



## **Summer Camp: 2025**

### **Year 1 Evaluation Results**

Children's Trust of Alachua County

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March 2026

### **Purpose Statement**

This report evaluates year one of a three-year grant cycle for summer camps funded by the Children's Trust of Alachua County (CTAC). The purpose of this report is to provide insights into the program's performance, including successes and opportunities for improvement. The primary audience for this report is the Children's Trust staff, providers, the Trust Board, and partners who help support the implementation of services. After gaining insights from results presented, we aim to strengthen services and outcomes for children and youth.

## **Table of Contents**

### **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

- Why is summer camp important?
- Best practices: Summer camp framework

### **Key Questions**

#### CTAC Summer Program Design

- Where were camps located in Alachua County?
- What were the goals of camp?
- What was the scholarship and enrollment process?

#### Children and Youth

- Who were the children and youth served?
- How much programming was offered and how much did youth participate?

#### Camp Staff

- Why is high quality staff training important?
- How much training did staff receive?
- Staff Feedback
  - o Why did staff choose to work at camp?
  - o How does working at camp impact counselors?
  - o How did working at CTAC camp impact counselors?

#### Literacy

- What did literacy programming look like in CTAC summer camps?
- Did students make progress? Did camps reach their goals?

- Literacy programming conclusions and next steps

#### Outcomes

- Were children and youth satisfied with camp?
- Were parents satisfied with camp?
- What were provider insights on camp?

#### Investment

- What was the investment in summer camp?

#### **Conclusion**

#### **References**

### **Executive Summary**

The Children's Trust of Alachua County offered summer camp programming to Alachua County youth to provide fun, adventure, and learning in safe environments with nurturing, caring adults. Campers had the opportunity to develop new passions, make lasting friendships, gain confidence, build new knowledge and skills, and express themselves. CTAC provided funding to ensure children from low and middle income Alachua County families were able to participate in summer camp.

The purpose of this report is to share results from 2025 summer camp programming and provide insight into performance, successes, and areas for improvement moving into the next fiscal year. This evaluation does not include two Freedom School summer camps funded under the same summer camp RFP (request for proposals). Key findings are highlighted below:

#### **Performance Results:**

- 22 camps funded on 26 sites
- 1,117 children and youth served

- 33 program days offered by camps on average, ranging from 5 to 50
- 6.9 weeks of programming offered on average, ranging from 1 to 10
- 87% of campers attended camp for the number of days they planned to attend, on average
- 396.9 hours of training provided to camp counselors

**Key Success:**

- 96% of families were satisfied with the camp experience overall
- 91% of families were satisfied with the learning activities offered
- 95% of families reported their children enjoyed their camp experience
- Campers reported positive camp experiences, particularly around activities, field trips, and relationships built with peers and staff
- Staff reported positive experiences working at camp
- Providers reported positive literacy experiences for campers

**Areas of Opportunity:**

- Camp providers plan to start recruitment and enrollment processes earlier to potentially increase number of children served.
- Continue to focus on staff professional development, with CTAC support, so all staff feel equipped to succeed in their role.

**Introduction**

In February 2025, the Children’s Trust of Alachua County facilitated a competitive procurement process to identify qualified organizations to provide summer camp programming to Alachua County children and youth. The purpose of the initiative was to provide fun and enriching summer programming to children and youth from low and middle income Alachua County families in a safe environment with nurturing, caring adults. 25 summer camps were

awarded funding through the procurement process and 22 camps completed the contract negotiation process to implement programming.

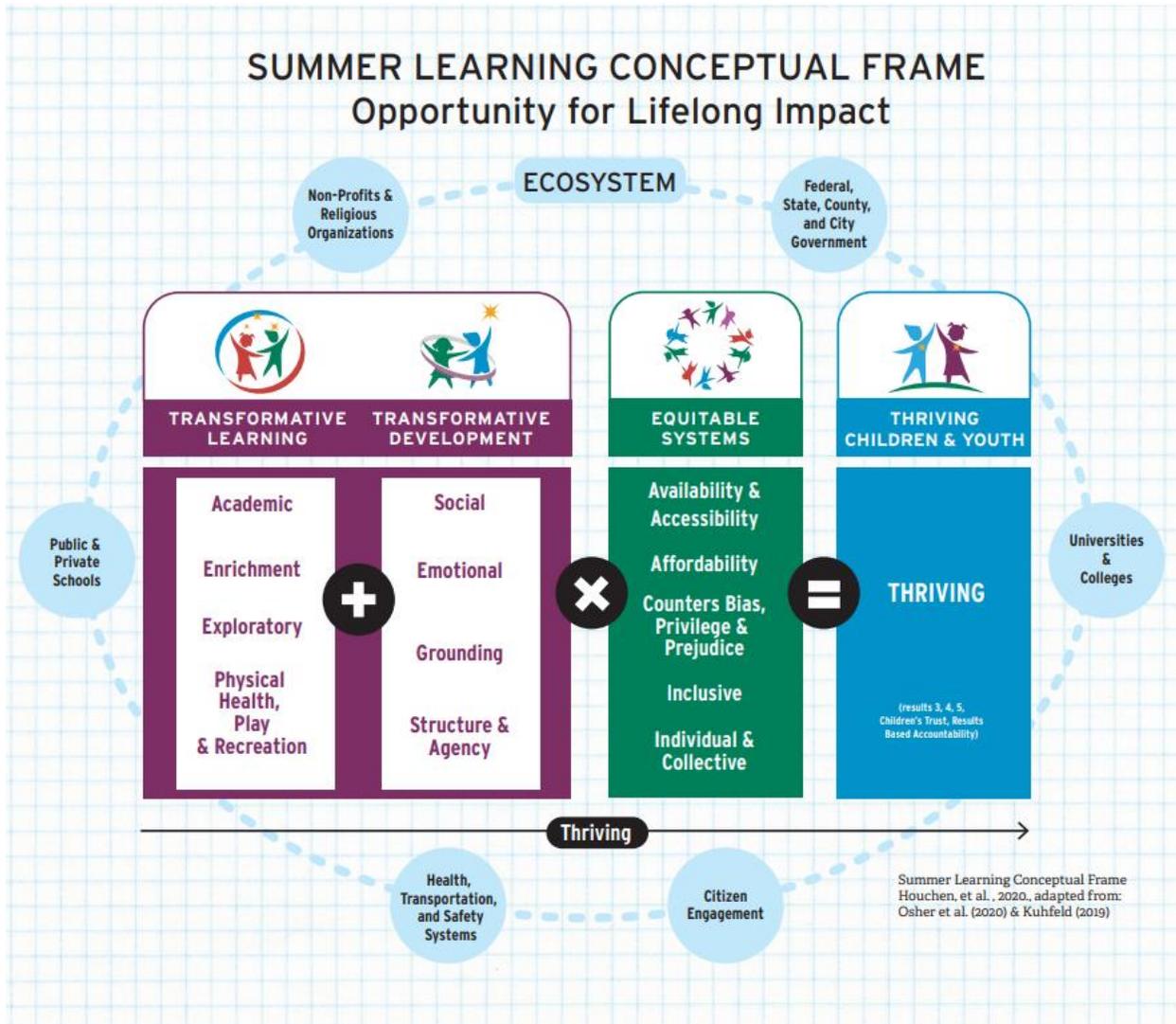
### **Why is summer camp important?**

The Youth Development Research Practice Partnership (2021) reports, “a robust, accessible system of structured and safe summer programming is foundational to a community’s well-being” (Houchen et al., 2021, p. 12). Such a system enables children and families to thrive by providing structured supervision while parents work and nurturing environments where children can explore their interests, build relationships, and explore what it means to be community citizens (Houchen et al., 2021).

Additionally, family income contributes to a summer opportunity gap between low income and wealthier children. A 2011 study found 38% of rising first grade children from households at or above 200% of the federal poverty level attended a summer day camp, compared with 13% of children in families at 100-199% of the federal poverty level and 7% of families at income below 100% of the federal poverty level (Redford et al., 2018). Children from lower income families watched more television and spent less time talking with parents during summer months than children from higher income households (Gershenson, 2013 as cited in Redford et al., 2018). They were also less likely to engage in experiences like visiting the beach, a state or national park, an aquarium or zoo, an amusement park, or attending a play or concert (Redford et al., 2018). Differences in summer experiences may contribute to the persisting academic achievement gap between low income and higher income children and youth, ultimately influencing gaps in future education, career, and earning potential (Redford et al., 2018).

### **Best practices: Summer camp framework**

The Youth Development Research-Practice Partnership completed a summer needs assessment for CTAC in 2021 which included recommendations for programming within a Summer Learning Conceptual Framework.



CTAC emphasized in the RFP for funding that providers offer activities under the Transformative Learning section of the conceptual framework, which focuses on academic, enrichment, exploratory, physical, health, play, and recreation focused activities. Academic activities, including literacy focused programming, are those designed to improve success in

school and are typically led by highly trained staff. Enrichment activities broaden knowledge and can include STEM, arts, and music, and explorative activities encourage active inquiry, decision making, and problem solving. Physical, health, play and recreation activities focus on fun, physical activity, and health. CTAC also encouraged providers to focus on Transformative Development, which includes building campers’ social skills, emotional development, including self-awareness and confidence, and grounding, to improve campers’ sense of identity and role in the larger community. Providers were also required to maintain daily activity schedules, providing structure to camp days, and youth agency, allowing youth to contribute to the planning of activities that align with their interests.

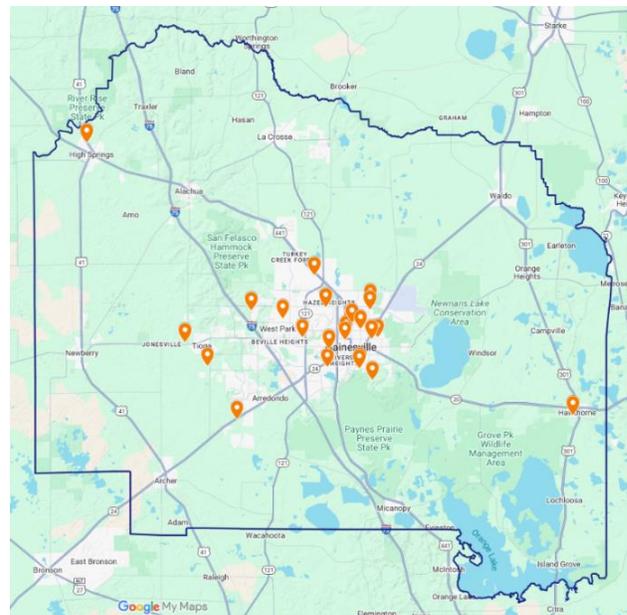
### Key Questions

The following key questions address CTAC’s summer program design, youth served, attendance, staff, literacy programming, and ultimately the impact of programming on Alachua County children and families served.

### CTAC Summer Program Design

#### Where were camps located in Alachua County?

CTAC funded 22 summer camps; three camps operated on more than one site, so camps took place in 26 sites across 15 zip codes. 23 camp sites were located in the city of Gainesville, and three camp sites were located in Hawthorne, High Springs, and Newberry respectively.



