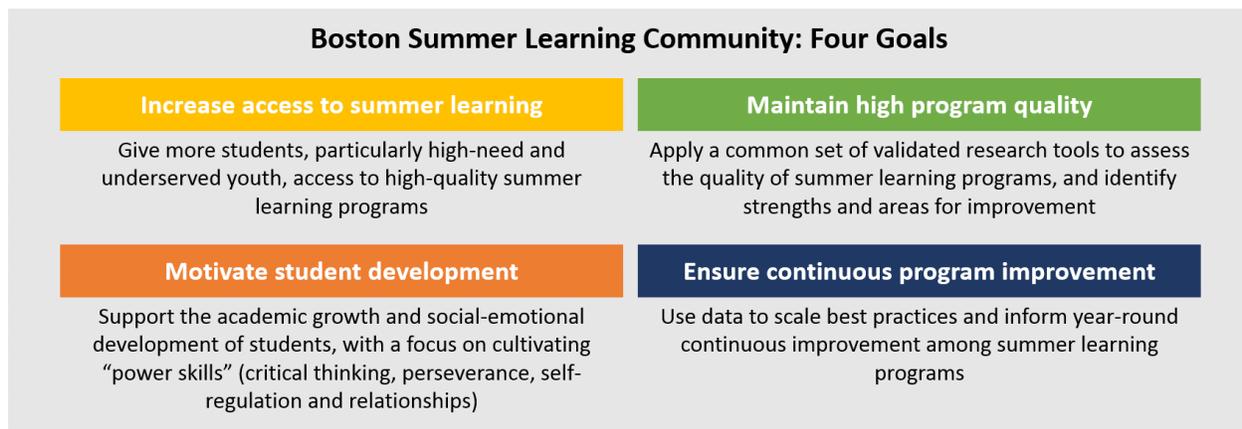


## The Boston Summer Learning Community: A Model for Massachusetts

The **Boston Summer Learning Community (BSLC)** is a coalition of community-based organizations in the Greater Boston area committed to providing local students with meaningful opportunities for continued academic and personal growth during the summer months. Boston After School & Beyond and Boston Public Schools, in partnership with the Boston Opportunity Agenda, launched BSLC in 2010 to equip students with the knowledge and social-emotional skills to succeed in school, college and the workforce.

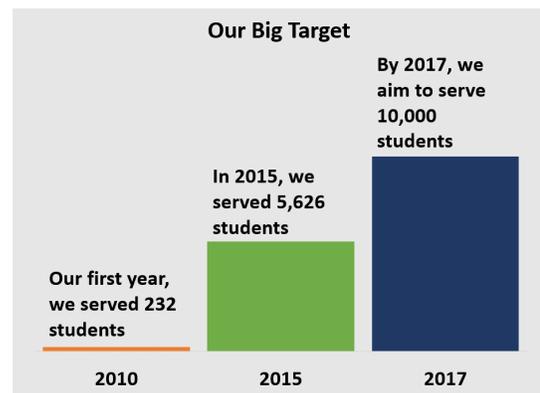
BSLC brings together existing community resources around a shared vision for student learning out of school. As in many big cities, Boston has a fragmented learning ecosystem: community-based organizations offer students enrichment activities independently of one another, without a venue to collaborate, share effective practices and align their goals to citywide objectives. BSLC fills this gap. BSLC leverages private donations—nearly \$2 million in 2015—to augment public funds and enable partners to serve more youth with high-quality summer programs. Collectively, partners work toward higher achievement and better outcomes for the students of Boston.



Partners cater to the specific needs and interests of their students, and retain autonomy to set their own schedule, location, staffing and curriculum. Unlike traditional summer school, partners immerse students in diverse environments—including natural reserves and parks, summer camps, colleges, workplaces and other sites—for hands-on, interactive learning experiences. Over the course of the summer, students practice their math and language skills, learn about STEM careers, engage in sports and physical activities, plan and prepare for college, explore the visual and performing arts, and more.

In 2015, Mayor Martin J. Walsh and Boston Public Schools Superintendent Tommy Chang set an ambitious target for BSLC: to enroll 10,000 students in 100 summer learning programs by 2017. BSLC worked with 79 programs to serve over 5,000 students in the summer 2015 and is currently expanding its network to meet this target.

This brief contains findings on the quality and outcomes of BSLC’s summer 2015 programs. Each year, BSLC evaluates program quality and the impact of programs on the social-emotional skills and academic performance



of students. These findings help partners learn from one another and enhance their programs to better serve students.

