

# MAKING WAVES AT DCS



## DCS Summer Learning Institute Helps Students Stay on Track



This past summer, Dexter Schools held an accelerated learning program for selected exiting K-5 students to address reading and math achievement gaps created by COVID-19 learning loss. The Summer Learning Institute (SLI), run by approximately 50 DCS teachers, staff, and students, was attended by almost 200 students four days a week from June through August. Ryan Bruder, DCS Executive Director of Instruction, shared the program's success and parent feedback at the September 16<sup>th</sup> Board of Education meeting.

"The kids had a ball," Bruder shared. Positive testimonials from participating families reiterated that instruction was presented in a fun and engaging way. The main focus of the program was to maintain and/or grow students' reading and math skills, goals which both Bruder and parents feel were

successfully met. Fall NWEA scores will be available shortly, and Bruder anticipates they will positively reflect students' summer learning. He explained that when fall NWEA results are released, staff will compare the quantitative data with last year's scores to determine program effectiveness. They will also compare the SLI students' scores with those who weren't in the program to see how those numbers shake out.

Daily Math & reading lessons were coupled with SPARK opportunities, the DCS term for inquiry-based, hands-on exploration, such as working in the Creekside garden, building cars and playing games. With this combination, SLI teachers ensured students felt joy during their summer break balanced with continued learning support. Directors Ashley Kerns and Pam Krebs, both literacy experts and instructional coaches, worked closely with teachers and staff to develop the program curriculum and provided support throughout the summer. Krebs had first-hand experience running a DCS summer program, having served as one of three 2021 Dread Strong Summer Coordinators.

The Board of Education approved funding for the Summer Learning Institute in May 2022, which included providing free lunches for students through Food & Nutrition and busing for all participating families through the Transportation Department. Students were selected for the program through a combination of NWEA data and multiple teacher recommendations. For

three hours each day, classes of approximately 15 students worked with DCS teachers and paraprofessionals in small groups of 3-5 students at Creekside.

Participating families had many positive things to say about the SLI program, as well as offering suggestions for areas of growth. One parent shared:

*“I can confidently say that SLI helped my child. He has struggled with reading and comprehension since a young age, and the pandemic exacerbated it. This has negatively impacted his confidence and his enjoyment of school. However, he enjoyed and looked forward to SLI and I can confidently say it helped with his reading. It provided a consistent enjoyable learning experience that we were able to expand on at home. I hope SLI is available next summer.”*

Other testimonials also expressed appreciation for the program: “my child came home excited to share what he learned,” “it made continued learning fun and he really enjoyed it,” and “we saw a big improvement in her confidence in reading over the summer.”

Opportunities for growth included earlier notification so families can better schedule summer activities, communication about what’s being learned each week, possibly longer days (3 hours/day seemed too short), and sharing progress monitoring data. All of these suggestions will be considered for next summer’s program.