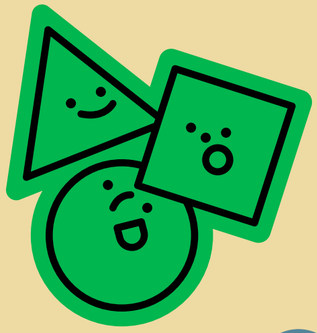
PROJECT PATHFINDER™



CENTRAL ALABAMA MARINES-COUNCIL
A REGISTERED 501(c)(3)

CAMPAIGN IMPACT REPORT 2026

- **Program located in Central Alabama**
- **Summer Academic & Enrichment Camp**
- **Winter Community Service Project**
- **Springtime Fitness & Resiliancy Challenge**

An intentionally designed seasonal youth engagement initiative delivered across three lines of operation. Built primarily to support military- and veteran-connected families, yet inclusive of children in the broader community.

72.2%
Campers demonstrated reading improvement (STAR Scaled Score)

58.3%
Campers demonstrated math improvement (STAR Scaled Score)



100%
Families would recommend Project Pathfinder

2.7%
Camper attrition

ONE CAMPAIGN, THREE OPERATIONS

Project Pathfinder engages military- and veteran-connected families through three seasonal lines of operation.

2026 successfully conducted two operations; the winter service project is scheduled for December.

The summer camp operation is the largest and most consistently evaluated, yet isn't a substitute for the school-year. Rather, it's a low-pressure setting designed to build academic confidence, character, and hands-on career exposure.

1

SUMMER CAMP

7 Weeks · 34 Days · 37 Campers
89% Military-connected · June–July 2026

2

WINTER COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT

Scheduled for December 2026

3

SPRING FITNESS CHALLENGE

Tuscaloosa Gauntlet · 18 Registered Youth Racers
100% Military- and Veteran-connected · April 2026



2026 Outcomes — Summer Camp

72.2% / 58.3%
Camper Reading / Math Scaled Score growth (STAR Score)
34 total camp operating days

2.7%
Camper attrition w/ one withdrawal all summer
target <10% · 97.3% completed

100% / 100%
Staff & Family satisfaction
targets >90% / >75%

$0
Program cost per camper, with grant funding
$1,273 cost per camper, without grant funding

82.2%
Average daily attendance
target >85%

35+
Funders, community & business partners
Collaborative Ecosystem Model

PROJECT PATHFINDER

Renaissance STAR Assessment (STAR): *A nationally used, computer-adaptive assessment that measures student performance in reading and mathematics. STAR provides standardized scaled scores that allow programs to compare student performance over time and identify changes in academic achievement between pre- and post-program assessments.*

BUILT TO ACCOUNT FOR INTERSTATE MOVES

Military-connected families move far more often than civilian households, and every move can mean a new set of state academic standards.

This isn't a claim about any individual camper's family this summer—it's a defining feature of military- and veteran-connected life that Project Pathfinder's academic summer model is deliberately built to account for.

6 - 9 Schools

Number of schools the average military-connected child attends between kindergarten and graduation

~3x

More often military-connected kids change schools vs. civilian peers

~35%

Annual student mobility rate at Department of War Activity schools, which still score above the national average on National Assessment of Educational Progress

WHERE THE GAPS WIDEN

Research consistently identifies friction points when military-connected students change schools: mismatched curriculum sequencing (e.g., a child who finishes Algebra I in one state may land somewhere that covers different material), slow transfer of school records, and credit or graduation-requirement gaps between states.

Multiplied across moves and subjects, the cumulative effect on academic progress can be significant.

ALABAMA'S RESPONSE

Alabama participates in the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children and runs its own Purple Star School program to ease enrollment, placement, and on-time graduation.

Community-based academic reinforcement—like Project Pathfinder's 161 hours of summer instruction—complements those policy tools, helping to close gaps that enrollment paperwork alone can't fix.

