



Serving a Broad Range of Learners

Since its inception, Horizons National has been committed to serving children from a broad range of academic ability. The rationale for this central component of the Horizons philosophy is outlined below.

Addressing the Achievement Gap

The underlying goal of every Horizons program is to provide opportunity, improve academic skills, and increase motivation for low-income youth in order to contribute to closing the achievement gap that exists between them and their more fortunate peers. Finite resources make it important to ensure the largest possible impact for each dollar invested in our outstanding model of academic enrichment. While high achieving students gain substantially from our programs, growing both in competence confidence, the students who are most likely to realize the greatest academic benefit from the Horizons experience are those who are underperforming in school. It is these students, who are typically testing below grade level, for whom the achievement gap is at its widest. This is also the group that is the most underserved; there are more programs available to students at either end of the academic achievement spectrum, while those in the middle are more likely to fall through the cracks.

Benefits of the Academic Ability Mix

Dr. Edward Zigler of Yale University, who has been involved with evaluation of Horizons programs for more than 20 years, is a strong advocate of working with an academic mix of students. Dr. Zigler reports that students learn more in the presence of peer role models, and that this is true in both directions. High achievers learn from the opportunity to be leaders in the program, and underperformers are motivated by the example of their higher performing peers. Serving a broad range of learners also allows Horizons to give admission preference to siblings who may be performing at very different levels within a family, supporting a key program principle of serving entire families.

Supporting Public Schools

Horizons students' enthusiasm for learning and their improved academic skills can have a powerful impact on motivating others in the classroom. Horizons students typically attend public schools with very limited resources. By serving a wide range of academic ability, Horizons programs help create higher levels of success within these challenged schools. This promotion of higher achievement, better attendance, and more positive attitude across a broad range of learners is a key reason public school teachers, principals and superintendants enthusiastically endorse and support Horizons programs.

Conclusion

An important component of the Horizons model is the recognition that the most effective investment of our resources is serving children who can benefit the most from this transformative program. More than 45 years of experience, experimentation, and evaluation support purposefully working with a wide range of academic performers. The higher-achieving leaders thrive and continue to grow, while the children below grade level typically improve their academic skills at even greater rates. Horizons National is firm in its conviction that roughly one-third above grade-level and the remainder at or below grade level is the ideal mix of students that should be the target for all Horizons programs.