## Summer 2015 Overview: High Program Quality, Improved Student Outcomes

BSLC continued to grow and expand its reach, from 58 programs serving 3,504 students in 2014 to 79 programs serving 5,626 students in 2015. Evaluation results show program quality remained high, and students improved their social-emotional skills and proficiency in math and English language arts. Five takeaways from this research include:

1. **Enrollment:** BSLC's 5,626 students were enrolled in Boston Public Schools (66%) and other schools (44%), including charter schools. Programs such as MathPOWER and Camp Harbor View (see *Summer 2015 Program Spotlights* below) brought students together across district and charter sectors for shared learning and enrichment experiences.
2. **Program Quality:** Students and evaluators from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) at Wellesley College rated program quality high. But students wanted more opportunities to exercise choice and autonomy, take on leadership and responsibility, and engage in higher-order thinking.
3. **Student Perspective:** Most students said they grew their own social-emotional skills covering resiliencies (e.g., emotional control, assertiveness, trust and empathy), peer and adult relationships, and learning interest and engagement (e.g., critical thinking or problem solving, perseverance and school bonding).
4. **Teacher Perspective:** Teachers in BSLC's Summer Learning Project, a group of 16 programs serving low-income students from Boston Public Schools, reported improvement in the social-emotional skills and academic proficiency of their students. Teachers rated their students higher on these skills and more proficient in math and English language arts by the end of the summer.
5. **Digital Badges:** Students responded positively to BSLC's new system of digital badges recognizing student accomplishment in social-emotional skills. BSLC piloted this system in six programs and plans to expand the pilot to additional programs and schools in future years.

### Boston Summer Learning Community: Summer 2015 Program Spotlights

#### MathPOWER: A Summer Academy Making Math Fun

Served **216 students in grades 5-11** (54% Boston Public Schools students; 46% charter school students)

#### Program Components

- **Morning academics:** Students complete hands-on projects in math and English language arts with support from program staff and Boston Public Schools teachers
- **Afternoon enrichment:** Program staff lead students in interactive learning activities
- **Weeklong college and careers program:** Students visit Boston colleges and workplaces
- **Weekly clubs and field trips:** Students explore various themes in groups, such as photography, soccer and journalism, and create budgets for each field trip
- **Five-week academy for rising 9<sup>th</sup> graders:** Students learn about paths to college at Northeastern University

#### Camp Harbor View: A Summer Camp for Tomorrow's Leaders

Served **498 middle-school students** (44% Boston Public Schools students; 56% charter school students)

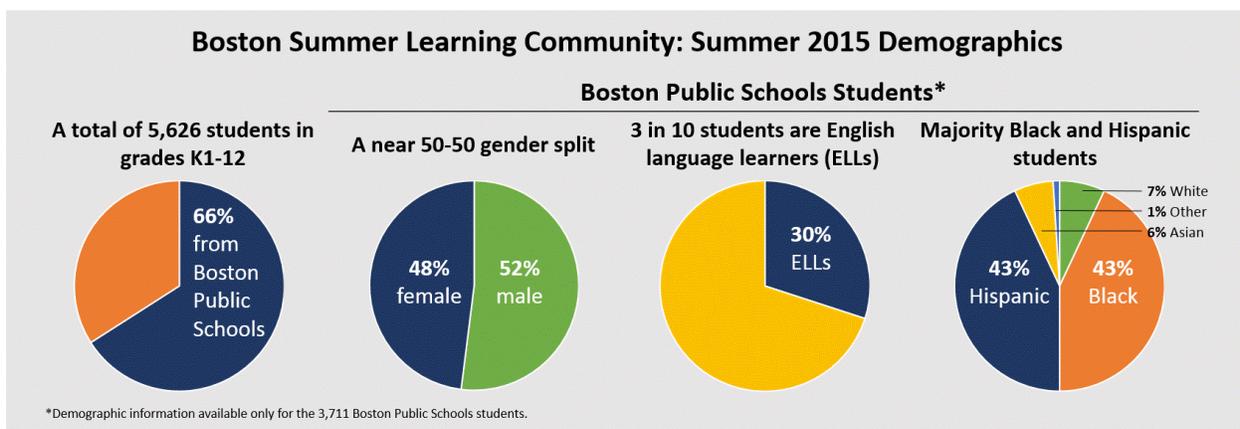
#### Program Components

- **Leadership development:** Students build their confidence and develop their social-emotional skills
- **Knowledge is power:** Students work on hands-on activities to learn math, physics, English language arts, science, health and fitness
- **Sports and fitness:** Students exercise regularly through sports (e.g., lacrosse and soccer) and other activities (e.g., rock wall climbing and yoga)
- **Arts:** Students take part in dance, music, performing arts and culinary arts classes
- **Aquatics:** Students fish, sail, kayak and swim throughout the summer

## BSLC Background and Enrollment

In 2015, BSLC’s 79 programs served 5,626 students in grades K-12. These programs fell into one of two categories. BSLC and Boston Public Schools collaborated on the Summer Learning Project, an initiative specifically targeting low-income students in the district. The Summer Learning Project’s 16 programs enrolled 993 Boston Public Schools students, or 18% of all BSLC students. BSLC also works with a second group of programs catering to a mix of students from Boston Public Schools, charter schools and other districts in the Greater Boston area. The 63 programs in this second category served 4,633 students, or 82% of all BSLC students. All programs used a common set of tools to evaluate program quality and student outcomes.