ALABAMA PURPLE STAR SCHOOLS
Supporting Military Families

Schools recognized for providing dedicated support to military-connected students and families.

PROJECT PATHFINDER

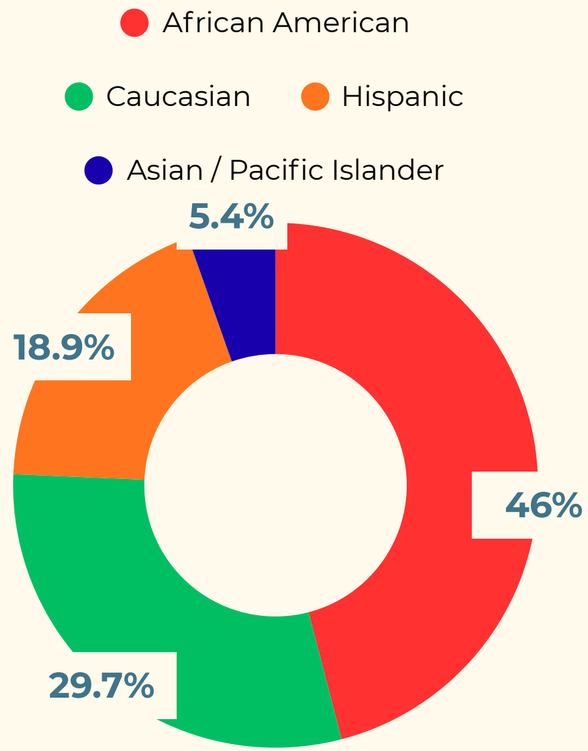
Sources: Military Child Education Coalition; Ruff & Keim, The Professional Counselor (2014); Penn State Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness; Alabama State Dept. of Education (Purple Star Schools); Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3).

THE CAMPERS



- **Project Pathfinder serves rising 1st–8th graders.**
- Campers enrolled from schools and homeschool families across the region.
- 89% from military- or veteran-connected households, with additional spaces filled by the broader community.

CENSUS BY RACE/ETHNICITY



Grade band with the highest enrollment: Grade 3 (8 campers), Grade 5 (6), Grade 7 (6).

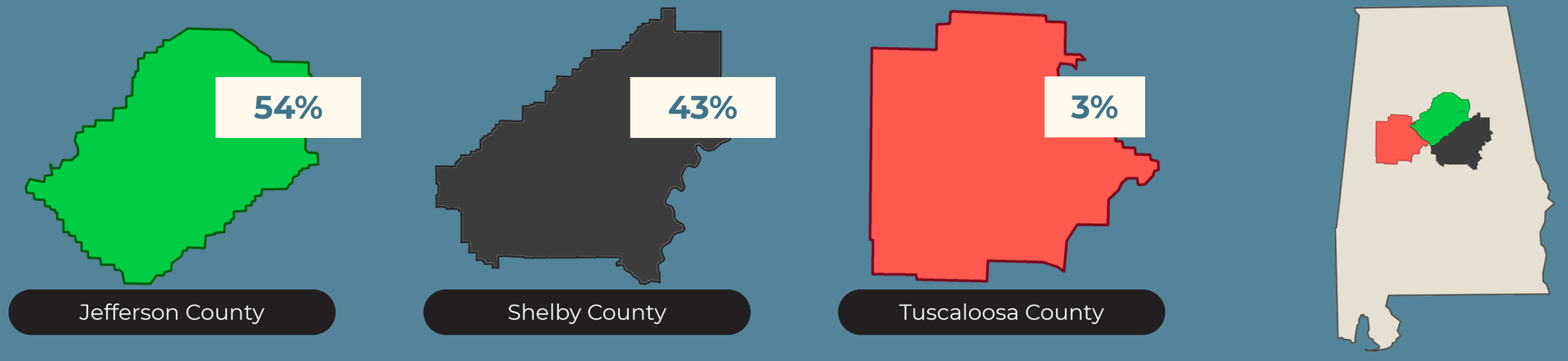
89%
Enrolled camper population from military- and veteran-connect families

