

# EVALUATION REPORT

**Summit Learning Program  
Dexter Community Schools**



THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION DESIGN,  
EVALUATION, & RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
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## Executive Summary

Dexter Community Schools (DCS) introduced the Summit Learning program in 2016. Summit is an approach to teaching and learning with three main components: mentoring, project-based learning, and self-directed learning opportunities. Summit is currently used by students who attend Creekside Intermediate School (5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade) and Mill Creek Middle School (7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade).

The evaluation utilized an integrated mixed methods case study design. Quantitative data included standardized test scores and student, teacher, and parent survey data. Qualitative data included interviews with students, teachers, and parents.

### Key Findings

- Students who participated in Summit for **two years** earned **significantly higher scores** in reading (NWEA, M-STEP) and math (NWEA), compared to students who were never in Summit (p. 8).
- One year of Summit participation was not associated with meaningful differences in achievement scores. Findings suggest that students and teachers using Summit face a **learning curve** that may delay the emergence of achievement outcomes (p. 43).
- Summit helped students develop **cognitive skills**, including the ability to analyze and synthesize, solve problems, and effectively navigate information (p. 13).
- Summit promoted development of **non-cognitive skills**, including independence, communication, collaboration, confidence, awareness of learning needs, and ability to get help when needed (p. 16).
- Summit students reported higher persistence, self-management, and future aspirations than students who were not in Summit (p. 12). They also had more positive classroom experiences, felt content was more relevant to their lives, and felt more accepted at school (p. 29).
- Teachers reported **positive experiences** with Summit. Students' and parents' experiences were **mixed**, but tended to be positive (p. 25).
- Participants described **positive experiences** related to the ability to individualize instruction, mentor meetings, preparation for life after high school, and Summit's technology (p. 29).
- Participants described **challenging experiences** related to clarity of expectations, workload for students and teachers, introduction of the program, and communication with the DCS community (p. 29).



# Evaluation Framework

## Program Background

Dexter Community Schools (DCS) introduced the Summit Learning program in fall 2016. Summit is an approach to teaching and learning with three main components: mentoring, project-based learning, and self-directed learning opportunities. Summit is currently used by students who attend Creekside Intermediate School (5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade) and Mill Creek Middle School (7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade).

## Evaluation Design

The Center for Education Design, Evaluation, & Research (CEDER) at the University of Michigan School of Education conducted an evaluation of Summit in DCS. The evaluation described the experiences and outcomes of Summit Learning students, as well as experiences of teachers and parents. Ultimately, the evaluation aimed to provide information that can be used to:

- Inform program planning and implementation.
- Communicate program outcomes to stakeholders.
- Inform decisions about future use of Summit in DCS.

The evaluation utilized an integrated **mixed methods case study design**. Quantitative data included standardized test scores (NWEA, M-STEP, PSAT), Summit Learning survey data from students, teachers, and parents, and K12 *Insight* survey data from students. Qualitative data included interviews with students, teachers, and parents. Quantitative and qualitative findings were first analyzed separately and then subsequently integrated to reveal additional insights into stakeholder outcomes and experiences.

## Evaluation Questions

The following questions guided CEDER's evaluation work:

1. How does participation in Summit relate to student achievement?
2. How do students, teachers, and parents describe Summit's contribution to students' cognitive and non-cognitive skills?
3. What are students', parents', and teachers' experiences with the program?
4. How do students', parents', and teachers' descriptions of their experiences with Summit relate to student outcomes?



## **Evaluation Activities & Participants**

### **A. Analysis of Student Achievement Data**

The CEDER evaluation team analyzed data from NWEA, M-STEP, and PSAT assessments to examine relationships between Summit and student achievement.

#### **NWEA & M-STEP**

Our quantitative analysis employed multiple linear regression (MLR) models to predict NWEA Rasch Unit (RIT) and M-STEP scores based on years of participation in Summit. Outcomes of interest were 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math NWEA RIT scores (collected in spring 2018), 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math M-STEP scores (collected in spring 2018), and 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies M-STEP scores (collected in spring 2018).

Models controlled for students' growth on the relevant test during the year before Summit was introduced (2015-16; Summit was introduced in 2016-17), their pre-Summit (spring 2016) score on that test, and their grade level at the time of testing.

#### **NWEA & M-STEP Participants**

Reading and math NWEA and M-STEP analyses included data from students who were in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2016-17 academic year (first year of Summit implementation) and 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2017-18 academic year (second year of Summit implementation). Total number of students was 489 for reading and math NWEA and 480 for reading and math M-STEP.

Social studies M-STEP is administered in 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, so our analysis included only one cohort of students. The sample consisted of students (n=265) who took the social studies M-STEP as 5<sup>th</sup> graders in spring 2015 and as 8<sup>th</sup> graders in spring 2018.

#### **PSAT**

To explore the effects of Summit on students' longer-term academic performance, we compared 9<sup>th</sup> grade PSAT reading/writing and math scores of students who participated in Summit in 8<sup>th</sup> grade (during the 2016-17 academic year) with scores of students who did not. PSAT scores were collected for 9<sup>th</sup> graders in spring 2018.

We conducted MLR models to predict 9<sup>th</sup> grade PSAT scores based on students' participation in Summit in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, while controlling for pre-



Summit (spring 2016) NWEA RIT scores and pre-Summit (2015-16) growth scores from the same content area (reading or math).

#### **PSAT Participants**

Analyses included PSAT reading/writing and math scores from all students who were enrolled in 8<sup>th</sup> grade in DCS in 2016-17 and took the PSAT in DCS as 9<sup>th</sup> graders in 2017-2018 (n=243).

### **B. K12 *Insight* Student Surveys**

K12 *Insight* administered student surveys in spring 2018 to DCS students. Surveys included 57 four-point Likert scale items (rarely or never, seldom, often, almost always) intended to measure three types of student engagement. *Cognitive engagement*, defined as the quality of students' psychological engagement in academic tasks and activities, included items measuring class experience, student experience, relevance, and academic support. *Self-awareness*, how connected students are to their school and how well they are able to manage themselves, included items measuring involvement, persistence, self-management, and future aspirations. *Social awareness*, the connection students have to other students and adults in their school, included items measuring acceptance, relationship management, relationships with peers, and relationships with adults.

The CEDER evaluation team received the final report from K12 *Insight*, as well as results of analyses comparing students who participated in Summit and those who did not. Results from those comparisons are included in this report.

#### **Participants**

Analyses of K12 *Insight* student engagement surveys included data from 758 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, 267 who were participating in Summit in spring 2018 and 491 who were not. The survey was emailed to all students.

### **C. Student Interviews**

The CEDER evaluation team interviewed 15 DCS students who had experience participating in Summit. Interviews were conducted in person at the schools and lasted approximately 30 minutes each.



### Participants

We employed a stratified random sampling technique to select students who represented 5<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> grade and had spent different amounts of time in Summit. First, we identified ten combinations of current grade level and years of experience in Summit. Next, we randomly identified students within each of those categories. We invited 25 students to participate in interviews and successfully recruited 15. Grade levels and years of participation in Summit are shown below for students in the final sample. Nine students were female and six were male.

Current Grade	Experience with Summit		
	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years
5 <sup>th</sup>	2		
6 <sup>th</sup>	3		
7 <sup>th</sup>	2	1	
8 <sup>th</sup>	1	1	2
9 <sup>th</sup>	1	1	
10 <sup>th</sup>	1		

### D. Teacher Interviews

The CEDER evaluation team conducted interviews with DCS teachers who had experience using Summit in their classrooms. Teachers currently using Summit in 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade participated in group interviews with other teachers of the same grade level (three groups, one per grade). The evaluation team conducted individual interviews with 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math and science teachers who are part of hybrid teams in which Summit is only being used in math and science classrooms. Interviews were conducted in person at the schools and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

### Participants

Seventeen DCS teachers participated in interviews. We conducted one group interview for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers (n=9), one for 7<sup>th</sup> grade teachers (n=2), and one for 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers (n=4). We also conducted two individual interviews with 7<sup>th</sup> grade teachers who used Summit and were members of hybrid teams (teams in which only two out of four teachers used Summit).

### E. Parent Interviews

The CEDER evaluation team conducted group interviews with parents. One group interview was held at Creekside Intermediate School and two



were held at Mill Creek Middle School. Parents of students who participated in interviews were invited to participate, as well as parents recruited by the school. Group interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes.

#### **Participants**

Eight parents participated in group interviews.

### **F. Summit Learning Surveys**

Summit Learning developed online surveys and administered them to students, teachers, and parents of participating students in spring 2018. The CEDER evaluation team conducted descriptive analyses using the aggregate data reported by Summit Learning.

#### **Participants**

Student surveys were completed by 232 students who were enrolled in Summit during the 2017-18 school year, including 35 from Creekside Intermediate School (5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade) and 197 from Mill Creek Middle School (7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade)

Teacher surveys were completed by 13 teachers who used Summit in 2017-18, including two from Creekside Intermediate School (5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade) and 11 from Mill Creek Middle School (7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade).

Parent surveys were completed by 24 parents. 54% of respondents had a student in their first year of Summit and the remaining 46% had students in their second year with Summit.





# Evaluation Findings

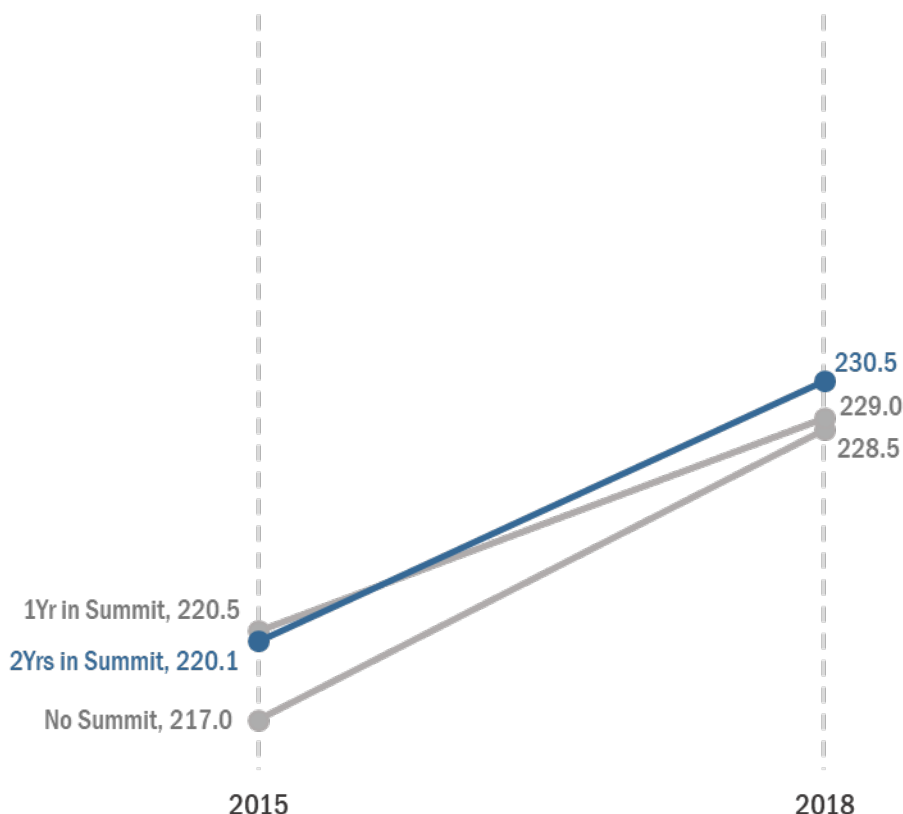
## I. Student Achievement

This evaluation explored the effects of Summit on multiple measures of academic performance: 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math NWEA Rasch Unit (RIT) scores, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math M-STEP scores, 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies M-STEP scores, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade PSAT scores.

