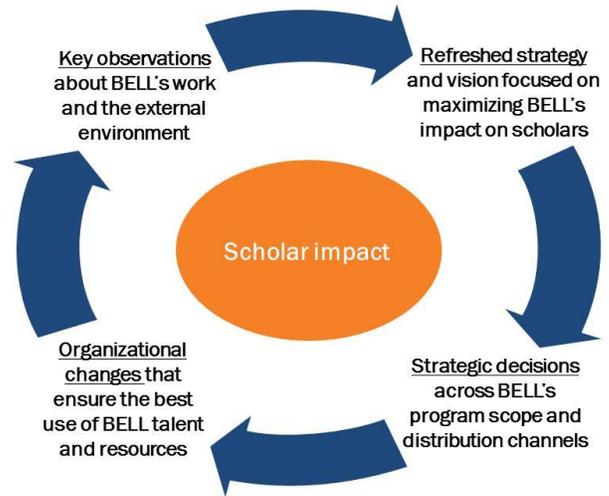


## **BELL and its History of Adaptive Strategy**

BELL has always adapted its strategy to align its talent and resources with an ever-changing environment. We started as an after school tutoring organization that evolved into a rigorous academic program that attracted new public funding (SES) and accelerated growth. As SES funding ended, BELL shifted more of its focus to summer learning – where it had developed an evidence-based model and attracted philanthropy. More recently, BELL enhanced its summer learning efforts in response to new trends. We developed a model focused on early literacy (READY) and a licensing model to teach others how to deliver BELL’s summer program. The common link across these changes is BELL’s focus on using its talent and resources to best serve scholars.

Every year, BELL’s Executive Management Team (EMT) reviews our strategy to make sure we are using our team and resources to best impact scholars. This “strategy refresh” process starts by surfacing observations from in and outside BELL that affect our work. Next, we make sure our strategy reflects this learning and adapt our focus as needed. Finally, we make strategic decisions and organizational changes that reflect BELL’s refreshed strategy. During this process, EMT engages key stakeholders (e.g. Board, funders, staff) to make sure any changes made reflect the best thinking of the full organization.



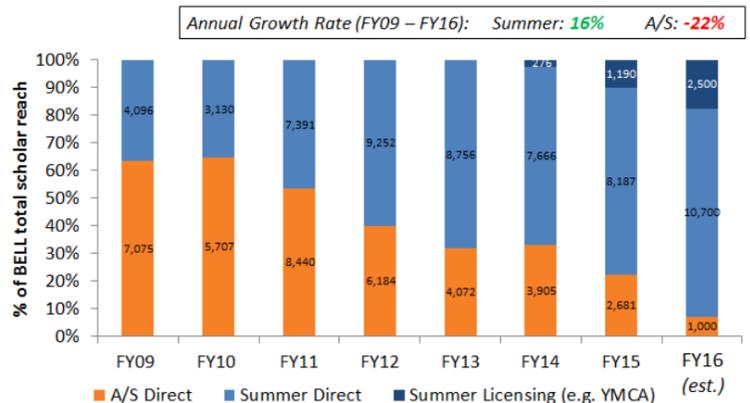
## **Recent Observations That Inform BELL’s Strategy**

### **1. BELL’s scale and footprint is driven by summer learning**

Summer 2015 marked BELL’s largest summer to date. BELL served over 13,000 scholars in 35 communities and 21 states through direct service and licensing partnerships. Just as impressive, scholar outcomes improved during this period of significant growth. Scholars gained on average two months of literacy proficiency and three months of math proficiency during summer 2015. The growth BELL experienced during summer 2015 represents a larger trend. Over the past eight years, BELL’s scholar reach in the summer has grown by 16% annually.

BELL’s summer growth is due to many factors. Our national footprint and evidence base make us stand out in a field with limited evidence-based national providers. Some of BELL’s most recent summer innovations have also produced new growth opportunities. Our early literacy program (READY) served over 4,000 scholars this summer and BELL’s licensing partnership with the YMCA doubled in 2015 (now serving ~2,500 scholars from 20 communities). These models are also driving additional growth opportunities for next summer.

BELL After School is shrinking at the same time. Over the past eight years, BELL’s after school reach has declined by 22% annually. In 2015-16 we are serving 1,100 scholars in three regions (just 7% of BELL’s scholar reach). External changes, including the availability of public funding and the misaligned focus of after school work (e.g., customized by school, DYCD’s focus on enrichment) has made after school less sustainable. Philanthropists have also been most interested in our summer models, making it difficult for BELL to make up for public funding shortfalls.



With the reduction in direct service afterschool work, our year-round team now has more time and capacity to focus on, plan for, and deliver high-quality summer programs. BELL can also become more cost effective. We can use seasonal personnel and outsourced capacity to meet a temporary surge in work without having to incur year-round costs.

BELL's trend toward summer and away from After School may not be permanent. Funding priorities may shift again and offer new opportunities for after school. Like we have done in the past, BELL will continue to monitor the expanded learning field and adapt accordingly.

## **2. BELL needs to stay relevant**

The fields of education and expanded learning continue to evolve and BELL must stay relevant and cutting edge. There is continued momentum to invest earlier in a child's education and the expanded learning time field is growing due to an increased focus on technology, innovation, and lower-cost solutions. To stay ahead of the field, BELL must continue to build on its track record of innovation (e.g. READy, licensing) while also keeping a close eye on cost.