**What were the goals of camp?**

Camps focused on a range of goals and topic areas. Four camps provided programming in the arts, including both performing and visual arts, and four camps aimed to expose youth to STEM or STEAM activities and professions (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics). Six camps led programming where youth learned the importance of civic engagement and building community. Five camps aimed to help youth prepare for college and careers. 14 camps (63%) included an academic component and twelve of those camps focused on literacy skill building specifically. 14 camps (63%) aimed to help youth develop social emotional skills; skills focused on building relationships, making responsible decisions, and managing emotions. Two camps focused on serving special needs children, with an emphasis on building friendships, social skills, and life skills. Most camps incorporated field trips into programming, and all aimed to provide a nurturing, fun, enriching environment for youth.

**What was the scholarship and enrollment process?**

To qualify for a CTAC summer camp scholarship, a child needed to be an Alachua County resident, be entering kindergarten through twelfth grade, and meet at least one of three income requirements: The family was living at or below 300% of the federal poverty guidelines, the family received SNAP benefits, and/or the child was in foster care, voluntary formal kinship care, or under case management supervision.

Persons in Household	48 Contiguous States and D.C. Poverty Guidelines (Annual)						
	100%	133%	138%	150%	200%	300%	400%
1	\$15,060	\$20,030	\$20,783	\$22,590	\$30,120	\$45,180	\$60,240
2	\$20,440	\$27,185	\$28,207	\$30,660	\$40,880	\$61,320	\$81,760
3	\$25,820	\$34,341	\$35,632	\$38,730	\$51,640	\$77,460	\$103,280
4	\$31,200	\$41,496	\$43,056	\$46,800	\$62,400	\$93,600	\$124,800
5	\$36,580	\$48,651	\$50,480	\$54,870	\$73,160	\$109,740	\$146,320
6	\$41,960	\$55,807	\$57,905	\$62,940	\$83,920	\$125,880	\$167,840
7	\$47,340	\$62,962	\$65,329	\$71,010	\$94,680	\$142,020	\$189,360
8	\$52,720	\$70,118	\$72,754	\$79,080	\$105,440	\$158,160	\$210,880

[Reference: 2025 Federal Poverty Guidelines](#)

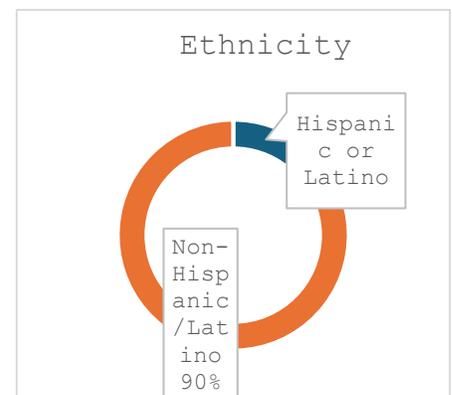
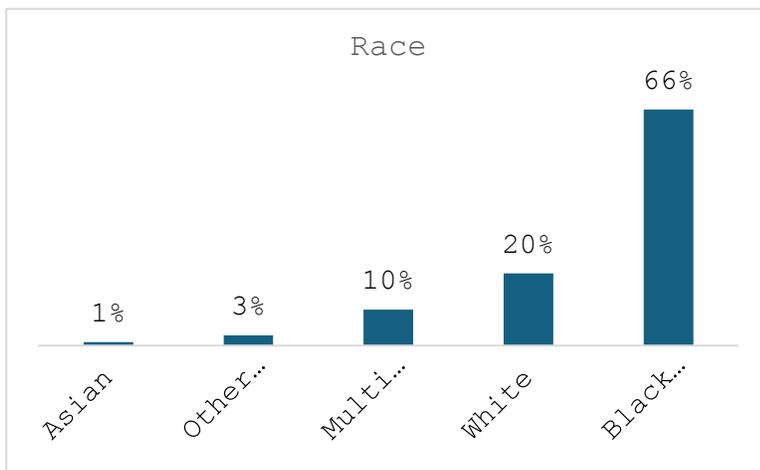
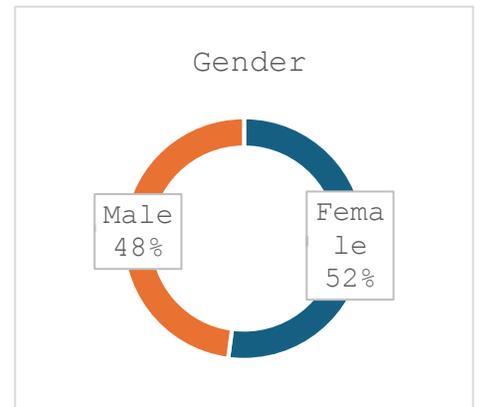
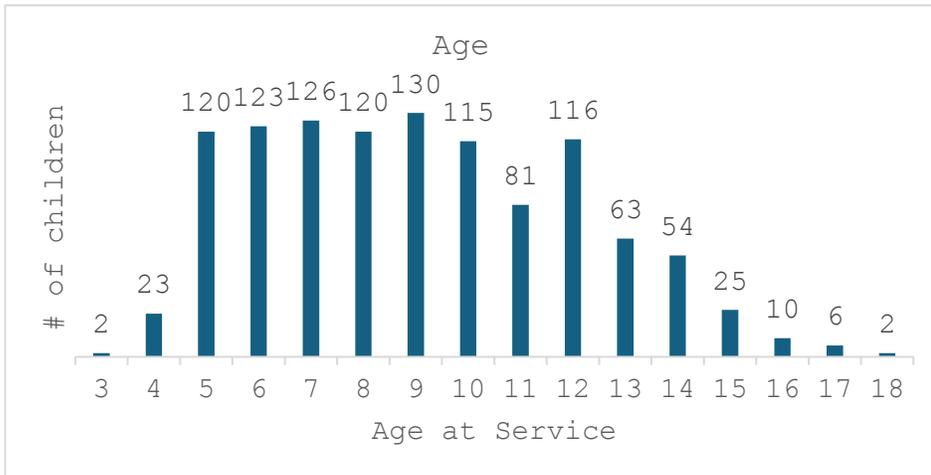
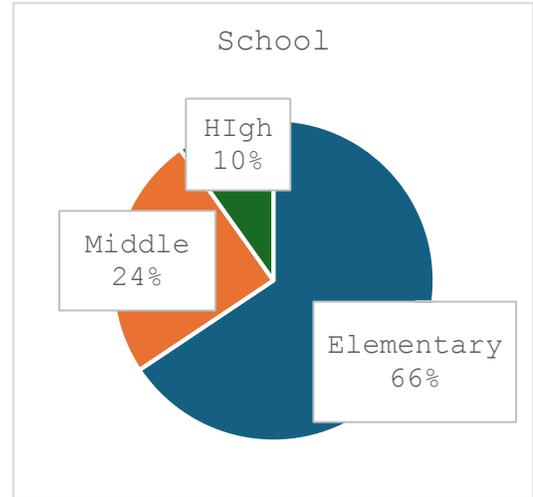
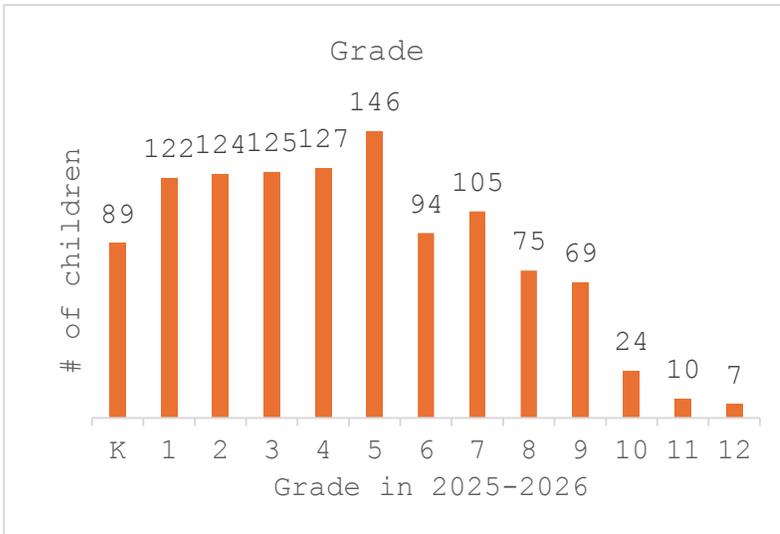
Families completed an enrollment form for each child to participate in camp on which they indicated the child's scholarship eligibility and provided documentation to verify eligibility. Acceptable documents included an income statement, SNAP eligibility letter, or placement letter if child was in foster care, volunteer formal kinship care, or under case management supervision. Families needed to meet at least one eligibility criterion but were encouraged to indicate if they met more than one criterion. All families provided the number of children and adults in the household and the family's annual household income.

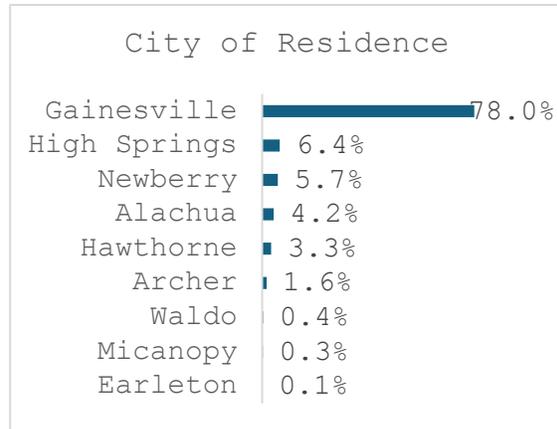
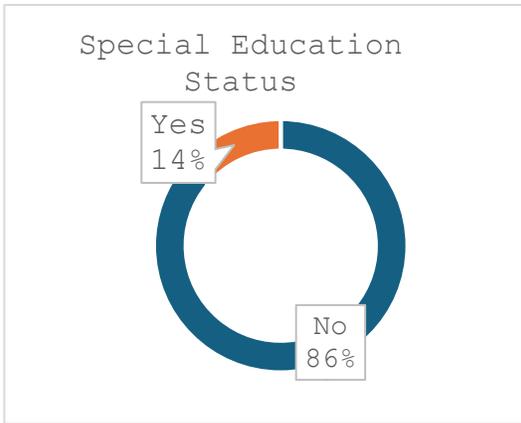
## **Children and Youth**

### **Who were the children and youth served?**

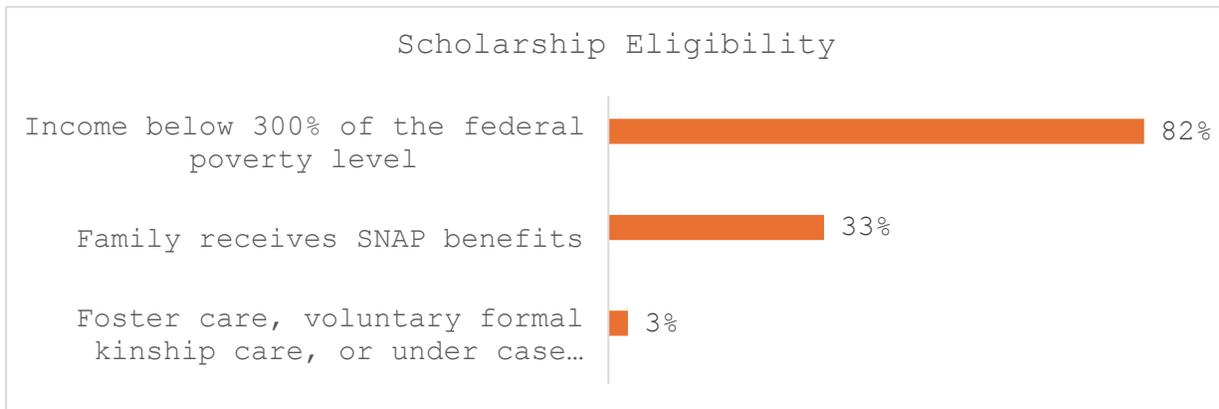
In 2025, 1,117 children and youth were served in CTAC funded summer camps. A child needed to attend camp three or more days during at least one week for the camp to receive funding for that child. 16 additional children attended camp but did not attend three or more days during at least one week, so were not included in the total number of children served. 16/22 providers (72%) served the number of children they originally planned to serve (met their performance target for number of children served).