### A. NWEA – 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading

MLR revealed that students who participated in **two years of Summit scored significantly higher on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade NWEA reading test** than students who never participated in Summit ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Two years of Summit** was associated with **an increase in NWEA reading scores** that was significantly larger than the increase for students with no Summit.



On average, students who participated in two years of Summit performed 1.9 points higher on the NWEA reading assessment than students who were never in Summit. The model showed no difference in reading scores between students who participated in one year of Summit and the non-Summit group.

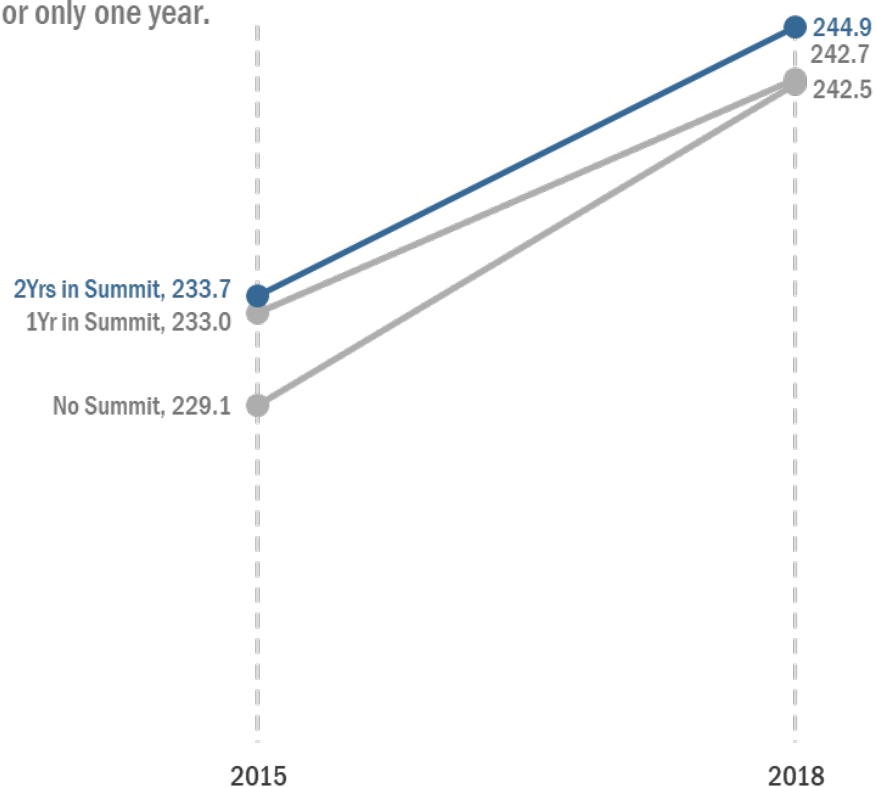


In addition to the overall NWEA reading score, we analyzed relationships between participation in one year of Summit<sup>1</sup> and performance on subtests measuring three individual reading goals – Literature, Informational Text, and Vocabulary Acquisition and Use. Participation in one year of Summit was associated with a 1.8-point increase in Literature ( $p < 0.05$ ), and a 3.1-point increase in Informational Text ( $p < 0.001$ ). No significant differences were found for Vocabulary Acquisition and Use.

## B. NWEA – 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Math

MLR revealed that students who participated in **two years of Summit scored significantly higher on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade NWEA math test** than students who never participated in Summit or had only one year ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Two years of Summit** was associated with an increase in **NWEA math scores** that was significantly larger than the increase for students with no Summit or only one year.



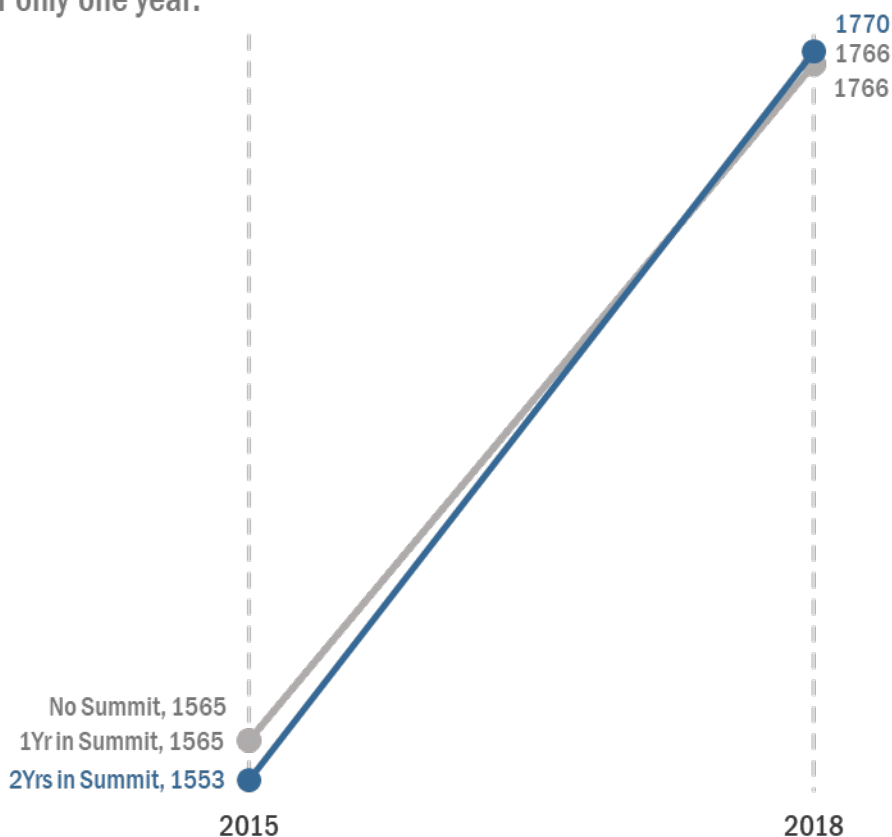
<sup>1</sup> Data on these individual reading goals was not available for students who participated in two years of Summit.



On average, students who participated in two years of Summit performed 2.4-points higher on the NWEA math assessment than students who were never in Summit.

In addition to the overall NWEA reading score, we analyzed relationships between participation in Summit and performance on subtests measuring four individual math goals – Operations and Algebraic Thinking, Real and Complex Number Systems, Geometry, and Statistics and Probability. Participation in two years of Summit was associated with a 4.7-point increase in students' scores on the Operations and Algebraic Thinking goal ( $p < 0.05$ ), a 4.5-point increase in students' scores on Real and Complex Number Systems goal ( $p < 0.05$ ), and a 3.5-point increase on the Geometry goal ( $p < 0.05$ ). We found no significant differences for Statistics and Probability.

**Two years of Summit** was associated with an **increase in M-STEP reading scores** that was significantly larger than the increase for students with no Summit or only one year.





### C. M-STEP – 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading

MLR revealed that students who participated in two years of Summit scored significantly higher on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade M-STEP reading test than students who never participated in Summit or had only one year ( $p < 0.05$ ). On average, students who participated in two years of Summit performed 3.9-points higher on the M-STEP reading assessment than students who were never in Summit.

### D. M-STEP – 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Math

MLR revealed no significant differences in M-STEP math scores for students who were in Summit and those who were not.

### E. M-STEP – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies

MLR revealed no significant differences in M-STEP social studies scores for students who were in Summit and those who were not.

### F. PSAT – 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading/Writing & Math

Models revealed no differences between Summit and non-Summit students PSAT reading/writing or math scores. In other words, students' **9<sup>th</sup> grade PSAT scores were not affected by whether or not they participated in Summit as 8<sup>th</sup> graders.** Notably, 9<sup>th</sup> grade PSAT scores for all DCS students tended to be well above scores from a nationally representative sample of 9<sup>th</sup> graders in the United States.

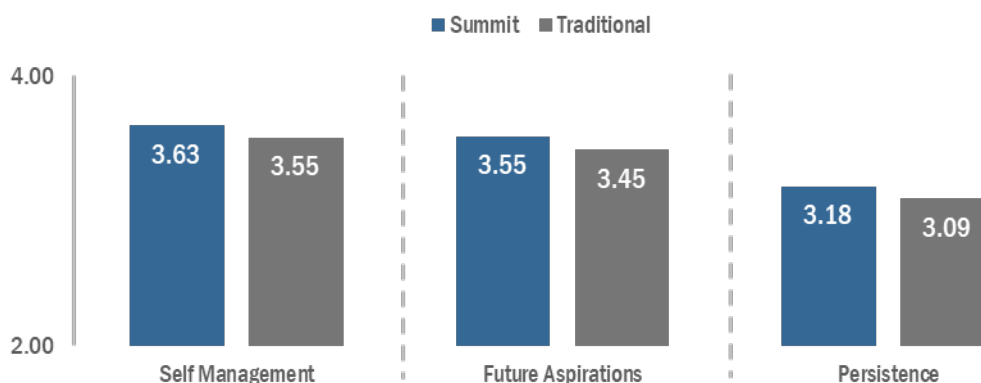


## II. Cognitive & Non-Cognitive Skills

### A. Quantitative Findings – K12 *Insight* Student Survey

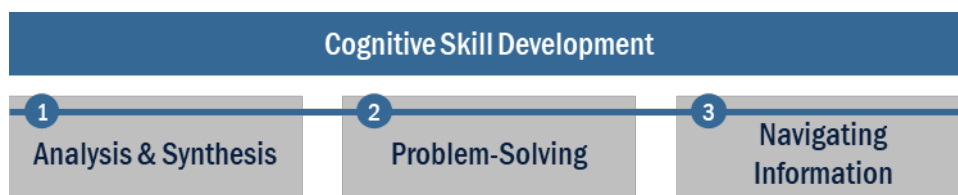
Students in Summit scored higher on self-management, future aspirations, and persistence than students who were not in Summit ( $p < 0.05$ ). Summit was not related to any differences in involvement, relationship management, relationships with peers, or relationships with adults.