97.3%
Completed the full program
2.7% attrition · target <10%

51% / 49%
Male campers/female campers

22
Schools and homeschool families represented in 2026
37.8% returning campers from 2025

WHERE CAMPERS CALL HOME



PROJECT PATHFINDER

TWO YEARS OF GROWTH

In 2025, Central Alabama Marines-Council piloted a 4-week summer camp program serving 28 campers. Based on those results, the Project Pathfinder expanded to a full 7-week summer program in 2026. The outcomes suggest evidence-based growth in the academic domain, not a sudden leap based on isolated anecdotal statements.

ACADEMIC GROWTH, YEAR-OVER-YEAR (2025 - 2026)

Reading Growth	+1 mo → +6 mo
Math Growth	+2.3 mo → +4.5 mo
Attrition	3.6% → 2.7%

sail
SUMMER ADVENTURES IN LEARNING

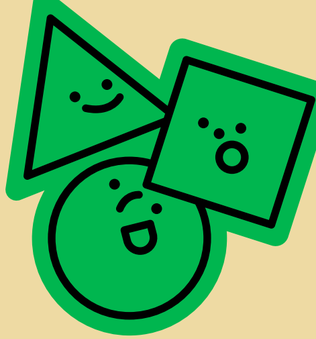
Both subjects grew dramatically year-over-year. Monthly growth figures reflect an independent review of STAR data by our partner Summer Adventures in Learning (SAIL).

WHAT SCALED WITH THE PROGRAM

Instructional hours	95 → 161
Certified teachers	0 → 2
Enrichment activities	8 → 19

Cost per camper (based on program capacity) rose from $751 to $1,273 alongside the added staffing, hours, and activities, but 2026 also was supported by Alabama Department of Education grant covering 65.5% of costs, versus $0 in outside government-sponsored support in 2025.

> ***One metric moved the wrong way: attendance rate dipped from 98.2% in the 4-week 2025 pilot to 82.2% across the longer 2026 session. More days in a longer program means more chances for a camper to miss one. It's the one KPI flagged for attention heading into 2027.***