BSLC supports thousands of minority students and other high-need students from Boston Public Schools. Overall, programs served 3,711 Boston Public Schools students across the two categories above, or 66% of all BSLC students. BSLC partnered with Boston Public Schools to match these participants to district records to obtain additional demographic information. Among district students, 48% were female and 52% male, 30% were English language learners, and 86% were either Hispanic or Black.



The attendance rate for all summer 2015 students was 81.2%. Attendance for Summer Learning Project programs held steady at 78% for a second year in a row, after a high of 82% in 2013. As in previous years, the second category of programs had a higher attendance rate on average, with some even exceeding 90%.

## Program Quality

Students and evaluators from NIOST agreed that program quality was high, but students pointed to three specific areas for improvement. On average, evaluators rated programs as meeting the quality benchmark (a rating of 3 out of 4) in organization and structure, supportive environment, and engagement of students in activities and learning. While students also scored programs highly on supportive environment, they rated three out of five areas related to youth engagement in activities and learning below the quality benchmark—specifically, having choice and autonomy, taking part in opportunities for leadership and responsibility, and engaging in higher-order thinking.

These findings are consistent with program quality ratings in 2013 and 2014, which follow a similar pattern. BSLC plans to help partners review student feedback and incorporate changes into program

offerings for 2016. Students and evaluators rated programs using NIOST’s Assessment of Program Practices Tool (APT) and the Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes-Youth Survey (SAYO-Y), respectively.

Boston Summer Learning Community: Summer 2015 Program Quality				
Ratings by NIOST evaluators			Ratings by students	
<b>Structure and organization</b>	<b>Supportive environment</b>	<b>Engagement of youth in activities and learning</b>	<b>Supportive environment</b>	<b>Engagement of youth in activities and learning</b>
At or above quality benchmark	At or above quality benchmark	At or above quality benchmark	At or above quality benchmark	Overall improvement from 2014; above benchmark for 2 out of 5 domains

## SEL and Academic Growth

Most students said they grew in nearly all social-emotional skills, including resiliencies (e.g., emotional control, assertiveness, trust and empathy), peer and adult relationships, and learning interest and engagement (e.g., critical thinking or problem solving, perseverance and school bonding). Results show strong improvements among students in the following skills: 83% grew in academic motivation, 81% grew in learning interest, 79% grew in reflection and action orientation, and 75% grew in critical thinking, perseverance, peer relationships and empathy. Only 47% of students reported improvements in their emotional control, although many cited this skill as a personal strength coming into their summer programs. Students completed their self-assessments in the SAYO-Y tool.

Teachers in BSCLC’s Summer Learning Project also reported growth in the social-emotional skills and academic proficiency of their students. A comparison of teacher ratings at the start and end of the summer shows student improvement in both areas. On average, students were better able to maintain peer and adult relationships, and engage in learning (e.g., critical thinking or problem solving, perseverance and initiative) by summer’s end. Teachers reported that more students “usually” or “always” demonstrated behaviors consistent with these skills post-program. Based on teacher ratings, roughly one-quarter of students improved enough to move up one full level in their social-emotional skills. For example, a student who “rarely” showed a skill pre-program may have improved to “sometimes” demonstrating this same skill post-program (on a scale from “never” to “always”).

Boston Summer Learning Community: Summer 2015 Student Social-Emotional Skills	
<p><b>Students said they improved their own social-emotional skills</b></p> <p><b>Strong results for the following skills:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 83% improved in academic motivation</li> <li>• 81% improved in learning interest</li> <li>• 79% improved in reflection and action orientation</li> <li>• 75% improved in critical thinking, perseverance, peer relationships and empathy</li> </ul>	<p><b>Teachers reported growth in the social-emotional skills of their students*</b></p> <p><b>By the end of the summer program:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students grew their skills in relationships, and learning interest and engagement</li> <li>• More students “usually” or “always” showed behaviors consistent with these skills</li> <li>• Roughly one-quarter of students moved up one full level across all skills</li> </ul>

\*Teacher evaluations available only for Summer Learning Project programs.