**Persistence, self-management, and future aspirations** were significantly higher for students in Summit.



### B. Qualitative Findings – Cognitive Skill Development

In interviews, students, teachers, and parents described various cognitive outcomes, including analysis and synthesis, problem-solving, and ability to navigate information.



#### THEME 1: ANALYSIS & SYNTHESIS

Students and teachers described ways that Summit cultivated students' analysis and synthesis skills, including collecting data, making sense of information, and communicating findings.

**STUDENTS** spoke about gaining the ability to understand larger systems by reflecting on patterns in data and the relationships between individual



pieces of information. They shared examples of specific projects that allowed them to practice these skills.

The last project we did in English was we listened to a podcast and we wrote an essay on the podcast. It...was about a murder and we wrote about who we think did it, because it was like something that had been on *True Mysteries* or something because it was unresolved.... You would take into account the evidence and then you would like analyze and stuff. –Student

**STUDENTS** learned to develop their own topics of interest and independently collect information to help them understand it.

I've probably gotten better at researching things because most of the time teachers won't get back to you right away, but they will get back to you [eventually]. I could probably just look [up the answer] and find it pretty easily, if I needed to. –Student

**TEACHERS** felt that Summit equipped students with the skills to competently engage in the research process, from collecting information to communicating an argument.

If I went back four years ago when I wasn't doing this, and I said to my students, "Okay, you guys are going to write a paragraph where you have to do some research about features in an earthquake structure and then design your own structure and tell me why it's going to be beneficial," I really think they would've struggled with that. Now the students are so used to going through that thought process of gathering their information and constructing a paragraph. –Teacher

## **THEME 2: PROBLEM-SOLVING**

**TEACHERS** explained that Summit helped students develop the ability to find solutions to complex challenges. Teachers described Summit's ability to frame problems in ways that motivated students to want to solve them. They provided rich descriptions of various projects that elucidated ways that students became engaged and excited by the process.

[In math] the difference is huge. The kids tackle problems in a way more authentic kind of a way. Because we always start out with the word problem. We start out with the scenario that's messy and icky and figuring out how to unpack and they are so much more willing to just dive in and start tearing at it than in the past. When I have tried to implement curriculum like this before Summit came along, kids would be faced with a problem that wasn't...neatly



framed and previously lectured on and [they would] just lean back and say, "I don't know what to do and I'm done." I feel like now they dive in. –Teacher

Towards the end of the year I do a project called Problem Solving Plastics. [My partner teacher] teaches them about countries in need. Then the students have to pick one of those countries. Part of the report is telling me all about that country, the GDP of it, and the percent below the poverty line, and the education level of that country. Then they have to pick a problem that everyday people have and they have to solve it with plastics. They make plastic air conditioners, and water filters, and solar lights, and things like that. –Teacher

### **THEME 3: NAVIGATING INFORMATION**

Students, parents, and teachers explained that Summit helped students learn to effectively navigate information from various sources. Through working with Summit, students learned how to seek out beneficial study aids and distinguish between more and less trustworthy sources.

**STUDENTS** commonly reported that Summit helped them learn to identify helpful resources and cultivated the ability to discern reputable information.

I'm learning about how the circulatory system works, and I'm learning ... how to take better notes, and how to make sure your resources are good. Cause if I got a resource that wasn't believable and I put it on my book, that means I would be giving out false information and that wouldn't be good. –Student

**TEACHERS** observed students learning how to interpret rubrics and use them to guide their work.

I think the amazing thing is prior to Summit, the students never referenced your rubric. They didn't use the language in it. They're using the language when they're having discussion with each other, asking each other about narrative or tone of voice. "What's the tone? What's the theme of your paper", right? They didn't use to have these discussion before having the words and what they meant with the rubrics. –Teacher

**PARENTS** explained that Summit helped their children cultivate the capacity to seek out high-quality learning supports.



Now they need to figure out what they need to know, figure out where it is, be able to have note taking skills to take notes on it, and then the study skills to be able to study it independently. I think it...will set them up for success later on when they have to study on their own and they're not going to get fed, like, "Here's the answers to the test. Just memorize these." I think it helps them to learn more than just to regurgitate. –Parent



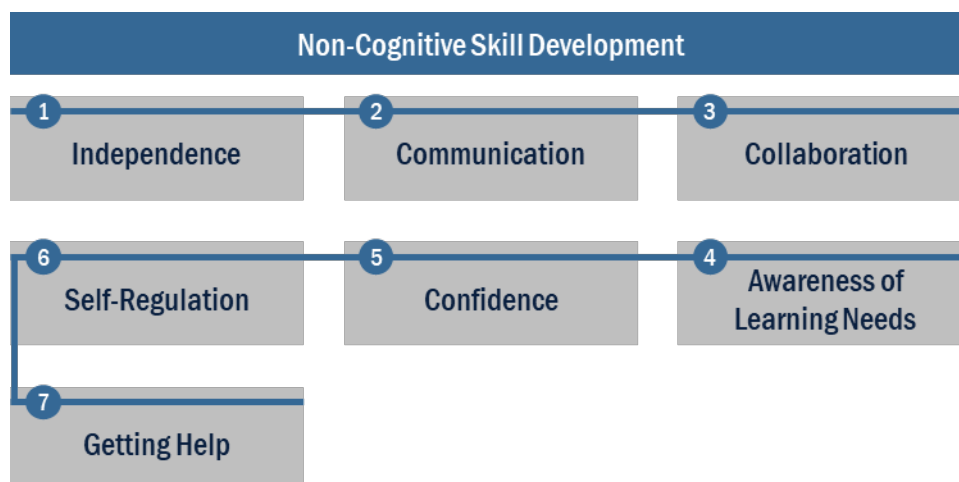
He learned where to find information. He learned that he could find information and not everything was handed to him.

He **learned how to differentiate** between Joe's video on space and something from NASA.

- Parent

### C. Qualitative Findings – Non-Cognitive Skills

In interviews, students, teachers, and parents described various non-cognitive outcomes of Summit, including independence, communication, collaboration, confidence, awareness of learning needs, and ability to get help when needed.



### THEME 1: INDEPENDENCE

Through Summit, students became more independent. They developed their ability to think, plan, and study independently. They improved their ability to sustain task-oriented behavior without intervention from external authority figures. The overall structure of Summit and the self-directed tasks were designed to help students become self-directed and





self-reliant learners. Summit engenders goal-setting, time management skills and guides students to plan ahead for long-term goals. Participants emphasized ways that gaining independent learning skills will equip

“

I feel like **I'm doing more than just teaching**. It's not just the content like it was before. We're addressing learning habits and things that I didn't learn until college. How to prioritize. How to calendar. How to collaborate. We're also addressing these social emotional needs that our kids deserve as well.

- Teacher

students up for future success.

**STUDENTS** reported that Summit helped them learn the importance of goal setting. They described various ways they practiced goal-setting in Summit.

[If I had to give advice to another student about using Summit], I would say probably set goals and remember. Instead of working on multiple things at once, focus on one thing you need to get done and then move to the next one rather than just being like, “Oh no, I gotta get this. Oh wait, I gotta get this....” Cause then you get really confused and you get off track. –Student

We create goals...like smart goals.... [We also] use the 16 habits of success, so it tells us what you should be doing and how you can succeed in Summit. –Student

**STUDENTS** shared their success in becoming self-directed learners, learning to plan their time, finding resources that met their needs, and individualizing their approach to the content. They explained that Summit's structure taught them to independently manage their schedules in accordance with short- and long-term objectives.

[If I had to give advice to another student about using Summit, I would say] go over each objective. There are many objectives in each playlist. Go over each one. Go through the material you feel helps you best, like maybe the videos would help you more, or the slideshows or the articles, because there is some information that doesn't help people. –Student

I definitely look at what's the most I have to do and what's the closest due date, and then I'll organize when I'm going to do stuff accordingly... a lot of times I'll just look at the workload and how soon it has to be done. –Student



[You can] split your efforts as much as you like. For example, I find science a lot easier than history. If I need to, I can spend all week [on] history and not focus on anything else. It lets me focus on what I need to focus on. It just gives me a lot more flexibility with when I have to work. –Student

[Summit is] more learning to learn and learning to manage your time than directly learning and memorizing facts. In traditional your time's scheduled out for you, so generally you'll learn what you need to know if you're focusing. But here, you need to learn how to manage your time... –Student

**STUDENTS** attributed their increased independence to the flexibility that was built into Summit. Having the ability to move through the curriculum at their own pace also allowed them to focus on content appropriate for their own level of understanding.

[In a non-traditional classroom, the teacher would] be saying it and I would already pretty much know it all. She's teaching us, but we still had to listen to it. And now, like, we still have to listen to her, but she recognizes that we know it, and she'll let us do the advanced math, or let us study for the test. – Student

I have decided to pass all my content assessments in whatever order I needed to or felt like I needed to. I decided this year that I was going to try to get into algebra, which I ended up doing, so I had to plan out when I was going to take those tests and things like that, in what order and things like that. –Student

Even though the overwhelming majority of students appreciated the ability to move at their own pace, a few **STUDENTS** reported challenges (see page 35).

**TEACHERS** also emphasized students' development as self-directed learners.

“

I think that what really spoke to me is watching my former students go into a Summit classroom and **become self-directed** and really an active part of their education. That was huge for me.

- Teacher



The self-direction is huge in terms of the focus areas. We see a ton of growth in that, even between now and a couple months from now we're gonna see a bunch more growth from [students] as they learn to navigate there. They have to plan, essentially what their timing is and what they're gonna do for focus areas and what they still need to learn. I think that is one of the most powerful things...about Summit is just learning those skills of how do I help myself? How do I plan out my time? –Teacher

**PARENTS** felt their students gained important independent learning skills through their participation in Summit.

I like the fact it just seems more like it's learning that you would do at a college level, as far as more being independent. Little groups, little study groups. So, I really like those aspects of [Summit]. –Parent

**PARENTS** also emphasized their appreciation for their children's ability to learn and move through Summit content at their own pace.