4 → 7 weeks
Program length in 2026 nearly doubled the instructional dosage

28 → 37
Campers enrolled, up 32%

2.7%
Attrition rate down from 3.6% in 2025, against a <10% target

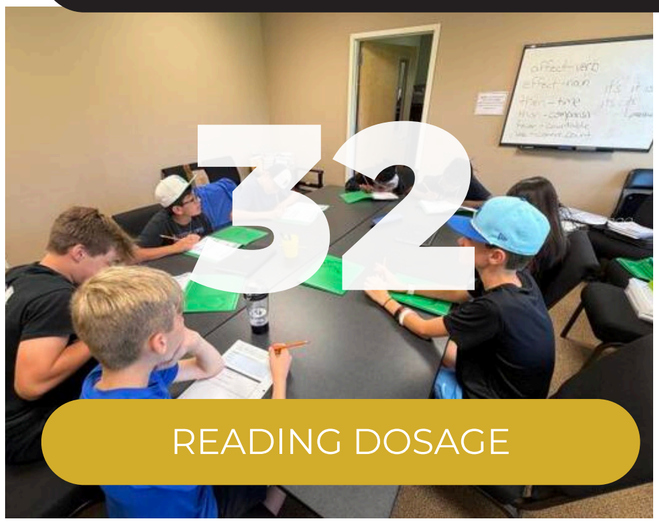
ACADEMIC GROWTH

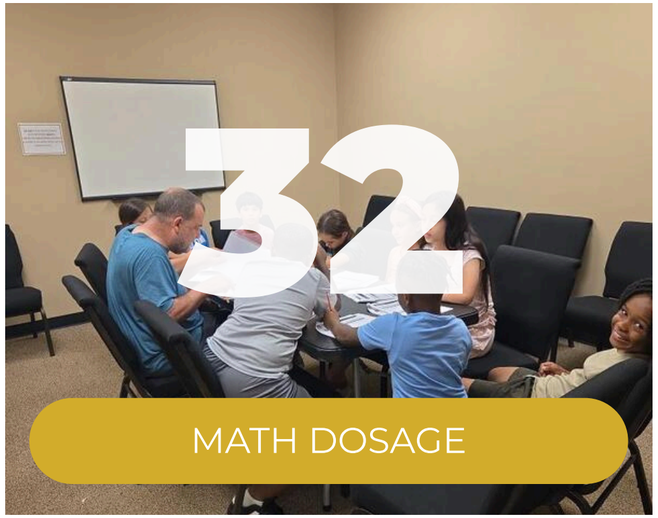
Greater program exposure was associated with stronger Reading gains, both by summer-session participation and total attendance days.

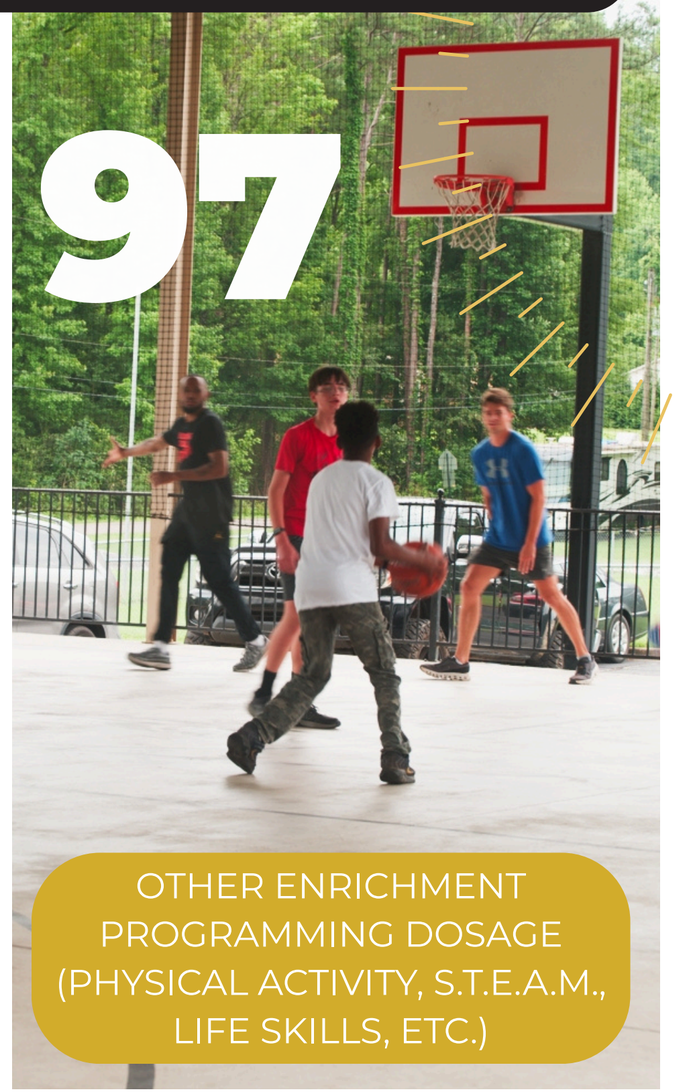
The pattern is consistent with the independent 2025 Project Pathfinder cohort, strengthening the descriptive evidence across two program years.

Results indicate association, not causation, given cohort and sample size limitations.