More than half of youth served (57%) were aged 9 and under, and 66% were in elementary school. The average age was 9.0. Most youth were female (52%), Black or African American (66%), and Non-Hispanic/Latino (90%). Most of the children served (78%) lived in Gainesville. CTAC served 154 children (14%) who indicated they had a Special Education Status. CTAC funded two camps specifically for children with special needs, which served 86 children.





82% of children came from families living at or below 300% of the federal poverty level, 33% received SNAP benefits, and 3% were foster care, volunteer formal kinship care, or under case management supervision. The average household income was \$64,166.67, the average family size was 4.1, and the average number of children in the household was 2.7.

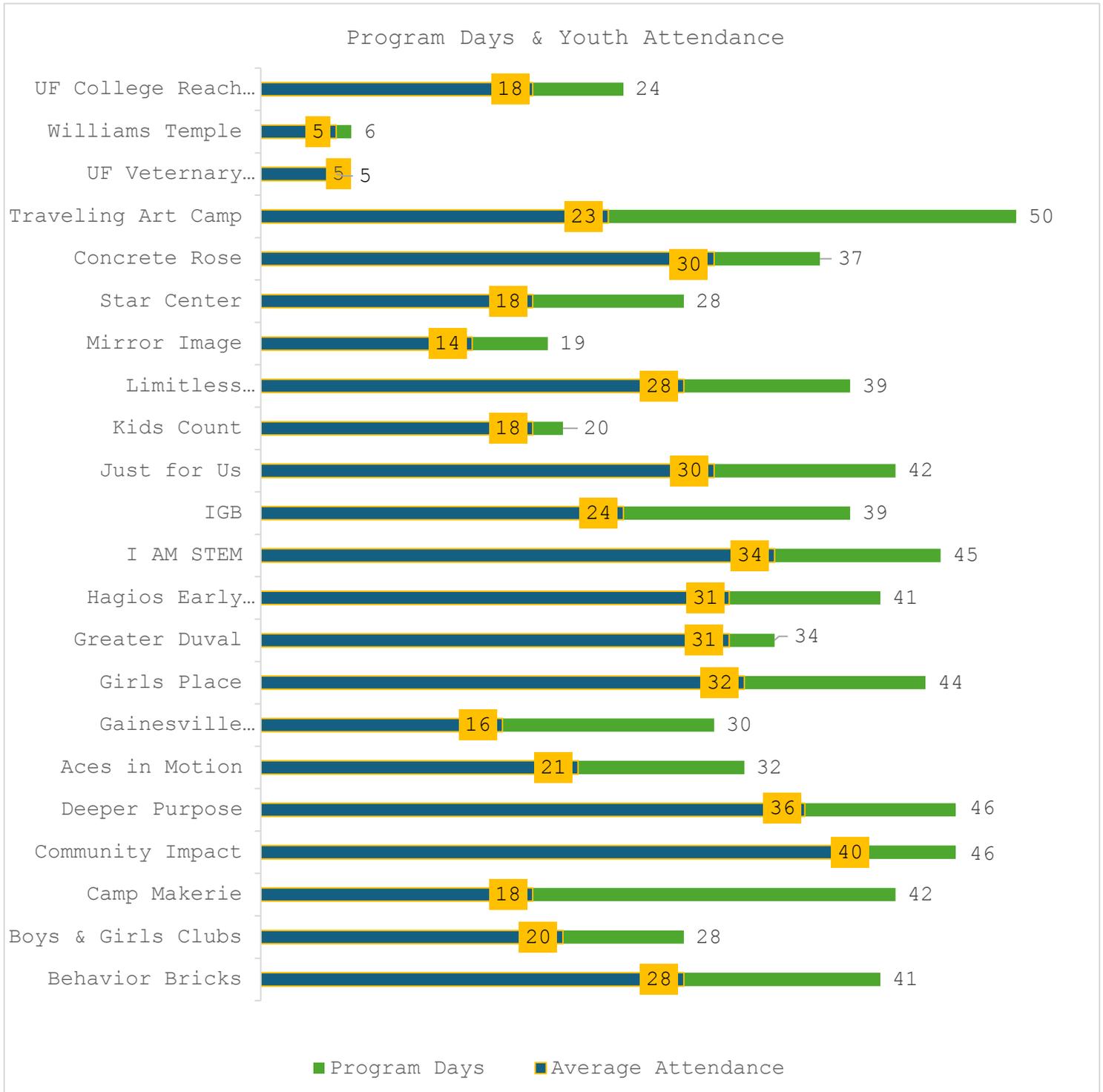


**How much programming was offered and how much did youth participate?**

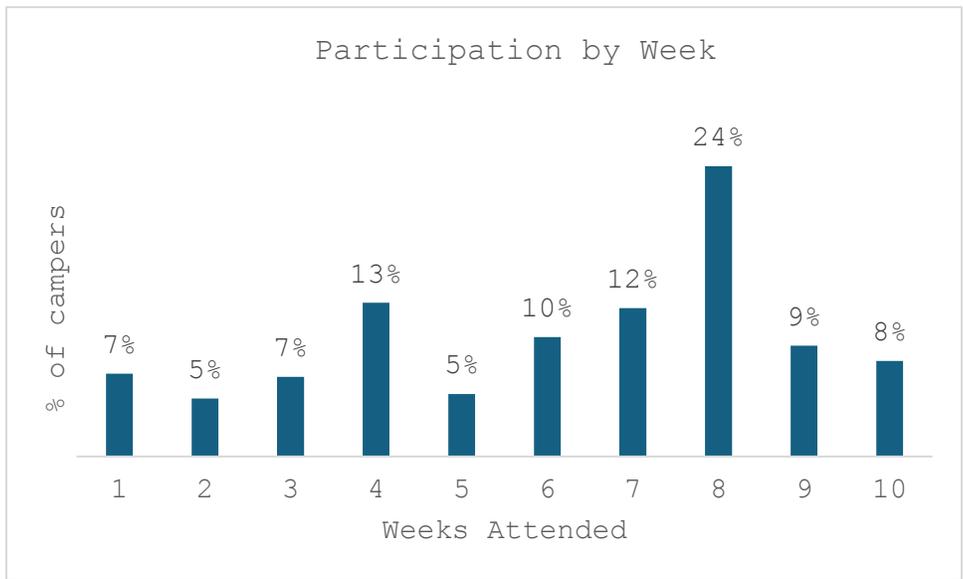
Camps offered an average of 33 days, ranging from five to 50 days. 17/22 providers (77%) met their target for number of camp days offered; Five providers were open fewer days than they originally planned. Children attended an average of 23 days, 73% of program days offered. Children indicated on a calendar on their enrollment form the number of days they

planned to attend camp; campers attended an average of 87% of the days they planned to attend.

All providers met their target of children attending at least 75% of the days they planned to attend.



More than half of providers (63%) offered 7-10 weeks of camp. Youth attended an average of 6.1 weeks of camp, with the majority (53%) attending 7-10 weeks.



### Camp Staff

Relationships, particularly with staff, are central components of almost every aspect of youth programming. Quality staff training helps promote nurturing relationships and positive youth development, as most staff need to build knowledge in these areas (Henderson et al.,

2006). Summer camp staff completed both pre and post summer surveys that provided insight into staff preparation and training and how staff experienced camp. Survey results indicated most staff felt training equipped them to succeed in their role and most had a positive, impactful summer experience.

### **Why is high quality staff training important?**

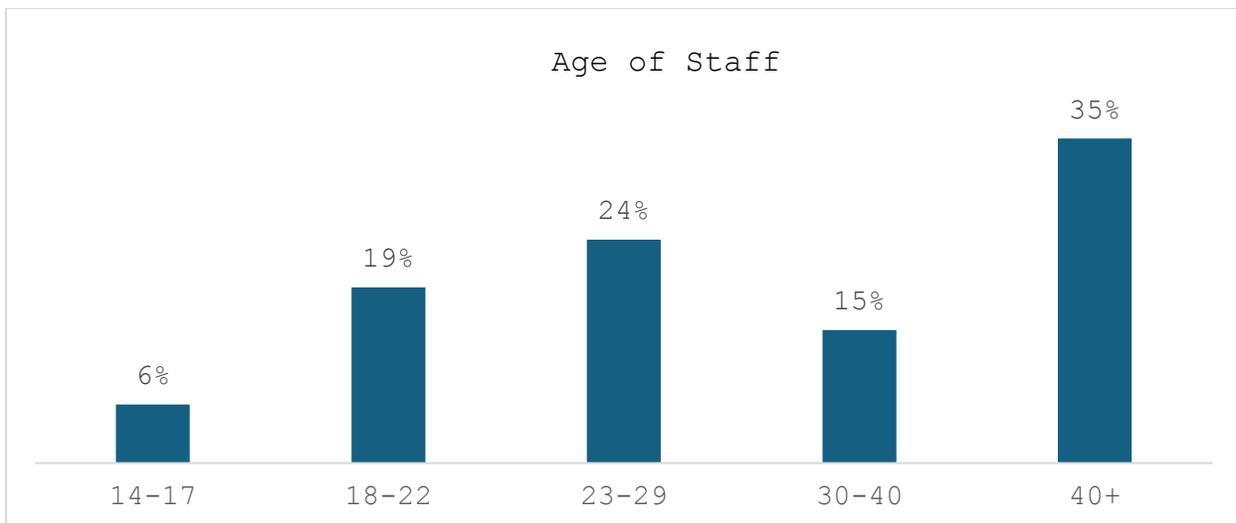
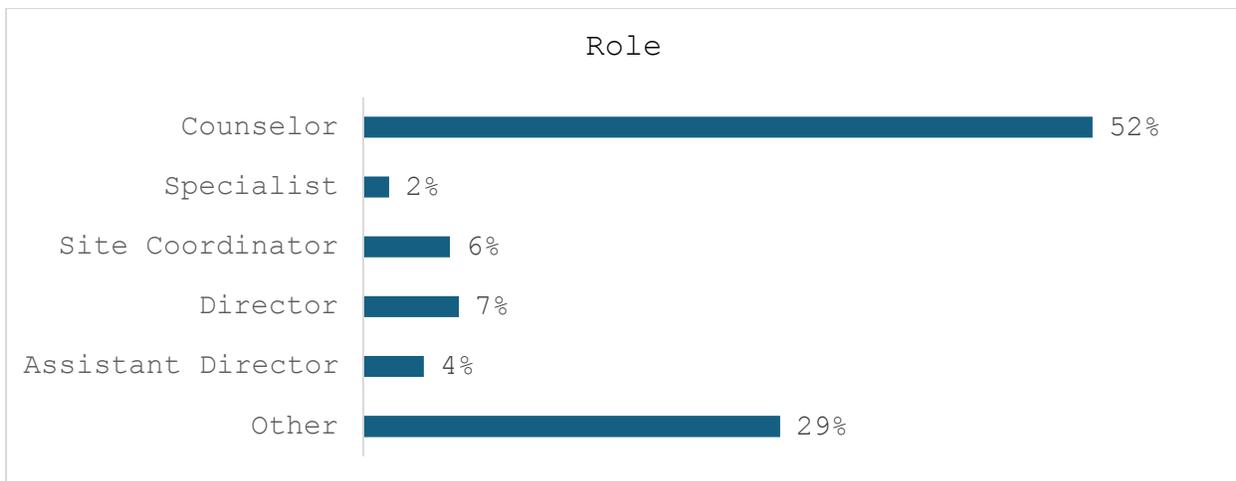
Maintaining a well-trained team of staff is essential to delivering a high-quality summer camp. Staff should have a strong understanding of safety procedures, daily processes, and skills to lead program activities and engage families. Staff should also have knowledge of positive youth development, including how to build meaningful relationships with youth and integrate social-emotional learning into activities. Such knowledge strengthens staff's understanding of camp goals and directly contributes to improved outcomes for youth (Henderson et al., 2007).