At school she's been able to move ahead and move forward more at her own pace. As opposed to class pace. –Parent

I think that's one thing I really like is that they can go at their own pace. If they're ahead in some subjects, they can move ahead. If they're struggling, then they can get a little more attention from the teacher. And the teacher can help them along. –Parent

## **THEME 2: COMMUNICATION**

Students improved their communication skills, including the ability to articulate needs, ideas, and questions.

**STUDENTS** described learning to better express their ideas and questions. Group projects were especially helpful for cultivating students' abilities to share information with peers and divide work among a group.

I think my communication has improved a lot because...you can ask [other students] for help, like, "What did you do for this?" I think [Summit] also contributed to...just generally being better at asking for help.... –Student



**TEACHERS** described improvements in students' communication skills and emphasized how Summit's structure and curriculum uniquely supported the growth of students' ability to articulate their thoughts and describe their learning goals.



You can hear a kid who has been in Summit for multiple years, because **they talk to their peers differently**. They reciprocate differently in discussions.  
- Teacher

[Students] need to explain what they're learning. Specifically, I'm having trouble with this. Not just this objective, but how the solar system was formed. It's a very specific to what they're studying, so I appreciate them being able to talk openly or with the teacher about what they're having trouble with, but exactly what it is. "I don't understand this. Can you help me explain, again, the phases of the moon?" ...The ability to share out loud what they're learning – that matters. –Teacher

A **PARENT** shared that Summit's team projects provided their child valuable group communication skills such as the ability to provide constructive criticism and confidently voice an opinion.



I think because a lot of the projects are group projects, they're **learning how to work with other people** and how to be a leader ...how to speak up. At least for my kid, she needed to learn how to speak up.  
- Parent

[Summit has] taught them some good skills. It's also been a very big life lesson because when you have that kid in your group who does no work... But, guess what? That's what happens when you're in the real world. And you have the person that doesn't write their part of the report. They're learning some really good life lessons. They're learning some communication skills. You can't just tell the person that you hate them. Or that they're a loser or whatever. Cause in the science group, there was no option to break up. You were together. - Parent



### THEME 3: COLLABORATION

Students became more skilled at working cooperatively with one another towards shared goals.

**STUDENTS** described group as important opportunities to practice efficiently delegating tasks between group members according to personal strengths. Through these projects, they also learned to work with different personalities, show empathy, and manage conflict.

The nice thing about Summit is a lot of times it's up to us to decide how to divide the work and things like that. If someone says, "Oh, I have nothing to do tonight, I can finish this." We're like, "Okay," where if someone says, "I am doing a bunch of different things, I cannot finish this tonight" ...it's really nice, because someone else can....and [they can] say "Okay, this is what we did, this is what we need to have done." –Student

I've learned how to work with people that aren't the easiest to work with. I've learned how to work with people whose personality I might clash with, and how to deal with different kinds of people... I kind of just take a step back, realize what their personality is, how they cope with stuff like that, and how they might assess it. Kind of put myself in their shoes and how they might do it, so I kind of just take on their personality for a second. –Student

**TEACHERS** noted that students' collaboration skills transferred to contexts outside of group projects.

The level of collaboration is just phenomenal amongst the students. It doesn't even need to be a group thing. They're so willing to help each other and to work things out together and use each other for the knowledge that they have and figure out how to do that. I just don't feel like it was like that prior to these projects. –Teacher

**PARENTS** felt that the interdependent nature of Summit's group projects reflected the dynamics of a professional workplace and taught students to consider the way their performance affects others.

I think there's a lot to being said for working in groups... It's taught them some good skills. It's also been a very big life lesson because [of] when you have that kid in your group who does no work. So, in that science project that they did last year, if someone didn't do the homework, then you didn't get the points that day.... But, guess what? That's what happens when you're in the real world.... They're learning some really good life lessons. –Parent



#### THEME 4: CONFIDENCE

Through Summit, students developed confidence in themselves and their ability to learn.

**STUDENTS** emphasized how projects built on one another throughout the year and, as the year progressed, they felt increasingly confident about the learning material and their own abilities.

[When first learning the content] I had no idea, like, "What are they even talking about?" By the end, I finished it with a 10 out of 10. I'm like, "I am so good at this." –Student

I feel like the more tests you pass, the better you'll become at taking more tests in the future and becoming more confident.... I've learned how to conquer bigger challenges. And it kind of builds up to harder projects. I can understand how to do it better next time. –Student

**TEACHERS** explained that, as students became increasingly confident in their own abilities, they became more motivated to assist fellow students.

If [students are] working on the same focus area, they teach each other so much more than they ever did in the past because one person might be really strong in [a particular area] and they passed it a month ago and now somebody else is just getting to it and they're like, "Oh, I remember that. I can do this..." In another curriculum where we kept everybody together, you don't see that happening as much.... [That] helps with confidence. I think their confidence definitely grows once they get into the year. When they get to the end to the year and they're like, "I've done it. I've passed my focus areas." That's a huge thing for them in terms of confidence. –Teacher

#### THEME 5: AWARENESS OF LEARNING NEEDS

Students became more skilled at assessing their learning needs, including the ways they learn and what they need to succeed.

**STUDENTS** felt like Summit helped them develop questions and seek resources tailored to their specific learning needs.

I definitely learned how to realize where I'm struggling a lot more, and I can identify more where I'm having problems and seek help for those specific problems rather than asking, "Okay, I'm struggling in geography, help me." It's more like, "Okay, I'm struggling in geography of America, can you help me?" –Student



[If I had to give advice to someone about Summit, I would say] it depends if you [are an] auditory learner.... I learn best from watching videos, so I'd probably just tell them, "Make sure you look at all the resources, and find out what works best for you," so they know, for future focus areas, that they can read the resources, or watch the videos, or there's some activities. Khan Academy has the little quizzes. –Student

**STUDENTS** identified mentor meetings as a good place to talk with teachers and craft learning plans that allowed them to meet their goals.

[I do not have mentor meetings, but if I did] I would want ... to talk about how you're doing, if you have any red in your year.... And, like, what you're doing good on, what you're doing bad on, and what you need help on. –Student

**TEACHERS** described components of Summit that fostered students' awareness of their learning needs, including self-assessments and rubrics.



I think [Summit] has **taught my child how to learn**, and how to study. Before they would just get a study guide and they'd have to know the blanks on the study guide, and that was pretty easy.  
– Parent

The kids are asking to see rubrics about projects that we're doing. "What are you looking for? What should I be striving for?" And to watch students do that...and then these mini study groups start forming during our [self-directed learning] time – the kids are just invested. –Teacher

**PARENTS** found that Summit taught their children how to both actively engage in and advocate for their own learning.

I mean I think they're encouraged by the teacher to be advocates for themselves, which I love. I think kids need to do a better job to do that, as opposed to the parents always reaching out. [Our child's teacher] is really trying to separate the parents more from the students. So, the students are really getting into the independent learning and being advocates for themselves. –Parent



## THEME 6: GETTING HELP

Students became more willing and able to seek help when they needed it.

**STUDENTS** grew more comfortable asking their peers for help. They described valuable opportunities to review work with their classmates.

“

[I have learned how to ask] for help more because I used to not ask for help as much when I was in non-Summit classes. But doing this kind of helps you ask for help more, like with your peers that've already done it.

- Student

In math, our homework will be on the paper, and then we'll correct it together. If we're doing it in class, then I can just ask my friend what she got. If I was confused how she got that, [then] we go over it in class usually. It's pretty easy to talk to your classmates and get help, if you need it. -Student

**STUDENTS** viewed mentor meetings as important places where they felt had extra, individualized support. Mentor meetings helped them understand the benefits of asking for help when they needed it.

Personally, I was never the kind of person to like to go to my teacher and be like, “Hey! I need help.” I was always too scared to do that because I was like, “Oh, that just makes it look like I can't do it.” But then going into those mentor sessions I was like, “Okay, I see the benefits in this and how it's really helpful and now I can use that now.” Like I go into my teachers and I'm like, “I need help studying this. I don't know what to do.” I feel like that was a skill I really gained. -Student

One **STUDENT** described awareness of a variety of resources, including peers and Summit learning materials, that could be used to answer questions without involving the teacher.

[If I had to give advice to a student, I would say] if you didn't know what you were doing, you could look back at the resources. And if they needed help, they didn't understand something, I could probably help them. Or if they didn't understand the resource, and somebody else did, anyone could really help them. For these, the teacher doesn't have to be the only one helping. - Student





### III. Experiences with the Program

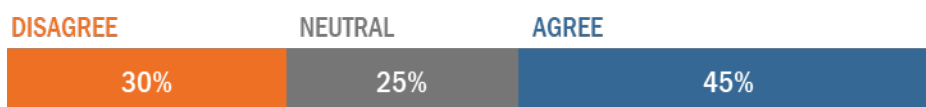
#### A. Quantitative Findings – Summit Learning Surveys

Summit Learning Surveys provided quantitative information about students', teachers', and parents' experiences with Summit.

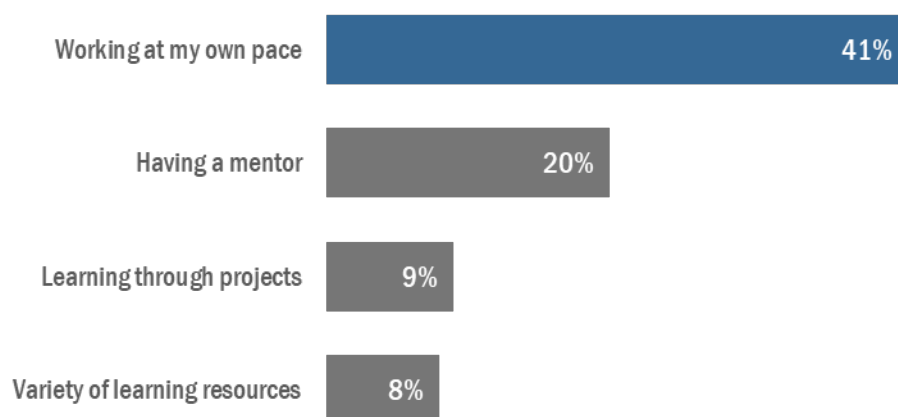
##### STUDENT SURVEYS

Students' experiences with Summit were mixed.

**45% of students enjoy learning through Summit Learning.**



When asked to identify their favorite part of Summit, students most enjoyed **working at their own pace**.



