of Kent and Queen Anne's, which this summer expanded its reach into Queen Anne's County for the first time.

"When organizations work together, you can pool resources and have the capacity to have a much wider impact on the lives of children," says Gunston headmaster John Lewis. "Intervening in summer slide is the most important thing you can do to close the achievement gap for low-income kids. It's just not complicated. Kids from low-income families have less opportunity in the summer. Anything we can do to help provide those opportunities or be part of that process helps us to educate children to their fullest potential. And that's our mission. Our mission and the Horizons program are a good match."

The program, two years in the making, is starting out with kindergarten, first and second grades. The children attend Church Hill and Centreville elementary schools and qualify for the federal free and reduced meals program. Ultimately, Horizons hopes to add other grades at the 32-acre waterfront campus. The idea is that the kids keep coming back, year after year, building on their school year successes.

"Horizons offers the opportunity every summer to bring back those same students and build on skills. These children will get academic support, physical activity, social skills and, hopefully, they won't lose some of what they've gained in the school year," notes Carol Williamson, Queen Anne's County public schools superintendent. Williamson plans to read to the kids as a "special guest" over the next weeks.

The program – which includes math, reading, science, swim instruction and enrichment clubs – has been developed around a theme: How things work. As examples, the kids will make a balloon-powered car and, during a field trip to Rita's Italian Ice, they will flavor their own treat and learn how liquids can turn into solids. The kids will also visit the Centreville Library, the Naval Academy and the pool at the Kent County Community Center.

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Q & A with learning consultant RON FAIRCHILD

Education reform advocate Ron Fairchild was working for the Boys & Girls Clubs of America in the late 1990s when he attended a conference at Johns Hopkins University that nearly leveled him.

"They were presenting all this data on summer learning loss and I'm thinking: 'How is it possible for me to be sitting in a large youth organization like the Boys & Girls Clubs with literally millions of kids and never having heard about summer learning loss?' It was like a two-by-four across the head," recalls Fairchild. "This was something we needed to do something about."

Fairchild went on to establish the Baltimore-based National Summer Learning Association. He also served as executive director of its predecessor organization, the Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University.

Today, Fairchild heads the Smarter Learning Group, a national consulting firm that helps non-profit organizations improve learning opportunities for low-income children. Clients include Horizons National, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

A former teacher, Fairchild spoke recently with Horizons Today about summer learning loss.

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Horizons Heroes

Horizons of Kent and Queen Anne's wishes to recognize the HORIZONS HEROES who have supported our program with annual donations of \$1,000 or more. Our thanks go to:

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Youth Today highlights Kent program

Parents and their children had high praise for Horizons.

Jamie Foote, the mother of Alexandria, a seventh-grader in her second year at Horizons last July, said her daughter has made big strides academically.

"Before she got in the program, she was way behind in her reading and math; her levels were two grades below everybody else," said the mother, who works for Kent County government as a parks and recreation department facilities supervisor.

Now, Alexandria (who goes by "Allie") is up to grade level in reading and a bit ahead in math.

The program also helped Allie socially, her mother said. "She is very shy and doesn't like to venture outside the box to meet people. And at Horizons, she comes home every day with a new friend and just absolutely loves it, and she actually interacts there."

"Innovative Summer Learning Program Expands Kids' Horizons"

Excerpted with permission from Youth Today, March 12, 2015.

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Williamson, in particular, is a fan of the field trips.

"They provide experience outside their own community," she says. "It goes to language development – talking about what they've seen and done. It will build language. It also develops listening skills. It's hard to read something when you've never heard the word before."

Since 1995, Horizons – located at Radcliffe Creek School – has served hundreds of Kent County children at or below the poverty level as part of the growing national initiative to reduce the summer slide. In addition to the Gunston location, Horizons this summer formalized its partnership with Washington College, where the program's middle school students are headquartered.

Horizons National chief advancement officer Kim Fairey said Horizons of Kent and Queen Anne's is "leading the way" by expanding organically and regionally.

"We're just thrilled to welcome Gunston and Washington College into the family. Really, it's the way our expansion will work nationwide in the future," she said. "Regionalization has created so much enthusiasm. It's in the DNA of these programs to grow. I think there's a wave coming."



First day jitters and smiles at Gunston.

Ellen Uzelac

What has been the trajectory of the summer learning movement since you first founded the Summer Learning Association?

My sense has always been this had been a very well-kept secret. It was something sociologists wrote about but it had not really been something that had been popularized. But you work and you work and you work and you try to get people's attention and frame the issue in a way that's compelling. One lowlight was an interview I did for a TV station where they basically presented me as the Grinch that stole summer vacation. They had this image of me talking about the research and how kids need to be engaged over summer and then they cut to a mother with kids in the pool: "Brittany, it's time to get out of the pool and go to summer school!" Of course, the kids protested.

