Summer Learning Program Quality Intervention (SLPQI)
Phase Two Feasibility Study
Executive Summary

In 2013, the David P. Weikart Center (Weikart Center) and National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) began a collaboration to improve the quality of summer learning programs. The *Summer Learning Program Quality Intervention* (SLPQI) is a continuous improvement intervention for summer learning programs that includes four core components: (1) a standard and measures for quality of management and instructional practices – and the *Summer Learning Program Quality Assessment* (Summer Learning PQA); (2) training and technical assistance supports, (3) performance data products and (4) a continuous improvement cycle that fits the prior three elements to local circumstances and resources. The SLPQI and the Summer Learning PQA were designed to advance the science and practice of continuous improvement by focusing on qualities of learner experience that optimize skill building in specific domains, *active-participatory* and *academic*.

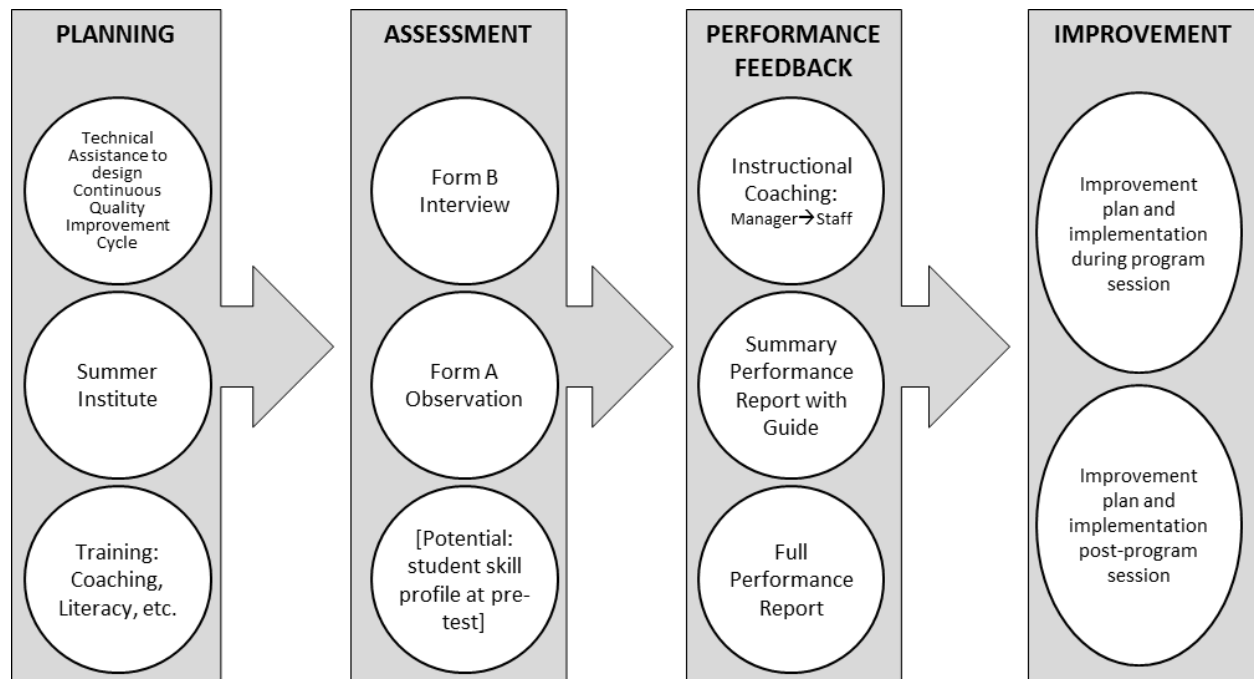**Overview of the Intervention**

The elements and sequence of the SLPQI, as implemented in this study, are summarized in Figure 1 and described in greater detail in the remainder of this section. The SLPQI is modeled after the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI), an evidence-based continuous improvement model for out-of-school time programs.[1] The SLPQI represents an adaptation of the YPQI to suit summer program content, structure and timelines.