*Note: 21% of students selected "none of the above"*

**52% of students had a clear action plan after meetings with mentors.**

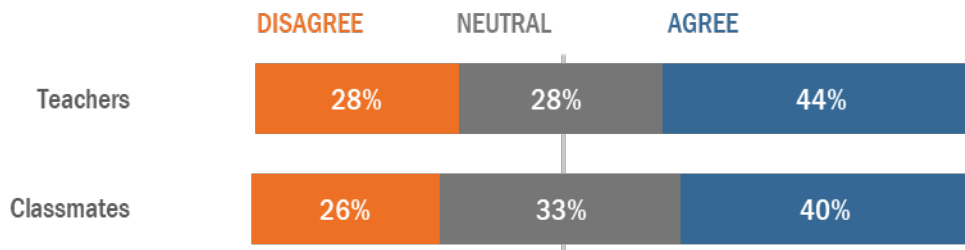


**75% of students reported that mentors' long-term goals were aligned with their own.**



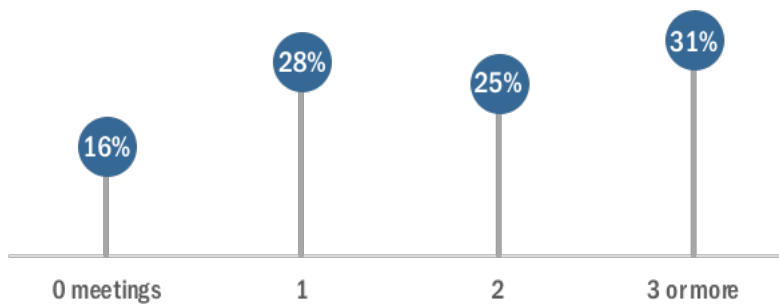


Students tended to agree that they were **building strong relationships** with...



Frequency of **mentor meetings** varied widely.

Over a four-week period, students' number of meetings ranged from none to three or more.



**48% of students** agreed that Summit **met their needs** as learners.



**48% of students** agreed that Summit **pushed them to do their best**.





## TEACHER SURVEYS

Teachers responded very positively to Summit.

**93% of teachers** agreed that Summit learning had a positive impact on students.

DISAGREE AGREE



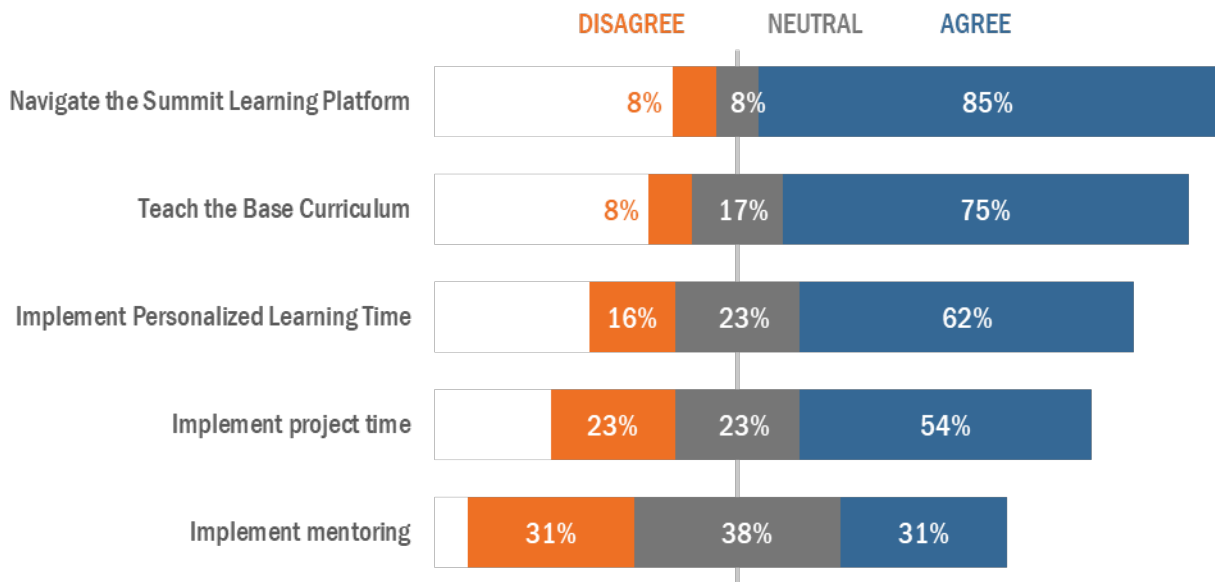
**84% of teachers** agreed that every student could succeed with Summit.

DISAGREE AGREE



Teachers tended to agree that training and support provided prepared them to implement most aspects Summit.

Teachers agreed that they were adequately prepared to...



**69% of teachers** agreed that Summit implementation was supported by DCS.

DISAGREE NEUTRAL AGREE





83% of teachers would **not go back** to their original way of teaching.

DISAGREE NEUTRAL AGREE



69% of teachers **recommended Summit** to another teacher in the last year.

NO YES



## PARENT SURVEYS

Parents' experiences with Summit were mixed, but tended to be positive.

65% of parents **agreed** that Summit **met the learning needs** of their child.

DISAGREE AGREE



*Note: 5% of parents responded with "I don't know"*

65% of parents **saw an improvement** in their child.

DISAGREE AGREE



*Note: 9% of parents responded with "I don't know"*

86% of parents **agreed** that they understood the Summit approach well enough to **explain it to another parent**.

DISAGREE AGREE



60% of parents **agreed** that they **had more information** about their child's school work and progress than they did the previous year.

DISAGREE AGREE

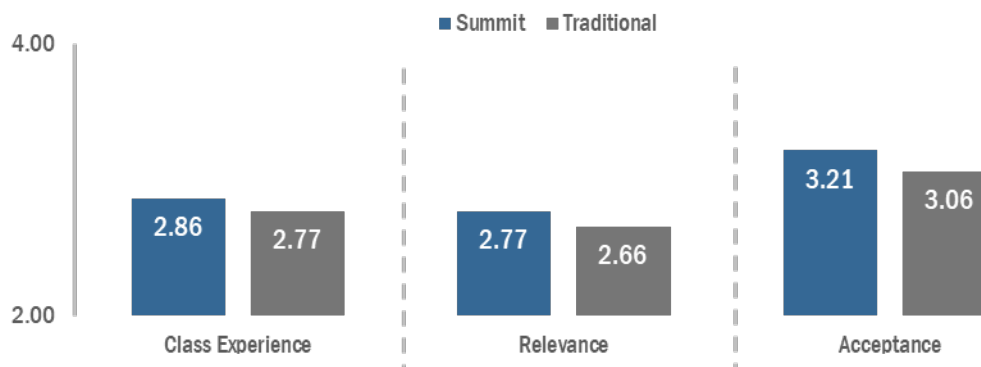




## B. Quantitative Findings – K12 *Insight* Student Survey

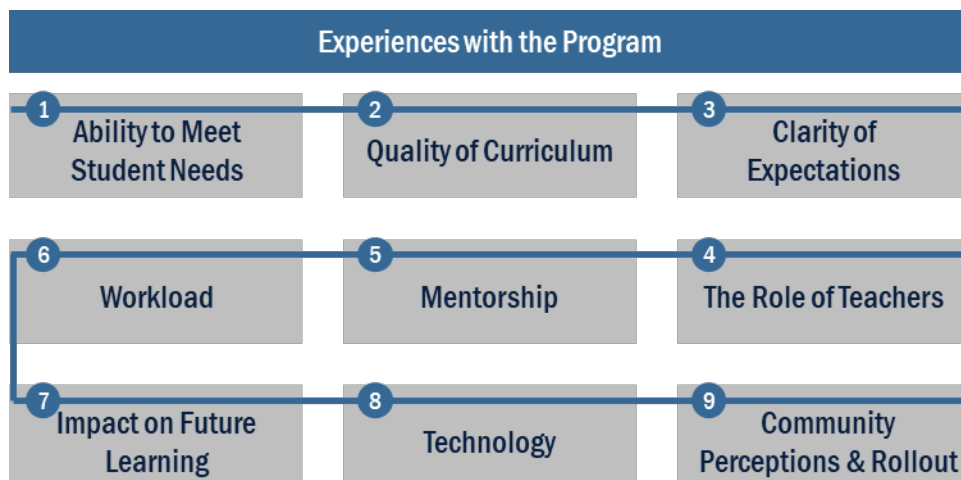
Students in Summit reported significantly more positive classroom experiences and believed content was more relevant to their lives ( $p < 0.05$ ) than students who were not in Summit. Summit students also reported feeling more acceptance within their school community ( $p < 0.01$ ). Summit was not related to any differences in student experience or academic support.

**Class experience, relevance, and acceptance** were significantly higher for students in Summit.



## C. Qualitative Findings – Interviews

In interviews, students, teachers, and parents described their experiences with the program. Nine themes emerged from interviews: ability to meet student needs, quality of curriculum, clarity of expectations, workload for students and teachers, mentorship, the role of teachers, impact on future learning, technology, and challenges in rollout and community perceptions. Each theme is described below and supported with illustrative quotations.





## THEME 1: ABILITY TO MEET STUDENT NEEDS

**TEACHERS** appreciated that student data provided through Summit's online platform was easily accessible and allowed them to address students' individual learning needs.

“

The data that we get through Summit has made it so easy to **spot students that struggle** or are further ahead.... It's really easy for us to look on there and really hone in on a group of students that need help...

- Teacher

With greater awareness of students' needs, teachers were better able to tailor instruction. They described various opportunities to work with students one-on-one and in small groups. Several teachers spoke about the ability to differentiate instruction as a unique advantage of Summit over traditional approaches to teaching.

“

I think this program gives us the ability to differentiate like we've never been able to do before. I would not be able to...meet as many kids' needs as I can with this platform and this program...

**If I had to go back to teaching traditionally, I won't be able to be as good of a teacher for sure.**

- Teacher

It's the best learning management system by far.... The data integration on it is real time. It's precise. You can literally see exactly what objectives kids are struggling with within a larger content area. You get project data coming in so you know where to target intervention in small group instruction, because you already know kids who maybe struggle.... I know ahead of time that they struggle with this [topic and can plan] groupings or structuring our day [to target the problem] which I was not able to do [in a traditional classroom].

- Teacher

The part that I couldn't do on my own without the Summit structure is...the differentiating in the individual learning process.... [In a traditional classroom, I couldn't] give kids those resources and the time to push themselves further and have it be a built in structure where they feel safe doing that. – Teacher



One **TEACHER** appreciated that Summit allowed them to differentiate instruction without separating students.

The beauty of it is that they're still in the class with their peers.... Last year [when high-achievers were separated, it] was stressful for the teachers in the other subjects because they lost some of their highest kids and they didn't have any kind of model students. – Teacher

**STUDENT, TEACHERS,** and **PARENTS** appreciated that Summit gave students the ability to advance through content and assignment deadlines according to their personal rate of learning progress.