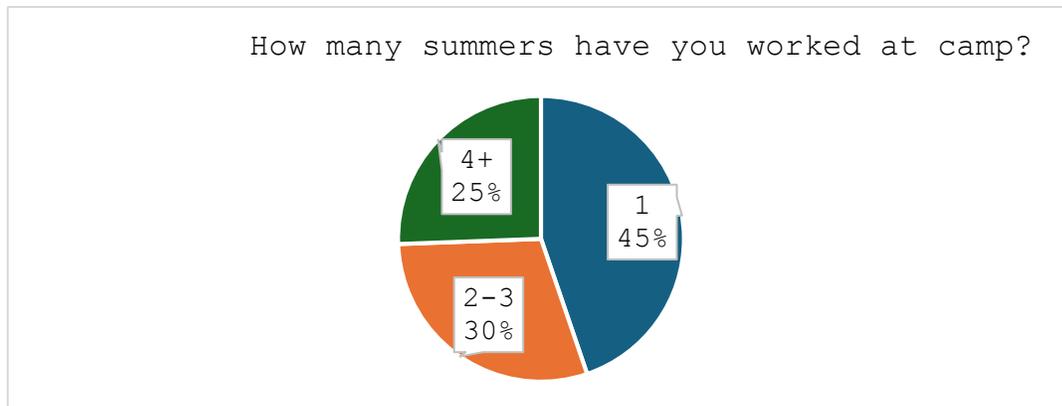
### **How much training did staff receive?**

Staff leaders were required to provide a minimum of four hours of pre-camp training and one hour of training for every week of camp throughout the summer. 18 of 22 camps (82%) met this target. Camps provided a total of 370 hours of training, averaging 18 hours per camp. Training covered a range of topics including safety, camp schedule and logistics, positive youth development, building a strong culture and community, behavior management, and problem solving. Staff completed a pre survey after pre camp training and 96% agreed or strongly agreed that pre camp training equipped them with skills to maintain a safe environment and handle emergencies (N=176). Camp leaders received pre-camp survey results to review and follow up with staff as needed at the start of the summer.

### **Staff Feedback**

Staff also provided feedback in post camp surveys. Post camp surveys were administered at the completion of summer camp to assess the effectiveness of staff training throughout the summer, including skills developed in training, and provide insight into their experience working at camp. 174 staff completed post staff surveys. Post surveys also collected information on staff age and role, number of summers working at camp, and why staff chose to work at camp. More than half of survey respondents (52%) were counselors. 49% were under the age of 30 and 45% reported this was their first summer working at camp.





### **Why did staff choose to work at camp?**

Staff also reported in the post summer survey why they chose to work at camp. Many staff reported already having connections with the camp, such as working at the site for other programs like after school, attending the camp as a child, and/or feeling connected with the camp’s mission. One staff wrote, “I was a Girls Place employee throughout the school year, and I am incredibly passionate about Girls Place and its mission. I decided to work at the summer camp because I deeply care for the girls.”

Staff also discussed enjoying working with kids; others mentioned wanting to make a difference and have an impact on children in the community. One staff wrote, “I love interacting with children and making a difference in their life while allowing them to express themselves through art and creativity.” Another wrote, “to help lead our youth in the community to have a safe, educational and fun summer,” and one wrote simply, “to serve.” Staff also discussed wanting to develop skills, such as leadership and communication, gaining professional experience, and building community.

### **How does working at camp impact counselors?**

Warner et al (2022) found in a study of young adult camp counselors that seasonal camp employment helped participants solidify their desire for dynamic work that offers a supportive

social environment with work-life balance and makes a difference in their community. Seasonal employment gives young adults the opportunity to discover and reinforce work values in a temporary setting (Warner et al., 2022). Duerden et al. (2014) argues out of school time programs, specifically summer camps, present an ideal environment for young adults to gain workforce development skills including communication, problem solving, and leadership. A study of California 4-H summer camp programs, where high school age counselors work together with adults to plan and lead summer activities, consistently found staff gained more through the camp experience than campers, most notably in confidence, responsibility, and leadership (Bird & Subramaniam, 2018).

### **How did working at CTAC camp impact counselors?**

Staff were asked in the post camp survey to describe their experience working at camp and the impact it had on them. Responses were overwhelmingly positive and focused on skills counselors developed, the support from older counselors and team atmosphere, how the experience informed their future plans, and the impact the camp had on children served.

Responses around skills developed included, “I was able to grow individually and also in my ability to work well with a team. I feel more confident thanks to leadership trusting in me and my abilities,” Another staff wrote, “It was enlightening. I learned that I have to be more bold and vocal.” Another staff described camp as, “The best and most formative experience of my life. Has taught me skills that I will use everywhere and given me connections that I will carry with me.” Another wrote, “I had a great experience managing logistics and supporting staff. The experience sharpened my problem-solving, organization, and communication skills in a fast-paced, team-oriented environment.”

Staff also discussed the impact of working in a supportive, team oriented environment.

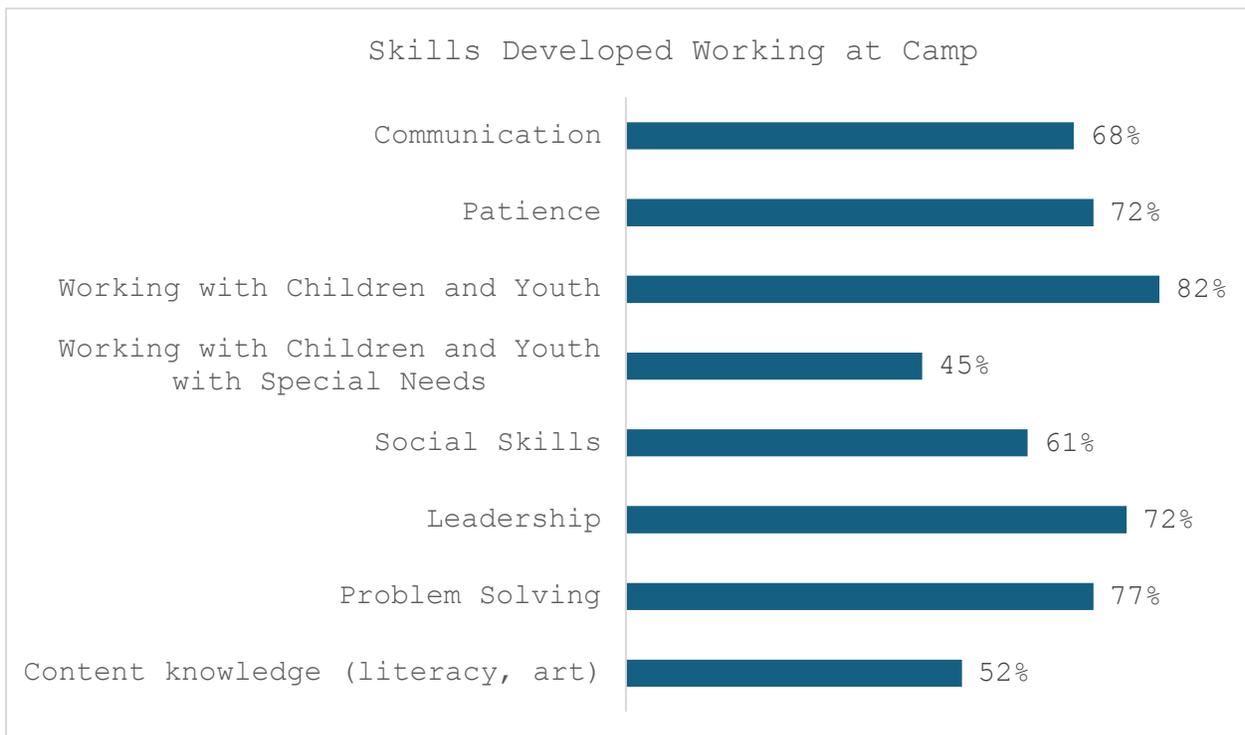
One staff said, “I absolutely loved working here this month. I’m very sad for it to be over. I love the staff and our work culture as well as our campers.” Another staff wrote, “It’s a unique experience you won’t find anywhere else [;] it’s not just magic for the campers but for the [counselors] as well. There are challenges every day that we work through and use each other to build up our skills. This camp went from being a simple new job to becoming a safe place for [counselors] and campers.”

Many staff also discussed how working at camp informed their future plans. One counselor wrote, “I would describe the experience as stretching but rewarding. It continues to heighten my desire and call towards pouring into the younger generation. Not a sacrifice but an investment.” Another counselor wrote, “My experience was great, I recently found my love for kids and teaching them.” Another wrote, “I have been a professional circus performer for over a decade. This contract changed how I saw my career moving forward. I have decided to focus much more of my time and energy on Circus Education rather than performing specifically because of how proud I was of what we achieved together.” Comments also included, “This camp was a really amazing experience that has confirmed my plans to continue working with children in the future. I have been able to work with amazing coworkers that have taught me so many new skills,” and “It has inspired me to dedicate the rest of my life and career to the advancement and empowerment of children.” Counselors who teach during the school year also expressed how the experience influenced their teaching. One teacher wrote, “It was a great experience. I hope to implement some of the activities in my yearly teaching curriculum.”