According to Summer Learning Project teachers, more students were proficient in math and English language arts by the end of their program. Teachers evaluated student proficiency in the two subjects on a scale from “poor” to “very good.” On average, teachers reported increases in proficiency, with more students rated “satisfactory” and “very good” and fewer rated “poor” or “needs improvement” post-program. In fact, the percentage of students demonstrating “satisfactory” proficiency in math and English language arts increased by 7 and 12 points, respectively. Teachers assessed student growth via NIOST’s Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes-Teacher Survey (SAYO-T).

### Boston Summer Learning Community: Summer 2015 Student Academic Proficiency

Teachers reported gains in proficiency among students:\*

Teacher rating	Math			English language arts		
	Start of summer	End of summer		Start of summer	End of summer	
“Very good”	9%	13%	<b>+4</b>	6%	8%	<b>+2</b>
“Satisfactory”	41%	48%	<b>+7</b>	41%	53%	<b>+12</b>
“Needs improvement”	38%	32%	<b>-6</b>	45%	35%	<b>-10</b>
“Poor”	12%	6%	<b>-6</b>	8%	4%	<b>-4</b>

\*Teacher evaluations available only for Summer Learning Project programs.

## Digital Badges Pilot

Digital badges are symbols of learning accomplishment in and out of school. BSLC is developing a citywide system of digital badges to reward students for their success in five social-emotional skills: communication, critical thinking, engagement in learning, perseverance and teamwork. To earn a digital badge, students must meet a uniform set of criteria aligned to the Achieve-Connect-Thrive (ACT) Skills Framework and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Teachers evaluate students against these criteria and award one of two kinds of badges, one for overall achievement or one for growth.

In the summer 2015, six programs serving middle school students piloted digital badges: DotHouse Health, Hale Reservation, MathPOWER, Sociedad Latina, Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston’s Blue Hill Club. By summer’s end, 252 out of 470 students (54%) earned at least one badge. Teachers and other program staff said they received positive feedback from students about the new digital badges, but also noted the need for better tools to discuss with students the role of these badges and the skills they represent.

## Summer 2016 and Beyond

BSLC turns the city into a classroom, offering students from Boston Public Schools, charter schools and other districts in the Greater Boston area hands-on, interactive learning experiences in diverse settings. Evaluation findings from the summer 2015 confirm that BSLC programs are of high quality and help students develop their social-emotional and academic skills. BSLC is committed to using these findings to support the continuous improvement of all programs. In preparation for 2016, BSLC and its partners set out to achieve three objectives:

1. **Build on existing program strengths:** Partners will design and refine strategies to enhance student social-emotional and academic development, including trainings and supports for program staff to establish positive relationships with students.

2. **Address areas of improvement:** BSLC will lead partners in a year-long effort to reflect on the evaluation findings and make data-informed decisions about summer programming. Partners will use student feedback from the summer 2015 to increase youth engagement in activities and learning.
3. **Expand use of digital badges:** BSLC will pilot its new system of digital badges with more partners and schools during the academic year and summer months. Citizen Schools' Orchard Gardens campus and select partners of Madison Park High School have committed to piloting the system during the 2015-16 academic year. These badges will give students a way to show potential colleges and employers they have mastered the critical social-emotional competencies needed for success.

### Appendix – 2015 Partners of the Boston Summer Learning Community

<b>43 organizations that operated 79 program sites and served 5,626 Boston students from 128 Boston Public Schools</b>	
826 Boston	Hale Reservation
Achieve at Noble and Greenough School	Here-in Our Motives Evolve (HOME, Inc.)
Action for Boston Community Development	Horizons at Dedham Country Day School
America SCORES Boston	Hyde Square Task Force
Artward Bound	Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion (IBA)
BCYF Leahy Holloran Community Center	Let's Get Ready
Boston Area Health Education Center	MathPOWER
Boston Private Industry Council	MIT Office of Engineering Outreach Programs
Boston University Upward Bound	Phillips Brooks House Association
Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Boston	Sociedad Latina
BPS Office of English Language Learners	Sportsmen's Tennis & Enrichment Center
Breakthrough Greater Boston	The Steppingstone Foundation
Brigham and Women's Hospital	Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center
Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL)	Tierney Learning Center
Camp Harbor View Foundation	UMass Boston
Community Music Center of Boston	Upham's Corner DRAMA Camp
Courageous Sailing	Urbano Project
Crossroads for Kids	Wentworth Institute of Technology
Dorchester House	YMCA of Greater Boston
Dudley Street Neighborhood Charter School	Zoo New England
For Kids Only Afterschool	