You kind of get to decide what you want to do and...go at your own pace. It's not directly guided with the teacher and the classroom, it's not everybody doing the same thing at the same time. It's more individual. - Student

When we used to give assessments, you needed to know it by a certain date, and if you didn't get it and you failed it..., we [still] have to keep moving to get through everything. It's not like that anymore, so I really feel like the students are getting a much firmer understanding of the content. – Teacher

I like it that your kid's not put in a box. I feel like a lot of times some of the traditional [approaches] force you to...have to learn at the same pace as everyone else and maybe you're not getting it. [Summit] allows him to go at his own pace and if he can advance, great, but at least he's understanding it for where he's at versus where everybody else is. – Parent

**PARENTS** and teachers felt that Summit was able to provide individualized instruction to students with special needs in ways that was superior to traditional teaching methods.

“

I had five teachers tell me [my child] had attention deficit. They want me to put her on medication. I took her to doctors. When she went to [Summit], she was a star.... So, for me, it was **a difference between having a failed child and the most successful child....** She hated going to school every day – and now she doesn't.

- Parent



[My child] is not a traditional learner. He struggled his whole career to the point where I almost pulled him and put him in home school or someplace else... He wasn't shown as gifted because he has sleep apnea and they thought he had autism. They kind of just didn't do much with him... So when [Summit] came it gave him the opportunity to advance. [He could] get extra support in areas that he wasn't advancing in. - Parent

Two **TEACHERS** described one student with special needs for whom Summit was particularly beneficial:

I can speak to an example of a student who [Summit] has kind of been a game-changer for. They're in Special Ed and they have dysgraphia and dyslexia.... His ability to be able to go through math content at his own pace and see these great successes....[has made him] excited about school.... I think all of it comes from just his ownership of this program...[and] his ability to be able to use a speech-to-text component on the computer, so he doesn't have to put the pencil to paper, because that is so incredibly painful him and so incredibly difficult.... There are other ways for him to show what he knows through [Summit], especially because of the projects, that he just has opened up to this world of learning that I'm not sure that he would have in another classroom.... He would have just sort of gone into himself and not have expressed any of his learning or his excitement for learning. – Teacher A

Last year [the student was] in tears almost every day saying, "I can't. It's too hard. I can't." And this year you ask the student to do it and he says "Okay, yeah. I can do that." And it's amazing to see that shift.... He's just become this confident kid who knows he is smart, instead of just seeing all these negative results from past years. – Teacher B

## **THEME 2: QUALITY OF CURRICULUM**

Some **STUDENTS** expressed concern with the quality of Summit's learning materials, specifically in the self-directed portion of the curriculum.

Some [playlists] are really easy. You can get through them by watching like two videos and like one resource and you'd be able to get like 9/10, 10/10 easily. Then there'll be some where you take the test over and over and over again because there was something missing in those resources or something like so hidden in those articles, they had to go over millions of times just to find it. It was either really frustrating or really simple. –Student





**TEACHERS** expressed much appreciation for the quality of Summit's curriculum. In particular, they liked that Summit allowed them to work collaboratively with other teachers and integrate learning content across multiple subjects.

I feel better as a teacher, too. The students are benefiting from it, but I feel like we are, too. I don't think I could be where I'm at with these projects and what I'm getting out of my students if I didn't have this as a jumping-off point. I didn't know I could do some of the stuff that I'm doing right now if it wasn't for Summit. –Teacher

The other thing that's really cool is you can assign projects and attach multiple teachers to it. So, in the first two years of doing Summit...the social studies teacher and I integrated a lot of the curriculum together and collaborated pretty much every other project. And we both were able to offer feedback and assess. –Teacher

**PARENTS** appreciated that Summit incorporated a variety of resources to accommodate students' diverse learning needs.

I like [that] there are various resources that are at their disposal in order to continue to progress. They have YouTube videos, you can take little tests, or [watch] PowerPoint presentations.... Maybe some are more visual learners, so they've got access to that. Or more the texts. I think there's different ways that they can help learn whatever subject they're working on. I really like that. –Parent

Several **PARENTS** expressed concern with the quality of the learning content provided by Summit, describing units as disconnected. Because learning was dependent on student engagement, lack of teacher engagement was a detriment for less-engaged students.

It wasn't very cohesive. [History] was like very world-wide units... There's not a lot of connection between them.... I understand that some kids go in and they watch every video. And they love it. [My daughter] was just trying to get what she needed to get an eight on the tests and to go on. And because the teachers didn't go over it, there's an essential element that was missing. –Parent



### THEME 3: CLARITY OF EXPECTATIONS

Students and parents expressed frustration with communications regarding learning expectations and progress markers. They described challenges with communication from the Summit platform and teachers, including occasional lack of alignment between the two.

**STUDENTS** described a lack of clarity in communications about assignments, feedback, and deadlines.

You go to the teacher and they tell you what to do or what not to do. But sometimes it's confusing what they want you to do...because you have these checkpoints and they're telling you to do one thing, and sometimes the teacher tells you to do the other. And it's just kind of a mash of things. – Student

At the book review that we did I didn't know what I did wrong and I got a yellow ... It wasn't really frustrating, just confusing. –Student

The most difficult part is, sometimes, like what they say you need to know is not compared to the test. So you do all the studying and stuff, and you'll have questions that are nothing to do with your studying. –Student

**PARENTS** expressed similar frustrations.

“

[I wish Summit] **could be more clear on what's mandatory to know and what's like, if you want to go into it deeper, this would be an optional enrichment.**

- Parent

We were at a point where we weren't even sure [my child] was gonna pass because ... it was very vague. It was just this big bubble of, Okay, well we thought he was doing good—he's on this line. Well no, you've got so many projects that you've got to get wedged in. –Parent



Some **TEACHERS** described improvements that Summit has made with regard to clarifying expectations.

Summit's gotten better.... With each year they've improved what's in there. A lot of the checkpoints that you're doing within the project will specifically say, "This checkpoint, we're going to work on argumentative claim," or, "We're going to work on counter claims." It will give you a bunch of examples and we'll tell [students], "This is specifically what I'm looking for you to work on towards the final project or product." That's improved a lot since the beginning of the program, I think. –Teacher

#### **THEME 4: WORKLOAD FOR STUDENTS & TEACHERS**

A few **STUDENTS** and **PARENTS** described challenges with the workload presented by Summit, particularly regarding work outside of school time.



They don't give us very much time in class, so I have to do most of it at home. I'm pretty busy, so **it's hard to keep up with the blue line...**

– Student

For people that were always busy, [Summit] was just harder for us because you also have to put in time out of school.... – Student

My biggest complaint is that [my daughter] has spent so much time doing homework. I feel kind of sad for her that her life has become so intense in middle school. –Parent

For many **STUDENTS**, workload challenges seemed to relate to difficulty with time management and long-term planning. Students had mixed feelings about the self-paced nature of the program. They described appreciating the autonomy, but also described times when it led to confusion or anxiety.

You kinda were able to move at your own pace, which I liked and didn't like. ...It was kinda hard [because sometimes] you need the teacher... and then you're like, "Okay, well now I don't know this and now I don't get how this works." Then you could end up falling behind. –Student

The class is moving ahead, so it's not just you're behind the blue line [that marks expected progress]. It's also the whole class is ahead and you haven't filled out document three, or whatever.... So, if you didn't have your thing done, then the whole class would know. –Student



Some **STUDENTS** described difficulty managing time across subjects, noting that they would prioritize one subject and fall behind in another.

If you're like, "Okay well, we have a long time to do this," you oftentimes put it off. Or you get a lot of things done in one subject and you don't in another. I think it really is the freedom [and] it's being able to see the entire year, because that's a little intimidating to some kids. –Student

For a lot of kids who are really strong in science, it's great...because they can move ahead and they can go and work on physics if they feel like it. But a lot of kids also, they'll be strong in science, so they'll only work on science and they'll stop paying attention to English or history, or whatever. –Student

Some **TEACHERS** appreciated that Summit gave them the flexibility and time to better manage their classroom and adapt to various student needs.

[Summit has] been a real game-changer for me in that I've got a new energy again.... I'm a delivery expert, not a curriculum expert. I should not be writing curriculum. And it's allowed me to focus on more the children's need individually, rather than "what am I teaching today?" –Teacher

Many **TEACHERS** felt that Summit required them to provide unrealistic amounts of student feedback. Some teachers felt that the time was worth it. Others described ways they adapted Summit's process to be more manageable for them.

I'm not just grading things once. I'm not grading things for right or wrong, and giving them a percentage at the top of the paper and checking it off. I'm going into their work and I'm giving them specific feedback on their cognitive skills ...I'm going back and forth a lot of times with kids, kind of facilitating this growth within their work that is very different than what I was used to doing before. It's just more time consuming, but the benefits of it I feel far outweigh the negatives. –Teacher

It's a lot of grading.... Some of the checkpoints that lead to a final paper, they themselves would be three-paragraph checkpoints that you're supposed to check for each student. Then, you're inundated with it and it's not realistic with time. We've learned instead of doing a checkpoint this way, we're going to narrow it down so that I'm only looking for certain things. We've adjusted it ourselves, but the expectation of Summit [for grading]...could be just insane, especially for English. –Teacher



**TEACHERS** also described a substantial time commitment required to learn to implement Summit with fidelity.

If you don't have the ability to put in additional time [to learn to implement Summit], it can be very hard to manage. And I think sometimes it can be hard to really follow through in full fidelity what the program kind of inherently demands of you. –Teacher

Some **TEACHERS** expressed a desire for more flexibility to adapt the curriculum to better fit students' needs. They noted that the program allowed for flexibility, but challenges in learning to implement the program had so far prevented them from taking full advantage of these opportunities.

I would like to start making my own projects and implementing them. Summit does give you the freedom to do that. I haven't done it yet because we're just kind of hanging on for dear life for the first two years. –Teacher

#### **THEME 5: MENTORSHIP**

**STUDENTS** described positive experiences with mentor meetings. They found their mentors crucial to getting help and building a connection with their mentor.

[My mentor] actually helped me a lot with math. [Mentor meetings were] the time where I would get a lot of tests done and I'd pass. And he just kind of understood all of our struggles and he kind of understood like where the little imperfections were in the system.... And then the friends that you had in there, you were able to work with them on certain playlists too. I really enjoyed [mentor meetings] because it was just a time for me where I could get a lot of stuff done without feeling pressured or stressed. –Student

Many **STUDENTS** expressed a desire for more frequent mentor meetings.

I saw [my mentor] last week for a meeting, but I hadn't seen her for three weeks between then. So, it was a little hard to...have these mentor sessions because they're so varied. I might be having a problem for two weeks, but I don't see my mentor throughout that entire span. –Student

**TEACHERS** described mentor meetings as an important and beneficial aspect of their teaching practice.

These kids [need] social and emotional connections with their communities, and their peers, and their teachers. [Mentorship was] another component [of Summit] that...I thought was really incredible. –Teacher



Some **TEACHERS** felt that Summit's expectations of mentor meeting frequency imposed unrealistic demands on their time.