Lastly, staff discussed how impactful the camp was for the campers. Comments included, “It was a fun and fulfilling experience, where the kids not only learned new topics, but they were exposed to new ways of thinking,” and “wonderful experience working with staff and

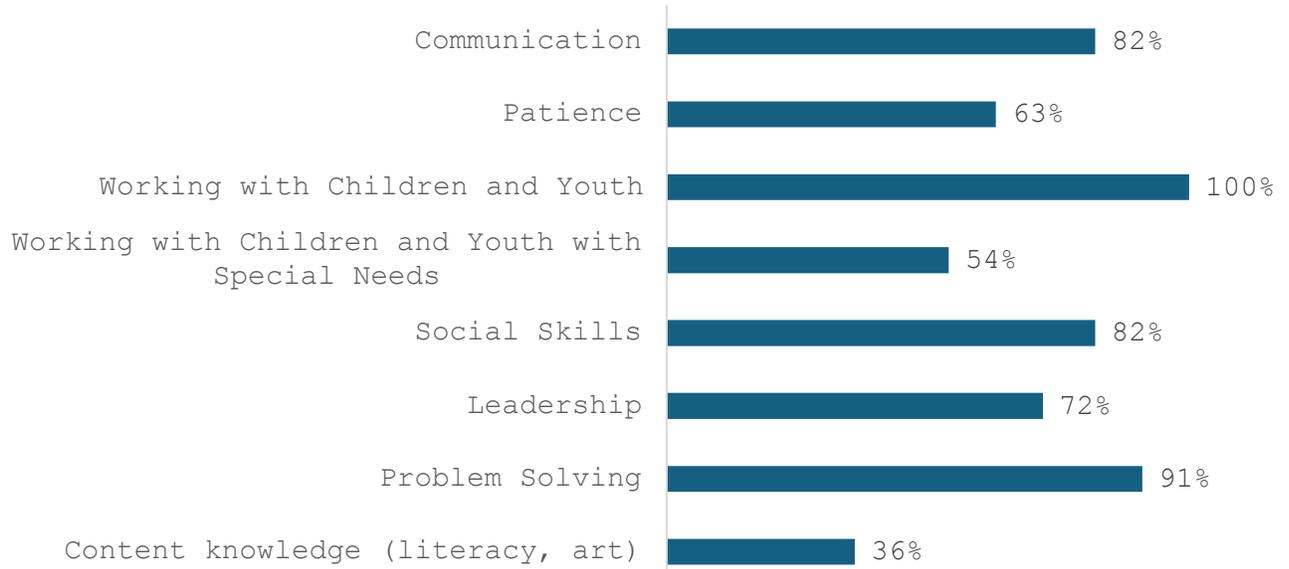
kids at camp. Very impactful to see all the students gain confidence in their skills, make friends, and try new things.” Staff also discussed skills they taught their campers, as in one comment, “It was an enjoyable experience. I was able to teach some of the campers how to write their name, site words, math, and letter sounds.” Finally, the kids impacted me just as much as I may have them. We all learned from each other.”

Staff indicated in the post survey the skills they developed working at camp. Most staff (82%) developed skills working with children and youth, leadership (72%), patience (72%) and problem solving (77%).

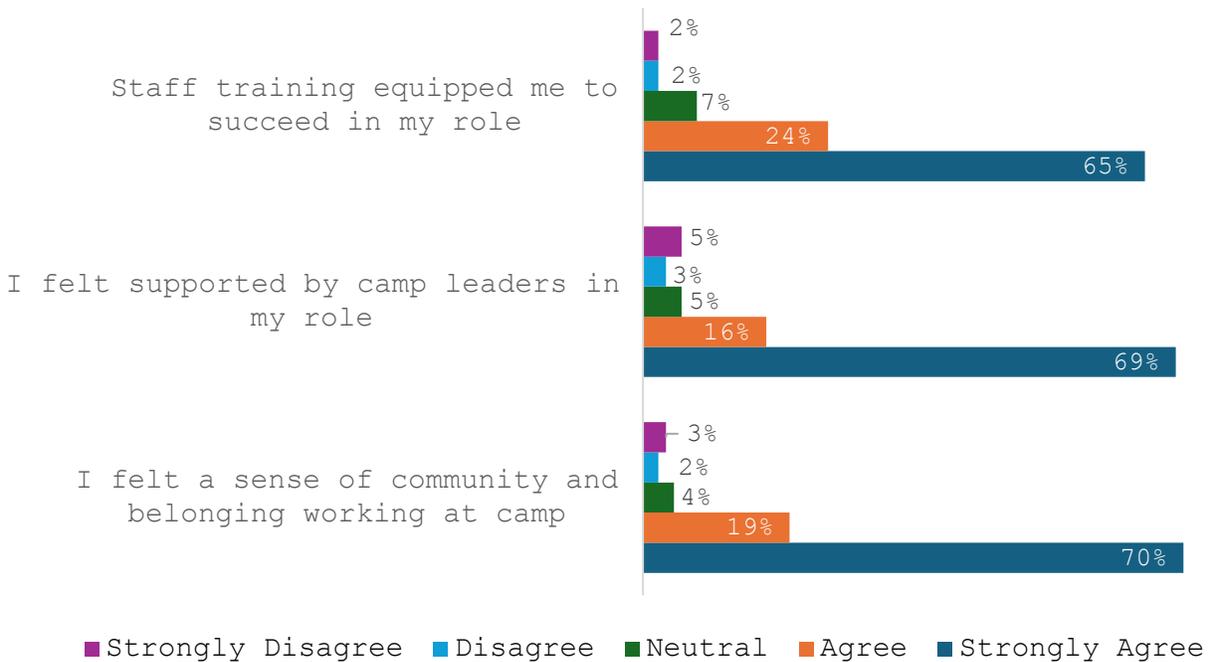


11 counselors (6% of staff) were aged 14-17. All these younger staff developed skills around working with children and youth and most developed communication (82%) and problem-solving skills (82%). Summer camp provides an opportunity for younger counselors to build job skills in a supportive, team oriented environment (Duerden et al., 2014) and start to develop a vision for their professional futures (Warner et al., 2022).

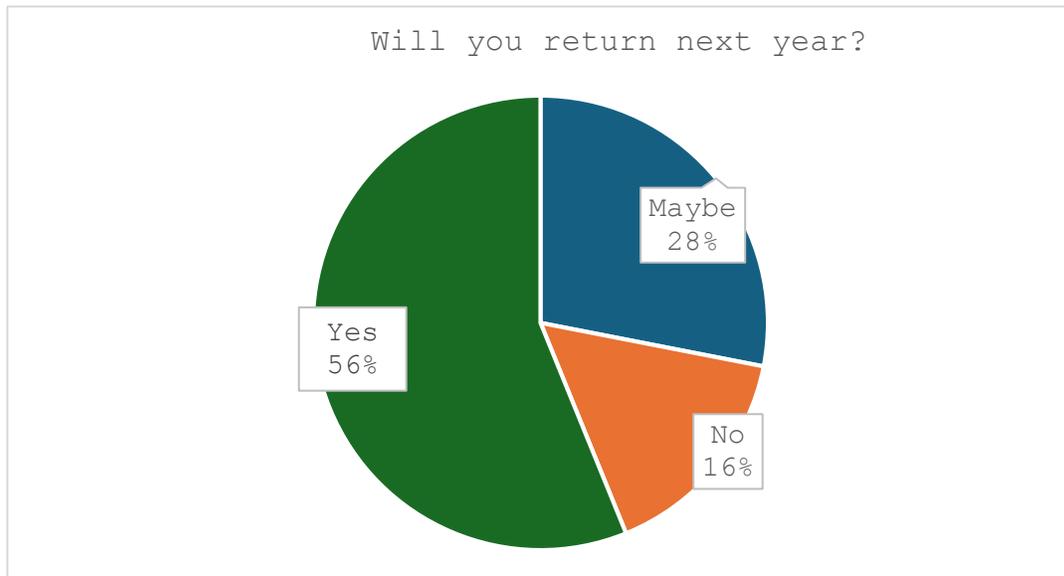
### Skills Developed, Counselors Ages 14-17



### Staff Satisfaction



More than half of staff (56%) reported they planned to return to camp next year, detailing how much they enjoyed working with children, the impact they and the camp had on the children, and the impact the camp had on the community. Staff who said they maybe or would not come back discussed unclear future plans, graduating, and getting a full-time job.



### Literacy

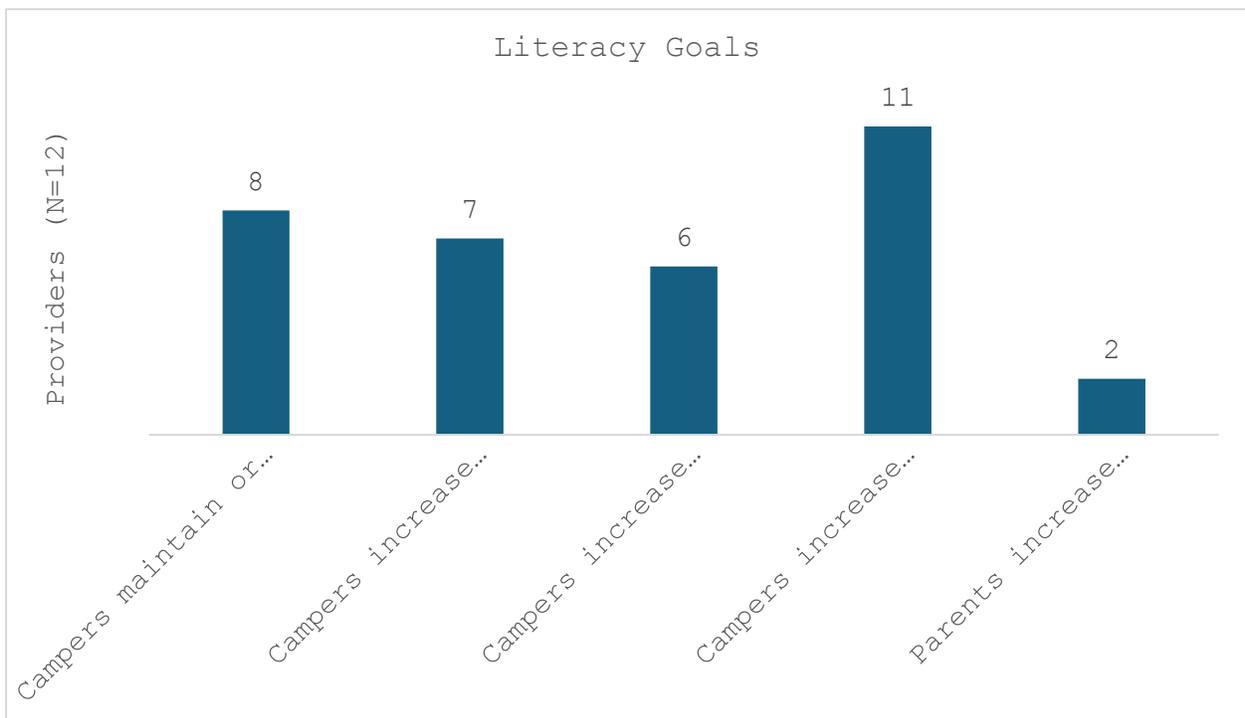
The 2025 Alachua County Comprehensive Literacy Needs Assessment reported that only about half of students in Alachua County are reading on grade level. In the 2024-2025 school year, there was a 33-point gap in English Language Arts achievement between economically disadvantaged students (38% scoring 3 or above on state assessments/on grade level) and non-economically disadvantaged students (71% scoring 3 or above on state assessments/on grade level) (Florida Department of Education, 2025). While all students tend to lose some literacy skills over the summer break, summer learning loss is more profound for students from low-income households (Gao et al., 2016). Focusing on literacy in CTAC's funded summer

programs helps students who most need support. Summer camps were encouraged, but not required, to incorporate literacy activities into programming to support these students.