7- WEEK PROGRAMMING DOSAGE, PER CAMPER (IN HOURS)







PRE- & POST-STAR TEST SCALED SCORE IMPROVEMENTS

72.2% Reading

58.3% Math

PROJECT PATHFINDER

WHY THOSE RESULTS ARE REPRODUCIBLE

- **Strong numbers matter less than whether they can happen again.**
- **Brookings, RAND, and the Wallace Foundation have specified what separates a summer program that works from one that doesn't.**
- **Project Pathfinder's summer camp was built against nearly every criterion on that list.**

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS WORKS	PROJECT PATHFINDER 2026	STATUS
Programming at least 5 weeks, 3+ hrs daily instruction	7 weeks · 34 days · 161 hrs per camper	Exceeds
Blend academics with hands-on activity	64 hrs core Reading/Math + 19 enrichment activities	Met
Partner with community organizations	35+ funders, partners & business entities	Met
Professionalize staff; invest in instructors	W-2 employment, 20 hrs training, 2 certified teachers	Met
Center on evidence-based curriculum	SmartPlay curriculum with STAR pre/post	Met
Must not feel like punishment for students	No grades, no academic-standing pressure	Met
Consistent attendance; 20+ days for gain	34 days offered; 82.2% avg daily attendance	Priority



Campers explore water conservation, lure identification, and knot-tying with Coosa Riverkeeper.

PROJECT PATHFINDER

For context: roughly 90% of U.S. districts offered academic summer programming in 2022, but only about 13% of students participated. Likewise, those programs averaged three to four weeks, below the threshold researchers associate with measurable gains.

WHAT FAMILIES & STAFF SAID



“Our daughter has developmental delay and ADHD. During her time in the program she has absolutely blossomed! She's more confident, not as afraid to sound words and read!”

— 2025 parent survey

“My children’s reading and math comprehension skills improved — the robotics course also taught them problem-solving skills.”

— 2026 parent survey

“I heard about the Lemonade Wars for the rest of the summer — I wasn’t even there that week.”

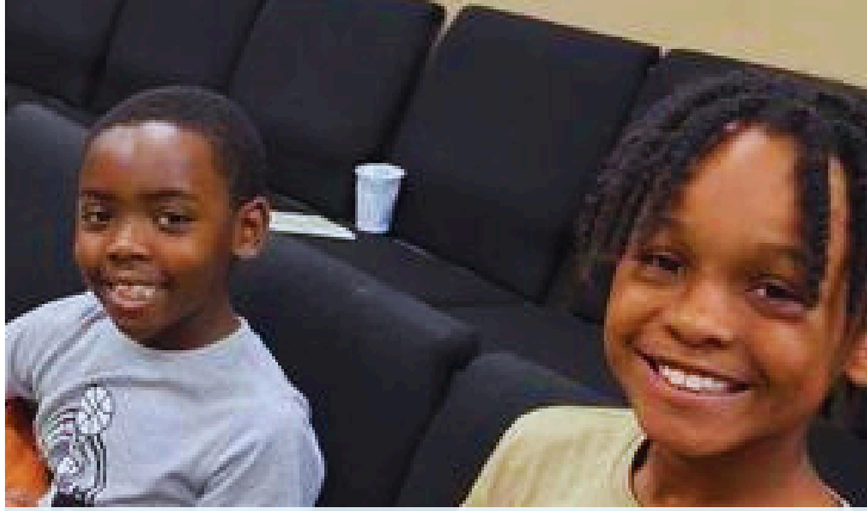
— 2026 staff survey

“Their reading has improved dramatically, and they’re more attentive writers now.”

— 2026 parent survey

“Project Pathfinder is 10/10!!! My son LOVED his experience — we look forward to next summer.”

— 2026 parent survey



100%

2026: parents positively rated feeling their child(ren) was (were) safe

100%

2026: parents said they would recommend Project Pathfinder

100%

2026: parents stated thier chil(ren) had a positive enrichment experience

83%

2026: families said they plan to enroll again in 2027 (the remaining 17% stated they were unsure)

PROJECT PATHFINDER

SIX NEW JOBS, AND A TRAINED LOCAL WORKFORCE

A grant to Project Pathfinder doesn't stop with the campers. It supported six seasonal W-2 positions in a state where labor-force participation trails the national rate, while helping build a trained instructional bench that strengthens year-over-year programming.