One of our favorite things is mentoring. With the amount of students that we have to mentor, I think what Summit expects in terms of how many times you meet a student and what you're able to talk about is a little beyond what we can do here because we have so many students in each mentoring group. – Teacher

A **PARENT** described mentor meetings as an essential part of their child's individualized learning experience.

My oldest daughter is...super quiet, so in a traditional classroom she literally got zero attention. [In a previous grade] I said something [to her teacher] about like, I don't know if she could be doing more than she is, and [her teacher] was like, "I have no idea what she knows because she never participates in class." I feel like with Summit that's not the case because they always get the mentoring time, so she's definitely getting that attention. And I just feel like she gets more attention...than she would've in a traditional classroom. –Parent

## **THEME 6: THE ROLE OF TEACHERS**

**PARENTS** agreed that quality teachers are important for student success in both Summit and traditional classrooms. One parent described experiences with Summit as largely dependent on teachers' implementation of the program.

[Experiences with Summit are] definitely teacher dependent. I feel like the [class] last year was kind of a mixed-up jumble and this year the [same subject] teacher is catching them up on last year and teaching them this year and doing a good job of organizing it. –Parent

Other **PARENTS** felt that the variety of resources available through Summit may mitigate concerns about teacher quality.

If you give me a choice between a great teacher over Summit, I'll take the great teacher. Let Summit go, I don't care. But you can't give me that choice every time. And I think [Summit] mitigates the harm that a bad teacher can do. When [a teacher is] boring, they're not engaging. At least with Summit, you can maybe find a video that's engaging. Or you can find somebody who wrote an article that's engaging. You can read it two or three times and find the parts that you missed.... But, if you just have the teacher and they're just up there "blah, blah". Where do you get that? And let's face it, I've never read a textbook that's exciting. –Parent



## THEME 7: IMPACT ON FUTURE LEARNING

One **STUDENT** felt that their learning experience in Summit would be applicable in “real life”.

We can learn the basics and then we get to use those basics again. We get to learn it and then, to make sure we understand it, we get to use it in situations, like real life. Last year we did a project on making our own ski resort to make sure that we understood math and things. –Student

One **STUDENT** feared that the ability to retake tests in Summit would detract from students’ future ability to complete assignments on schedule.

Like in high school when it's not Summit or just in any non-Summit class, when you don't turn something in on time you can't turn it in three days later and be like, "Oh, I'm good. No one cares." So, it's great right now, but in the future if kids get in the habit of not doing the work and then turning it in three days later, and they get full credit, it's not always [going to work out that way]. –Student

**TEACHERS** implemented Summit because they believed the program could provide students with the learning and skills needed for the “real world”.

“

We knew what those kids needed in the **real world** and we found a program that could provide it for them.

- Teacher

It's real science in my opinion. What [students] are doing with programming and then doing some modeling, mixed with pitching inventions to a panel of experts – I just think the realistic approach to [learning]...is pretty awesome.

-Teacher

Many **PARENTS** expressed gratitude for the ways they felt Summit was preparing their children for high school, college, and the workforce.

“

It's just **driving her to this success**  
I didn't even know she could reach.

- Parent



I also have a daughter who's a freshman at Eastern this year who didn't do Summit. And her transition from eighth grade to ninth grade was really hard. She struggled so hard in pretty much everything. She got Student of the Year [in middle school] and she struggled to maintain Bs in high school at first. [My other child] did Summit. What did he learn? How to learn. And his transition...to high school was like a dream. –Parent

When I go through it, I'm amazed at what he does know. I'm like, wow, this is impressive. Because that's what I've also heard is they don't know anything, they're just memorizing it. But he's actually applying it and learning it and so it's sticking. –Parent

**PARENTS** expressed mixed opinions about knowledge retention. Some voiced concern that Summit does not adequately facilitate knowledge retention.



Sometimes it's more about **passing the test** than it is about learning.

– Parent

They don't have to do [math] homework in the traditional sense. I mean, they have some, but they don't have to practice things over and over. So, they may get it, but if they don't do it over and over it may not stick for the long term. – Parent

Other **PARENTS** believed that challenges with knowledge retention were present in all classrooms and not specific to Summit.

I don't care what classroom you sit in, the kids are gonna forget [what they learned] in a month.... I don't care if you taught it traditional or if you taught it Summit, they're not gonna remember it. So, there's such this push I feel like, from parents, that "My kid's not remembering this, they're going too fast." And I'm saying if they were in a traditional classroom, they wouldn't remember it either. –Parent

## **THEME 8: TECHNOLOGY**

**STUDENTS** appreciated the logistical benefits of Summit, in that learning materials were all accessible in one place and didn't require them to carry heavy books.





You're working off the platform and you can do a lot more from home because you have a Chromebook.... And I find that amazing because it means you don't have to lug heavy books everywhere. –Student

One **STUDENT** expressed concern with Summit's reliance on internet access and how that can impede learning.

[We need] better internet. Whenever you try and log on it says "Error" or something can't load right. And then you shut down your computer and it still doesn't work. You can't do class. –Student

**TEACHERS** reported that Summit's online platform was a major support for their teaching.

I think the product's really cool – the hands-on approach mixed with the use of technology in the computer. –Teacher

There's a misconception that the computer's teaching them, and it's not. We're teaching them. The computer monitors them. It gives us the data to let us know what we have to teach next.... It's a tool for us to be more efficient and effective in the classroom. –Teacher

One **parent** felt that Summit's online platform was an excellent fit for their child's learning needs.

“

I almost pulled my son [when he went from Summit into] high school and put him online because he did so well and loved [Summit] so much.

- Parent

## THEME 9: CHALLENGES IN SUMMIT'S ROLLOUT & COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

Some **STUDENTS** felt they could have benefited from more guidance when they were first introduced to the Summit platform.

I've had a pretty good experience so far. There is some stuff that I'm still learning, like they haven't completely explained everything. They kind of just threw you into the Summit platform and was like, "Figure it out yourself."– Student



Many **TEACHERS** discussed how the “botched” rollout has negatively impacted Summit’s reputation. They described challenges managing community members’ misperceptions about Summit.

I think we've definitely botched the roll out, and some kids just got dropped into it without any parent involvement. And it tarnished it a little bit, because you know, kids are struggling, and there's a massive learning curve. –Teacher

I think one challenge has been that the community has had some misinformation about the program. With anything that's new, it's a little scary, and we knew we were all kind of taking a risk to engage in this. But...we knew enough about it to know that it was best practice, so we had to build trust, or gain trust from our community and I think there is a misconception that it's too much screen time because part of the curriculum is online.... In my opinion, [the online portion] gives you a better way to monitor the students and meet their personal needs. –Teacher

I think there are misperceptions and misunderstandings about what Summit is, not just within the community, but within the Dexter School staff. I think things were learned year one about how to do things differently and they have made some changes at [the two schools], but I think the perception is hard to undo with other staff and community members about exactly what Summit is and what we're doing. –Teacher

Some **PARENTS** described a lack of parent education during Summit’s rollout and believed that the resulting lack of understanding led to negative perceptions from some parents.

“

Parent education...was really lacking in this whole rollout thing.... There’s such a vocal [group] of people—they’re not big, but they’re vocal—who want to kibosh this program and who find everything bad about the program, but they don’t even really know.

- Parent

I think it's a great program. [The schools] need to figure out a way to help parents figure out if it's the right program [for their children].... I think they need to get more parent involvement because there's a lot of parent negativity out there. –Parent



## IV. Relationship Between Outcomes & Experiences

Integrated mixed methods analyses combined quantitative and qualitative findings to garner additional insight about the outcomes and experiences associated with Summit.

### A. Learning Curve Means Achievement Outcomes Take Time to Appear

Findings suggest that students and teachers using Summit face a learning curve that may delay the emergence of achievement outcomes.

#### MIXED METHODS META-INFERENCE

Students' and teachers' challenges learning to use Summit may explain the fact that benefits to student achievement did not appear immediately. Students may require time to acclimate to Summit and teachers' implementation may become more effective over time.

- Despite initial challenges, students' scores in the first year were the same as students who were in traditional classrooms.
- In the second year, after they had time to adjust to the program, students began performing at higher levels than peers who had not participated in Summit.



#### QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

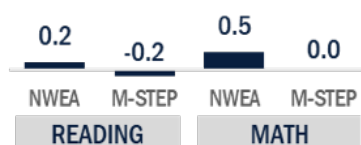
**Reading** (NWEA and M-STEP) and **math** (NWEA) scores were **higher for students who participated in Summit for two years** than for those who never participated in Summit.

Statistically Significant Difference  
between 2yr Summit & Traditional Scores



Students who participated in Summit for **one year showed no differences** in reading and math achievement (NWEA or M-STEP) compared to students who never participated in Summit.

No Statistically Significant Difference  
between 1yr Summit & Traditional Scores



#### QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

**STUDENTS** described experiencing challenges when they began using Summit, including adapting to the new approach and learning new procedures.

"It was weird because like all of a sudden the whole school had computers... It wasn't like that in seventh grade. We had books and stuff.... So that was **NEW FOR US....** And we didn't know that we were gonna be in [Summit] until like a few weeks before school started when we got our teacher letters...." – Student

"[The teachers] kind of just threw you into the Summit platform and was like, 'Figure it out yourself.' I remember the first time they wanted [us] to submit for feedback.... I didn't know how to do that. Nobody explained to me how to and I was pretty shy, so I didn't want to speak up... **I WAS...LEFT HANGING.**" – Student

**TEACHERS** also reported initial challenges learning to implement Summit. Their understanding increased over time and improvements were made to the program that made it easier to implement.

"When I first saw the rubric, I was a little taken aback by how wordy it was. I actively spent some time dissecting it, making it easier to understand. But what I've been doing is for each project have certain look-for's...and as long as they have that, they got the points. [This strategy] allows me to make it **EASIER TO UNDERSTAND** the different skills...." – Teacher

"**SUMMIT'S GOTTEN BETTER**, too. With each year, they've improved what's in there. A lot of the checkpoints that you're doing within the project will specifically say [what they are looking for]...It will give you a bunch of examples and we'll tell [students], 'This is specifically what I'm looking for you to work on towards the final project or product.' That's improved a lot since the beginning of the program, I think." – Teacher



## B. Benefits Go Beyond Academic Achievement

Findings suggest that Summit has benefits that go beyond achievement scores.