Another important factor in staying relevant is recognition. A recent "demand test" of BELL's licensing model suggests BELL has work to do in becoming a go-to name in education and expanded learning. Only 35% of participating summer learning providers had heard of BELL before taking our survey. Those providers who had heard of BELL were more interested in exploring BELL partnerships. Before BELL can make a large dent in the achievement gap, we must increase others' awareness of our powerful programs and compelling strategy.

## **3. BELL is in a strong position to develop and run highly effective regions**

BELL has strong and experienced leaders in place across each of our regions. These leaders have relevant education and fundraising experience and strong ties to their communities. At headquarters, BELL also has strong leadership in place that can help regions have an even greater impact on scholars and communities. The timing could not be any better. We have important work to do to ensure every BELL region delivers highly effective and financially sustainable programs. We also have opportunities for smart growth across multiple regions that require strong leadership to see through.

## **4. There is growing interest in BELL's licensing model**

BELL's licensing model is the model we have developed to teach other organizations to deliver our program. We have current licensing partnerships with the YMCA and with two community-based nonprofits in East St. Louis, IL. In the past year, BELL's licensing model has attracted significant interest.

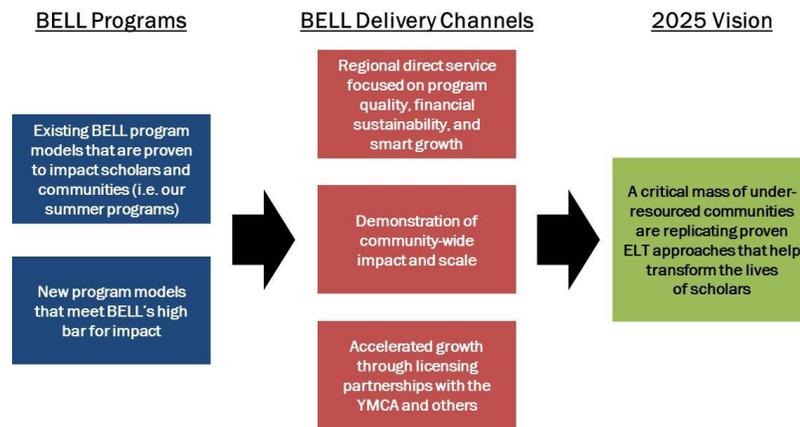
The YMCA is eager to expand our partnership. We have grown the YMCA partnership to 20 communities in just three years, with plans on doubling the partnership's footprint and scholar reach in 2016. The YMCA is now interested in exploring ways to broaden the scope of our partnership – from improving YMCA summer camps to supporting other signature programs (e.g. After School, Pre-K).

We have also received positive feedback from two organizations in East St. Louis that piloted this model in 2015. The pilot's success suggests BELL can apply the skills and tools we developed working with the YMCA to other partners. Other prospects have begun to reach out to BELL about our licensing work and a recently completed "demand test" revealed a need for and interest in BELL technical assistance from a diverse range of summer learning providers.

Finally, the concept of evidence-based nonprofits growing via licensing models is catching on across the sector. Many see BELL at the forefront of this trend due to our work with the YMCA.

## BELL's Refreshed Strategy

Based on the observations above, the Board and EMT have refreshed BELL's strategy. The strategy is centered on our programs and delivery channels. Programs refer to the program models (e.g. BELL Summer, Power Scholars Academy) we offer partners to get results for scholars and communities. Delivery channels refer to the different ways (e.g. direct service regions, YMCA) we get BELL programs into the hands of scholars and communities. See below for a visual of BELL's refreshed strategy.



We will focus on two areas related to BELL programs. First, we will continue to improve and innovate on BELL's summer learning programs. These models include BELL Summer, REAdy, and BELL's licensing model for summer learning. These models continue to be in demand and are proven to impact scholars, families, and educators in under-resourced communities. Our summer programs are best positioned to accelerate BELL's impact in the near term. Second, we will explore new program models to design, pilot, and eventually scale. Any new model must meet BELL's high bar for impact and growth and go through a rigorous pilot/evaluation process before we replicate it more broadly.

We will also focus on three areas related to BELL delivery channels. First, in BELL regions that are currently smaller than others, we will run direct service operations focused on delivering highly effective and sustainable programs and pursuing "smart growth." We define smart growth as new opportunities to serve scholars that are roadmap aligned and financially sustainable (i.e. we are confident in our ability to raise the philanthropy needed to run the program). Smart growth will look different by region and require us to engage in a thorough review process for any new opportunity.

Second, in BELL regions that consistently generate smart growth, we will ensure a strong regional office that enables us to demonstrate community-wide impact and scale. These regions will have achieved a significant level of scale, are close to achieving financial sustainability, and have created clear momentum where future growth opportunities are likely. The region that currently meets these criteria is the Carolinas while Maryland is poised to meet them in the near future.

Finally, BELL will accelerate growth through licensing partnerships. This work will feature a partnership with the YMCA designed to reach 50,000 scholars annually by 2020. The BELL-Y partnership will continue to grow the Power Scholars Academy, improve YMCA summer camps, and likely expand to serve scholars through other YMCA signature programs (e.g. After School, pre-K). BELL will also pursue new licensing partnerships with other youth serving organizations that are mission aligned and have the resources needed to deliver effective summer learning programs.

We believe this strategy will help BELL realize a powerful vision – that a critical mass of under-resourced communities replicates proven approaches to expanded learning that help transform the lives of scholars. Realizing this vision will require BELL to develop new skills, add staff capacity, and secure additional resources. Through its innovative programs and delivery channels, BELL can realize this vision without growing its organization at the same rate as direct service alone would require. This approach positions BELL to play a leading role in a sector that cares about the impact delivered *and* the amount of resources used to deliver it.