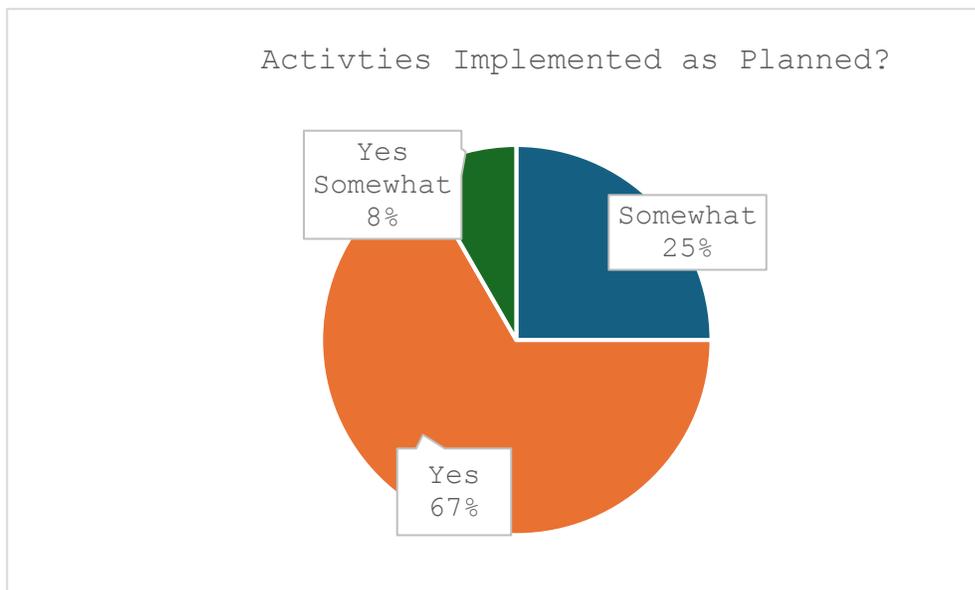
### What did literacy programming look like in CTAC summer camps?

Of the 22 summer camps funded by CTAC this past summer, eight indicated in their funding proposal they planned to implement literacy skill building activities. At the end of the summer, CTAC staff sent all 22 camp providers a survey focused on literacy. We asked those eight camp providers specifically to complete it and requested completion from any other camp providers who implemented literacy activities. 12 of 22 camp leaders completed the survey. The purpose of the survey was to help us better understand what literacy programming looked like in CTAC camps this past summer, potential outcomes for students, and what practices can be continued or expanded in the future to further support campers' literacy skill development.

The survey first asked camp leaders to indicate the goals of their literacy programming. Most camp leaders (91%) focused on campers increasing literacy behaviors, such as reading and writing.



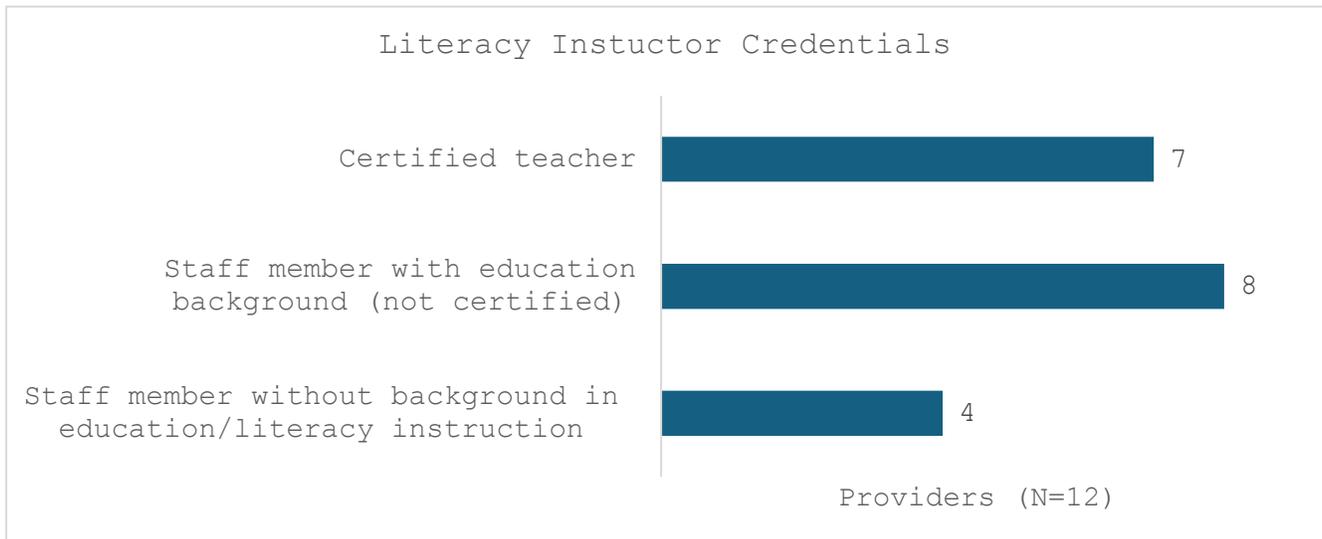
The survey also asked if staff were able to implement literacy activities as originally planned and described in their funding proposal. Most providers indicated they were able to implement activities as planned. The two providers who struggled to implement activities as planned discussed how the literacy activities did not engage youth as they hoped, staff did not have the skill set to implement the activities, and they did not have enough time to implement the activities.





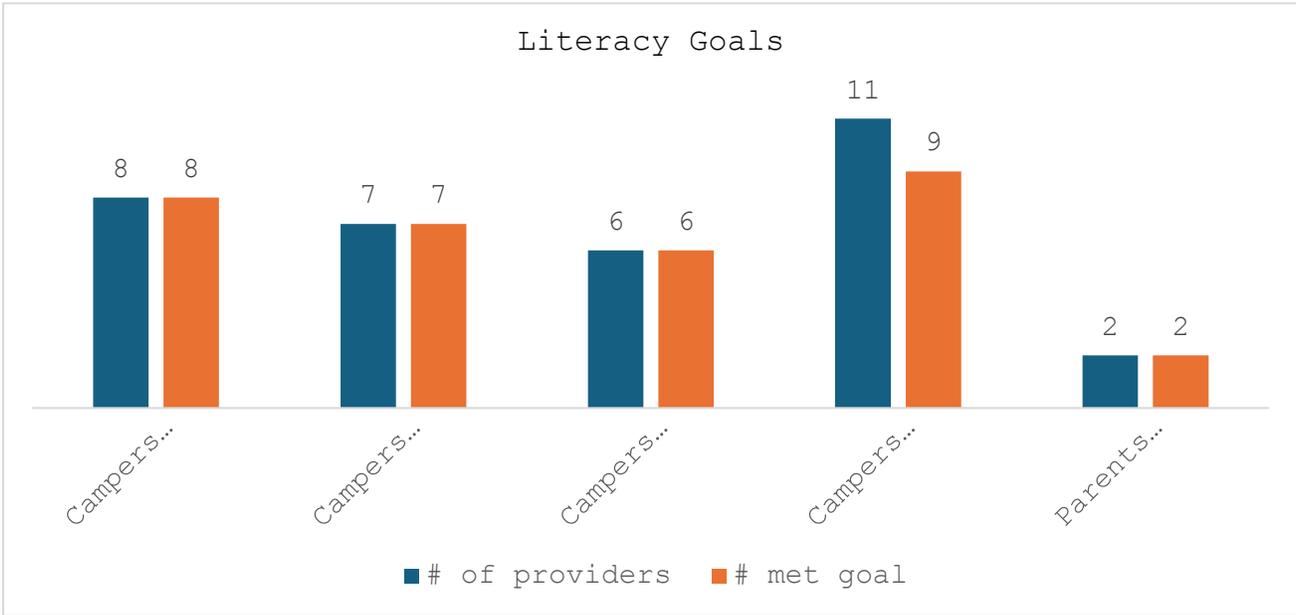
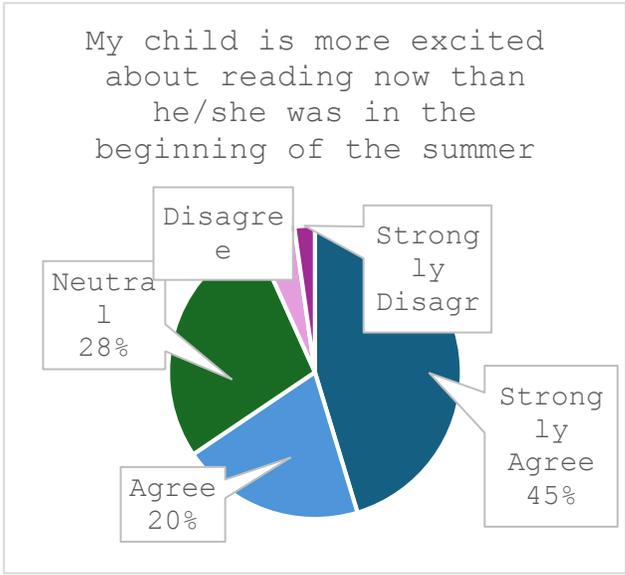
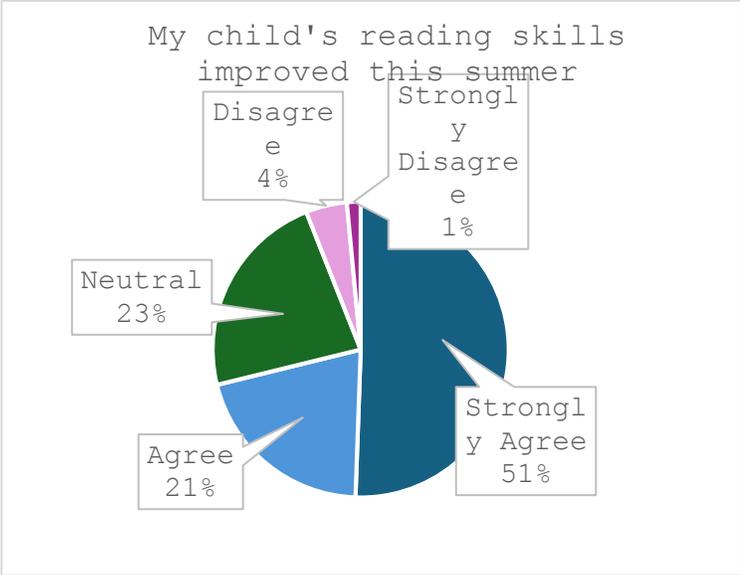
Staff also indicated the strategies they implemented to meet their literacy goals and the dosage for each. The literacy strategies most often implemented were giving campers the opportunity to explore books on site (7 providers implemented this activity daily), and read alouds, which was defined as an adult reading aloud to a group or peers reading aloud to one another (7 providers implemented this activity daily).

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the background/credentials of the staff leading the literacy activities. 58% utilized certified teachers and 67% utilized a staff member with an education background who was not certified.



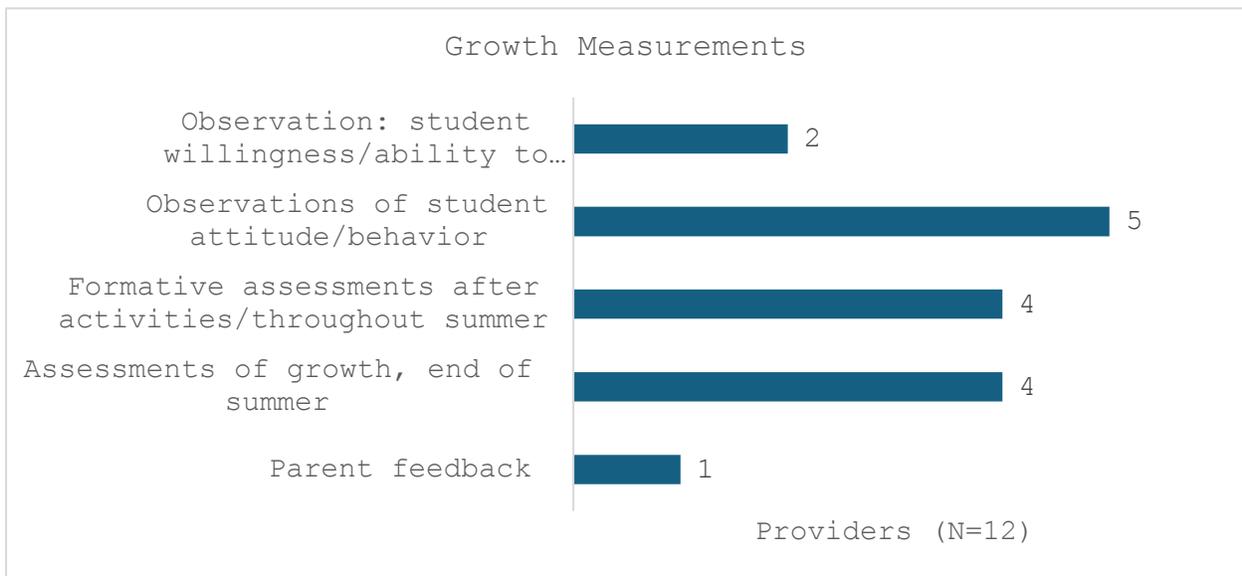
**Did students make progress? Did camps meet their goals?**

Responses from the survey administered to parents at the end of the summer indicated 72% of parents of children in these 12 camps agreed their child’s reading skills improved over the summer and 65% agreed their child’s excitement toward reading improved over the summer (N=267).