That investment is also amplified by a network of 35+ funders, community partners, and business affiliates, ensuring no single entity carries the success of the program alone.

6

New seasonal positions created; 100% on W-2 payroll, taxes withheld, and employer-matched

100% vs 56%

Our staff intending to return next summer, against the camp industry's average actual return rate (American Camp Association)

>1.5x Economic Multiplier

Research suggests community-serving nonprofit spending can generate additional local economic activity as dollars circulate through wages, vendors, and household spending.



Workforce development, not just employment

- *Every staff member completed 20 hours of training before the summer began.*
- *100% reported they felt valued, grew professionally, and would recommend working here and 100% want to return.*
- *The hybrid model of certified teachers alongside qualified non-certified instructors builds a local talent bench that deepens each year rather than restarting.*

Why the W-2 model matters to a funder

- *Grant dollars flow through formal W-2 payroll—not informal cash arrangements or contractor classifications for employee roles—providing employer-paid Social Security and Medicare contributions, wage and overtime protections, and a verifiable earnings history for every seasonal hire.*
- *Those wages contribute to an economy where Alabama's labor-force participation sits at 57.7%, below the national rate of roughly 61.9%.*

PROJECT PATHFINDER

Sources: American Camp Association on seasonal staff return rates; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Alabama Dept. of Workforce (2026); University of Minnesota Duluth research on nonprofit local-spending multipliers.

CORE FUNDERS HELPED POUR THE FOUNDATION



Camper-built garden planter donated to host facility New Hope Cumberland Presbyterian Church at the close of camp.

PROJECT PATHFINDER

THANK YOU FOR MAKING THIS SUMMER CAMP POSSIBLE!

PARTNERSHIPS AREN'T AN ADD-ON; IT'S ONE OF OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

POSITIVE COACHING ALLIANCE

Southern Company

THE SMARTPLAY
Cover All the Bases

AMERICAN VILLAGE
CITIZENSHIP TRUST

COVENANT RESCUE GROUP

PROTECT YOUTH SPORTS

LovJArtGall3ry

RED MOUNTAIN
Search Dog Association

STEM Education Works™

Extension
ALABAMA A&M & AUBURN UNIVERSITIES
SHELBY COUNTY

NORTH SHELBY COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT
EMERGENCY MEDICAL
NORTH SHELBY FIRE DIST.

Cahaba Valley Fire District
Professional and Compassionate Service
EMERGENCY DIAL 9-1-1

New Hope Cumberland Presbyterian

Alabama 4-H
Alabama Cooperative Extension System

UAB The University of Alabama at Birmingham
School of Nursing

• KEEPING WATCH OVER OUR WATERS SINCE 2010 •
COOSA RIVERKEEPER

Asure

BondFire Ranch

HOOVER POLICE
HONOR PRIDE DIGNITY
ALABAMA

PROJECT PATHFINDER

THANK YOU FOR MAKING THIS SUMMER CAMP POSSIBLE!

CONNECTED BY MISSION; AMPLIFIED BY KEY AFFILIATE PARTNERSHIPS

ONE SIXTEEN FILMS

Hendrick CHEVROLET HOOVER

Wi WEBSITES INC.

CENTRAL ALABAMA VETERANS COLLABORATIVE

A2Z PRINTING • SIGNS • DESIGNS

AMERSON ★ EVENTS

LT. GENERAL VICTOR "BRUTE" KRULAK #1415 MARINE CORPS LEAGUE SEMPER FIDELIS HOOVER, ALABAMA

TEAMWORK CAHABA VALLEY YOUNG MARINES "RIVER RATS" DISCIPLINE LEADERSHIP

Krulak Marine Alliance of Alabama 2018 KRULAKMARINES.ORG

PROJECT PATHFINDER



Campers gain hands-on environmental conservation and outdoor science education through local programming taught by Shelby County Extension Office and Alabama 4-H.