

LESSONS LEARNED FROM AN INNOVATIVE SUMMER DAY CAMP COLLABORATION

Frank Porter Graham Bilingual School and the Town of Chapel Hill, North Carolina Parks and Recreation

By John Brunner, MA



Photo Credit: FPGB Facebook Page

The Town of Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation Department (CHPR) in North Carolina enjoys a strong reputation for providing high quality, financially accessible youth programming. One of the most popular of these programs is Summer Day Camp.

CHPR historically operates three nine-week full day summer day camps:

- Two Summer Day Camps for rising Kindergartners through rising fifth graders: One at Hargraves Community Center, with a max enrollment of 100 and one at the Chapel Hill Community Center with a maximum enrollment of 70.

- One middle school camp for rising 6th to 8th graders with a max enrollment of 50.

Each of these camps regularly has wait lists of over 50 individuals. There is a need in the community, and an interest in the Department of Parks and Recreation for the Town of Chapel Hill to offer more affordable summer programming. However, the Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation department has limited programmable space, and staff have been researching opportunities in the community for more space.

Frank Porter Graham Bilingual (FPGB) is the first Magnet School in the Chapel Hill – Carrboro City School System and is a Kindergarten through 5th grade school that offers Spanish and English instruction.

Over the last few years, FPGB has offered a half-day experiential summer learning program for four weeks as a summer learning experience. The enrichment camps offered students opportunities to build background knowledge, experience, and vocabulary in content areas that are part of the standard course of study. The offerings were in English and Spanish. Each enrichment camp had targeted time for daily independent reading and math fluency practice. During the learning experience, students who needed more targeted instruction received small group instruction similar to guided reading and math strategy groups. The parent response has been very positive but parents requested a longer program and a full day program since it is challenging for families living in poverty to find affordable quality summer programs.

In order to meet the academic needs of students who are second language learners of English and Spanish and to respond to the needs of families for quality, affordable summer care, FPGB had an interest in offering nine weeks of full day summer program with an ability to serve 80-100 students each week.

These interests resulted in collaboration with CHPR and the Chapel Hill – Carrboro City School System to offer a pilot program and a hybrid summer school/summer day camp offering.

The seed for this collaboration was planted in April 2016, through an unsolicited email by the Assistant Director of CHPR to the Principal at FPGB. With not enough time to get organized for the 2016 summer, by the FPGB staff worked on the concept and came back to CHPR in January 2017. The CHPR staff acknowledged the concepts, met with the Principal to flesh out the proposal, and quickly presented the ideas to the CH Senior Administration, including the Department Director, the Director of the Business Management Department, and the Town Manager. These individuals endorsed the idea and encouraged a jointly designed final process and plan.

Staff from Chapel Hill paraphrased recommendations from GreenPlay LLC's Partnership Policy And Proposal Format (available at <http://greenplayllc.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/GreenPlay-Sample-Partnership-Policy.pdf>, page 4.) to prepare for the partnership discussions.



Photo Credit: Langley Day Camp via Creative Commons

In order for partnerships to be successful, research has shown that the following elements are essential:

- Leadership support for the concept & process of partnering.
- A Partnership Policy that sets development priorities and incorporates multiple points for go/no-go decisions.
- The partnership creation process should be transparent.

Each of these fundamentals were acknowledged and utilized during this partnership program development process.



Photo Credit: FPGB Facebook Page

As the Principal of FPGB continued to develop her area of responsibility, she was able to identify funding from a third party non-profit, to reimburse the Town for all expenses. This had the effect of allowing the same level of financial accessibility as the Town of Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation's other summer day camps.

The joint design included:

- 8 weeks of summer day camp at Frank Porter Graham Bilingual School
- 4 hours of daily enrichment instruction in the morning with a unit plan submitted for each grade level assigned that follows current guidelines

- 6 hours of "traditional" summer day camp recreational programming (games, sports, music, art, play, etc.) in the afternoon.
- Breakfast and lunch for each camper
- One field trip per week
- One swim per week

Registration was managed by the FPGB Principal. Hiring and training of staff was managed by CHPR. Other considerations included budget and funding sources as well as a written agreement between the two organizations. The Principal at FPGB was able to secure funding for the majority of the camp through a combination of school funds, grants, foundation funding, and a nominal registration fee. The school paid for supplies and a select group of staff. CHPR hired and paid for the majority of the camp staff members, and were reimbursed for these expenses from the funding secured by the Principal. With the beginning of camp taking place in the previous fiscal year, a certain amount of fiscal dexterity was necessary. An Assistant Superintendent and the School Board Lawyer worked in concert with the Town of Chapel Hill Legal staff to develop the written agreement. The plan for hiring was to find a mix of Frank Porter Graham Bilingual teachers and staff and complement with standard Summer Day Camp Employees.

The short-term goal and outcome of this specific partnership was to provide an excellent enrichment, cultural and recreational experience for the campers in a safe, stimulating environment. The long-term goal of this partnership and outcome was to continue build a symbiotic relationship with the Town and the Chapel Hill – Carrboro City School System to develop similar opportunities to enhance the lives of citizens where mutual interests allow.

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