Almost all providers reported they met their literacy goals. The survey asked how they determined if they met their goals. Five providers (41%) indicated they observed changes in camper attitudes and behavior. Providers described, “students [being] able to contribute to the play reading sessions” and “excitement” when implementing activities. One provider indicated

she “measured students’ willingness to participate in literacy games.” Formative assessments included “student assessments for each activity,” and “daily evaluation of student progress.” End of summer assessments included comparing early journal entries to entries at the end of the summer and UFLI<sup>1</sup> testing. One camp submitted comprehensive DIBELS<sup>2</sup> and reading assessment data indicating 100% of students made progress over the summer in different domains including letter recognition and writing. Another camp submitted pre/post data on students’ attitudes toward reading which showed 97% of campers (35/36) maintained or improved their attitude in reading over the summer.



The survey also asked providers to describe what worked and what challenges they encountered implementing literacy activities. Regarding what worked, provider responses focused on incorporating camper voice and choice into activity selection. Providers offered

<sup>1</sup> [UFLI Foundations](#) is a reading curriculum developed by the Literacy Institute at University of Florida

<sup>2</sup> Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills is an assessment used to assess reading and literacy skills in K-8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

reading games with prizes, wrote poetry, developed recipes, and offered books and activities aligned with camper interests. Challenges encountered included student resistance to academic feeling activities and not having enough time to implement activities. When asked what they would do differently next year, providers discussed administering more formal pre/post testing, increasing family engagement around literacy, and implementing more fun, hands on activities.

### **Literacy programming conclusions and next steps**

The purpose of the literacy survey was exploratory; we wanted to gather insight into what providers were doing related to literacy, and what outcomes they identified. Outcome findings were somewhat anecdotal but promising. Several providers relied on observations of the improvement in student attitudes and willingness to engage in literacy behaviors over the course of the summer. Attitude toward reading is strongly related to reading achievement (Martinez et al., 2008) and could potentially be a doable focus across summer programs.

More than half of CTAC funded summer camp providers (12 of 22) chose to implement literacy programming even though it was not required, highlighting provider interest in literacy. 10 of 12 camps implemented literacy activities daily, and all 12 implemented them weekly throughout the summer, reflecting providers' commitment to working toward their literacy goals. Providers work the most closely with youth served and have the best understanding of what youth need. Their interest and commitment in providing literacy programming highlights the need for youth literacy programming in our community.

Ultimately, campers made progress, anecdotally, and in formal assessments submitted by providers. Providers implemented activities on their own, and if more support was provided, they may be able to do more and administer more formal assessments to evaluate camper progress. In future summers, CTAC can organize spaces for providers to share best practices,

strategies to increase impact, and provide support in utilizing standardized tools to evaluate impact. CTAC summer providers may also be ideal candidates to implement literacy programming facilitated through the CTAC funded Alachua County Literacy Collaborative.

### **Outcomes**

The outcomes of summer camp programming were based largely on youth, parent, and provider insights. Responses from end of camp parent surveys specifically informed the majority of performance measures evaluating camp impact.

#### **Were children and youth satisfied with camp?**

CTAC staff interviewed three campers from each site during site visits conducted throughout the summer. Staff asked campers: What is the coolest thing about summer camp? What is your least favorite thing about camp? and what would you be doing if you weren't at camp?

Campers' responses regarding the coolest thing about camp focused on camp activities, including learning new things, field trips, and relationships developed with peers and staff. Responses around activities included, "fun stuff every day; swimming, tennis, activities," "playing with shaving cream," and "working with all the different art materials, the jewelry- it's shiny. I like the camp. It's really fun." One student responded it's cool "when we go on stage, [I like] practicing acting. Going into character." Responses also illustrated how campers enjoyed learning new things. One told us about, "STEM activities- learn[ing] about different things, [like how a] volcano explodes," "learning really cool tricks that you never thought you could do," and "learning about different things, about farms."

Campers overwhelmingly thought field trips were the coolest part of camp. Camper comments included, “field trips- splash pad, library, and planetarium,” “go to the pool every Wednesday- get to play,” and “Field trips- looking forward to Wonder Works.”

Campers also mentioned relationships with staff and peers. Responses included, “you can make friends, art class, drawing, kids are nice. You can talk to teachers, they support you,” “reading scripts, working together to memorize lines, we say ‘line’ and help each other,” and “field trips, playing games, drawing, basketball, soccer, making new friends.”

CTAC staff also asked campers their least favorite things about camp. Most campers responded “nothing,” or “I like everything.” Some responses focused on the weather, including “When it's raining- we have to stay on the porch,” and “[going] outside- it's hot.” Campers also disliked waking up early and the long days. Some mentioned disliking academic components, especially those done with teachers remotely through Zoom. Responses included, “the Zooms- feels like summer school. I want to learn but I want to have fun learning” and “Reading- it takes a long time to read a whole book.”

Lastly, staff asked campers what they would be doing if they weren't at camp. Most campers said they would be at home, and many indicated they would be watching a screen. Responses included, “Would be at home. In [my] room, on [my] phone” and “at home watching TV, video games.”

### **Were parents satisfied with camp?**

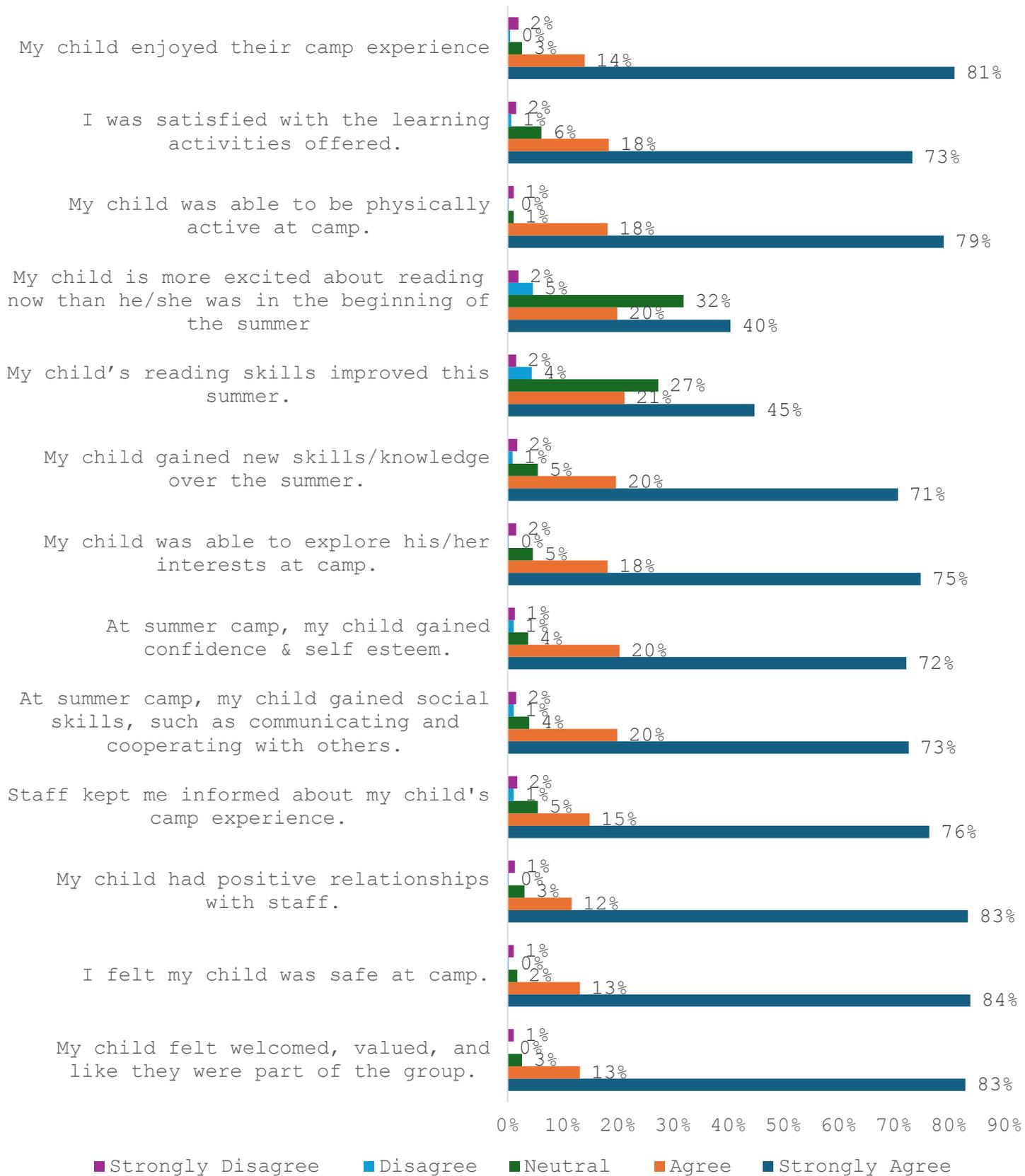
Camp providers administered surveys to parents as children finished their time at camp and at the end of the summer. 458 parents completed a survey. Parent survey responses were used to evaluate performance targets related to how well camps implemented programming, including how parents felt about camp communication and how they felt about the camp