### MIXED METHODS META-INFERENCE

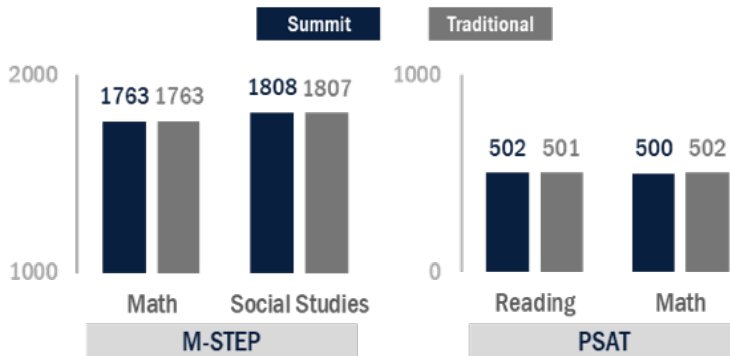
Although benefits of Summit may not always be apparent in achievement test scores, students and teachers believed that the program has benefits that extend beyond what can be measured by tests.

- DCS students tend to perform well on tests regardless of participation in Summit.
- Summit does appear to add value to students' and teachers' experiences.

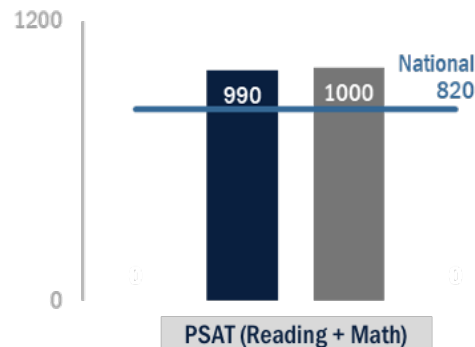


### QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Participation in Summit had no effect on math M-STEP, social studies M-STEP, reading PSAT, or math PSAT scores.



DCS students' PSAT scores were **higher than median national scores**, regardless of their participation in Summit.



### QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

STUDENTS and TEACHERS describe their experiences with Summit as being more than the teaching and learning that occurs in traditional classrooms. They describe various cognitive and non-cognitive benefits of Summit. For example:

"I have learned in a different way. It's more **LEARNING TO LEARN** and learning to manage your time than...learning and memorizing facts." – Student

"I feel like I'm doing **MORE THAN JUST TEACHING**. It's not just the content like it was before. We're addressing learning habits and things that I didn't learn until college – how to prioritize, how to calendar, how to collaborate. We're also addressing these social, emotional needs that our kids deserve as well." – Teacher



# Conclusions

## I. Summary of Findings

### A. Student Achievement

The association between Summit participation and achievement scores was mediated by the length of time students engaged with the program. Students who participated in Summit for two years exhibited significantly higher reading (NWEA and M-STEP) and math (NWEA) scores, as compared to students who never participated in Summit.

One year of Summit participation was not associated with meaningful differences in reading, math, or social studies achievement, as measured by NWEA, M-STEP, or PSAT assessments. No difference existed in test scores of students who participated in one year of Summit and those who did not; although, notably, scores among both groups were higher than state and/or national norming groups.

### B. Cognitive & Non-Cognitive Skills

Student engagement surveys administered by K12 *Insight* revealed that students in Summit reported higher persistence, self-management, and future aspirations than students who were not in Summit.

Students, teachers, and parents reported that Summit helped students develop cognitive skills, including the ability to analyze and synthesize, solve problems, and effectively navigate information.

Each group also described many non-cognitive skills that students developed through their involvement with Summit, including independence, communication, collaboration, confidence, awareness of learning needs, and ability to get help when needed.

### C. Experiences with the Program

Summit Learning Surveys revealed mixed experiences. Overall, teachers had the most positive reactions. A large majority agreed that Summit had a positive impact on students and agreed that they would not go back to their previous way of teaching. Students' appreciated the self-paced nature of the program and found mentor meetings beneficial, although the frequency of these meetings varied. Students expressed mixed opinions about whether Summit met their learning needs and pushed them to do their best. Parents' experiences were also mixed, but tended to be positive.

Student surveys administered by K12 *Insight* revealed that students in Summit felt more positive about the classroom experience and relevance of content to their lives



than students who were not in Summit. Students in Summit also felt more accepted at school.

Interviews with students, teachers, and parents about their experiences with Summit echoed the aforementioned mixture of opinions found in the surveys. Each group appreciated that the program allowed teachers to individualize instruction to meet students' different needs. Feedback about the quality and clarity of content were mixed, including appreciation for the variety of resources and challenges with the cohesiveness of content and clarity of expectations. Summit presented a challenging workload for both students and teachers. All groups spoke of mentor meetings as a valuable part of the program. Students desired more frequent meetings, although teachers worried about the demands that meetings places on their schedule constraints. Parents explained that experiences with Summit could be dependent on the teacher, but some also felt that Summit may be a useful buffer against negative effects of ineffective teachers. All groups expressed appreciation for the ways that Summit prepared students for the "real world" (i.e., life after formal education), although some parents expressed concerns about knowledge retention. All groups praised the technological aspects of Summit. Challenges with the initial rollout of Summit in DCS have created some negative perceptions; teachers and parents expressed a need for greater communication about Summit with the DCS community.

#### **D. Relationship Between Outcomes & Experiences**

Integrated mixed methods analyses combined quantitative and qualitative findings to reveal additional information about the relationships between outcomes and experiences. First, mixed methods analyses suggest that teaching and learning with Summit involved a learning curve for both students and teachers and that the emergence of academic outcomes for students may have been delayed as a result. Instead of appearing after one year in Summit, achievement outcomes were only apparent after two years of participation in Summit.

Second, mixed methods analyses suggest that Summit yields benefits for students that extend beyond achievement scores. DCS students tend to perform well on tests regardless of participation in Summit, but Summit does appear to add value to students' and teachers' experiences, including cognitive and non-cognitive skills that will help students succeed in the "real world."

## **II. Recommendations**

Based on evaluation findings, including suggestions provided by students, teachers, and parents, we offer DCS the following recommendations:



#### **A. Prioritize interactions between teachers and students.**

Summit intentionally creates a learning environment that is less teacher-driven than traditional classrooms. However, some students and parents expressed a desire for greater involvement from teachers and identified specific ways in which greater teacher involvement would be beneficial.

Ensure that students know how they to get help when they need it. Given the self-paced nature of the program, students may progress well for a while and then get stuck and not be able to move forward without teacher assistance. Ideally, teachers would be available to work individually with students whenever these needs arise. However, teachers have many demands on their time and may not be able to react immediately. Students need to feel confident asking their questions and seeking out help. They also need to know the process for requesting help and should be equipped with strategies they can use to continue moving forward while waiting for teacher assistance (e.g., seek help elsewhere, shift focus to a different project).

Encourage teachers to identify and intervene with students who are not engaging deeply with the learning content. Parents expressed concerns that some students work through the playlists just to accumulate points and, without engagement from teachers, they may miss opportunities to make deep connections and engage in meaningful learning.

Encourage teachers to check in with students during group projects. Students requested that teachers check in to make sure that they are on track, rather than waiting until assignments are due to provide feedback.

Make mentor meetings a priority and ensure students have equitable access to these meetings. Students, teachers, and parents all loved mentor meetings and students requested they be held more frequently. However, teachers described challenges making time for mentor meetings and meeting frequency seemed to vary.

#### **B. Protect teachers' time to allow for interactions with students and planning.**

As mentioned above, evaluation participants expressed a desire for more engagement between teachers and students, including more frequent mentor meetings. Additional engagement would take additional teacher time, which is already in short supply. Teachers also expressed an interest in incorporating new projects that are tailored to the needs and interests of their students, but lacked time to develop their ideas.

Consider ways of modifying the amount and frequency of feedback required by Summit to reduce teachers' workload and allow time for interactions with students and planning. The feedback required by Summit seemed to be the greatest demand on





teachers' time. Some teachers mentioned ways they had adapted their strategies over time to make the feedback process more manageable.

Consider ways (or additional ways) of protecting planning time for Summit teachers within teams and within subjects to collaborate with one another, share best practices (e.g., strategies for efficient feedback), and design new projects. For example, teachers might participate in planning retreats or have collaborative planning periods.

### **C. Be intentional about developing cognitive and non-cognitive skills.**

Evaluation findings make it clear that Summit created a unique classroom environment that allowed students to develop many cognitive and non-cognitive skills. However, the process of developing these skills was challenging for many students. Students described struggles with goal-setting and time management, including balancing their time across different subjects.

Explicitly teach and continuously reinforce these skills. Provide individualized attention to students who may be struggling in these areas. Teachers may need to be particularly attentive to students who are shy and do not verbalize their need for help.

Provide students with a clear introduction to the Summit program and online platform at the beginning of each school year. Students expressed challenges with the introduction of the program and some felt that they were left to fend for themselves.

Consider ways to prepare students for future learning environments that are less flexible than Summit. One student expressed concern about how Summit will affect students in high school, when deadlines are less flexible. (Notably, evaluation findings did not suggest any negative impact of participation in Summit in middle school on students' high school achievement.)

### **D. Share information about Summit with the DCS community.**

Share information about Summit with DCS parents and staff, including parents of students who are not in Summit and staff who are not directly involved with the program. Providing clear information about the goals of the program and the changes that have been made since the first year of implementation may help correct misconceptions that many parents and teachers identified as problematic.

Share results of this evaluation widely. We are providing a visualized one-pager to help communicate major findings with community members.

Encourage increased communication between teachers and parents throughout the school year. Some parents complained that they did not have a good understanding of what their children were doing in Summit.





#### **E. Address any issues with the learning platform and technology.**

Continue reporting issues to Summit Learning and requesting improvements to the platform. Teachers reported that Summit had been responsive to requests in the past and the updates had greatly improved the quality of the program.

Students requested that playlists are more consistent, with less variability in length and difficulty. Consider relaying this request to Summit Learning.

Ensure that high-speed internet access is available in the schools. Internet connectivity issues can present an obstacle to learning through the Summit platform.

#### **F. Consider additional evaluation to gain deeper insight.**

This evaluation raised additional questions that could be explored in future evaluations. Below, we offer several ideas for future research and evaluation:

1. How do Summit parents' perceptions (e.g., student engagement, workload, quality of curriculum, communication with teachers) compare to those of parents whose children are in traditional classrooms?
2. How does teachers' implementation of Summit vary? How are fidelity and quality of implementation related to outcomes and experiences?
3. Do outcomes vary for Summit students performing at different achievement levels?
4. Do outcomes vary by grade level? Are benefits influenced by the age at which students enter the program?
5. What are the long-term effects of participation in Summit?