Figure 1 summarizes the SLPQI sequence. In general, system leads receive technical assistance designing an organization-level continuous quality improvement cycle that they can both expect programs to implement and for which they can provide adequate supports across sites. Then, program managers and

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[1] The Youth Program Quality Intervention is the most widely used quality assurance process in the afterschool field and was the subject of a randomized trial which demonstrated that high fidelity to the same four continuous improvement elements improved the quality of instructional experiences for at-risk youth (Smith, Akiva, et al., 2012). Subsequent validation studies have linked exposure to high quality instructional practices, as defined by the Youth Program Quality Assessment, to improved school success outcomes (Naftzger, 2014; Naftzger et al., 2013; Naftzger, Tanyu, & Stonehill, 2010; Naftzger, Vinson, Manzeske, & Gibbs, 2011).

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staff are engaged with workshops and training to learn the methods entailed by continuous improvement cycle and plan for implementation. Next, an assessor visits each site and produces a performance report based on interview and observation data and this report is passed back to program managers. Program managers then use the performance feedback during individual interactions with instructional staff as well as during improvement planning workshops that can occur during the summer program session, after the session in preparation for the following school year and summer, or both.

Figure 1

SLPQI Theory of Action

PLANNING	ASSESSMENT	PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK	IMPROVEMENT
Technical Assistance to design Continuous Quality Improvement Cycle	Form B Interview	Instructional Coaching: Manager→Staff	Improvement plan and implementation during program session
Summer Institute	Form A Observation	Summary Performance Report with Guide	Improvement plan and implementation post-program session
Training: Coaching, Literacy, etc.	[Potential: student skill profile at pre-test]	Full Performance Report	

About the Study

The SLPQI feasibility study was implemented in 32 summer learning programs in Grand Rapids, Mich., Northern California, and Seattle, Wash. The sample included systems with quality improvement organizations of varied expertise with continuous quality improvement generally and the SLPQI in particular. This study was designed to test the feasibility of implementing a continuous improvement sequence at scale in place-based summer learning systems. In addition, we hoped to advance our understanding of the reliability and validity of the information produced by the Summer Learning PQA measures. The main goals of this study were proposed as follows:

- Further clarification of the quality standard at the organization and instructional levels

- Improvement of quality measures and provision of detail on reliability and validity to support both performance improvement and program evaluation uses
- Refinement of the SLPQI and delivery in approximately 40 sites with varied designs (e.g., school and CBO; teacher and volunteer led; systems with existing quality improvement infrastructure and systems without; school-age and youth).

Following implementation of the SLPQI, each summer learning program was evaluated. The evaluation component of the study addresses the following questions:

- How feasible was implementation of the SLPQI?
- How can the feasibility be improved?
- Was the SLPQI useful and therefore a good use of time?
- Did the Summer Learning PQA identify areas of low quality?

Data collection for this study included analysis of project records, the Summer Learning PQA observational measures, an interview-based assessment of management practices, the Observation of Child Engagement, assessor surveys and program manager surveys and interviews.

Key Findings

The full report provides findings for an evaluation of the SLPQI that addresses feasibility of implementation, customer satisfaction and the effectiveness of the Summer Learning PQA to differentiate higher from lower quality programs. Key findings include:

(1) overall satisfaction with SLPQI and Summer Learning PQA was high;

(2) implementation of SLPQI was uneven across sites, although partially by design;

(3) readiness for SLPQI can be characterized by several key features and timing is the greatest challenge;

(4) precision and meaningfulness of Summer Learning PQA data is promising;

(5) summer learning programs contained a mix of higher and lower quality features, with differing profiles for active-participatory versus academic instructional quality.

Recommendations

The Phase II study has advanced our understanding of how continuous improvement elements fit into summer learning programs and has provided an opportunity to continuously improve the SLPQI and supporting infrastructure to a point where implementation at greater scale is possible. As a result of the

Phase II study, we offer the following recommendations for next steps in the effort to bring a continuous improvement culture to the summer learning field:

(1) continue to improve the standard/measures, in particular the Form B interview and the on-line Scores Reporter for production of automated reports

(2) mount a study that further addresses the critical issues of precision (reliability) and meaningfulness (validity) of the data produced by both Forms A and B

(3) complete development of support materials for the SLPQI

(4) expand the assessor's role to encompass one of a technical assistance coach that could serve to increase the assessor's stake in the process and sense of accountability to the program

(5) develop a multi-tiered implementation model to vary intensity and cost across the full range of summer learning system and program needs, from a single program to a regional network