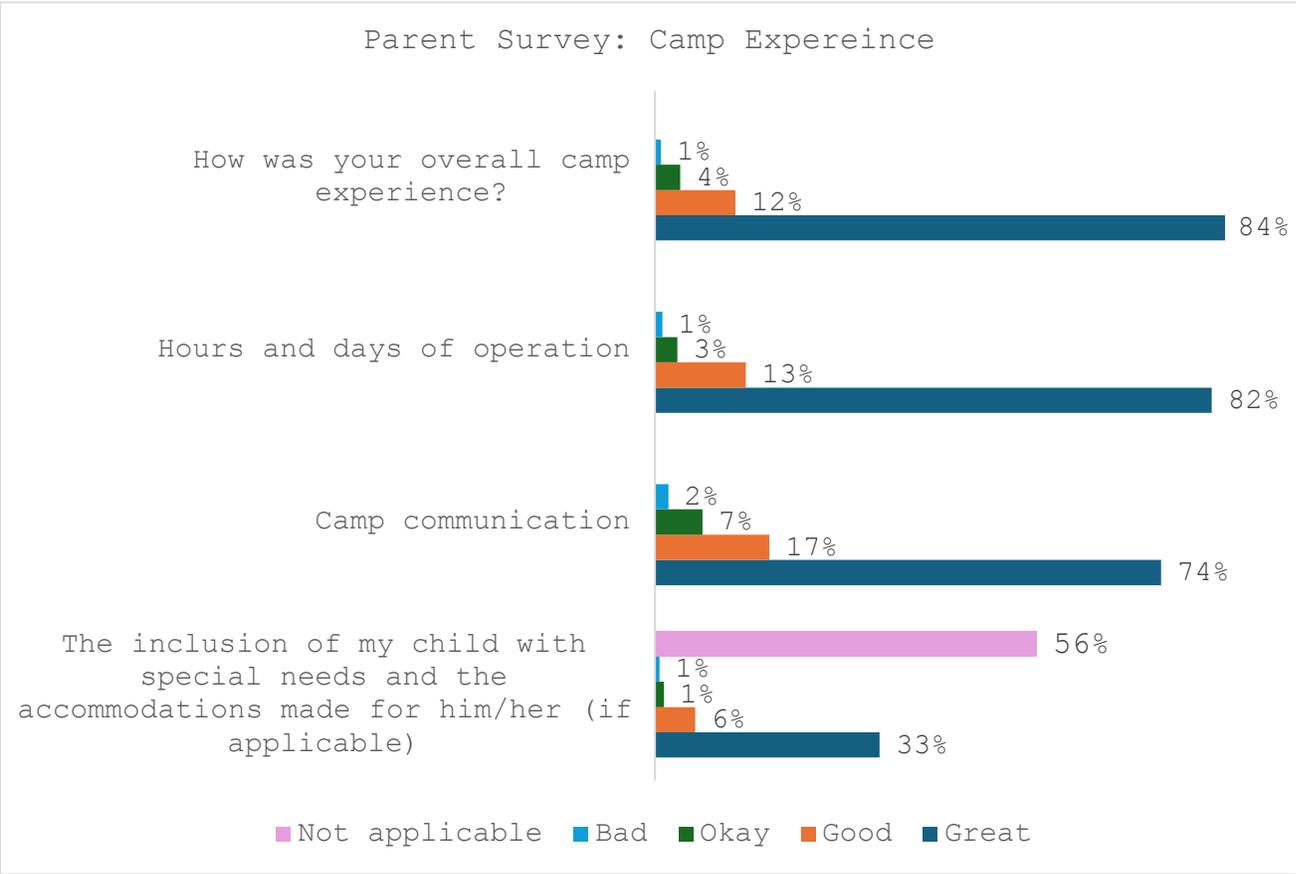
experience overall. Parent survey responses were also used to evaluate the impact of the camp experience for children served, or if campers and families were better off from participating in camp. Better off measures included if families were satisfied with learning activities, if families reported children enjoyed their camp experience, and if parents felt their children were safe at camp.

The performance target for camp communication was 85% (85% of parents report they are satisfied with camp communication); 77% of camps (17/22) met this target, and in total, 91% of parents were satisfied with camp communication. The performance target for overall satisfaction was 90%; 95% of providers (21/22) met this target. In total, 96% of families were satisfied with the camp experience overall.

The performance target for satisfaction with learning activities was 90%; 63% of providers (14/22) met this target. Fewer camps met this target potentially due to not all camps aiming to provide structured learning activities during camp. In total, 91% of families were satisfied with learning activities offered at camp. The performance target for children enjoying their camp experience was 90%; 86% of providers (19/22) met this target. In total, 95% of parents reported children enjoyed their camp experience. The target for parents feeling their child was safe at camp was 90%; 100% of providers (22/22) met this target. In total, 97% of parents felt their child was safe at camp.

## Parent Survey





When asked what skills their children gained at camp, many parents mentioned social skills such as building friendships, boundaries, respect, conflict resolution, expressing feelings, confidence, and communication. Parents also mentioned job skills such as public speaking and professionalism and life skills such as financial literacy. Many parents shared their child learned to swim, and many shared their child gained literacy skills.

When asked what they liked best about camp, Parents discussed the activities provided, the ability of their child to be social and make friends, exposure to new places through field trips, and learning, including swimming, life skills, literacy skills, and social emotional skills. Lots of parents mentioned the camp was exciting and their children wanted to go every day. Parents also mentioned the caring staff, and feeling like their child was well taken care of. One parent wrote,

“The certified reading teachers’ lessons were challenging, but gave my child confidence.”

Another wrote, “Field Trips, Camp games, inside and outside, new friends and continuing learning.” One parent wrote, “to be taught by leaders of the community [who instilled] growth, maturity, and ambition in the kids.” Finally, one parent wrote, “the nurturing of my child’s creative soul.”

When asked what they liked least about camp, parents mentioned the communication could be better, the heat, and children not wanting to leave at the end of the day.

Overall, parents shared the scholarship had a positive impact on their family. They detailed how their child did not have to stay home during the summer, how their child learned skills, and had enriching experiences at camp. Many mentioned financial hardship and said their child would not have been able to attend camp without the scholarship. One parent said, “[due to the scholarship, I] was able to purchase more resources for his upcoming kindergarten school year.” Another said, “Stronger reader, more confident, improved self-esteem greatly, made new friends.” Another wrote, “Scholarship provided confidence my daughter could attend the entire summer, provided stability.”

When asked what they would like to tell the Trust, most parents expressed thanks. One parent responded, “Thank you for finding ways for children to have opportunities to learn and be exposed to new things.” Another wrote, “Thank you for this service, it made a difference in our lives this summer.” Overall, parents appreciated the camp scholarship and felt their child had a nurturing, enriching experience.

### **What were provider insights on camp?**

Providers were asked to complete a reflection at the end of the summer to provide insights on key successes, challenges, areas of opportunity, and how CTAC can further support

them. When asked about key successes, several providers discussed exposing campers to new people and places through field trips. One provider wrote, “experiential learning: Field trips offered immersive opportunities that significantly deepened camper engagement and enthusiasm, translating knowledge into lived experiences.” Providers also mentioned campers building social emotional skills. One provider wrote,

*“Within the True Leader Model curriculum, scholars focused on self-leadership in the areas of self-image, purpose, faith, character, and work ethic. They also engaged in team-building activities, strengthened their sense of identity, and participated in character development exercises that reinforced positive values and personal growth.”*

Several providers discussed the success of their curriculum and activities. One provider wrote,

*“Our theme, ‘Emotions in Motion: STEM Adventures from the Inside Out’, connected social-emotional development with hands-on STEM learning. Scholars engaged in dissections and even explored how the spinal cord powers reflexes, built candy neurons to understand anxiety, and created calming jars (just to name a few activities). The Inside Out Challenge invited each class to design a 3D model of the human body showcasing systems like the brain, heart, lungs, and nerves. Models integrated STEM skills from camp projects, with a kindergarten class proudly winning first place.”*

Providers also mentioned dedicated staff, including new team members and TeensWork Alachua interns as successes. Finally, several providers appreciated the support from CTAC staff, especially the how-to videos on SAMIS, and the availability of staff to answer questions as they arose.

Challenges in program implementation included camper recruitment, camper attendance, the timing of the funding release, transportation, and hiring and onboarding new staff. Several providers mentioned the challenge of maintaining numbers for reimbursement when students were sick or did not complete the week. One provider wrote, “no flexibility to accept a doctor’s note for an absence to receive reimbursement. Parents tried to send contagious kids to meet expectations.” Another wrote, “struggled with attendance due to... student illnesses. Parents

communicated as consistently as possible, but having purchased meals and event tickets based on the proposed total proved a challenge.” Another provider wrote, “some families struggled to meet the three-day-per-week attendance requirement when children were splitting time between parents.” Ultimately, providers requested CTAC re-visit the attendance policy.

Providers also wrote about the challenge of student recruitment, which affected their enrollment numbers. They described how the late release of CTAC funding resulted in a late start for marketing and enrollment. They shared plans to start recruitment earlier next summer and utilize community partnerships to advertise their program, ideally increasing enrollment. One provider wrote, “We are confident that this challenge is resolvable with earlier outreach and promotion. With more lead time in the upcoming cycle, we expect to meet our enrollment goals.” Providers shared how the late funding release impacted their program operations in other ways as well. One provider wrote, “with Children’s Trust funding supporting 150 of our scholars, the late release of funds created significant stress in completing verification processes, mandatory trainings, and administrative requirements within a compressed timeframe.”

Providers also discussed challenges with recruiting, onboarding, and hiring new staff. New staff, and especially new directors, had a lot to learn in a short time. Providers discussed starting staff recruitment and training earlier in the year and strengthening volunteer recruitment to increase capacity. Providers also mentioned needing additional support from CTAC for staff professional development.

Finally, providers illustrated challenges with transportation, especially with such a strong focus on field trips. Comments included, “establishing vetted backup transportation... is critical to maintaining safety and program reliability,” and “we are...exploring ways to secure more consistent transportation to better support field trips and community engagement.” Others

mentioned trying to partner with the school system to obtain a bus for the summer and/or securing additional funding for transportation. Overall, providers appreciated the support from CTAC and are already in the process of planning for next year.

**What was the investment in summer camp?**

In 2025 the Trust invested \$1,856,882.70 in summer camp programming, excluding two Freedom School sites. The investment per child was \$1,662.38.

<b>Program Investment</b>	
FY 2025 Summer camp budget allocation*	\$1,840,000
<i>*\$2,000,000 total, \$1,840,000 for summer camps and \$160,000 for Freedom Schools</i>	
Total contracted amount	\$1,994,228.83
Total actual expenditures	\$1,856,882.70
<b>Total investment per youth (1,117 total youth)</b>	<b>\$1,662.38</b>

**Conclusion**

In 2025, 22 CTAC funded summer camps served 1,117 children and youth. Camps offered an average of 6.9 weeks (and 33 days) of programming, of which campers attended an average of 6.1 weeks (23 days). On average, campers attended for 73% of the days camps were open. Most campers were in elementary school (66%), with an average age of nine. 66% of campers identified as Black or African American. 82% of campers came from families living at or below 300% of the federal poverty level. The average family income was \$64,166.67, which is just above 200% of the federal poverty level for a family of four.

Youth reported positive camp experiences and identified the coolest parts of camp as the activities, field trips, and relationships built with staff and peers. Families appreciated the skills

children learned, particularly social emotional and literacy skills and the variety of activities, particularly those that were hands on and those that took place off site on field trips. Camp staff also detailed the fun, learning, and growth of children over the short summer months. Staff described literacy gains made by students, particularly in their observations of student willingness and excitement to participate in literacy activities, and through frequent formative assessments. Staff also reported on their own learning, particularly the development of their own confidence and leadership skills. The overwhelmingly positive and impactful summer experiences of staff surely created an exciting and enriching environment for campers. Finally, providers highlighted the learning and growth of campers and staff, campers' exposure to new people and places through field trips, and the building of community through meaningful partnerships.

**Specific successes include:**

- 1,1117 children and youth served in 22 summer camps
- Youth reports of positive experiences, particularly around activities, field trips, and relationships developed with staff and peers
- Positive literacy learning and growth in campers
- Parents reporting skill development in campers, particularly around social emotional capacities

**Areas of opportunity include:**

- Start marketing of programming earlier to increase enrollment
- Continue to develop staff training initiatives
- CTAC staff continue to support providers in data collection, reimbursement processes, and evaluation

Overall, CTAC funded summer camps succeeded in delivering positive summer experiences for low and middle income Alachua County youth. With these insights and improvements already in progress, we look forward to continuing our work together in 2026.

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