

Camp iRock

Summary

United Way of Pickens County, the School District of Pickens County and the Pickens County YMCA collaborated to develop a free remedial reading and summer camp experience for underperforming students in grades 1-3 in Pickens County. Called Camp iRock, it was intentionally designed to be a fun experience, where reading is emphasized, and children can participate in a true summer camp experience including team-building exercises and character education. 2016 Camp iRock children spent four hours a day, four days a week, receiving intensive remedial reading instruction from highly qualified, trained and certified School District of Pickens County teachers, summer interns from Clemson University's Call Me MiSTER program, and Pickens County YMCA counselors. Each afternoon, the YMCA counselors provided Camp iRock children with as much summer fun as they could handle. Fridays were reserved for educational field trips to places such as Clemson University, Table Rock State Park, local fire stations, the Greenville Children's Museum, and the World of Energy at Oconee Nuclear Station. In addition, all campers were provided free swim lessons every Friday afternoon.

2016 Camp iRock held two Family Night events at each site, with over 90 family members attending each event. Family Nights featured a communal supper for campers and parents, and informational sessions about what Camp iRock children were learning. Children were rewarded with the opportunity to select age-appropriate books that they could keep at home. Parents were encouraged to emphasize reading at home. 76% of the campers attended at least one family night activity.

Demographics

- *Target Settings:* Rural
- *Target Groups Served:* Students in grades 1-3 identified by the School District of Pickens County with reading deficiencies. 3rd graders were selected based on Read to Succeed Legislation, while 1st and 2nd graders were identified as underperforming on a variety of reading measurement tests, as well as other risk factors (low income, living in foster care or single parent homes)
- *Districts Served:* Pickens

Research and Evaluation

What national or other research was considered during the development of this program/initiative? Describe the evidence that shows the program or initiative is relevant and effective.

United Way of Pickens County, the School District of Pickens County and the Pickens County YMCA spent a year collaboratively researching and conducting community conversations with Pickens County parents, citizens, teachers, administrators, and business leaders in an effort to identify the greatest unmet need in Pickens County. The following conclusions to our research guided our efforts to create Camp iRock.

The National Summer Learning Association deems summer learning loss as one of the most significant causes of achievement gap between lower and higher income youth and is one of the strongest contributors to the high school dropout rate. Every summer, low income youth lose 2-3 months in reading while their higher income peers make slight gains. By 5th grade, summer learning loss can leave low income students 2 ½ to 3 years behind their peers.

Based on the SC Ready Reading testing in 2015/16, 54.6% of 3rd grade students in Pickens County tested below national grade level standards in reading. Research shows that 1 in 6 children who are not reading proficiently in 3rd grade will not graduate from high school on time.

The School District of Pickens County administered Fountas and Pinnell (pre and post testing), to evaluate the effectiveness of 2016 Camp iRock. In 2016, 100% of the children attending 2016 Camp iRock either maintained or increased reading growth; 19% of the campers experienced minimal growth in reading, 29% experienced moderate growth, and 34% experienced exceptional growth. Students who attended at least 50% of Camp iRock had an average of 2 levels of growth in reading, which equates to 5 months of growth. Additionally, 85% of students maintained or improved their attitudes about reading; 87% of the parents reported that their child's attitude towards learning improved; and 95% of parents reported growth in their child's positive character values.

The YMCA utilized the Fitnessgram assessment tool to evaluate growth in physical fitness. In 2016, 51% of campers either maintained or decreased their body mass index. Furthermore, 66% of campers passed the YMCA standard swim test.

Resources

- *Annual Cost:* \$279,000
- *Funding Sources:* Personal contributions from individuals, families, businesses, employee workplace campaigns, grants from foundations and the SC Department of Education.
- *Staffing needs:* 13 certified teachers with literacy intervention experience, 3 special needs teachers, 9 “Call Me MiSTER” interns, 29 YMCA counselors, 3 site nurses, 3 media specialists, 1 Camp Coordinator, 3 site coordinators, 3 resource development staff.
- *Infrastructure/Equipment needs:* During the 8 weeks of 2016 Camp iRock, we utilized 3-4 classrooms, libraries, cafeterias, gymnasiums and outdoor space in 3 elementary schools in Pickens County. We utilized the School District of Pickens County’s busses to transport children to/from camp and home, to swimming lessons and weekly field trips. We used the YMCA’s indoor pool for swim lessons. Other needs include the School District’s reading curriculum, 1,000 books to build home libraries for each child, 3 iPads for end of year prizes, official Camp iRock t-shirts, snacks, supplies for athletic activities and arts and crafts.
- *Partner Organizations:* United Way of Pickens County, School District of Pickens County, Pickens County YMCA, Call Me MiSTER Program at Clemson University.

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