

# Summer learning program grows

## Successful K-8 initiative expands to serve younger children

JUSTIN MURPHY

@CITIZENMURPHY

A successful K-8 summer learning program in Rochester has expanded this year to serve younger students, a move that aligns with community leaders' stated goal of reducing poverty by starting early.

Eight local schools and universities belong to the Greater Rochester Summer Learning Association and collectively provide free educational summer programs for about 700 Rochester students. They call their programs SummerLEAP.

Research bears the program out: Students gain in math and reading skills over the summer, rather than declining, and those who attend for at least three years have a 90 percent on-time high school graduation rate.

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Tiffany Archibald leads Cesar Lora and Ezekiel Ortiz with the rest of her prekindergarten summer program students at Ibero Family Center to the library on Joseph Avenue. The summer learning program for Rochester School District students was expanded with grant funding.

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LUIS PEREZ, HORIZONS AT HARLEY SCHOOL SUMMER PROGRAM DIRECTOR

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Until this year, there have been spots only for students entering grades 1-9. But about \$400,000 in funding, including \$50,000 from M&T Bank, is allowing the association to provide spots this summer for about 165 rising kindergartners at universal prekindergarten sites around the city.

The concept was tested on a smaller scale last year, and the results for the younger students were the same as for the older ones, said Luis Perez, who runs the Horizons at Harley School summer program.

"We demonstrated that if we give them the same thing they give the older kids, they go into kindergarten that much stronger," he said. "The data was so compelling, we decided to really ratchet it up this year."

One of the summer sites is the Ibero-American Action League Family Center on Clifford Avenue. On Wednesday, a flock of about 15 kindergartners-to-be started the day with swimming lessons, then reconvened in the classroom for storytime and lunch — Taco Wednesday.

In the afternoon, they went to the library and met a Rochester police officer, then worked on an art project. Breaks were provided to scoot, shimmy and shake around the room.

"We were always concerned about what happened with these kids during the summer," said Ida Perez, Ibero's director of Youth and Family Services. "Knowing they're here and safe and learning, and aren't going to lose any of that learning as they go into kindergarten, is a great benefit."

The young summer students were specifically selected as those most likely to slide over the summer, she said. Ibero is one of eight sites for the rising kindergartners.

The problem, Luis Perez said, is that the program does not currently have capacity to take in another 165 first-graders next summer. It signals the need for expanded capacity; the association is working now to recruit other local colleges to take part, and it has advocates at the new Rochester- Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative.

"The challenge for us is to find enough new sites to take those rising first-graders next year so they can continue on this journey that we know really changes their trajectory," Luis Perez said.

[JMURPHY7@DemocratandChronicle.com](mailto:JMURPHY7@DemocratandChronicle.com)



**German Cutino, a foster grandparent volunteer from the Community Place, gets a hug from 5-year-old Daniela Morales Negron during the prekindergarten summer program at Ibero Family Center.**

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