This is not the message. It's not about taking away the freedom of kids over summer months. It is about extending the promise of an enriching, memorable and productive summer for all kids. The problem is we have this image in our minds of a wonderful summer for kids. Far too many don't get anything close to that. That's why programs like Horizons are so incredibly important.

Over time, there has been some significant media attention, in part due to Malcolm Gladwell's book, "Outliers." Time magazine also did a cover story on the topic. I was just in Iowa and heard about a foundation that has begun to support summer learning work and reading that Time article was one reason why. It goes to show the power and potential of a well-developed communications strategy.

What sorts of innovation are you seeing in the summer learning space?

Unequivocally, I would say a comprehensive, six-week, full-day summer program that meets the academic and developmental needs of kids works. Based on data, those programs are going to make a difference not just preventing characteristic losses from happening but actually producing some gains.

I'm also very excited about the way you can pair some of those high-touch interventions with high-tech support that might be more scalable and reach thousands of kids. In Arizona, they are using an online platform to do summer reading for hundreds of thousands of low-income kids across the state. Now, that's exciting.

What about small-town poverty as it relates to summer learning?

There is emerging research from a group called Reading is Fundamental that doing a simple summer book distribution in rural communities makes a statistical difference. The kids took home books over the summer that built on themes in the classroom. While there are barriers and challenges, there are enough resources in any community to think creatively about how to solve the problem.

As a society, what are the consequences of an academic summer slide over time?

The evidence shows that the achievement gap between kids based on socioeconomic status gets worse and worse over time. What we are doing by not addressing this problem is creating a catastrophe in the making. The kids who fall farthest behind are the ones for whom no matter how high quality their regular school day is, they will still experience setbacks. Those losses accumulate. They are far less likely to graduate from high school ready for college and career. We've basically structured our education system to perpetuate a kind of inequality we see manifesting itself much later and at a far greater cost than had we intervened earlier with something much more proactive and preventative versus more remedial and punitive.

Are you a fan of year-round schools?

I'm a fan of year-round learning. Many folks are having a hard enough time paying for the school calendar we have them on. The notion of adding 20 or 30 days is really untenable. We need to encourage people to get the most out of their current investment and partner with other organizations that in effect give us the same result in a more efficient fashion.

What is top of mind for you at the moment as you consider summer learning in this country?

For me, it's a problem that can be solved. It's one thing if you look at a problem in our communities and you don't really know the solution. You can't figure out what causes it or how to solve it and you throw up your hands. But if you look at a problem you have research on and you know what works and what can be effective, but for some reason you decide not to solve it because traditionally we've never built 12-month systems for kids, that for me is an entirely different scenario.

We need to get busy at working on solving this problem. It is within our grasp. It doesn't have to be an intractable reality for low-income kids. And it doesn't have to be expensive. Top of mind for me is I want to be part of the solution to this problem. I want to see communities demonstrate they can do it. We can put an end to this thing.



Ron Fairchild at Horizons campus at Radcliffe Creek School.

One coach + one ninth-grader = SUCCESS

When Horizons coach Sam Shoge, 25, looks at Kyle Roderick, he sees a bit of himself. Like Kyle this past school year, Shoge was once a ninth-grader at Kent County High School. Also like Kyle, Shoge ran outdoor track at the school. At the moment, he and his 15-year-old charge share this bond: a love for the Marvel superhero movies.

“I do see a lot of myself in him. It’s been very easy to sit and talk – to build that trust, build that bond,” says Shoge, assistant director of admissions at Washington College and a Chestertown councilman. “It’s also important to mention that in this mentor-mentee relationship, it goes both ways. It’s not just me that’s doing the educating. I’ve learned a lot from Kyle.”

As part of Horizons’ new one-on-one high school coaching program, Shoge met with Kyle, a Horizons alum, twice monthly during the school year to help him with study skills and give him a glimpse of what life could look like after graduation. The goal: to create an extra layer of support throughout all four years of high school. Four other Horizons alums and their coaches participated in the program.

“All of the coaches have that passion for helping students who don’t come from a lot,” says Queen Anne’s County High School guidance counselor Kelley Moore, who launched the initiative. “We started small and we had some success.” The five students’ cumulative grade point average was 2.3. Everyone moved up to the tenth grade.

As for Shoge, he said he didn’t want to be one more voice “preaching academics.” Instead, he told Kyle about merit scholarships that are awarded for a 4.0 grade point average (a lot) versus a 3.0 (not as much).

“It puts into perspective that good grades literally pay you money. That was my academic conversation with him. Working hard in school pays dividends,” he added. “It resonates more than your stereotypical: Work harder. Do better.”

Kyle, a teaching assistant with Horizons this summer, earned a 3.8 grade point average the last quarter of the school year.

“Sam helped me figure out some things I needed to fix,” he says. “He helped me succeed.”



Tenth-grader Kyle Roderick, a teaching assistant with the Horizons program, and pre-Kindergartener Xzavion Somerville.

Ellen Uzelac